

WORK SMARTER NOT FASTER:
AN INVESTIGATION INTO ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE TRAINING
FOR GARMENT WORKERS IN A UNION SETTING

by

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates an English as a second language training program for garment workers initiated by a union, for its members and non-union workers. It is a case study based on one particular English language training in the workplace program, provided as a partnership between a union and the labour studies program of a community college.

The research objective of the study was to identify and analyze significant factors related to: (1) the union's perceived need to establish English in the workplace (EWP) classes and the impact of such a program on the union, (2) the perceived need and impact of the classes on the participants, both union and non-union workers and, (3) as a secondary consideration, the impact of the program on the company, the teachers and the college.

The issues were examined through an investigation of the perceptions of the union, the participants, the company, the teachers and the college. The study used a qualitative research design and ethnographic and participatory research methods were employed from an insider perspective, to facilitate the gathering of data. Particular attention was paid to the role of the union in providing English as a second language (ESL) classes to garment workers, as this was a unique factor in the delivery of the program.

The implications of the study for practice include; recognition of barriers to learning and using English, a knowledge of the culture of the work place and the setting where the classes occur, as well as a knowledge of the other stakeholders involved in the program. The implications for pedagogy include issues related to; the development of appropriate content, teacher education, and the role of the teachers and the college in providing such a program. This study illuminates many critical aspects in the perceptions of union officials, garment

workers, the teachers and the company, regarding the need and impact of an English in the workplace training program.

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CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

I will never look at clothing in the same way again. As I peruse the racks of beautifully displayed clothes in bright, airy stores, I cannot shake the image behind the colourful pants, shirts, sweaters, T-shirts and jeans, an image of garment workers – mostly South Asian women – frantically working at a machine, sewing, sewing for their livelihood, working in a factory with no windows, noisy from the clatter of machinery, dusty from the fabric fragments everywhere. This is the work environment that they live and breathe everyday. They endure many health hazards, such as eye strain, back problems from bending over a machine for many hours everyday, and hands knotted up from handling the clothing items, yet the atmosphere which they create in a union shop is one of friendly camaraderie. These women are lively, energetic and assertive. This is the best situation, a unionized workplace where the workers are guaranteed a minimum base rate pay of between \$8 and \$9 per hour, regardless of how fast they work, and they have the possibility of making more through piece-work.

1.1 The Canadian Garment Industry

Most garment workers in Canada do not have the luxury of a union to help minimize their exploitation. Although the union movement has made a significant difference to the working conditions of garment workers over the years, most garment workers are not in unions. The percentage of unionized workers in the garment industry in British Columbia (B.C.) has dropped dramatically from sixty percent to just five percent in the last decade,

according to a union informant. This has led to some serious infractions of working conditions in the non-union sector which the union has been trying to address.

Most garment workers are immigrant women who have limited proficiency in English. They are often from countries where there is no union movement or where unions are illegal. So they come with no history of a worker rights movement and are often afraid of being involved in a union. Indeed, many garment workers are working in terribly exploited conditions in “sweat shops” even in B.C, which has some of the strongest labour legislation covering working conditions in all of Canada. In sum, they are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The purpose of this thesis is to document an English in the workplace program (EWP) for garment workers from a union perspective. This case study involves an investigation of English language training for immigrant women garment workers, organized in a trade union context. The objective of this study is to identify and analyze significant factors related to:

- (1) the union’s perceived need to establish EWP classes and the impact of such a program on the union,
- (2) the perceived need and impact of the classes on the participants, both union and non-union workers and,
- (3) as a secondary consideration, the impact of the program on the company, the teachers and the college.

These issues will be examined through an investigation of the perceptions of the union, the participants and the other stakeholders involved in the training program. The study will use a qualitative research design and ethnographic and participatory research methods

will be employed from an insider perspective. Particular attention will be paid to the role of the union in providing English as a second language (ESL) classes to garment workers as this was a unique factor in the delivery of the program.

I will argue that this training program was an attempt to provide English language training in the context of addressing the lived situation of garment workers with recognition of the power relations in the greater society and how those forces act on and influence the experience of garment workers. As educators, if we do not operate within a framework of recognition of who has power and who lacks power then we will be reproducing the same inequitable relations that already exist in society and thereby helping to create a passive work force which functions in the interests of the dominant class. Also we will not be addressing the real needs of the immigrants themselves. The curriculum for worker rights and advocacy for the working poor that emerged from this process is an attempt to provide critical language training which will enable the participants to analyze their reality and participate in its transformation (Auerbach, 1991)

The theoretical basis of research will involve a consideration of issues of language socialization and culture in the context of social identity and class relations; it will address issues of power and inequality including gender. Language is not neutral but is impacted by cultural and political implications; therefore, a consideration of the context in which our lives are embedded is an essential element in both teaching and learning a language. In order to design an effective program, it is useful to understand the complex dynamics of the learner's social identity and context and the effect of these on the learning environment. It is also important that the effect of these factors be consciously acknowledged. If we do not include

these factors then the language experience will remain disconnected from the social context of the environment in which the learners function in their daily lives.

1.3 Background to the Study

1.3.1 Education, Labour and Training

Historically, labour unions have been involved in the delivery of education and training programs for their members since the early 1900s. Education has been seen to be an important way of furthering the rights of working people and protecting the gains that workers have won. As early as the 1900s, unions like the garment workers' union were involved in offering night classes in English language and citizenship skills. In fact, the garment workers' union was in the forefront of the movement to limit the workday to eight hours. It also advocated for improved safety and better conditions at work by lobbying for legislation to address these issues. The reason for the union's support of English as a second language (ESL) programs was its stated goal of meeting the needs of its members. The workers, most of whom were immigrants with a limited proficiency in English language skills, required a greater knowledge of English in order to participate in their union and to ensure their safety at work. The reasons for the union being a provider of ESL training programs today, in essence, remain unchanged. Labour unions want to enable their members to participate in the union and to protect and further the rights of workers by organizing them into unions

1.3.2 The Economic Climate

There have been some dramatic changes in the economic climate of the 1990s, which have led to an immediate urgency for developing and providing training programs within some sectors of the trade union movement – specifically manufacturing and the resource-

based industries. In the 1980s and 1990s there has been a decline in manufacturing.

Economists state that our economy is changing from a manufacturing and resource base to one that is technology- and service-oriented. The implications of this are that workers will require more skills and training in order to qualify for the jobs which are available. According to Goldstein (1993) "garment and textile companies in Toronto were forced to lay off one-third of their workers between 1988 and mid 1990" (p. 57). Most of these laid -off workers were women immigrants who did not have a high proficiency in English. These displaced and unemployed workers are the most vulnerable casualties of the shift in the economic base, because they do not have sufficient English language skills to retrain for other work. This process of labour adjustment – a term for the shift from one kind of work to another – is completely outside the control of the workers and the union; the best the latter can do is to be involved in the termination and closure process and to negotiate the most beneficial terms possible for the workers. Immigrant workers find themselves vulnerable because of their lack of English and at the mercy of capital in its insistent search for new markets and greater profits.

Due to the changing world of work, restructuring has become a very familiar term, especially in the manufacturing- and resource-based industries in Canada, as has been previously mentioned. Trade unions and governments to some extent are becoming more involved in providing training and re-training opportunities for their constituent groups in the face of job loss and factory closure, especially in the garment industry and forestry sector. Because many of the workers in these low-paid, low-status jobs are immigrants, this training often takes the form of ESL or literacy skills or upgrading for high school equivalency.

There is a recognition by some employers as well as by unions that workplace training is desirable in a time of major change in the nature of the labour market itself as many areas of the work force, in both public and private sectors, restructure. At this time there is also a move away from unions and unionized workplaces. Most of the economic growth is in the small business sector which has traditionally been more difficult to organize and where, therefore, the number of unionized workers is very small. For all of the above mentioned reasons, unions are taking a greater role in the provision of training for their members in the face of job loss and subsequent loss of membership. Burnaby, Harper & Peirce (1992) make three important points regarding EWP training: (1) this kind of training provides access to ESL classes that would otherwise make it difficult or impossible for most immigrants to participate; (2) there is a benefit to management in accessing the skills and training that immigrants bring with them but are often denied to employers because of lack of language skills and (3) immigrant's individual needs differ and this will affect participation. These different needs can include issues of acculturation, confidence, and communication.

1.3.3 Training and English in the Work Place Programs

There have been many English in the work place programs (EWP) offered over the last twenty years. They grew out of an identified need to provide English language training on the job. This is part of the recognition that language training does not have to occur in isolation from work and can in fact be effectively incorporated into the workplace and work training programs. As has been mentioned by Harper, Peirce, and Burnaby (1996) new immigrants feel a lot of pressure to enter the work force soon after they arrive in Canada. They often cite money as a reason for this, but the psychological desire for security and the social identity that employment can provide also act as incentives to find work. However,

once involved in the work force, many immigrants become too busy with work and family to find the time to take English classes. This is even more true for women, who generally face more barriers than men in accessing language classes and training, because of cultural factors and responsibility for the family and childcare. English in the workplace classes provide access for women who are often disadvantaged in terms of their economic, social and cultural position in society.

Immigrant learners choose programs for a variety of reasons beyond linguistic concerns. Affective factors such as familiarity of location, comfort level with the group experienced through group identity – for example, co-workers at the same worksite – gender, race, satisfying socialization needs, all become consequential in these kinds of programs. An English language training program for garment workers provided at the union hall also has its place in this context.

There have also been community ESL programs provided through community-based groups and offered in community centres, neighbourhood houses, church basements and other community locations. Most of these programs share the goal of helping learners to acquire a functional level of communicative competence in English. They provide a welcome alternative to the more formalized institutional training that is available in the public community college system. The community-based programs have traditionally drawn on a different population from those who attend the colleges. It is often the case that those individuals with fewer years of education in their first language are not comfortable attending an institution like a college. They prefer the less intimidating format of a group which meets in a community centre, neighbourhood house, worksite, local library branch, religious centre or other such agency which is rooted more in the community of which they feel a part and

have some connection to. These centres are often able to offer more flexibility than formal educational institutions in such areas as syllabus design, intake procedures, class level, streaming and formalized assessment. In Vancouver, there are many precedents for offering English language training through non-traditional organizations which have been set up for other purposes, and are not specifically designed to provide such training. These programs have been demonstrated to be very successful in meeting the diverse needs of immigrant learners.

1.4 The Program

This study is concerned with ESL classes for garment workers initiated by a local of the garment workers' union in partnership with the labour studies program of a community college. The union officials approached the labour studies program with a proposal to initiate EWP classes for garment workers, both union members and non-union. The program ran for eight months as a continuation of a previous pilot program. There were eight classes in all: some met twice a week in the day time in either morning or afternoon; some met twice a week after work; others met once a week on Saturdays. All but one of the classes were held at the union hall in a recently converted classroom; the other was located in one of the local factories. The students were predominantly Asian, with Chinese speakers being the largest group. Working students generally attended classes directly after work or on Saturday; daytime classes were generally attended by students who had recently been laid off due to factory closure and relocation. Some of the workplaces had unions and some did not. Most of the students functioned at the beginner to advanced level of English, with reading and writing skills being considerably weaker than oral and listening skills.

1.5 Justification of the Study

This study provides useful insights into the organization of workplace training programs for immigrants taking a worker rights perspective. There have been many studies of workplace and content programs for ESL students, including ethnographic studies to determine needs analysis of work language requirements from an employer's perspective (Harper et al., 1996) but there is a definite lack of research on workplace training programs that are organized through a union, with a worker rights perspective. The particular contribution of this study is its focus on the union initiated EWP classes. The specific characteristics of a union initiated program are threefold: a concern with meeting union members' needs; a focus on organizing; and an interest in protection of worker rights. It is interesting that much time and money is spent on devising appropriate workplace content, job specific language skills and even career-building skills such as resume writing and interviewing, but the most basic information of what constitutes people's rights at work is often overlooked.

This study provides a positive example of a partnership between a publicly funded community college and a large international trade union to provide a training program which meets the needs of the workers based on their lived experiences as immigrant women garment workers. There is a growing demand for such training in the union movement and unions are desirous of being involved in its delivery. Studies like this can help to inform organizations and educators concerning the complex issues and agendas to be considered in the delivery of such programs.

Furthermore, qualitative studies like this may initiate a focus on whose interests are being met in the course, what materials are being used and how this contributes to the empowerment or disempowerment of the workers.

CHAPTER TWO:

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a growing body of research on language and empowerment developing the view that language represents the cultural, social and power relations within the larger society (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1992; Peirce, 1995; Pennycook, 1989). Central to providing a successful language training program is the belief that language is not neutral, rather it is a complex social construct that requires the individual to be attuned to many different influences. "To talk with a bureaucrat, politician, or academic, you are required to talk like them if you want to be taken seriously or get what you need" (Morgan, 1995/6, p.10).

Critical language awareness (CLA) is a crucial concept for language learners in non-traditional settings such as a union hall. CLA encompasses the notion that language is a medium for expressing cultural values and relations of power within the society. In teaching ESL there would be an interest in recognizing the critical reflection of the individual in relation to the dominant culture rather than the learner being viewed as a passive vehicle receiving language from the educator. Education, especially including language training, can either reinforce the status quo or challenge its assumptions. There is an opportunity for educators to examine how language is used to support different particular interests and privileges. (Freire, 1987; Cummins, 1992; Peirce, 1989; Pennycook, 1994). Critical pedagogy, therefore would include ways of understanding social and cultural practices which examine how power relations are constituted, reproduced and maintained. Critical thinking begins with the personal but must go beyond awareness, to include action and decision making through which individuals can ultimately gain greater control over their lives. The goal is for learners to become critical thinkers, able to use problem-solving strategies which

can help to challenge those forces which dominate society and contribute to unequal power relations. It is within this context that the garment workers' union became involved in offering ESL to its members. The union wanted to help its members to obtain some power and control over their work situation and lives. They also felt a need for recognition of typical immigrant issues: loss of status through immigrating; poor job prospects; low self-esteem; the need to re-establish themselves in a new country and context; as well as the regular union agenda – protection of worker rights and organizing the unorganized workers.

It is this theoretical framework of a critical approach to understanding the socio-cultural context and the effect of this on the identity of the language learner which I will use for analyzing the data from the stakeholders. The remainder of this section will provide an examination of the theoretical approaches which are appropriate to the provision of this kind of training program. There will also be a consideration of the underlying theory which can inform such an approach. This will include language socialization, acculturation and motivation theory, as well as theories of investment, social identity and empowerment .

2.1 Language Socialization Approaches to Second Language Acquisition

2.1.1 Language Socialization Theory

The notion of language socialization (LS) draws upon sociological, anthropological and psychological approaches to the study of linguistic competence. Language Socialization theory emanates from the fields of both anthropology and language acquisition theory. Hymes (1974) and later Saville-Troike (1989), among others, developed the linking of these two disciplines. They were instrumental in asking the questions; *what do people need to know in order to communicate in a community?* and *how do they acquire and use knowledge?* They attempted to show that language acquisition occurs in a cultural context and is combined with

a knowledge of the appropriate behaviour and values of the society or cultural context.

Language socialization theory emphasizes that language acquisition does not take place in isolation, but rather demonstrates the connections between language and culture. Language socialization theory is concerned with the integration of language learners into social groups and the interconnection of language and social issues (Larsen-Freeman, & Long, 1991) The main proponents of language socialization theory are Schieffelin and Ochs (1986a, 1986b).

According to Schieffelin (1990):

The study of language socialization has as its goal understanding how persons become competent members of their social groups and the role language has in this process. Language socialization, therefore, concerns two major areas of socialization: socialization through the use of language and socialization to use language (p.14).

Schieffelin and Ochs' research built upon the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that language functions not simply as a device for reporting experience, but also, and more importantly, as a way of defining experience for its speakers. Much of the research into language socialization has been undertaken in relation to first language acquisition in children rather than with second language learners (Ochs 1988; Watson-Gegeo and Gegeo 1986; Schieffelin 1986, 1990; Crago et al., 1993). These studies demonstrated how language socialization differs across cultures, and how it is closely related to the development of cultural values and belief systems. Schieffelin and Ochs' research focused primarily on interactions between caregivers and children in their first language (L1). They concluded that, firstly, language is a source for children learning both the social and cultural ways of their group's "world view". Secondly, language is a critical resource to learn how cultural knowledge is passed on through the generations and finally, language socialization aids in understanding the functional and symbolic interface between language and culture.

2.1.2 Language Socialization and Second Language Learning

A number of theorists have argued that language socialization continues to occur whenever a person finds themselves in a new sociocultural situation and has to engage in a new role in society (Duff, 1995; Hall, 1993a, 1995; Ochs, 1988; Poole, 1992; Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986a, 1986b). Secondary language socialization occurs in all environments where language learners find themselves in a different cultural context; environments such as the school, the neighbourhood, the community and the work place. In LS theory social and psychological factors (e.g. communicative need, social interaction patterns, motivation for formal language study, or preferred learning style) are analyzed to determine their predicted influence on second language acquisition.

In examining LS theory I have attempted to show the importance of the sociocultural context to the acquisition of language. The meanings and functions of language are socioculturally organized and therefore linguistic knowledge is embedded in sociocultural knowledge. Sociocultural factors are very important in relation to the learning environment. They are the social organization of the community and the different groups that constitute the society, its social classes and occupational, ethnic, cultural, and religious groups (Stern, 1983). This area of second language acquisition (SLA) also encompasses other sociocultural and affective factors such as acculturation and motivation, which impact on the language learning process and must be considered when developing a comprehensive theory of language learning which can inform an effective training program.

2.1.3 Acculturation Theory

According to Schumann (1978), the process of becoming acculturated is central to the acquisition of the SL, because language is a reflection of the culture. The language learner

has to interface culture one (C1) with culture two (C2); the extent to which the learner becomes acculturated to the TL directly affects the acquisition of the L2. The psychological and social factors cannot be underestimated in their impact on the progress of the learner. The desire of the learner to integrate and of the target culture to have the learner integrate is very significant. Schumann's model of acculturation serves a useful purpose in helping to understand the role of C1 and C2. He differentiates two types of acculturation; He differentiates two types of acculturation; in Type One Acculturation, learners are both socially integrated into the target language and psychologically open to it. In Type Two acculturation, an additional pre-condition is a conscious or unconscious wish to become like the target group. It is assumed that the learner would have adequate access to TL speakers to acquire the L2. Schumann states that social and psychological contact with the target group is essential for SLA but a desire to become like them is not necessary. (Larsen – Freeman & Long, 1991) In this theory, social factors are those issues which affect the language learner as a member of a social group in contact with the target language group. Psychological factors are affective in nature and concern the learner as an individual. They can include such things as language shock, culture shock, motivation and ego boundaries (Ellis, 1985). Schumann's theory is a useful way to visualize the immigrants' dilemma, but it restricts our ability to understand why, after living and working in the dominant culture for many years, they often do not feel part of it, they do not speak the language, and they do not feel able to operate within it. Fear of loss of their own language and culture leads to loss of social identity. There has been criticism of this theory in that it does not sufficiently account for the social context of the learner's situation.

2.1.4 Motivation Theory

Motivation is probably the single most important factor in the learner acquiring competence in the L2. A number of different theorists have placed motivation theories in a position of high priority when dealing with affective factors in the acquisition of language. Lambert and Gardner (1972) cite two kinds of motivation; instrumental – which has a functional goal (for example getting a job) and integrative – which is broader in scope encompassing the desire to enter into the new culture. This has also been referred to as intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation – intrinsic being the motivating factors emerging from within, and extrinsic being external factors, such as getting good marks in class. In this case intrinsic motivation would lead to feeling more confident in a situation and therefore having a higher sense of self-esteem.

2.1.5 Investment Theory and Social Identity

Peirce (1995) has taken this research a step further by incorporating notions from sociology and psychology regarding investment theory. Peirce makes a strong argument for the notion of what she terms “investment” as a more comprehensive term than motivation. She gives investment a social context which has its roots in postmodernist theory. Investment is a broader concept than motivation and relies upon a relationship between the individual and the changing social context in which they function. The notion of investment enables the language learner to be viewed as a person functioning in a context which is not neutral or solely determined/controlled by them, but subject to outside forces which impact on that context. As Peirce states, “The notion of investment ... attempts to capture the relationship of the language learner to the changing social world. It conceives of the language learner as having a complex social identity and multiple desires” (p.17).

In my own research, I have been influenced by the work of Peirce (1995) in relation to the language learner and the language learning context and its effect on social identity. In particular, her article on "Social Identity, Investment, and Learning" puts forward the notion that much prior research has emphasized the individual in relation to affective factors at the expense of a consideration of the social context. She argues that "SLA theory needs to develop a conception of the language learner as having a complex social identity that must be understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable social structures which are reproduced in day-to-day social interaction" (p.13).

Peirce differentiates social identity from cultural identity. Social identity refers to the relationship between the individual and the larger social world, as mediated through institutions such as families, schools, work place, social services and the law courts. She is concerned with how these social relations must be understood with reference to issues of race, gender, class and ethnicity (Pierce 1997). Cultural identity, on the other hand, is the relation between individuals and members of a group who share a common history, language and ways of understanding the world. Her argument is based on a consideration of previous research in SLA dealing with sociocultural factors. She claims that Krashen's theory, which states that comprehensible input (CI) combined with a low affective filter is the most advantageous condition for language acquisition to occur, situates motivation, self confidence and anxiety as individual variables with no social context. She proposes a theory of social identity which is based on the work of other theorists such as Ellis (1985), Krashen (1985), Schumann (1978), and Stern (1983), but extends it to incorporate the social context. She examines their work in relation to sociocultural variables such as motivation theories. She claims that although they recognize the complexity of the language learners' social context,

they do not sufficiently take into account the power relations which mediate the access a language learner may have to the target language (TL) or the conditions under which their interactions may occur. She has argued that second language acquisition (SLA) theorists

have not questioned how relations of power in the social world affect social interaction between second language learners (SLL) and target language speakers (TLS) [nor have they] developed a comprehensive theory of social identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context (p. 12).

I have attempted to show that more attention needs to be paid to the social context and conditions under which the language learner is functioning and the relationship which mediates the two. Language learning does not occur in a vacuum, but needs to take account of the lived experience of those participating in it. There are numerous reasons for learning language; they are often contradictory and may include the desire to enter the culture on the one hand and fear of loss of identity on the other. The learning process must recognize these factors and address them directly.

2.2 The Political Nature of Language

Poststructuralist theory is concerned with issues of language in its sociocultural context and the power relations which govern those contexts. Various literature has been written on the political nature of language (Freire, 1978; Giroux, 1988; Pennycook, 1989; Tollefson, 1991; Peirce, 1995). Vygotsky (1978) has also noted that "human learning presupposes a specific social nature" (p. 88). Thus learning can be conceived as socially constructed. Socioculturalism means viewing the learner in a social context where the learning emerges within a cultural context. Language, therefore, is far more than a means of communication, it is a way of analyzing experience. Since language and culture are so connected to issues of power it is important to address how power and language acquisition

can be approached. Learning and schooling must be viewed as part of the fabric of society and the interests of the dominant culture (Giroux, 1983).

Poststructuralist theory also necessarily questions the role of language as a medium of cultural expression and values; “if language is the site where meaningful experience is constituted, then language also determines how we perceive possibilities of change” (Weedon, 1987, p. 86).

2.2.1 Empowerment theory

Empowerment theory is closely connected to the concept of social identity and investment outlined by Peirce, in that it enables inclusion of the relationship between social structures and power and the individual in society. So far I have demonstrated that in order to fully understand the social context and its impact on the learner, it is necessary to consider issues of empowerment theory. Empowerment means the recognition of power relations in the society and how the dominant culture works in relation to the minority culture. A considerable body of theory has been developed on empowerment. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator is probably the best known for his theories on how to empower learners, politically, economically, socially and morally, to become critical thinkers, able to use problem-solving strategies which can help them to challenge those forces which dominate society. Freire’s vision of education as a means of individual transformation has been central to many literacy, ESL, labour and health education programs during the last twenty years. The central concept underlying Freire’s ideas is the notion of empowerment of the individual through understanding her/himself in relation to the existing social forces – the socio-economic, political, cultural, and historical context of their personal lives. Freire (1993) has said that education is not neutral, it is either domesticating or emancipatory. Domesticating education

promotes conformity and adherence to the agenda of the power elite of the society, thus ensuring that the status quo remains unchanged by producing workers who have the skills required to be productive but are passive in their role. Education that is emancipatory has as its goal empowering learners to give voice to their concerns arising from the social context of their own background in order to effect change and ultimately transform the power relations of society. Freire talks about the “banking concept” of education where learners are viewed as the recipients of an established body of knowledge to be imparted by the teacher – the expert. (1970, p. 53). The learners become passive and their lived experiences are marginalized and devalued. The values of the dominant culture become the only values which are given recognition – one socio-cultural-linguistic voice. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, he says:

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

2.2.2 Giving Voice to Participants

Denial of personal experience actively discourages development of critical thinking skills and reflection which may lead to a desire to transform or change circumstances.

However, there has been some recent research which suggests that a focus on the personal is not enough to ensure a critical reflection of the power relations of the workplace (Harper, Peirce, & Burnaby, 1996). Their article “English-in-the-workplace for garment workers: A feminist project?” raises some interesting concerns about a curriculum which has as its sole focus an emphasis on the personal. Although Freire contends that beginning with the personal

is the key to taking a critical stance, Harper et al. (1996) maintain that a conscious effort is required to ensure that the pedagogy is critical and not merely reproducing the inequitable relations of the dominant culture in microcosm form in the English in the workplace program (EWP). The study is focused around two interesting questions: “one posed by a plant manager, “Is EWP empowering our workers?” and the other, “What does EWP mean in terms of a feminist pedagogical project?” (p. 6). This study raises some important concerns regarding content of a program; it suggests that in order not to reproduce the same inequitable relations as currently exist in the dominant culture it is necessary to have a purposeful curriculum that deliberately sets out to challenge the traditional assumptions.

Beginning with the personal is not sufficient because it may well end there. If a program is really going to concern itself with the social identity of the learner and the learner’s relationship to the societal and learning context, then its goals must be to examine the inequalities that are intrinsically structured in the environment.

2.3 Barriers to Participation for Immigrant Women

There is a body of research concerning immigrant women and communicative competence which has unearthed some contradictory and illuminating findings regarding the desire to speak and the desire to remain silent in the target language (Goldstein, 1994; Harper et al., 1996; Holmes, 1993; Peirce, 1994). When learning a second language there are many desires and fears – seeming positives and negatives through the eyes of the learner. The target language is the perceived path to integration and therefore a better economic and social life in every way: a better job and therefore more money; more status in the community; a richer and fuller life; less isolation and fear about encounters with the target language; and acceptance and understanding of the target culture – in other words, integration. Conversely, there is the

fear that integration will inevitably lead to loss of the first culture and language, especially in relation to children. Research shows that many immigrants fear that their children will embrace the new culture and turn their back on the native culture, and there is substantial evidence to show that these fears are grounded (Wong Fillmore, 1991; Cummins, 1986). Language loss and language maintenance have become important areas for SLA research.

These concerns and fears may result in a negative attitude toward the target language; the acquisition of language itself becomes a fearful thing. Barriers are then created against learning the language. Women are much more vulnerable to these kinds of issues because of their role in the family. A traditional view of women and first language (L1) maintenance is one of women as conservers – conserving the L1 as well as the ethnic and cultural values within the family. Holmes' (1993) research on immigrant women and language maintenance in Australia and New Zealand indicates that “in many immigrant communities, it is traditionally the woman's role not only to take care of the children and the old people, but also to educate the children in matters relating to ethnic traditions and values” (p.163).

This study also suggests some interesting explanations for immigrant women's desires and fears regarding patterns of language use and language maintenance in a broader context. She claims that women generally use the ethnic language more than men. She goes on to debunk some of the more traditional explanations for this; namely that women are more linguistically conservative or less adventurous than men. Her research demonstrates that in some instances women can be leaders in language shift, especially in the second generation, where they perceive it to be in their interest economically to function in the L2. She states that “women appear to be maintaining the ethnic language as well as acquiring proficiency in English. Many second generation immigrant women are proficient bilinguals” (p.167).

Holmes' (1993) research is intended to show that women are choosing, in some instances, to function primarily in their L1 because there is a cost associated with learning the L2. Perhaps one of the greatest motivating factors in L1 maintenance has to do with the passing on of cultural values and communication within the family, since language is the main conduit for the transmission of cultural values and ethnic identity, and this area of responsibility primarily belongs to women.

There is also a general sense of becoming other in their own identity, so immigrants no longer recognize who they are; their own sense of belonging is threatened within their ethnic community. Goldstein (1994); in her research with Portuguese immigrant women factory workers in Toronto, found, surprisingly, that there was also a cost rather than a benefit to the women for learning and using English at work. Her research concluded that the women risked being ostracized by their co-workers and excluded from conversations that may be occurring during work time if they engaged in speaking English at work. This research shows that there are contradictory assumptions and expectations about the use of dominant culture language in the workplace, amongst immigrant workers themselves. In order to survive at work, the women in her study needed to speak their own language, Portuguese, on the job, for the following reasons; to establish and maintain friendships so they could access physical help when needed and for emotional support. It was also noted that use of English alienated other workers because some workers were threatened by their inability to function well in the language and therefore they didn't understand what was being said and feared they might be the subject of discussion.

Immigrant women experience many significant barriers to participation in English language training programs. There is considerable research on the public versus private

sphere in feminist theory and how this division affects language learning and women.

Rockhill (1991) explores how unequal power relations in the home can restrict women's participation in education. She cites cases where husbands feel threatened by their wives attending English classes because they construe it as a threat to male power and domination in the private sphere of the home. The men then exert pressure to forbid the women from attending English classes. Goldstein found the same restrictions being placed on women in her study with Portuguese women factory workers. Some of the young, single, women were not allowed to attend ESL classes because men were present in the class. Other women were afraid to go out alone at night and that was the only time available to them for attending classes. There are many similarities to the garment worker situation, where the work force is predominantly female and although many of the women have lived and worked in Canada for many years, they have not attained a functional level of English. Women are confined within the private sphere; they work, socialize and carry out their domestic responsibilities in their native language, while men are more likely to be integrated into the dominant culture both socially and at work.

Relations within the factory can also mimic the family in their intensity and rule bound expectations. In this sense the work place becomes an extension of the private world of the family, especially where, as in the garment industry, the workers are functioning in their native language – the comfort of always doing things the same way; sitting with the same people, sticking to the same linguistic group, eating lunch with the same people; these routines are human nature to some extent, but they can become limiting and foster a fear of change.

Management's conception of language needs at work have to do with the productivity of the worker and possibly some liberal notion of benefits to the worker in terms of individual growth, self worth, self-esteem and being a productive member of society at large. However management's support of EWP stops at the point where the workers desire to leave the job ghetto for a perceived better job or become too familiar with their rights as workers and thus a threat to the work environment. From the point of view of the workers, there are many and varied reasons for a desire to become functional in the target language.

2.4 A Training Model for Union ESL

2.4.1 Empowering Pedagogy

For successful training to occur language skills should be organized as an adjunct to genuine daily life related concerns and priorities. The issues pertinent to the community or group which are studying together can form the content of the speech acts, language discourse and curriculum design. Most ESL programs have the stated goal of developing communicative competence in the learners. Workplace language training is supposed to lead towards greater economic access by creating stronger language fluency. In fact these goals alone are not sufficient to challenge the socioeconomic situation of immigrant workers. Pedagogical choices about classroom matters such as content, materials development and curriculum are not merely arbitrary decisions revolving around which theme to begin with or what grammar point it is useful to teach. In Freire's (1970) view it is the teachers job to pose problems and engage the students in critical reflection in order to analyze their reality and explore the possibility of transformation. The problem posing method, which is based in Freirian theory and critical pedagogy, as outlined by Auerbach and Wallerstein (1987) in

English for the workplace: ESL for action problem posing at work, is a very useful model for a critical approach to curriculum in a workplace setting.

The problem posing method originated with Freire, who claimed that education begins with the experience of the learner and either perpetuates existing social relations or challenges them. According to Auerbach and Wallerstein (1987), a problem posing methodology involves three stages: listening (or investigating the issues or generative themes of the community), dialogue (or codifying issues into discussion starters for critical thinking), and action (or strategizing the changes students envision following their reflections) (p. 2). In a problem posing method much of the content is generated by the students lived experiences, rather than the teacher devising both the content and structure of what is to be learned. In a more traditional approach the empowering potential of a problem posing method is absent. The problem posing approach is particularly suitable for a program like the garment worker EWP, where immigrant women are working in unskilled or low skilled jobs. They often experience social and emotional barriers to learning English, as previously mentioned, as well as a lack of self-esteem and alienation from the dominant culture. This kind of approach allows for a reconstruction of reality by acknowledging “the root causes of one’s place in society – the socioeconomic, political, cultural and historical context of our personal lives” (p. 2). It is an empowering methodology.

Problem posing has implications for teaching style also. It requires a shift from the traditional view of the role of teacher and student; the teacher being the transmitter of knowledge and the student the passive recipient or empty vessel waiting to be filled up. Instead the classroom becomes a site of struggle and conflict, where students will take up

issues and disagree. An empowering pedagogy needs to encourage and foster the consciousness that change is possible through struggle, both by ourselves and with others.

It is the experience of the reality of lived difference that critical pedagogy practice must claim as the agenda for discussion. This means both students and teacher must find space within which the experience of their daily lives can be articulated in its multiplicity (Simon, 1987 p. 469).

The role of the teacher in the classroom determines much of the content of the program, so the teacher's philosophy is crucial. Often teachers desire to create a more democratic learning environment but they are resistant, because it is not clear how to shift the responsibility for the learning from the teacher to the student. Giroux and McLaren (1986) refer to schools as "democratic spheres [where] the issue of teaching and learning is linked to the more political goal of educating students to take risks and to struggle within ongoing relations of power in order to alter the oppressive conditions in which life is lived" (p. 226).

All of these pedagogic practices assume a political consciousness on the part of the teacher and a desire to challenge the status quo – existing relations of power and inequity in the society at large. Empowering pedagogy is one in which the sociocultural reality is recognized and the curriculum, according to Ira Shor (1993) "is built around the themes and conditions of people's lives" (p. 31).

This is not to suggest that it is easy to devise a curriculum based upon these premises. In fact it is often challenging and labour intensive for the teacher. In practice the curriculum needs to be emergent, developing as the issues come forward from the group.

2.5 Curriculum

Tollefson (1991) claims that many language teachers and theorists have failed to recognize "how language-learning theory and common teaching practices are linked with

broader sociopolitical forces" (p.1). To that end, it is necessary to address the issue of curriculum in the context of the garment worker training program. There has been some research regarding the issue of government language policy which results in immigrants and linguistic minorities being channeled into low-paying jobs. These jobs are on the periphery of the economy and are often part of a "job ghetto", meaning that they do not necessarily lead to improved language skills, nor do they lead to better jobs (Auerbach, 1995; Garcia, Bullivant, and Hornberger, 1995; Tollefson, 1991).

Tollefson (1991) has written about the U.S. government policy of training refugees for entry level jobs. A policy which he argues will serve the interests of the government by providing a pool of cheap labour, but will keep them in a cycle of poverty and dependence. This is especially true for women; because of their economic dependence on a man, their family responsibilities and the fact that women in the work force are usually paid less than men. Women are victims of the double work day and other gender related inequities which impact on their economic situation. Sewing and home work, where workers are contracted to work in their own homes and paid at a piece-rate, usually well below the minimum wage, are prime examples of a job ghetto work situation.

We may ask what kind of content is appropriate in a union based ESL workplace class which is desirous of incorporating issues of socioeconomic status and empowerment or disempowerment. Auerbach (1995) states that "although dynamics of power and domination may be invisible, they permeate the fabric of classroom life" (p. 9). She goes on to argue that, if there is no recognition of the unequal power relations in the larger society, then what gets taught is the values of the dominant culture. Often curricula is mandated by the funders of the programs and they have quite specific goals. In workplace programs, the goals are usually to

produce better, more efficient workers who can fulfill the roles necessary to “fit in” to the work force, and can function successfully in work situations.

Needs assessment is a commonly recognized way of approaching an effective curriculum for workplace and other kinds of language training. Its effectiveness as a method, however, usually results in the production of better employees for the employer. In other words it functions in the interests of the employer rather than the workers. This goal may not be overtly stated, however, if there is no attempt to include the lived reality of the participants’ lives in the curriculum and materials then what is included will be what the funding bodies want – greater employability and economic self sufficiency and decreasing economic dependence on government. There are other approaches to curriculum development which can, and do, include a more critical perspective. This means a shift in the focus of the curriculum away from the management perspective of what will make the economy stronger; to a worker perspective of what will empower the workers.

Conclusion

In considering the needs of a training program with a focus on workers’ rights I have tried to emphasize the connection between the social relations of the society at large and the effect of these forces on the language learning experience of immigrant garment workers in particular. I have argued for an approach that includes a consideration of language socialization, critical language awareness, critical pedagogy and a methodology for approaching curriculum development which is empowering not silencing. I have considered empowerment theory, as well as the concept of multiple and changing social identity in the context of societal demands, as a way of understanding the complex needs of the individual in the work place. It is hoped that a better understanding of these theories will establish a

greater commitment to a truly learner centred curriculum which acknowledges the inequities that are a part of our society and gives voice to those who have the most to gain from speaking up and being heard.

CHAPTER 3:

METHODOLOGY

I have attempted to emphasize the relationship between language, culture and social identity as a framework for the delivery of an EWP training program for garment workers. In terms of this inquiry, I have considered the necessity of a critical pedagogy in order to challenge the dominant assumptions that would otherwise govern the delivery and development of materials. This is based on the underlying assumption that language is not neutral and therefore it is necessary to take into account all the sociocultural knowledge that locates an individual in his or her unique historical, political context.

3.1 Qualitative Methodology

3.1.1 A Sociocultural Approach

The methodology employed in this study is a qualitative one. Qualitative methodology has its roots in anthropology and is often used as a framework to study and learn about different cultures. The classroom, the union hall, the workplace are all cultures within themselves and therefore require a methodological approach which allows them to be studied in this tradition.

This study utilizes a sociocultural perspective to examine what constitutes an effective workplace training program for garment workers in a trade union context. In order to analyze the views of the union and the other stakeholders in the program, ethnographic and participatory research methods were employed.

3.1.2 An Ethnographic Approach

Ethnographic methods have gained greater credibility in both educational and ESL research in recent years. Ethnography has its roots in anthropological and sociological disciplines. It has been recognized as a valid form of research especially in the study of different cultural groups. The definition of ethnography is wide ranging and sometimes difficult to pin down; however there are some commonly shared assumptions: a concern with people in cultural groups, a holistic approach, an insiders' perspective (emic) and the use of "thick description" (Nunan, 1992; Watson-Gegeo, 1988; Geertz, 1973). Since ethnography is concerned with the study of shared cultural behaviour, its focus is the group. The context of the cultural behaviour is also a concern of ethnography. *What is the relationship of the behaviour to the surrounding climate, environment or context?* The insider perspective is very important to ethnography; it is concerned with what the members of the group perceive or think about a situation. This is in contrast to quantitative research methods which assume an objectivity based on a positivist, behavioural view; the group is to be studied from the outside (etic) perspective. The phrase "thick description" refers to the close attention to detail of the cultural context and interpretation of events from an insider perspective.

3.1.3 A Participatory Research Approach

Participatory research is an approach which believes in giving voice to the participants and is intended to be empowering. It has also been identified as a particular type of evaluation research which "determines whether the practice works – that is, does it do what is intended at the site?" (Schumacher, & McMillan, 1993, p. 20). In addition, a distinguishing feature of this kind of evaluation research is that "the focus is on a solution to a local problem in a local site, (and) rigorous research control is not essential" (Schumacher,

& McMillan, 1993, p. 21). Schumacher and McMillan (1993) have pointed out that "evaluation research can add to our knowledge about a specific practice and can stimulate further research and methodological development to study practices" (p. 20).

3.1.4 Evaluation

Evaluation involves the examination of a set of practices (Hitchcock, & Hughes, 1995). The evaluation approach used in this study can be described as an emergent process.

The findings are not "facts" in some ultimate sense but are, instead, literally *created* through an interactive process that *includes* the evaluator ... as well as the many stakeholders that are put at risk by the evaluation. What emerges from this process is one or more *constructions* that *are* the realities of the case (Guba, E. & Y. Lincoln, 1989, p. 8).

This study utilized some of the ethnographic and participatory methods outlined above. The most important aspect of the study was its attempt to document a language training program by examining the perspective of the union on the need for such a program and the impact of the classes on the union and the other stakeholders, as well as the participants. In the remainder of this section I will describe the general context of the present study (program, sites, participants and stake holders) and the data collection procedures and analysis used in this study.

3.2 Description of the Program

The program commenced in March 1996 and ended in October of that year. There were ten classes with a total of 250 participants and six instructors. Some of the classes were a continuation of a previous course that had been offered in 1995. When that course ended, the college and the union had jointly applied for further funding for these students, claiming that the pilot program was a good beginning but they would benefit from further language training to consolidate what they had learned. Their level of functional English was at the

beginner to intermediate level. Most of the participants in these classes were working in unionized jobs, although some were in non-unionized workplaces. They attended class directly after work two times a week or on a Saturday. These classes were held in the union hall. One class was held at a local factory in the lunch room. This class met directly after work twice a week. The remaining classes were scheduled as part of a closure agreement with a local factory. Because the students were laid-off, the classes were able to meet during the day time in the union hall.

3.3 Sites

The classes were mostly held in the union hall and this was a good location for these reasons; it was near to the workplace and therefore easily accessible to the workers and it was a familiar and comfortable location for the subjects. The actual classroom was at the back of the union office. Most of the research was carried out at the union hall; either in one of the offices or in the classroom. This location was a neutral place for me. The classroom space also doubled as a meeting place for union business at times and consequently it was a little utilitarian. The other site was a local factory lunchroom; it was not an ideal space for a classroom because its primary purpose was a space for the workers to eat. It was a long and narrow room with lots of natural light, but open at the top and therefore quite noisy from the hum of machines next door. There was also a lot of fabric dust in the environment. However it was very convenient for the workers and it provided an adequate space for the program. The convenience of location and time were probably the biggest factors in the success of the program, combined with the fact that the classes were free for the students. These factors are strong motivators for working people who have many other responsibilities in their lives.

3.4 Biographical Information of the Stakeholder Informants

THE STAKEHOLDER GROUPS:

- The Participants – Garment Workers - union and non-union
 - The Union
 - The Company
 - The Teachers
-

3.4.1 The Garment Workers – Union and Non-Union

The students in the training program were immigrant women garment workers with a wide variety of work experience both in Canada and their country of origin. They also came from diverse economic backgrounds, and varied in age and long term goals. They were predominantly Cantonese speaking, with a few students from other language groups represented; including Punjabi, Hindi, Vietnamese, Spanish and Eastern European. Their level of English ranged from Literacy, meaning not literate in their own language, to advanced level. As is typical of these kinds of work place classes, the students varied in their level of competency in the different skill areas. Some had strong oral and listening skills but most were weaker in reading and writing skills. The classes were multi-level for a variety of reasons including time constraints for the students and the number of classes offered.

Because the students were garment workers and came from the workplace they often knew each other and may have worked together for many years. Some were recent immigrants to Canada but many had lived and worked here for a long time, on average they had worked within the garment industry for anywhere from two to thirty years with an average of about

seventeen years. They ranged in age from twenty to fifty five, but the majority were in their late thirties or forties. They were not the classic ESL learners who are new immigrants to Canada and therefore need a lot of orientation to Canadian culture. Many of them had raised families in Canada and their children were firmly established in Canadian culture having attended school here. They shared the common goal of a strong desire to learn more English and to become more familiar with Canadian culture.

They were from a number of different garment factories in the Vancouver area, including larger unionized factories as well as one well-established factory that recently closed down, and some smaller unorganized factories. The laid -off workers were in a transitional period in their work and personal lives. They were facing a changing economy and the need to re-define their working lives.

3.4.1.1 Ethnic Background and Work Experience

The students were predominantly Cantonese speaking with some Vietnamese, Punjabi, Hindi, Spanish and Eastern European languages spoken. They had between one and thirty years of experience in the garment industry in Canada. They were all female and came from a variety of family situations typical of all aspects of society. Many had lived and worked in Canada for a long time, anywhere from two to thirty years, with the average length of time being twelve years. Some of them were recent immigrants with little or no experience in the garment industry and viewed this work as temporary until they had acquired a greater fluency in English, then they would be able to get a different and better job. They ranged in age from early twenties to late fifties.

3.4.1.2 Communicative Competence in English

English is a second language for as many as ninety percent of the garment union members in B.C. according to a union informant. The majority of these members have very limited English proficiency. When one of the local community colleges in the Vancouver area assessed one hundred and fifty garment workers as to their level of English, the assessment results demonstrated that all of these workers were functioning at a Low Beginner to Intermediate level of English. This level is inadequate to easily communicate in the target language and is severely inadequate as the workers respond to their rapidly changing work environment.

They varied in their level of competency in the different skill areas, many had stronger oral and listening skills, but were considerably weaker in the area of literacy – reading and writing skills. An initial assessment was carried out by the local community college to ensure that the classes were at approximately the same level of skill. The assessment involved a grammar component, an oral interview and a written component as well as a special literacy test for those who were not literate in their first language.

The garment workers had a wide range of experience as workers in the industry, some had worked as garment workers in their country of origin, some had had completely different kinds of work training and experience and others had been home makers prior to coming to Canada. Some worked for non-union companies and some for unionized companies, some were paid by piece rate and some were paid straight time, some had worked for one company for up to thirty years and some had recently immigrated and were very new workers in the garment industry. Some viewed it as a life long vocation and others saw it as a stepping stone to other work which would be accessible when they had acquired greater fluency in the

English language. The common thread uniting them was their desire to learn more English and they were extremely motivated in this respect.

3.4.2 The Union

The garment worker union has recently merged at the international and national level with another union. The union officials felt that the merger was going to be a positive thing for the industry because, as one person said:

I think overall with the merger happening, I think we're going to be stronger in Canada and internationally too. We certainly will have twice the membership we did. We might be able to exert more pressure on employers, the government and generally everybody concerned because we are a much bigger union now.

3.4.2.1 Union Officials

I conducted video interviews with four union officials: a senior official in Western Canada; a business agent; a union representative and the president of one of the locals. Three were full time employees of the union and one was a garment worker, who had been recently laid off due to factory closure, and was taking a re-training program offered by the union as part of the closure agreement. The union representative had been hired to help with organizing in the non-union sector of the garment industry and to do investigation into home work as well as help to service the union members.

The director, Rosa,¹ is a long time union activist and organizer who has worked for a number of large national and international unions. The other two officials, Jim and Mei, are themselves immigrants who speak English as a second language and came to Canada a number of years ago. They both started work as garment workers when they immigrated to

¹ All names have been altered in order to retain anonymity.

Canada and in fact met each other at work in the factory. They became active in the garment worker union as garment workers and then were hired by the union because it required more help to organize in the industry. One informant has worked for the union for eight years and the other for the last two years. To have access to informants who have both experience as immigrant garment workers and are substantially involved in and familiar with the union provided a very rich source of data for this study.

Mei – union representative

Mei is a particularly interesting informant because she had had no prior experience with unions before working as a garment worker. Her involvement with the union and her growth as a union activist is very interesting and provides another layer of insight to the plight of immigrants in job ghettoized situations. Mei was a nineteen year old immigrant when she first came to Canada. She spoke about how she became a garment worker and the fact that it was circumstantial rather than by choice, arising out of the general difficulty that immigrants have finding employment in the field of work for which they have had training and experience (when they are not necessarily fluent in the English language). In her case she was a bank teller in her country. Most Canadian jobs require Canadian experience, which makes it very difficult for new immigrants to find work in their field. As Mei said:

‘That’s the sad part for new immigrant, I tell you, it is sad part.’

‘That you can’t continue in your field of work?’

‘I tried, right. I tried applying here but when I went to those bank there, they said oh you’re a new immigrant, right, and you don’t have our experience so... they not hire me because they said you don’t even know... experience... Yeah, lack of Canadian experience ... And so I fed up. So, I went to try because I got a friend and she works at a [Vancouver garment factory] actually and she says why don’t you come and try because we’re so busy. So I went there and I got a job.’

The discussion about Mei's involvement in the union was also very enlightening and interesting. Her first job in Canada was in a unionized garment factory, but she had no meaningful contact with the union and didn't realize there was a union although she signed a membership card as part of starting work at the factory. Nobody approached her to explain what it meant to belong to a union or to work in a unionized factory. However, when she returned to the factory after a long absence due to raising a family, the situation was very different.

'So did you get involved with the union the first time you worked there?'

'No, not at all. I didn't even know what that's about. At that time they didn't explain to me so I didn't even know what that's about so I just signed a card just as a union member because of the benefits.'

'So the second time when you went back...'

'It was totally different because I was so fortunate because it's been over 16 years at (the factory) they never have strike. I started there only a week or two weeks and then they went on strike, then I started to know what's in my union and what's the job unions to do. I started to know the union shop stewards and executive members and I met Jim, he's the vice-president of the union of our local.'

As Mei says, soon after she started work she was involved in a strike. The workers went on strike for better wages and working conditions. Mei describes herself as "fortunate" to be involved in this job action because it enabled her to "fight for her rights", and to understand the power and role of a union in helping workers to stand up to management. Because she played an active role in the strike she quickly became more involved in the union and made friends with other union activists. Her co-workers began to ask her advice on various work related problems and issues, since they knew she was close to the union. She

was then elected to the negotiating committee. Her commitment to the union resulted in her volunteering to help with the ESL project. She went on to say that she had never been involved in anything like this before and it was obviously a very politicizing experience for her. This experience of becoming more active in a union by being involved in a strike is not uncommon; for Mei it led to a strong commitment to her union and a rapid learning curve in union affairs. As she herself said:

Because I started to learn more about the union and every time because, you know, union is a non-profit organization. Sometimes they need people to help. Usually it's like a volunteer, right, so I used to help with translations and some kind of business like involved the Chinese community. So, after that...(I became)... like a shop steward, acting shop steward. And also, because in our department most of the workers they don't speak English that well so they used to come over to me because they know that I'm quite close to the union so most of the time, if they have any problem or any difficulties they like come to me and talk to me, then I pass this to the union. And that's the reason I come closer and closer to the union office and after that I involved in the negotiation with (the company). Then I recommended as the member of executive committee of the local 27. Then I gradually, gradually involved, deeper and deeper and deeper involved in the union business ...

Soon after this the union offered her full time work because they needed to do more organizing and needed more help to organize the many garment workers who were working in sweat shops with no union. The union also recognized the need for more resources to conduct investigation into the rise in numbers of home sewers, and this would entail research into the situation. Home sewers are people who sew clothes out of their homes; they are usually dealing with a contractor who brings the fabric and pattern to their home, the sewer then does the work at home and the contractor collects it later. Mei's story is a fascinating example of how the process of being involved in job action at work can connect people to their union.

Jim – union business agent

Jim came to Canada as an immigrant many years ago from South East Asia. He comes from a very well educated background himself. He worked as a garment worker when he first came to Canada, thinking of it as a temporary job. He describes his union involvement as the result of his involvement in the same strike that Mei was part of. He describes how he feels his role has changed from being a garment worker in the factory and able to dress more casually and speak his mind to having a much bigger role of responsibility. He had some insightful reflections on the transition from being a worker speaking up for his rights and those of his fellow workers, to becoming a leader in his union and how this has changed him. He had this to say about his role in the union as a business agent:

Now you have to think about a thousand other things before you yell at an employer or do something (about abuses or infractions). Before you only had the responsibility for yourself. I think a lot of people have said I've calmed down and don't fight as much for us as before. It's not that I don't fight for them. I fight in a different way. Even the clothes I wear are different. Before it was jeans and a t-shirt, now you've got to dress a little bit better. Our lives have changed over 20 years. Sometimes I'm sad that I left ... (but) now I can harass officially ... it's more cumbersome... you have to use the letters and the lawyers.

The fact that Jim is male is also interesting; he had this to say about gender:

People say how come a male is heading up the union where there's so many women. I don't think half the issues are dealing with men and women, it's more like immigrant issues. I think that those issues are more important than the male and female issues because people are not harassed and discriminated – that happens. But it's more because they're immigrants and they don't know the laws and they are exploited ...

The two union officials who were themselves immigrant garment workers, had become union activists and later business agents and organizers and therefore were very supportive of the ESL program, as they could relate to the need to learn English first hand. Their goals for the program were also more far reaching than some of the other union

officials. Their goals for the learners encompassed much broader goals than the confines of the workplace and even went beyond the concerns of the union to a recognition of typical immigrant issues of betterment of their lives and to include a consideration of training to access other, better jobs, which would not be part of the job ghetto. The interviews with these two informants were particularly telling in their understanding of the role of immigrants in the labour force and the concerns of immigrants. It is a sign of the commitment of the garment worker union to reflect the membership, that it hired immigrant garment workers to fill vacant positions, recognizing the need to have people with the experience of being workers in the factory in leadership positions within the union.

Rosa – Union Director

Rosa was hired by the international office of the garment worker union in 1985 as a union organizer. She spent eight weeks being trained by the union and was then involved in an organizing drive with one of the bigger garment companies at that time. The drive was successful and when one of the union managers left to take another job, Rosa was asked to temporarily assume the duties of Acting Co-Manager. She was subsequently voted into that position officially and spends her time split between two offices in larger centres in western Canada. Prior to her involvement with the garment worker union, she had worked for several other national unions. Rosa has fought hard to involve immigrants in the union and she is largely responsible for the high level of immigrant worker involvement in the union. This involvement is often the result of the recognition of the needs of the workers and the provision of English language training classes. She had this to say about her influence on hiring practices in the union:

I didn't come from the industry, but my policy has always been ...that if you can utilize and bring people into the union and build up secondary leadership, if they've been in the industry they understand it much better and they know what the issues are ... as an organizer (before) we used to get involved in putting on picnics ... getting all our people together ... we put on dances and raffles. Once they started to get involved ... in social events, etc. then all of a sudden, we'd call a meeting and the place would be packed. And we got shop stewards involved.

Rosa had a strong sense of how to get the membership active in the union, and the union has a high number of active members who come to meetings and are involved with union issues.

3.4.3 The Garment Company

Pete – Senior Management

Pete is a long time employee of a unionized garment company. He holds a high ranking position and he has worked there for twenty years and has known some of the garment workers since he began working there. He is very familiar with the garment industry, but from the management perspective. He has been very supportive of any initiatives to offer ESL training for the workers, however his support has taken a passive form, he has never initiated any classes himself, but has offered space for a classroom, and good support for the teaching materials such as desk, storage space, access to photocopier, and general support to iron out any problems as they arose which impacted on the classes. He also attended the graduation ceremony when invited. The teachers found him very welcoming in the classes which were held in the workplace.

Connie – Company Supervisor

Connie works as a supervisor for the same company as Pete. She was a garment worker, then a floor helper and finally became a supervisor; she speaks a European language, and she learned English as a second language in Canada. Supervisors are not in the union, but floor helpers still remain union positions. Connie described her job like this:

I have to make sure the quality is good. The people waiting on this work so they have to make enough money. Make sure the pricing is okay for them. If not I have to get the engineer involved to try to make sure we get a fair price. So I have to get the work done on time. I have priorities and different, like we have the different colours and ... tags there in the bundles. So different colours for different dates.

From this description it is clear that Connie's concerns and responsibilities have more management characteristics than those of the workers, her job involves ensuring that the buyer is getting the garments at a "good price" and this may involve adjusting the piece rate paid to the workers in order to ensure that the garment is produced for the appropriate price.

The hierarchy of the garment factory

MANAGER

SUPERVISOR

ASSISTANT SUPERVISOR

FLOOR HELPER

GARMENT WORKERS

PIECE RATE AND TEAM WORK.

3.4.4 The Teachers and The College

There were six teachers involved in the project. Their ESL experience varied from between one and twenty years of teaching. One had worked in a union based ESL class previously, and one had been involved with volunteer literacy training for the farmworkers in the Lower Mainland, one had some experience with other kinds of EWP courses, the others were instructors in ESL programs in the Community College setting. The hiring for the program was done by the Labour Studies Program of a local community college, which was responsible for the program. It should be noted that it is unusual for this kind of a program to be run by a Labour Studies Program rather than the ESL Department of the college. The

labour studies program was attempting to meet the educational needs of its union based constituency and therefore deemed it appropriate to run the program through its mandate. This was a significant factor in the program as a whole. It meant in the hiring, that other criteria would be taken into consideration rather than simply qualifications in ESL training. The hiring criteria specified an understanding and experience of trade unions and preferably previous work experience teaching English in the workplace with adult learners in a non-traditional and non-academic setting. It also stated that familiarity with employment, immigrant and human rights issues was essential. From the outset, the program belonged to the union, not management and it had an explicit mandate which was reinforced by the fact that it was provided by a Labour Studies Program. The mandate of the Labour Studies Program as described by the LSP co-ordinator is:

The Labour Studies Program was designed to provide labour education in a public institution, by unionized instructors, for rank and file workers. We offer both credit and non-credit courses oriented to union members, away from the campus, usually in union halls on weekends or evenings. ...The courses basically fall into four areas: Labour and Human Rights Law; Health, Safety and Workers Compensation; History and Political Economy; Union Development and Union Tools. They're designed to improve the skills of workers, to empower, foster self-confidence, and generally raise their level of awareness, analysis, and ability to work as trade unionists (Courier Newspaper, March 1998, p.18).

3.5 Description of Data Collection Methods

A variety of data collection methods were used in order to ensure reliability of the data:

- individual interviews with union officials – these interviews formed a major source of the data
- individual and group interviews with union and non-union garment workers

- individual and group interviews with the teachers delivering the ESL classes
- individual interviews with the plant manager and the supervisor
- researcher journal.
- observation of ESL classes
- discussion and problem-solving groups with teachers
- questionnaires completed by the participants
- review of other relevant documents related to the EWP classes

The data was collected during the period of June 1996 – June 1997.

3.5.1 Ethnographic Interviews

3.5.1.1 Individual and Group Interviews with Key Informants

Key informants were identified within each stakeholder group with the help of the union. Some of the key informants were obvious in that they were the contact people chosen by their organization to be involved in this particular project, for others I used the stakeholders to help identify appropriate people. Because the union was an important focus of this particular program I chose to give more attention to this group. The union had a key role in the organization and delivery of the program. Most of the classes were held at the union site, this meant that the program was operating out of a union environment and this affected the program and participants in numerous ways. The teachers and the college worked closely with the union in order to deliver the program to the satisfaction of both organizations. Two of the union key informants were immigrant garment workers themselves and had a particularly interesting perspective to bring to the training program. As far as possible, I conducted the interviews at the normal workplace of the informant or the union hall. Each interview lasted from between 30 minutes to one hour. All of the interviews were audio-taped

and most were also video-taped and transcribed. All of the interviews were available for the informants to see afterwards if they so chose. The video-taped interviews were copied and offered to the person for viewing and comments. I also reviewed some of the videos with the informants, where possible. The interviews were all conducted in English with no translation, so I ensured that those people who spoke ESL were able to function at a level of English sufficient to participate in the interview, that is from high beginner to advanced level of English. The garment worker informants were recruited from the highest level ESL class in the previous program. There was no payment for participation in the interviews, however the garment worker informants were very appreciative to have an opportunity to practice their English oral skills and thanked me at the end for speaking with them. All of the other informants viewed participating in the interviews as their contribution to the success of the program and their interest in any future endeavors, on behalf of their organization. All informants were recruited on a volunteer basis through the union official channels.

3.5.1.2 Interview Procedures and Questions

Prior to the interview I designed some general questions to focus the interview. (See appendix A). I wanted to be sure to cover the areas I had identified as important in terms of collecting data pertaining to the EWP training program for garment workers, but I also wanted to learn more about the context and background of the informant and their view of the program in relation to their organization, as this was an area I had chosen to focus on for my research. After introducing myself and stating the reason for the interview and the project, (consent forms had already been signed) I decided to begin by asking about biographical information. This seemed to be a comfortable starting point as it allowed the person to introduce themselves to me and also provided me with an opportunity to hear how they

described themselves in relation to the context of the program. In some cases I had had some contact with the person being interviewed and this proved to be very valuable in establishing a relaxed rapport early on. Some informants were quite familiar and comfortable with giving interviews, especially the union informants who are frequently required to give interviews in their capacity as union representatives. This was particularly noticeable in the reaction to use of the video camera, as this can be quite intimidating.

3.5.1.3 Use of Video in Giving Voice to Informants

Initially I had intended to use video only for the classroom observation and group discussion situations and to audio-tape the one-on-one interviews. The factor that convinced me to try using video, was a previous experience where I had interviewed a group of garment worker students using a tape recorder and then transcribed the tape. Upon reading the transcript I realized the great loss of “voice” in the hard copy . As I was reading the transcript, I could hear the voices of the women speaking and bringing the text to life, unfortunately this could not be the case for other readers. The difference between hearing the women’s voices and choice of words and reading it on paper was enormous. I suddenly understood what a reductive process this is and how much is lost in the re-telling. The way a person’s tone of voice, intonation, hesitation and inflection all contribute to our understanding of, not just the words, but the overall context of the speech act, took on a new importance. I then began to reflect on how much richer the speech act would be if one could see the person as they spoke and how another layer or dimension would be added to our understanding of what we hear. As the interviewer, of course, you carry the memory of being present for the moment in which the speaker spoke, however to convey that sense of completeness of meaning, video provides a much more complete record of the experience. It is, of necessity, much more

satisfying as a reproduction of the speech act. and therefore contributes a fuller sense of meaning. Because the data was collected over a lengthy period of time, the use of video proved valuable in reclaiming the context of the experience in greater depth. For the purpose of this research I have used lengthy quotations from the informants in the reporting of the findings (See chapter four and five) to give a better sense of voice in relaying the data.

In terms of gathering data I relied primarily on ethnographic interviews as well as observation of classroom procedures and frequent group meetings with the teachers prior, during and subsequent to the program. I used Spradley's (1979) book *Ethnographic Interviews* as a guide in the planning process.

3.5.2 Researcher Journal

The primary data was collected from interviews as described above. After each interview I kept a journal which consisted of my reflections, insights, interpretations and questions based on the interview. These interpretations of others' experiences cannot be deemed objective in any way, however it was useful for me in following up areas on which I needed more clarification and it helped to formulate greater clarity in interviews undertaken later.

3.5.3 Observation of ESL Classes

I observed all of the EWP classes in the training program. My observations were conducted for two reasons; initially to observe the participants in their learning environment and to monitor the effectiveness of the materials being developed, and secondly to observe the teachers in my role as coordinator. I also conducted some video observation of the classes. The video camera was set up in as unobtrusive a place as possible in order to record the activities and participation of the students as they took place in the classroom. The videos

proved to be a useful record of events which provided feedback for the teachers and the students.

3.5.4 Discussion and Problem-solving Groups with Teachers

I conducted several meetings with the teachers as part of my data collection. These meetings were focused around two questions: *What is working ?* and *What is not working?* in the program. The discussion was open ended and I encouraged feedback on the use of the materials developed for the teachers. Topics that were raised included; consideration of use of classroom space and other facilities necessary for teaching; procedures for permission to do out trips or guest speakers; sharing of material and ideas; safety in the building and details concerning the physical space. I also met individually with teachers to provide support or direction in the program if they requested it.

3.5.5 Participant Questionnaires

The students completed questionnaires at the end of the course. (see Appendix B). The purpose of the questionnaire was to ascertain future directions for the program as well as to provide some background information on the participants.

3.5.6 Review of Relevant Documents

Reports containing pertinent information written during the delivery of the program were collected throughout the course. There were reports to the various funding agencies describing the progress of the program, including the outline of course material covered to date, the nature of the participants, the drop-out rate, and comments from the various stakeholders – the union, the college, the instructors and the participants themselves.

3.6 Limitations of the study

This research was intended to be an investigation into a language training program for garment workers in a union setting based upon the reflections of one researcher. It was conducted in a restricted geographical area and took place in particular circumstances pertaining to that one program. For the above reasons the study is limited in the ability to generalize from the findings of the data.

The informants in this study came from a variety of backgrounds and life experiences and I have made every effort to represent their views as accurately as possible. However a number of the informants speak English as a second language and inevitably in cross cultural communication situations like this there can be miscommunications and meanings can be misconstrued.

3.7 Investigator Bias

In choosing to use a qualitative research methodology, ethnographic techniques and a participatory research style, it is important to acknowledge my role as researcher was not intended to be objective. The research was however rigorous in its methodology. I was involved in the program in a major way. I was very much an insider, being a coordinator of the program and also teaching one of the classes I had access to insider information which added a whole other dimension to the research. Because of my role in the program I had a much closer relationship to the stakeholders than an outside person would have had. The research benefited from my knowledge of the stakeholders and the relationship of trust that I had built up with the various informants. This trust, in particular, was a strength in the quality of the data collected. However, there are some dangers in familiarity, it can result in not noticing some obvious aspects of the data, and just taking for granted certain issues that may

need to be explored in greater detail. Whilst acknowledging these dangers, I think the benefits outweigh the disadvantages in this case. As the purpose of this study was to do an in-depth investigation into a program, through consideration of the union and to a lesser extent the other stakeholders' perceptions, I believe only an insider could access this kind of detailed data .

3.8 Data Analysis

The gathered data was analyzed according to the objectives as stated in chapter one: to identify and analyze significant factors related to: (1) the union's perceived need to establish EWP programs and the impact of such a program on the union, (2) the perceived need and impact of the classes on the participants, both union and non-union workers and, (3) as a secondary consideration, the impact of the program on the company, the teachers and the college.

In qualitative research the data analysis commences with data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The procedures involve the examination of the data to include "noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, casual flows, and propositions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.11). In this study the data analysis uses Spradley's (1980) definition of culture as being: "the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behaviour..... It is a shared belief system of meanings, is learned, revised, maintained, and defined in the context of people interacting" (p.6-9). The behaviour of groups and individuals then, is embedded in "cultural knowledge" and uses cultural principles to interact within their organization or social community. It is this understanding which underlies the analysis of the views of the union, the garment workers, the teachers and

the company in this study. The individuals interviewed in this study are part of a larger social organization.

The data from the interviews was transcribed in order to record accurate meaning and to uncover emerging and recurring patterns and themes. The data was rich with insightful comments and descriptions as is typical of ethnographic studies. There were many overlapping themes and topics.

Spradley's (1980) "domain" analysis system was particularly useful in the discovery of patterns emerging from the data. Domains are defined as large cultural categories that contain smaller categories. The large category is used to search, classify and examine some of the primary perceptions and concerns of the union, the garment workers and the other stakeholders. Then the data is examined for smaller categories which will be related to the primary ones. Finally, it is necessary to state that the procedures involved in domain analysis are interchangeable and may occur concurrently.

In this chapter I have described the methodology of the present study, including the description of the program, sites and participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. In the following chapter I will illustrate the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4:

FINDINGS: PERCEIVED NEED OF UNION AND PARTICIPANTS TO ESTABLISH EWP CLASSES

According to the objectives of the study the focus was on three kinds of factors: (1) those relating to the union's perceived need to establish EWP classes and the impact of such a program on the union, (2) those relating to the perceived need and impact of the program on the participants, both union and non-union workers and (3) as a secondary consideration, those relating to the impact of the program on the other stakeholders.

In the following two chapters the data collected will be reviewed in light of these factors. Chapter four will address the data related to the factors affecting the perceived need of the union to establish EWP classes and the factors affecting the needs of the participants, both union and non-union workers. Chapter five will address the impact of the classes on the union and the impact of the classes on the participants, union and non-union as well as the impact of the classes on the other stakeholders – the company and the teachers. I have used extensive quotes from the informants in order to present their perceptions of events.

4.1 Factors Affecting the Perceived Need of the Union to Establish EWP

It is helpful to categorize the factors affecting the needs of the union to establish EWP into two types; those concerned with the EWP **program** and those concerned with the **format** of the program. Firstly, I will deal with factors relating to the program.

4.1.1 Factors Relating to the Program

The union identified several factors relating to the need for an EWP program which were significant in their view and which led to their desire to establish EWP: the current state of the garment worker industry and its relation to the economy; the problems connected to immigrant garment workers such as the language barrier; the change in the immigrant population; the need for union education; gender issues and contradictions for the union in exposing the exploitation of garment workers . These factors will be discussed in relation to their impact on the union.

Factors relating to the need to establish the EWP program included external and internal issues which demonstrated the need for the establishment of the program as defined by the union.

4.1.1.1 The Current State of the Garment Worker Industry

The union had very specific reasons for being involved in ESL classes for both its members and within a broader constituency of garment workers in general, including organized and unorganized workers. The union officials saw two different categories of issues facing the garment industry ; those categorized as external – that is outside of the control of the industry and those characterized as internal – those that could be mediated by action taken by the union. Firstly, the external factors facing the garment industry took precedence at a macro level, because the free trade agreements and subsequent globalization of the economy have resulted in dramatic changes to the industry here in Canada and B.C.

4.1.1.2 External Issues

The union cites two major external factors which have affected the garment industry. The major external issue facing the garment industry involves global re-organization

strategies which are being used by many of the corporations in order to increase their profits. This entails redistributing capital from industrialized or "first" world countries to cheaper labour markets in poorer, or economically developing countries in the "third" world. This constant search for cheaper labour markets means finding and supporting a poorly paid work force who work in sub standard conditions for extremely low wages in other countries. In Canada there are labour standards laws and legislation offering protection for workers from the extreme kind of exploitation that occurs in an unregulated market, where there are no laws governing work. The garment workers' union claims that NAFTA is responsible for helping to perpetuate this situation of poorly paid workers and facilitating the moving of capital. One union official had this to say about free trade: "I think, you know, NAFTA is not free trade. It's basically moving money around. Not people, definitely. I couldn't work in Mexico or the United States. But they could set up factories in either place. Workers are not allowed to move but money can move." The garment workers' union opposed NAFTA right from the start and they maintain that NAFTA has hurt the garment industry in Canada enormously in terms of either driving down the standard of working conditions here in Canada or causing workers to be out of work by facilitating the easy relocation of companies to countries such as Mexico or Central or South America, where profit margins are greater at the expense of the workers.

The other significant external factor is the dramatic increase in the number of manufacturers in B.C. during the last ten years, partly due to uncertainty about the future of Hong Kong and partly due to Canadian immigration policy in encouraging business class immigrants to enter Canada. As a result of these changes in immigration patterns, many

“sweat shops” – non-union garment factories, have been springing up as owners seek to fulfill their part of the immigration agreement with the government.

To illustrate the difficulty the union is facing within the industry, one of the informants had this to say about the situation:

It's really hard to keep track of where they (garment factories) are and there's so many have sprung up all over. I mean they're in garages and they're in warehouses. They're above restaurants. You know you'd be surprised where you'd find a little garment factory going. ... It's getting worse and I think the government is at fault because a lot of these entrepreneurs that are coming into the country are not told specifically what the rules and regulations are and that they must abide by those rules because they seem to think they can do what they did in their own countries.

..... In these sweatshops, basically they're all immigrant women and very few of them speak, read or write English and they're very afraid of their jobs. a lot of these sweatshops are owned by people of their own colour and race and the threat of them losing their jobs, etc. is very real to them. And the other thing about these sweatshops too is that they go from 7 o'clock in the morning until midnight. Some of these people are actually working ten and twelve hours a day and how the union finds out about them usually is on an organizing drive. If we target one place, we'll find out. But there's so many of them that are in way far-out little places or in such places that you wouldn't even think there was a garment factory there. Basically, the only way you can track them is if by some chance one of our members tells us about it or if we happen to run into somebody that has decided to find out what their rights are or if this is right or if they get fired and they're not getting paid.

Employers are often uninformed or simply not interested in following the regulations regarding employment standards, and while the union feels that governments should be doing more to enforce and educate employers, their focus is on educating the garment workers themselves to be able to speak up and take action against abuse and exploitation.

As has already been mentioned immigrant garment workers are working in one of the lowest paid, low status jobs in the labour market in Canada. Their work situation is sometimes referred to as a job ghetto situation, because workers do not have access to the skills required to move into better paid, higher status jobs, which might lead to improved

economic circumstances and nor do these jobs lead to a greater proficiency in the dominant language. It is work which does not require a functional fluency in the language in order to be hired, consequently it is typically done by immigrants who are not able to speak the dominant language and do not usually have much opportunity to learn the language at work. Often the working conditions do not meet the requirements of the labour standards legislation in the non-unionized workplaces. Because the workers are immigrants and do not know their rights at work or speak the language, they are vulnerable to abuse by the employer.

As has been stated, the external factors such as NAFTA, more manufacturers, and deregulation, have caused a decline in union membership and created many complex barriers for the union in terms of its organizing goals. It is within this context that the garment workers' union has committed itself to helping workers in the industry by offering them English language classes. The union perceives education as being extremely important.

4.1.1.3 Internal Issues facing garment workers

The internal issues facing garment workers relate more to the everyday working conditions and the impact of these on their daily lives. The changes in immigration policy and country of origin of immigrants have had an impact on the union. The language barrier was identified by the union as the greatest problem. The union had this to say about it:

I would say the language barrier is really a problem because work force is changing – there are more Asian immigrants coming in now. Basically 90% are women, 90% also wouldn't know what a union is because the countries they come from wouldn't have that kind of situation. They don't know the laws.

There are two concerns identified here; one is the lack of English language skills and the other is the lack of knowledge regarding the role of a union and its importance in the workplace. This lack of union background was clearly a more recent problem for the union

and one that they were interested in addressing, hence the interest in a larger involvement in providing the language training. From the perspective of the union this is a change from previous times where many of the immigrant workers came from countries which had trade unions and therefore were used to the concept of unions and workers fighting for regulations to improve working conditions.

The union views its mandate as being to organize workers into unions in order to offer protection from exploitation and abuse in the workplace but, organizing in the garment industry is not easy. There are many seemingly contradictory and problematic issues which mitigate against the unions' mandate. The workers themselves have different views of the union which cause considerable difficulty in helping to organize the workers above and beyond the external factors which are outside of the direct control of the union. One of the union informants had this to say in answer to the following question:

‘What do you think is the biggest barrier to people joining the union?’

‘... language definitely. Not knowing about unions. When they come from countries where they've not had unions, I think that's another thing. If people are not educated in the unions, and they come here and they have a language barrier, that's two things that we have to overcome. And they have to overcome.

And no matter what we translate and we try to do, we can't have a translator for every situation. If you look at the population in Vancouver and the ethnic groups here, I mean it is humanly impossible. I think educating the workers in one language is the main thing and then getting them through the process, educating them – will go a long way in making the right decisions....’

The union prioritizes education as an extremely important organizing strategy, but furthermore they support the notion that immigrants should be able to function in the dominant language. Both of the union officials who were themselves immigrants felt very strongly that it was preferable to provide assistance and support for learning English rather than translating materials.

strongly that it was preferable to provide assistance and support for learning English rather than translating materials.

There seems to be implicit encouragement of workers by some employers (and at times the workers themselves) to work long hours and in some cases of employers to avoid paying proper taxes and overtime rates, including following labour standards legislation. The union is acutely aware of the contradictions which operate in the industry. They are dealing with immigrants who are working in job ghetto situations where the language needs are not clearly identified in terms of work. They are mostly immigrant women who are victims of the double work day, and have other gender issues to contend with.

'A lot of our workers have to work maybe two jobs or long hours and then they have to go home and cook or look after their kids, whatever, they don't have time for unions. The question is "what does a union do for me?". We had a change in attitude I think over the last five or ten years where immigrants coming from say Hong Kong or China, or Sri Lanka or Bangladesh, they used to working 80 hours. They are saying to us "well if you're a union shop you only work 40 hours or 35 hours, we want to work more".'

'So it works against you.'

'It's almost working against us. It's come to a point where there's also the situation where a lot of employers are not paying these people. They are paying them under the table right. So they work 80 hours and they aren't paying any taxes. It's almost they are encouraged to do this.'

It is an industry that is extremely difficult to regulate because of the number of manufacturing shops and the lack of enforcement of the labour code. However, the union recognizes the enormous difficulty of taking action in these cases. One of the informants had this comment to make:

The hard part is how do we deal with that? How do I close a guy up and say to 200 workers, "you're out of a job? We don't need you". To me, \$3.50 (per hour) is better than no money at all. These people, in one way, have no Employment Insurance (EI) cause they're people that have just come into the country. No EI, no benefits. Nowhere to turn to. So they work. I always say,

when it comes down to putting food on my table for my kids, as opposed to joining a union, what would I take?

Therefore organizing garment workers in B.C. is fraught with contradictions for the union. Formulating a strategy to overcome these factors is a formidable task, despite the fact that the union obviously has a very thorough understanding of the social identity of the garment workers and the reasons why they may be resistant to the union's efforts to maintain and improve working conditions in this industry. They are contending with efforts to undermine their credibility on all fronts, including the seemingly bizarre situation of employers who pay more money than minimum wage to keep the union out.

More people wanted to join (the union) when the Labour Code was bad, believe it or not. ... they wanted more protection. They were scared of the employers... now employers are scared. We have employers who pay more than a union shop, in some cases, to keep the union out.That's good. But we (the union) don't get any credit for that. Those people that work in there don't say "Well, the union is the one who got us the benefits". It's like, we're getting better benefits, why should we join the union? It's not like he's (the employer) trying to keep the union out by paying that extra money.

Comments like these signaled the need for more basic union education in labour history and an understanding of worker rights legislation to be incorporated into the curriculum, for example the struggle for the 8 hour day. The history of struggles of working people for improved working conditions and concepts such as the right to time when you do not work are areas which may be unknown to immigrant workers and therefore become important in a program such as this.

4.1.2 Factors Relating to the Format of the Program

In terms of factors relating to the format there were two influential ones reported by the union. One concerned **access** to the program and the other concerned the **style** of delivery. These two aspects will be addressed in the next section.

4.1.2.1 Access

In terms of access, the following issues emerged as being important from the data; recruitment methods, assessment, location, time, cost, comfort level, flexibility and ability to respond to current needs.

Most of the workers gained access to the program through the union, they organized recruitment and, as has been mentioned previously, there were a variety of reasons why certain groups of workers became involved with the classes. Some of the workers were involved in the classes because of a closure agreement between a factory closing down in order to re-locate and the union. Some of the workers were involved as a continuation of a previous program which had received extended funding and some of the non-union workers were recruited through word-of-mouth by the union, through friends and relatives. There were waiting lists of other interested workers.

There was a screening process which eliminated workers with a level of English in both written and oral assessed to be at the advanced level. The company had a minor role in access in terms of the time and location of the classes, but no role in selecting which workers were able to attend. However there were issues of over time involved periodically. These will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five.

For the classes which were held in the union hall, the location meant that the learners became very familiar with the union office and saw the union officials regularly, so it provided an opportunity for more contact in a positive environment. Many of the workers were already familiar with the union hall and for those who were not union members it offered an opportunity to become more knowledgeable about the union environment in non-threatening circumstances. The union was offering language training free to its members,

something they were all very interested in. Some of the reasons cited by the union for being involved in offering English language training are: to raise the profile of the union and to show garment workers, both union and non-union, what a union can do and does do for its members. One of the union informants had this to say about access to the classes:

They are thirsty for knowledge. I think ... most of the members, even the union members, would not be able to afford ESL classes and when these were offered free to them, they made the commitment to come. I think that there is a greater need for that but I also think that it's successful because the teachers did a good job, the students themselves did a great job, but I think the financial aspect is the greatest motivation for them to come."

Another reason for the success of the program was attributed to the location: "That is another thing why it was successful is because it was close by to their work areas or where they live." Another factor which the union described in terms of access related to the comfort level of the participants. It was expressed like this: "I think also one of things is that people are very intimidated when they go to colleges and most of our members have not been in school for ten, fifteen, twenty years. I know even for me if I had to go to a college setting, I would be kind of intimidated to do that." They felt that several other factors were important in how and where the classes were taking place: "The flexibility of things. the pace of the course itself – not rigid lines drawn in where you had to learn this."

All of the factors mentioned above; the familiar environment, location, cost, and relevance of the material impacted on the participation of the workers. From the union perspective the purpose of the ESL classes was multi layered. Primarily they were to connect and cement workers to the union, but the union also was able to recognize a greater purpose for immigrants learning the language of the dominant culture – that is integration and the opportunity to access better jobs. The union informants, especially those who were themselves immigrants, were able to articulate those needs.

4.1.2.2 Style

The other important aspect relating to the format of the EWP was the philosophy underlying the program or the appropriate style of training for such a program, including the content. The union frequently expressed concerns regarding the kind of training approach.

4.1.2.2.1 Education as Empowerment

The theme of education as a means to empowerment was recurrent throughout the interviews that I conducted with the union officials who were themselves immigrants speaking English as a second language. Here are some of the comments that were made:

'I think internally, the best way to do this is to organize. Go out there and really organize workers. I think workers are the ones who have the power to change their situations, not myself or anybody else. I think the workers are the union and we are definitely going to be doing much more organizing. ... The people themselves, educating them, through this process (the ESL project) and other processes we have in place, that's going to help. People make the right decision. Once they know the laws and they know what to do, they make the right decisions. The problem is that we've never had the luxury of educating our work force. ... Organizing is the main tool in changing workers' lives.'

'How can English in the workplace help or English through the union?'

'English in the workplace, taught by an employer, is not helping. We know that right now because employers don't want people to learn their rights. They want them to work faster, whereas the union wants them to work smarter.'

For the union, working smarter means a greater knowledge of the laws that govern the work place and of the dominant language in order to be able to take greater control over decisions affecting work life.

4.1.2.2.2 Content

In terms of the curriculum for the training program, the union wanted to include specific information on employment standards and labour legislation, worker rights, human

rights, health and safety at work. The union, when asked about content for the program, was able to go beyond even a traditional union focus on worker rights, employment standards and health and safety. They had this to say about the idea that some of the women may be interested in work other than as garment workers.

‘What would you like the workers to learn in the English classes?
What is your priority in terms of content?’

‘I have two priorities. While I recognize the workplace is changing, I think we also have to be prepared for a day when maybe there isn’t a garment manufacturer or manufacturing isn’t going to be here. I want our people to be prepared, if it happens that they could go out and find another job.I think with the changes and with NAFTA and imports coming in.... we can’t bury our head in the sand and say it’s not going to happen. I want them to be prepared to have the education ... to move into other industries. ... There are two different types of workers....The older work force which is not going to move, and ... the very new immigrants who the language barrier might be the only thing keeping them in the garment industry. I think we have to cater to a broader range of workers ... But I also think that they have to learn about the Canadian way of life, the culture, the laws, all of those things. It’s not just saying “let’s make this workplace better”. I think it goes beyond that. I think they have to get out and be out there in the communities, participate more in the communities and outside the workplace. The union’s point has never been to just promote the workplace. We want to reach out more than the workplace.’

What is being expressed here is a much broader conception of English training, it tries to take into account the needs of the workers situated within the economic situation and with a view to the future. The union also reported being concerned with how language training can help with relations between co-workers, acculturation issues, involvement in the community and training for other kinds of employment.

4.2 Factors Affecting the Needs of Participants for EWP – Union and Non-Union

The factors affecting the needs of participants for the EWP classes can be divided into two categories: (1) communication skills including speaking to the supervisor and

(2) knowledge of worker rights and sweat shop conditions. Some of these factors affected both union and non-union workers and some pertain specifically to the non-union workers.

4.2.1 Communication Skills

The term communication is used here in its broadest definition to include use of English at work and relations with management and the supervisor in particular as a manifestation of a problem area identified by the workers.

4.2.1.1 Use of English at Work

Most of the informants defined their main needs in terms of using English at work as: (1) to deal with problems or complaints concerning the supervisor (2) to talk to each other for social reasons (3) to learn the names of equipment and procedures and (4) to understand directions from the supervisor

Use of English at work is extremely limited, sometimes it is useful to be able to speak but it is certainly not a requirement to be able to do the job as was reported by all the informants. The majority of the workers speak the same language, Cantonese, and those who speak different languages may also speak English because they have a greater need to communicate in English at work. The work situation is such that it does not provide much opportunity for learning or practicing English skills. There are many references throughout the interviews I conducted with the company which detailed the fact that English was not a requirement to do the job. The company manager had this to say about the necessity of functional English skills at work:

‘And what about the language? Do most of the workers have a level of English that’s sufficient for the job?’

‘Most of them do..... for the job, because we have Chinese-speaking supervisors in cutting and in sewing. The problem, then, is minimized ...and the floor help or assistant supervisors, those people who service the operators,

..... most of them again are Chinese-speaking and you know you're getting the instructions or the communication flowing through the supervisor or through the floor helper to the employee and it works pretty effectively. Where someone needs to have more specific communication obviously we'll make sure there's a Chinese person translating for them. that happens when, for example, if they come to meetings with me and we're discussing what we're doing and changing the job or changing that operation, or changing the method of pay, that we always have to have someone translating, just to be sure the message is clear.'

'If there is a need for English at work, what would the need be? or what language do they mostly use at work?'

'Well, the supervisor does communicate to the people in Chinese. The supervisor, in turn, communicates to engineering people and people like myself in English. My Chinese is non-existent.'

'So the supervisor would be fluent in English, or pretty fluent?'

'Yes, oh yes. And we've got a Chinese-speaking supervisor in cutting who is fluent in English and in sewing (in one factory). (In the other factory), however, our supervisor - I've got one Portuguese lady and an East Indian lady and both of them obviously communicate in English on the job. But, as I say, ... I've got one, two, people in the sewing room at that level who is fluent in both Chinese and English.... And a lot of the girls, ...(in that factory) have adequate English to communicate then. You know over the years you learn what words are for the things you do during the day and the functions you participate in. If it was a conversation outside of work or anything probably it would be much more difficult.'

The above excerpts seem to indicate that the company perspective is concerned with the workers being able to follow directions and procedures in order to make sure they are productive workers.

These are some of the comments from the informants regarding their need to speak more English at work, especially to the supervisor in order to deal with problems or complaints, and also how the ESL classes had helped them to feel more confident:

I didn't like the piece-work. Because the supervisor want more work, but they didn't want to pay more. Sometimes I argue with him. I so angry, I quit one job. I can't speak, I just angry. I can't speak well, but I come to school, six months I can speak more.

I want to speak more English but my speech is difficult. I understand what she (supervisor) talking, but it is difficult to answer to you, my meaning.

I think I would (complain) but my English is not very good, so I cannot talk to the boss.

When I in Hong Kong I study some English a long time ago, but I always speak in Cantonese (in Canada)..... At work I still speak in it. It's hard speak in English. Now I can speak more. I'm so happy. I'm so lucky (to take) the ESL classes.

4.2.1.2 Relations with the Supervisor

One of the most important factors for the workers in terms of communication is the need to speak English to the supervisor. The supervisor is a management position and, as was reported by the company, the supervisor is usually bi-lingual, because they are the conduit between management and the workers. Most of the management can function in English, although it may not be their first language. If the supervisor speaks a different first language from the majority of the workers, then the workers have no recourse but to use English for communication purposes. While the company is content to solve this problem by hiring bi-lingual supervisors and providing translation when necessary, the union had a very different perspective on the situation. The union felt that the company's hiring practices for supervisors actually assists in keeping the workers from becoming functional in English.

In the words of one of the informants:

Most of the employers, the easiest way for them to communicate with the workers is to hire a supervisor of the same nationality. But what happens is – two things ... actually. One is when they are communicating with the supervisor, maybe what they are communicating to the supervisor is not what the supervisor goes and tells the management. The supervisor is telling the management what the management wants to hear. They are not on the workers' side. Let's face it, if you tell a supervisor "you are not doing your job", is she going to take that to management, no. She's not going to go and say "well they said I'm not doing my job". Basically, having that supervisor has hurt those people, because sometimes the demands are not always

communicated to middle management or upper management The second part is by getting those people to communicate with those supervisors in their own language, the employers have a hold on those workers. So they are not educated (in English) enough to go out there and find another job.

From the union point of view the company has developed a system of management which acts to prevent workers from learning or using English on the job and it becomes a way to control the workers and keep them in a job ghetto situation. The union takes the view that language training can only have positive results for the workers:

I think that once you learn the language, a lot of other barriers will come down. Some of the barriers our workers themselves put up. For instance, the Chinese group of people or the East Indian group, they come and sit together. They don't want to mix. But, that's a barrier they put up themselves. Sometimes it's because they can't communicate with those people. It's not just because they want to do that, it's just because they can't communicate. It's a very tough situation to be in.

The union is concerned that even issues of racial segregation in the workplace can be impacted by language use.

The garment worker informants had other concerns to add. Communication with the supervisor is probably the area which has the greatest potential for conflict and the most at stake for the workers. This is where disagreements about prices and allocation of work takes place. The workers reported that if the supervisor spoke the same language as the worker then the relationship between the two was usually better, if however the supervisor spoke a different language the potential for miscommunication and problems was much greater. As one informant said in answer to these questions:

'How was the supervisor?'

'She was very nice because she also came from Hong Kong. In whole factory, we can communicate very well because we can speak Cantonese. We are understanding of what we should do.'

'And did anybody speak English at work?'

‘No.’

Another informant from a different factory had a very different experience with her supervisor who spoke a different first language.

‘How is your supervisor at work?’

‘Not friendly. She is an Indian woman (Indo Canadian) so she has married a co-worker who is Indian. She is ... towards the Chinese people. Racism.’

‘Why is that? What does she do?’

‘Sometimes we do the same job, sometimes a mistake, but it is not the Chinese people. But the Indian supervisor always says it is the Chinese people. But it is not the Chinese. She never talk to the Indian people. Some mistakes, she always talk to the boss and say this mistake is the Chinese people. They always make mistakes. But they never take the Indian people to talk to the boss. Always like this. It’s not fair.’

‘Can you complain about that?’

‘I think I would but my English is not very good so I cannot talk to the boss.’

‘Does the supervisor speak English?’

‘Yes, her English speaks very well.’

‘So she speaks English to you and to all the workers?’

‘All workers. She talk to her Indian worker in Indian language.’

The above excerpt illustrates a perceived unfairness of how the supervisor treats the workers according to whether they share the same first language. This was reiterated by one of the union informants also:

‘... And that’s the advantage for the boss actually. Most of the boss they don’t like the workers get along. ... because they will stand together. ... Most of the time they will try to divide them, isolate them in different groups and then everybody against each other. And he’s the one taking advantages.’

‘Does that mean.... when they have supervisors, the supervisor does the same kind of thing?’

‘Oh, yes definitely. The supervisor all the time on the boss’ side.’

‘I wonder how in the language classes we can talk about that?’

‘... let them know. Don’t fall in the trap. Most of them they don’t know. Only the boss trying to do something, and the boss say hey don’t tell, don’t tell the other people because you’re the only one I tell you. Actually, he’s going to tell every individual but the same conversation. See what I mean? So that’s why it happens they fight and against each other.’

The trap of using racism and language skills or lack of language skills to divide the workers against each other is a powerful weapon for the boss.

In sum, although communication in English is not a company requirement to be hired into the work place, it appears to be necessary for the workers to be able to advocate on their own behalf. The company solution does not allow the workers to function on an equal basis.

4.2.2 Knowledge of Worker Rights

Another factor relating to the needs of the participants was the working conditions facing the garment workers in the non-union sector of the industry. This situation has been impacted by the increase in manufacturers and the closure and relocation of larger, unionized, companies.

Complaining about work related problems was another area where English was deemed necessary. Some of the women reported that when faced with unfairness at work, choices are very limited for the worker, and often the only resolution they can see is to quit the job.

‘What can you do if your boss doesn’t pay you the right money, if you don’t get minimum wage, what can you do about that?’

'The boss not pay I think maybe you change your job. ... if you tell the boss, they don't like you. Then you do the hard work until you unhappy and you will leave.'

'If you complain, you get a bad job?'

'Yes, Yes. ... If you complain to the boss, she (supervisor) doesn't like you. Maybe the boss make some problem for the supervisor. (and then) She don't like you.'

4.2.2.1 Piece Rate and other problems at work

Another situation which was mentioned by the participants in relation to the need for English at work was the piece rate negotiation. Piece rate is the most common method of payment in the garment industry and it is also the greatest source of contention. On the one hand the sewers like it because it presents the opportunity to make more money if you are a fast worker, on the other hand it is a system that easily gives rise to unfairness and even abuse in some instances. Each piece is assigned an estimated completion time and a price by the engineer. It is up to the sewer to complain if the price or time allowed is not appropriate. It requires constant monitoring in order to set a fair price for each piece.

In unionized factories there is a guaranteed base rate which is equivalent to at least minimum wage and maybe a little higher, but in other factories there were many examples of workers who had not received the equivalent of the hourly provincial minimum wage for their work. Some of the informants had this to say about the system:

I didn't like the piece-work because the supervisor want more work but they didn't want to pay more.

The government pay for the minimum wage is good, but they (some factories) don't do it. You do piecework you earn maybe \$4 or \$5 for an hour. Not fair.

The job of piece-work is very exciting. Co-workers always there. They want to make more so they always fight – they have arguments.

The garment worker informants expressed broad interests in terms of content.

‘What do you want to learn in your English classes?’

‘... I want to learn about life and to talk to someone. Conversation. Everyday. Maybe it’s good if boss is English. She has chance to talk to her in English. It is difficult. More people just talking in Cantonese. Talk some things ... arguing. They argue about ... prices. If supervisor is good for you, a good price or job for you, if not, you do it and argue.’

‘So, complaining to the supervisor would be one thing. What about other things?’

‘I want to learn more about work. More about life. Yeah, that’s important. You have to talk to other people.’

‘Talking is difficult, so if I have chance to (take the) next course, I hope I can learn more about talking. I hope this course can continue for newcomers and old customers and everybody have a chance to talk.’

‘(Our) ... English is not very well. Difficult to communicate. To communicate is very important. When we know each other, complaining is less.’

‘Making a joke ...’

According to the union, needs for EWP ranged from the current economic situation, a downturn in union membership and a negative image of unions within the immigrant community. The EWP classes were seen as a way of mitigating some of these problems and difficulties which were facing the union. For the participants the needs focused mainly on use of English at work for the purpose of complaining, dealing with work related problems, in particular the supervisor, and a social aspect. Finally there was some overlap in the participants and the union’s concerns as identified through the research reflected in a concern with acculturation issues, knowledge of Canadian culture and society and how integration might occur. Chapter five will be concerned with the impact of the classes on the various stakeholders.

CHAPTER 5:

FINDINGS: IMPACT OF THE CLASSES ON THE STAKEHOLDERS

The second focus identified in the objectives for this study concerned the impact of the classes on (1) the union, (2) the participants, both union and non-union and (3) as a secondary consideration, the other stakeholders – the company and the teachers. The second part of the findings will be divided into three sections accordingly.

5.1 Impact of the Classes on the Union

The findings in this respect are extremely positive. The union informants reported that there were several notable impacts on the union.

5.1.1 Violations of the Labour Standards Code Uncovered

Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the union was able to uncover violations of the labour code in some of the unorganized sweatshops as a direct result of the EWP classes. One union official who was hired to do some field work into the situation of the non-unionized shops had this to say about the working conditions:

Very bad conditions. Totally different as those unionized factories. They don't have the first aid facilities. They don't have the safety rules. They don't have the working schedule. They start in the early morning. They don't really have the coffee break. They don't have the really the lunch break. They don't have those. And, they, according to what they said, ten hours everyday is the regular working hours. No overtime pay. Racism. Sexual harassment. No dignity working over there. Working there just like slaves. Because I went in there and I try to find a job there because I really want to find out how it really, why people they suffer from those sweat shops. I know this one person, she went there, she worked and she worked for ten hours, she only made \$18 for that day. She cried. She called to the (union) office. She said "what I'm supposed to do? Just \$18". Lots of places like that now. Is over 100 (in the Vancouver area).

She went on to say that some of the non union shops are quite big and may have as many as 40 workers, in very crowded conditions with people working back- to- back. During the ESL classes various violations of the Employment Standards Act were uncovered, especially amongst the laid -off workers some of whom were out in the job market looking for other jobs. They returned with similar stories of abuse and exploitation; such as being paid by piece rate with no guaranteed minimum wage, or working overtime but being paid only for straight time, or having a machine break down therefore not being able to work for some of the day and only being paid for the pieces they had sewed which did not amount to minimum wage. In reality, many workers were not paid the equivalent of minimum wage, despite working for many hours and supposedly having provincial employment standards legislation.

The union has been able to uncover many abuses in the industry. It knows of some employers who operate double sets of books, where workers are working two jobs, being paid at minimum wage or less, with no overtime rates. One group of sewers was able to file a class action complaint against their employer through the employment standards branch, with the help of the union, when such an abuse came to light in the context of the English language classes. These kinds of infractions are not uncommon, and the union sees the ESL classes as a way of educating and informing the workers about their rights at work so they will be able to have some recourse in the face of this kind of exploitation.

As one union informant noted:

Through ESL (classes) a few students came and we started talking to them and ... because we asked in ... a labour studies program.... (they) gave information in regards to the Employment Standards Act. And because of it we are now doing an appeal to the Employment Standards and it's under investigation and we have 97 claims going in against one employer. ... at the beginning, they were all afraid to even put the claim in. ... These people were working 70

hours a week, seven days a week, ten hours a day. No overtime, no time-and-a-half, nothing. And with the new Employment Standards Act, after the 48 hours it's double time. So these people were getting paid straight time all the way through. They had double punch cards and when they sat down and figured it out, and gone back two years ...there was one person and he worked the 70 hours and even STAT holidays, they even worked Christmas Day. We figured it out and they owed him over \$30,000 in back pay.

The union went on to say that once the other workers realized the amount of money they were owed, and the real potential to recover the unpaid wages, they were able to overcome their fear and file a policy complaint with the Employment Standards Branch.

5.1.2 Greater Awareness of Rights at Work

The union reported that they had noticed an increase in workers talking about their work situations and expressing concern about their rights at work and knowledge of employment standards. This was a direct result of the EWP classes.

I think from the course that we just went through, it's proven that people are now starting to ask questions. They are wanting to know their rights. Some of them actually are talking about their employers and the situations they've been in. I think as long as you educate them, they will make the right decisions for themselves. We certainly can't be playing God in other people's lives, but we certainly can educate them. Getting to know the laws and language helps a lot for those people.

Another informant had this to say:

I think the main part I'm happy to see is them communicating. I think there's been a big change in union and non-union (workers). the contracts are very important and how we go about getting contracts and their help that they could put in to get these contracts. For instance, when we have a shop meeting, it is very important that they participate. They come to those meetings, they ask what a strike vote means. We have to always talk to them. It doesn't mean if we take a strike vote, we go on strike.

The classes had provided a forum for the workers to speak up about their work situation and this had become apparent to the union business agents. They also attributed an increase in confidence to the program. These kinds of changes in communication and assertiveness are

subtle and occur slowly over time, especially when the classes are only three hours twice a week or even once a week. However according to the union there were some very positive changes taking place.

5.1.3 Positive Attitude toward the Union and Better Understanding of the Union

The union informants also reported noticing a more positive attitude toward the union, as well as a better understanding of what belonging to a union means. In the past they felt that many of the workers, especially in the unorganized sector, didn't see any benefit to joining the union and even worried that joining a union would mean losing their job. Some of this is based in ignorance, particularly on the part of new immigrants. One of the union informants put it like this:

'Eight hours, ten hours a day – doesn't matter as long as there is work there. They don't care pay by piece rate, they just try really try hard and work hard to get the money because they are new immigrant, they need the money, they need to live. And that's the most saddest part and they don't know their rights. They don't even know their rights. So after we have this special project most of the students came to me and say "Oh, thank you very much to the union because I learned a lot, right, of my rights and I learned the regulations" and they learn about most union about. So most of the workers they quite interested to join the union actually. They came to me. At least, they have any problems, they call us.'

'So they know who to go to.'

'Yes, exactly, to seek the answer. If they have any problem related to their work they just call here..... it means our project really worked and those people they really learned'

After the classes the workers were able to identify the union as a potential ally and use union personnel as a resource for problems that they may encounter. All of this helped to counter what the union perceived as a negative image of unions presented in the media and generally in the public sphere.

[There has been] bad publicity by the media and other people about unions. For instance, if you look at collective agreements over the last 40 years, I think we've had maybe 2 or 3 work stoppages in 40 years. That is not a lot. But where the media deceives people is you never hear of a contract that was settled; you always hear about the strike that happened. And 95% of the time, if you look at the statistics, getting a union in does not automatically mean you are going to go on strike. There are only 5% of times that people go on strike, but that's the 5% that gets publicized. So people have a perception about the unions.

5.1.4 Negative Impact

Negative impact of the classes on the union concerned the lack of physical space for the program and the drain on the already over taxed union personnel in maintaining the program. The union provided excellent support for the program, including following up on attendance problems and communication between the students and the instructors as well as translation service and materials suggestion.

5.2 Impact of the Classes on the Participants: Union and Non-Union Workers

In general, the impact of the classes on the participants was positive. The participants liked the classes. They also reported that they enjoyed the experience of language learning and felt they were making good progress in their learning. They were able to both make themselves understood and could understand others better. They had also learned more about their rights at work, including issues of racism, human rights law and employment standards legislation. In addition, they felt they had been exposed to other knowledge about Canadian life which was useful to them. They particularly liked the various out trips which teachers had organized for them, and they felt better able to function in the community as well as the work place. They mentioned an increased ability in communication at work and in their community, with co-workers, supervisors and union officials, as well as in stores and other parts of their daily lives. Supervisors and union officials also noted some increase in

communication skills, although it should be mentioned that the classes ran for between three and six hours per week, which is not very much time for language acquisition. As Burnaby et al. (1996) state: "language learning can be a lengthy process, especially for isolated women, working in jobs that make linguistic communication difficult" (p.315) It is not within the scope of this study to do a more in-depth analysis on changes in communication patterns of the participants, although this could certainly form the basis of further research. Also the program has not been running for long enough to make such a study viable, however this would be a worthwhile project at some later date.

5.2.1 Increased Confidence in Communication

One supervisor reported that she noticed an increase in communication skills, however most of the other supervisors speak the same language as the majority of the workers, so much of the communication between them occurs in the first language. Therefore, it is not surprising that the findings did not uncover a marked increase in communication skills by the supervisors. The union officials, however, did report a difference, but it was noted through the workers themselves telling the union specific ways that the classes had helped them. This came to light in the course of the union evaluation of the program which took the form of on-going informal requests to the students about the course, the content and their progress. Some of these findings are reported here.

The union officials noticed an improvement in communication skills in their interactions with the students. As one union official commented:

Most of the students now they only took the course for six months, right, but quite a few of them they really can communicate with the other people, other races. They really feel proud of themselves. They call me, "Oh, I went shopping and usually the salesperson ask me may I help you, you know, because I don't know how to reply so I just smile to them, now I know (what to say) oh, I'm just looking or I'm browsing, thank you". Yeah, they call me

last week and they told me that they were so happy. They went to the bank, even they went into some western Canadian restaurants, they know how to order. That's because they learned, they learned from our class.

Another union informant claimed that the classes had helped the students to speak up at work when something was wrong. They had gained in confidence and the ability to complain if they felt something was unfair. She had these comments to make:

'Really and truthfully the ESL classes have made a lot of our older members well aware of you don't have to take it because you allow them to speak their minds....

'So, now they're speaking up. But I can remember, after the first project, you know, our graduating class and I had gone in to (the factory) and it was just before lunch time, before noon, and I walked in and they said "Hi!" Good morning. They look at their watch. "No, it's good afternoon." And I started to laugh. All of a sudden, you know. It sort of, it gives you a little bit of a chill but it was cute in a way and I sort of started laughing. They'll look at their watch now to see if it's noon, if it's morning or afternoon and I thought that was really great. And "How are you?" "I am fine."

'.....I was in the lunch room and there was a group there that I knew had taken ESL and the one group was sitting talking in there, practicing their English. It's very motivating to see them. You know it really gives you a deep feeling that you're doing something to help them.'

The participants reported that they felt more confident in using English, both at work and especially in the community. They responded to the following questions directly:

'Do your English classes make you feel stronger at work?'

'Yeah. Better than before. Not afraid to speak to everybody. Hello is good. Before this hello is difficult to talk out. This is the first step and talk to another.'

'What effect have the ESL classes had on your English?'

'Sometimes I don't know if I don't have the tools, now I know if there is a problem can talk to her [supervisor].'

'I learned bobbin case and bobbin. Before now I don't understand how to call this. What's that?!'

5.2.2 Negative Impact

Negative impacts of the EWP classes indicated by the participants concern the potential loss of overtime and thereby money by taking part in the classes. The overtime issue presented some concerns to participants, supervisors and teachers. The participants didn't want to lose the opportunity to earn extra money by working longer hours, the supervisors had fewer workers to draw on for overtime as they did not want to ask those taking the ESL classes, therefore their job was made more difficult, and the teachers worried that the students were being penalized for taking the classes by the potential loss of income.

The other negative impact was the work load of the women. They are mostly immigrant women who are victims of the double work day, and have other gender issues to contend with. "A lot of our workers have to work maybe two jobs or long hours and then they have to go home and cook or look after their kids, whatever, they don't have time."

For many of these students, the familiarity of the location, the time and the cost were all factors which made it possible for them to participate in the course. Many of them had family responsibilities outside of work which would inhibit efforts to attend other ESL classes. "I think some of these women have already shown assertiveness in just coming to this class and telling their husbands, 'Hey, how about you looking after the kids for a change.' I mean that's a big change for some of them."

5.3 Impact of the Classes on the Company

With respect to the impact of the classes on the factory, there were both positive and negative factors. Various employers had been supportive, to differing degrees, of initiatives to commence EWP classes, in discussions with the union. The union employers tended to be the most supportive of the EWP classes, but even they needed some convincing of the shared

benefits of such a program. Other employers were less receptive. The major concerns expressed by company managers about being involved in EWP classes were twofold; they may lose their best workers to other jobs or the classes would result in more complaints from the workers. The union reported these concerns which arose from meetings with management regarding the EWP classes. "Some of these employers came back to us and said guarantee that these people (the students) don't move or make trouble for us when they learn English."

5.3.1 Company Support for the classes

Management in the unionized factory, that was the subject of more extensive interviews for this study, demonstrated good support for the program and was very positive in general. There were two notable aspects of this support; one concerned the role of the classes in helping the workers adapt to new production techniques that the company was employing, the other concerned the public perception of the company as a good employer.

5.3.2 New Production Methods

The company was moving from piece-work to team work and this involves a greater need for communication skills. Piece-work is a more individual style of work whereas team work requires the workers to work together in order to finish a garment. The union had this to say about these changes in the workplace.

There is a change happening in the workplaces too because we're getting more team systems, more modular systems, more workers have to take on more in terms of knowing to work independently from the supervisors. Twenty years ago your supervisor told you what to do. Now it's more like the workers should be more in tune with what is happening and take more responsibility for the job they are doing. Even the environment is changing in the garment industry. ... It's not only skills. You have to communicate in terms of not just doing the work. They have to communicate with their co-workers. They are relying more on their co-workers ...

The company perspective on the requirement to change production methods from individual work to team work was explained in terms of economic viability and competitiveness in the market place. Management had this to say about the perceived changes and impact on the workers.

‘It used to be all sewing was paid individual piecework. You came to work you worked as hard as you wanted to and earned for yourself. Now with the quite complex operation we run (it became) unmanageable and too expensive ... so we came up with our last negotiations with the union an idea to pay a group incentive now.....’

‘Does it involve more skills too?’

‘Sometimes, yes and as we get into more teams that will become more of an issue because we want each team member to help the total teamers out rather than look after themselves. ...’

‘Would that involve more communication then between the workers?’

‘Yes. Initially, it would be between engineers, supervisors and workers but as it gets established and settled then it should be more so within the group of operators, in the team. ... We really need the team to communicate amongst each other. Much more than we used to.’

‘I’m wondering about the impact of that on English. Whether that will become more of a factor.’

‘Not necessarily. In sewing, again, where the large majority of employees are Chinese and they’re all able to communicate in their own language and that’s fine. They don’t have to cross over and use English in that setting. It’s only where you’re talking with an engineer then you have to Once the set-up is in place there’ll not be a lot of that. Although with new styles and queries happening there’ll still be some of that but, you know, that is as always it’s dealt with in a direct communication if they each understand each other in English or, if not, then a translator will help them to and, as I say, it’s not all day, everyday that it needs to be done.’

The factory has identified a need for improved communication and this can be incorporated into the EWP classes.

5.3.3 Public Perception of the Company

The other notable aspect concerned the public perception of the company as a good employer. Because the company did not identify knowledge of English as a necessary skill in the workplace it was of interest to determine on what basis they were interested in supporting this kind of a program.

‘So, in terms of the English, what benefits does the company (get)? The company has been really supportive of the classes providing space and making the teachers welcome and you attended the graduation and so on, and I’m just wondering why you’re interested in seeing them learn English. How do you see that benefiting the company...?’

‘Well, a lot of them will not have any real direct impact on the day-to-day job by being better (at) communicating in English but, at the same time, an employee who has a better grasp of English will just be a better person, will feel better or be more confident in what they do. You know, even something like that – a ... slight advantage to things will improve the way they apply themselves to their work....’

‘So you do see it as a benefit, sort of, in productivity as well as in their personal lives?’

‘I believe so, yeah. It’s not expected to be that obvious that I’m going to see a considerable improvement in productivity because their English is better. I wish it was because then we’d get a lot more English training! But, you know, realistically it’ll not be that noticeable but I still believe it’s there to some degree and if we don’t support it maybe we would lose out on something. You know, with the competitive situation we’re in, you can’t afford to lose out on anything these days. If there’s a slight advantage in any way, you’d better be looking at it.’

The company appeared to be interested in the English training because it wants to be regarded as a humanistic employer. It is important to remember that the unionized factories have the most human face of all the work situations. They are “good” employers, who willingly provided space and support for the classes while at the same time indicating that, in their view, the visible benefits to the company were minimal.

5.3.4 Content

The company indicated a considerable level of concern with public image and they wanted to be seen to be fair in the eyes of the workers. Therefore they were willing to accept a focus on worker rights in the curriculum, although it was not mentioned as part of the content they had envisaged. When this issue was raised in the interview, the manager immediately showed a willingness to incorporate such a focus, but with some reservations. The company had this to say about what they considered important to include in the content of the program:

‘The day-to-day type of communication that the employees use, to help them with that. It’s not necessarily, you know, real perfect English that people need to use. It’s being able to understand what things are and how to describe something or how to communicate at their workplace and probably out in their social lives. I mean if they’re shopping and stuff – things like that – their normal day-to-day activities, where it’ll help them with the language and being able to understand and read it.’

‘As you know, the union was very involved in the last group of classes too, so there was quite a strong worker rights component and looking at assertiveness and how to deal with that in English.’

‘Well, I understand that and I think that, you know, it’s not a bad thing of course. People need to know their rights and being a company that hasn’t had a habit or doesn’t intend to abuse people’s rights, you know, I think that’s healthy because a lot of things are misunderstood and there’s times when you want people to speak up and whether it’s being done on purpose or ... without realizing it, you know, we need to be told if something’s not right because we’d like people coming to work feeling that it’s a good place to work....’

In the process of the language training it became obvious that some of the garment workers, especially those who were laid-off were interested in examining other possibilities, they didn’t necessarily want to be garment workers. Some did, but others saw it as an opportunity to explore other options. However, their lack of English language skills immediately became a problem, particularly in reading and writing, as they were unable to

manage the assessment tests which would enable them to enter other training programs. The company's response to hearing about the English language training resulting in potential loss of workers to other vocations was interesting:

I suppose we would have to be careful with our encouragement of that, not that we would discourage it, but at the same time you're not going to want to put money into something where people are looking at an ulterior motive for learning the language, if you're helping to pay the bill.

5.4 Impact of the Classes on the Teachers

With respect to the impact of the classes on the teachers there were three important aspects (1) the work environment (2) the learners and (3) the content

5.4.1 The Work Environment

EWP classes are usually held in the workplace or, as in this case, the union hall as well. This factor can present teachers with additional challenges. The teachers reported that there are both positive and negative aspects to the delivery of a program in the context of another organization's environment. Here are some of the comments made by the teachers about the effect of the union environment on their teaching.

Just the fact that we were on site at the union was, of course, a reminder of why we were there and everything we did was related to employment rights and employee rights. So that was a constant reminder.

It was also important for the learners to be able to meet at a familiar place that belonged to them in a sense.

And the union was a resource if there were things that we didn't understand about the learners' context that the union could fill us in on.

.... a lot of the direction that the program went in was in a sense union initiated.

I think the union really knew their members and they knew these people so they, the environment, the way the learning was, like the learners could go to the union and let them know if something was working for them

or not and that would be relayed back to the instructors. I think it's good to have a body like that for the learners where they can go and be heard because often sometimes they're a bit reticent to approach a teacher directly.

The negative aspect to this arrangement had to do with the encroachment of one program on another's territory. One teacher expressed it like this:

This was the union territory and who were we, college instructors coming in and just taking over. Yet teachers, especially teachers in extension are very good at doing that. So there you have [potential for] quite a clash between, being the guest visitors versus being the person taking charge. Just being aware of that one point that we are visitors and conducting yourself appropriately until such time ... that changes, but initially you are a visitor. It's so important to understand, get to know the culture of where you are whether it's the workplace or the union.

The other negative aspect was the lack of understanding of the nature of the work involved in both organizations. In teaching much of the preparation is invisible, and it can appear to the outsider that a teachers' work day is very short and the compensation relatively high. Conversely, teachers can be unaware of basic union principles and of how such an organization works.

5.4.2 The Learners

EWP classes generally have a different character from the usual college based ESL classes. In most of the classes many of the garment workers knew each other because they worked side-by-side every day. This was certainly the case in the one class that was held at the factory. The majority of the workers spoke the same language, Cantonese, and the teachers reported a distinct interest in socializing.

The teachers agreed that probably the most important aspect of the program for the students, at the outset, was the opportunity to practice English conversation. They also viewed it as an opportunity to socialize and as an outing. However, they were very serious in

their intent to learn the language and the classes acted as a catalyst activating a passive knowledge of the language, so their progress was noticeable. As one teacher said:

‘They use English very little in their home environments and within their community and with their classmates, except when they were in a learning situation where they were required to use it, so it was surprising that they, for so long, had gotten along without English and then suddenly this big enthusiasm. But, my Saturday morning class was like a morning out.... they would come to class.... dressed up, they were there for a social time.’

‘Was it an opportunity to socialize and English was secondary?’

‘No, they were serious about it. But, what they really wanted to get out of it ... was the contact with the English, the culture, being able to feel a little more comfortable. I think a lot of them have a high passive knowledge of English.... and by being in the class it confirmed a lot for them. That, hey, I do know more than I think I know andit’s quite an empowering thing to be in a class where things you know are being reinforced and you’re acknowledging that you know more than you think you knew. They’re working in environments where they don’t know how much they know in relation to the Canadian worker or their boss. They’re assuming they know very little but ... in the classes...they realized they knew more than they thought and then the challenge is to take them beyond that too.’

The teachers also commented on the expectations of an educator in this setting. There was some resistance to particular learning styles, such as group work. When one teacher tried to organize the class into stations for group work she met with a great deal of resistance to such an independent learning style. In fact the learners were so resistant she had to abandon the concept altogether and return to the more traditional format of tables in a horse-shoe with the teacher and blackboard at the front.

Culturally these people generally have, like coming from traditional cultures, generally have quite a respect for educators but what that implies too is that they expect educators to act a certain way and the formal approach is usually something that’s met with favourably at the beginning and in ESL classes we tend to de-formalize things in order to make a comfortable atmosphere for people to learn and express themselves and so on. But I think a lot of learners expect initially a very formal approach and that’s where they’re coming from, their preconceived notion of what education is all about and how it’s to be conducted

5.4.3 The Content

The teachers were hired by the Labour Studies Program. Their mandate was to teach from a worker rights perspective. There was an initial assessment of the level of the students; however the classes were multi-level in nature. Most of the teachers began with a needs assessment of their particular class, one informant responded like this in answer to the following question:

‘What was your understanding of the mandate of the program?’

‘Well, from the manual² that was developed it was to deliver ESL in a workplace context so that there was English for work and that was very well laid out in the manual.’

‘What did you perceive your role to be while teaching in the program?’

‘Well, the workplace content was important but with that particular group of learners it was also to orient them to learning English in a formal setting. Also to provide a comfortable atmosphere where they would feel free to come and learn.’

‘Did you feel that the program was able to achieve the mandate or did you have to modify your expectations of what could be achieved?’

‘I think it was modified and it went beyond the mandate. It was very responsive to their needs they needed orientation to EI (Employment Insurance), so how to deal with EI bureaucracy became a big thing. The other thing was English for re-training. How to get into trade programs with an ESL component – .. hospitality, business and so on. How to access re-training programs became a big component as well. By being responsive to what the learners came to us with as their needs as well as doing workplace employment education and the human rights and so on, I think we got a full program that met the mandate but also met the needs that they came to us with.’

The re-training focus was particularly important for the laid-off workers who were experiencing major change in their life, and the ESL program had to respond appropriately.

² Teaching Guide for Teaching ESL in the Workplace, LSP, Capilano College, 1996, Working Document

The students needed help on many different levels; filling out EI forms and attending interviews, emotional support in the face of job loss and associated trauma, exploration of career planning and job opportunities. In these classes the program was organized around all of these issues as well as the information on labour legislation, human rights and health and safety at work.

The question of ownership of the curriculum also came up and one teacher put it like this:

‘If the company sets up an English class for a group of learners, the company is going to probably have a lot invested interest in what and why those learners are learning what they’re learning. But this particular program was quite separate from that and it was very responsive to what the learners needed rather than what an employer needed. the human rights element in that program was really a powerful component for the learners.’

‘Why did you think that?’

‘It was something that they are very sensitive to but they’ve never, outside of their own language or their own communities, never spoke or had input from ... employment standards something that is tied to the mainstream culture.To hear what the human rights coalition or people outside of their communities (say) about it and to explore it in English. I think it brought it out into the open for them and that it’s okay to talk about racism and inequality and so on.’

All of the teachers commented that the focus on human rights and employment standards was a very strong part of the program and served a useful purpose in allowing the students to begin to explore some of the legislation and its application to their lives in English.

The data describes the factors which the various stakeholders considered important in order to meet their needs and it also examines the impact of the classes on the various stakeholders. In the next chapter I will discuss the data in light of the questions raised in the introduction.

CHAPTER 6:

DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with a review of the climate of change in the work environment which provides the larger, social context in which this study occurred. It will then summarize the findings of the study, in relation to the long and short term goals of the stakeholders. Next the chapter moves to a discussion of the implications of the findings for pedagogy and for practice. Finally, implications for future research will be drawn.

This study is of interest because it concerns issues pertaining to immigrant women workers and their relationship to the dominant language and culture in a work place setting mediated by a union. To date, studies concerning EWP classes do not focus on the role of a union in such programs, nor do they investigate what the needs of an organization like a union might be in relation to immigrant workers and language training.

The main discussion is organized around the objectives for the study as outlined in chapter one and questions generated about the EWP program arising from the findings. Implications for pedagogy, practice and future research are addressed.

6.1 Climate of Change

The EWP program, which is the subject of this study, occurred in a climate of change. Substantial changes to the economy have impacted on the company, the workers and the union. According to economists and educators including business and government, in B.C., as in other provinces of Canada and in the U.S. the world of work is rapidly changing. Technological innovations began having significant workplace impact in the 1980s and have exploded in the 1990s. Technology is improving production processes in nearly all industries,

as well as changing the way organizations in all sectors operate, how workers do their work, and the types of work they perform. The B.C. Government Ministry of Education, Skills and Training document entitled "Charting A New Course" (1996) states:

Economic restructuring, constraints on our natural resources, rapid introduction and diffusion of new technology, and increased international competition are pushing B.C. toward a knowledge and information based economy and increasing the demand for constant skills retraining and upgrading. Many people are concerned that the work force is not adapting to this fundamental shift as quickly as the change is occurring (p.6).

One of the more visible changes in production methods in the garment industry is the shift from piece-work to team work, as was mentioned in the findings, and this has been one impetus for both management and the union to become involved in language training opportunities.

The removal of free trade barriers and tariffs and the creation of free trade zones has led to greater competition in the garment industry. To remain viable in this industry and maximize profit margins, owners have sought ways to minimize their production costs. This economic globalization of the garment industry has resulted in the ability of owners to move capital to other countries or work locations where there is an abundant supply of cheap labour and laws more favourable to the industry, to the detriment of Canadian workers. Health and safety regulations may be less stringent or non-existent, employment standards and human rights legislation and unionization may be minimal or outlawed. In many of these countries, often referred to as the third world, the rate of pay is extremely low and industry or business taxes may also be very low. The garment industry has been greatly affected by the free trade agreements such as NAFTA which Canada entered into with the U.S. in 1988 and later Mexico in 1993. Free trade zones appear to be on the increase and the new economic reality is that of a global economy where all countries have different values, different ideologies

regarding human rights, labour issues, worker rights and the role of the state in corporate affairs. It seems that in order to have economic growth in this new economy, labour legislation must be eroded, the hard won protections of working people must be removed, modified, adjusted to allow for competition. In reality, this usually signals lower wages, less job security, longer hours of work and potential unemployment. These realities are often obscured in euphemisms, employers talk about the need for a "*flexible work force*" and business complains to government about the need for "*removal of barriers to growth*". This climate of change forms the backdrop to the EWP program upon which this study was based. All of the stakeholders viewed the classes as having some potential to facilitate the changes which are impacting on the industry.

6.2 Summary of Findings: Short and Long Term Objectives of Each of the Stakeholders

6.2.1 Union

The findings established the principal needs of the union for the classes as being; a) to organize workers into unions and therefore to reach unorganized garment workers; b) to improve workers' perceptions of unions; and c) to ameliorate the potential for abuse of workers' rights through education. The union has defined its major long term goal as organizing more workers into unions. In the long term, the union also indicated an interest in organizing home workers – these are immigrants who are contracted to work out of their homes. They are involved in making many things from swim goggles to sewing or knitting garments. These workers are the most vulnerable and also the most difficult to reach because they are working in an unregulated area, isolated in the home. It is also work which often involves child labour. One of the difficulties for the union is the lack of resources to deal with

all the needs of the organization. The EWP program provided a way of addressing some of these goals but it required a substantial time commitment. The question of ownership of the training was raised. *In the long term would the union benefit from delivering its own training program?* If the union continues to offer the training with the support of company management, the union would need to delineate what kind of support it wants from the company. *Is it simply monetary, or could there be some shared goals and benefits which would give the company a greater role?*

6.2.2 Participants

In terms of the participants, the needs focused more on the social aspects of language use as well as the desire to be able to carry out daily activities in English. At times the union and the participants' needs appeared to be the same, especially in the areas of; a) recognition and desire for further training in order to access better jobs; and b) improved ability of the workers to communicate with management. As was stated earlier, many of the participants were not the classic ESL learners who are new immigrants, many have lived and worked in Canada for a long time and have raised families here. Their short term goals were, to be able to converse in English at work and in the community, and to become more comfortable using English for social purposes. They also wanted to be able to communicate more easily with the supervisor and to become more integrated into Canadian life. Because some of the workers had been laid off, there was an opportunity to explore other avenues of employment and many were interested in accessing other work or training programs which could lead to different work. The data did not show any clear direction for future programs.

Most of the participants indicated that they were very satisfied with the program as it was. It would, however, be beneficial to involve workers in the setting up of future programs.

It was relatively easy to establish the short term goals of the program but it would be worthwhile to determine the long term goals of the workers, especially those who are interested in other areas of work. It would also have been useful to carry out follow up investigation on the laid-off participants after completion of the program, to establish what kind of work they pursued. However, whether or not the union would wish to incorporate training for re-employment outside the industry, is not entirely clear,

6.2.3 The Company

The company, although supportive, was not as involved in the content and delivery of the program as may happen in other situations. The findings show that the company's short term goals of such a program, would include an ability to understand and follow directions and sort out work related problems on the part of the participants. The long term goals, however, may include workers acquiring a much more sophisticated level of English which would allow them to be involved in discussion of new production methods and new directions for the company. The company stands to benefit from this kind of involvement of the workers.

6.2.4 The Teachers

The teachers' immediate goals had to do with providing a viable program which was useful and interesting to the participants, so that they attended regularly and made good progress. They identified their long term goals as: facilitating the participants' adaption to the culture of the learning environment, determining the long term needs of the participants and providing a relevant program which met the needs of the stakeholders involved. One of the challenges for the teachers was how to formalize the learning situation sufficiently that the focus went beyond a social get-together. At times there was resistance by the students to

particular activities in the classroom, especially if it involved reorganizing the seating arrangements, for example, in group work. The teachers reported feeling pressured at times, to conform to the desire of the workers to socialize and that the prepared lesson could become de-railed by the groups' desire to chat, both in their own language and in English. Concerns regarding the social nature of ESL classes, where the participants work together and therefore know each other well, have been raised in other research. (Burnaby et al., 1992, & Harper et al., 1996) One of the suggested reasons for this, has to do with the dichotomy of the private and the public sphere. Women are very comfortable functioning in the private world of the family whereas the public world – the world of work is not as comfortable for them. (Harper et al., 1996, p.12). This division can create a tension in an EWP class which is focused on a worker rights' perspective and is attempting to deal with the world of work – the public sphere. We need to discover ways of presenting material and organizing the learning experience, which can help to build on the skills women have and include the necessary skills from the public arena, without giving up the comfort and benefits of the private world.

6.3 Implications of the Study

This study illuminates many critical aspects in the perceptions of union officials, and garment workers regarding the need and impact of an English in the workplace training program. It also explicates the impact of an EWP program on the educators and the company. It offers another perspective on EWP through a consideration of the role of a union in the provision and delivery of the training. Whilst acknowledging the limitations of the study, it provides some important insights. The implications of the findings fall into three groups; implications for pedagogy, implications for practice and future implications of the study.

6.3.1 Implications for Pedagogy

The implications for pedagogy include, the development of appropriate content, teacher education, the role of the teachers and the college in providing such a program. The development of a teaching guide to inform the program based on the needs of the union and the participants through the needs analysis of both stakeholders, became a priority within the program. There are two aspects to the development and implementation of a curriculum; the content and the delivery.

According to the union's expressed desire for a greater knowledge of the employment standards legislation, the teachers' guide contained a strong focus on this kind of material in the context of empowering the workers. The content included information on worker rights, human rights, discrimination, health and safety and other work place concerns. As has already been mentioned, a secondary factor in the success of this approach was the fact that the program was organized not only by the garment workers' union but also by the Labour Studies Department of a community college. The teachers were hired through the labour studies program and there was a requirement that they be knowledgeable and experienced in worker rights issues and union concerns. Once the content was established it provided direction for the teachers to focus on worker rights and advocacy in the garment industry work environment.

Initially the union did not have a clearly established notion of what the content should include and there was a view expressed that the teachers were the ones who were the experts in terms of content and pedagogical issues. There is some validity in this view. However, teachers often use a needs analysis approach especially in outreach programs such as the work place or community. While this has been a popular model for ESL programs in general,

some recent research indicates that it may not be sufficient to rely entirely on building a program around needs as identified by the learners. This, perhaps, has led to an over emphasis on the personal to the detriment of the work context. Harper et al. (1996) raise the question, based on their research of a workplace program, of whether it is possible to provide a pedagogy of possibility for workers to become more assertive and challenge the traditional relations which form part of the structure of their work lives, in a program where the primary focus is on the personal. ESL professionals have become very adept at providing student-centred programs and classroom environments where the students have license to discuss issues pertaining to any aspect of their lives, including areas such as family violence, assertiveness, health, family and other potentially difficult topics. Often these classes are taught by progressive thinking, concerned teachers who start from a needs analysis of the participants. These kinds of classes are marked by a friendly, secure, atmosphere conducive to personal discussion in a safe, supportive, environment. The notion of giving voice to the participants has characterized the more progressive ESL classes and methodology for the past number of years. While these issues are obviously very important to explore, recent research seems to indicate that this kind of focus is insufficient to challenge the traditional relations and hierarchy of society. Does it go far enough in enabling participants to make substantial changes to their perceived role / place / status in society? The research conducted by Harper et al., is based on concerns of a company as to why there has been no substantial increase in workers' participation in the company through joining committees and making other steps toward becoming more involved. This is a company which is interested in getting the workers to be more active in company affairs and has provided ESL classes with monetary support for its workers. The researchers make the argument that, perhaps it is the reproduction of the

private sphere in the classroom that does not allow the workers to move into the public sphere, where they must function in their work world. It is an interesting supposition, as many teachers are concerned with affective factors; such as self-esteem, confidence, motivation, and safety in risk taking. In the public sphere the challenge would be to build upon these attributes and combine them with a level of skill in social competence in language, where the worker can take their place as equals in the work place.

The union also recognizes that social relations of the workplace are a major factor in delivery of a program and for this reason they want to have control over the program so that it is not a reproduction of the power structure as it exists between management and the workers.

Critical pedagogy is a term used for a teaching practice which includes a vision of empowerment for the participants. It incorporates a world view which is cognizant of the inequitable social structures which impact on relations between groups and individuals in the greater society. If the intent is to present a view that differs from the traditional power relations operating in society then this critical pedagogy must take a conscious form and the teachers must be concerned with that view of the world. Questions that need to be raised include: *How do teachers provide a program which permits the learners themselves to move beyond survival issues of language into more complex modes of inquiry and communicative discourse which are enabling in terms of understanding and taking control of their situation?*

So, then, the main implication for pedagogy is the importance of the development of superior, interpersonal communicative skills in EWP programs. Teaching basic interpersonal communicative skills and the language of the content are unlikely to enable students to claim their rights in the workplace.

6.3.2 Implications for Practice

There are some implications for practice as demonstrated by the findings; recognition of barriers to learning and using English, a knowledge of the culture of the work place and the setting or organization where the classes occur as well as a knowledge of the other stakeholders involved in the program.

6.3.2.1 Recognition of Barriers to Learning and Using English in the Workplace

As the findings demonstrate, there are many good reasons for learning English; protection from exploitation at work, better opportunities for advancement, a stronger possibility for finding work in times of economic hardship. It should be noted, however, that proficiency in English is not an automatic guarantee of a better job or even economic mobility. It is, however, certainly one factor which can lead to greater control over ones' life. As has already been stated, the work place is not conducive to using English for most of the workers. The work is generally isolated and the workers are discouraged from talking while they work, in fact many women wear walkmans so they can listen to music and drown out some of the background noise. Although few opportunities occur for practicing English at work, it is also important to note that there were some less visible barriers to using English for the workers.

As mentioned in chapter two, Goldstein (1994) has written extensively about the use of English as a second language on the factory production line. She claims that there can be a cost to workers for using English even if they are able to function in the language, because of the workplace relationships which often mimic the family in their intensity and rule bound expectations. She found in her research with Portuguese women factory workers that most had found, and continued to keep, their jobs by a close connection to the Portuguese

community network and more importantly by their use of the Portuguese language. This practice of hiring friends or relatives from the same ethnic group created a “family” atmosphere at work. In Goldstein’s words:

Making friends on the line and ensuring access to assistance in case your work piles up or you need to leave is related to knowing how to talk to people on the line. Furthermore, talk that provides access to friendship on the lines and thus to assistance on the lines is talk that is spoken in Portuguese. Women on the lines including women whose first language is not Portuguese, but Spanish or Italian use Portuguese on the lines to gain access to friendship and assistance when they need it (p.33).

As a language that is associated with the performance of a work role on the production lines, Portuguese is not only associated with finding a job through networks in the Portuguese community, it is associated with keeping job and getting a pay cheque as well. For Portuguese women immigrants who have had no prior access to English-speaking networks and/or ESL classes, the use of Portuguese is the only accessible linguistic means to economic survival and gain in Canada. There are social and economic benefits associated with the use of Portuguese on the lines that are not associated with the learning and use of English. Moreover, there are risks to using English at work (p. 34).

Goldstein states that there are risks associated with using English on the line. It could result in the alienation of Portuguese co-workers who would feel insulted if spoken to in English – a language they may not understand, and therefore they might worry they are being talked about.

There were some similarities in my research. Many of the workers had been hired through word of mouth, or advertising within a particular ethnic community. This was a historical practice with which the company felt comfortable. As one company informant said:

I would suggest 95 % of our employees in the union labour force in the factory are Chinese. In some areas of the plant [they are] East Indian, and that tends to be more in the pressing area for whatever reason...and thinking back we’ve hired people there and then when we look to hire more people we go to them and ask them if they know other people and that’s where they’ll bring the people in who are friends or whatever, to come and work for us and it tends to be [our way of] advertising. It comes by word-of-mouth and we get people

that way... and so I would say there's... may be I'm wrong on 95916, but it's [in the] 90s for sure, for Chinese [workers].

In addition to the company hiring practice, the union and teacher informants referred to work relations between peers as being like a family, in some respects. For example, one union informant referred to workers who always ate lunch with the same coworkers for many years, sat in the same place at work and did not make any attempt to get to know other workers. The workplace can become insular and there can be invisible pressures that actively discourage the use of English in particular situations.

Change can be threatening and there is often a tendency to remain with the familiar and not to take risks. One example of the desire to remain with the familiar concerned the issue of ergonomic chairs, which the union health and safety committee worked hard to obtain for the workers. When the chairs arrived the workers refused to use them; they tried them briefly and then went back to their familiar seats, which were not as beneficial in terms of support. The ergonomic chairs had to be returned to the factory eventually because everyone reverted to the original chair. In some ways the workers were not always open to change. Learning a language requires taking risks and while a group which knows each other well can provide a supportive environment it can also obscure some other pressures. These kinds of barriers are not immediately obvious to an observer and yet they are extremely powerful motivators in the group.

It would seem that a functional knowledge of English on the part of the workers would help to improve this situation. They would be better able to articulate their concerns as well as being more confident and therefore empowered to understand and respond to the supervisor's directives and any complaints about their work. They would then be in a stronger position to represent themselves to management rather than feeling like the victims

of racism and unfair treatment. This is not to deny the power relationship which is operating at work between management and the workers, and certainly English language skills will not change that fundamental conflict, of different interests, however, these women would be in a stronger position if they had more English language skills.

6.3.2.2 Recognition of Barriers to Learning and Using English in the Community

Many of the barriers facing immigrants in terms of integration require changes to institutional structures and the beliefs and attitudes of the society at large. It is important to recognize the contribution of immigrants to the work force if they are not merely to be regarded as a pool of cheap labour, as has often been the case in Canadian history. They come with many and varied skills which are not utilized as they become absorbed into low level, low status jobs in the Canadian labour force as a result of their lack of English skills.

Employers and government have a vested interest, in the long term, for immigrants to gain language proficiency so that society may benefit from the wealth of experience they have to offer. Successful programs recognize both barriers to and contributions of immigrant workers and are developed through a collaborative process with the participants.

6.3.2.3 Cultures and Goals of the Stakeholders: Dilemmas and Conflicts

The findings indicate that a successful program must take into account the various objectives of the stakeholders. A thorough knowledge of the culture of the work place, the participants and the other stakeholders, in this case, the union, is a key factor in the smooth delivery of a program. This section will include a general discussion of the dilemmas the union faced in working with two key stakeholders; the educators and the company.

6.3.2.3.1 Educators and Union

The concept of culture is useful in order to understand the different agendas operating upon the program. D'Arcy Martin (1995) has written some insightful analysis of his role as a trade union labour educator and the path that led to his own understanding of a reconciliation of the role of educator and union activist. He has some useful perceptions which help in understanding some of the basic assumptions which are different for educators and trade unionists.

Martin uses some seemingly contradictory terms in which to articulate the tensions he encountered in his work as a union educator interested in democratic and socially just structures and organizations. The categories that Martin lays out are as follows: diverse/cohesive; oppressive/affirmative; passionate/bureaucratized; informal/accountable; subordinate/adversarial; oral/literal; voluntary/professional; rebellious/disciplined; collective/contentious; servicing/mobilizing. He is using these "dynamics ... cross-currents" as a way of locating his own work in the union movement (p. 30). He states that: "Each of these pairs represents a relationship, a creative tension, and I think they help us identify personal experience and supports and barriers in the movement" (p. 30). The notion of opposites in order to address some of the seemingly contradictory issues is a useful way of visualizing the themes.

A union is an organization whose goal is quite specific – to defend the rights of working people. The members of unions are diverse, but in order to adequately represent the membership it is necessary to be highly organized and efficient like any other bureaucratic operation which has to administer the detailed paperwork necessary to meet the needs of its members. Accountability, especially for elected officers, but also for hired positions is of

prime importance in the union movement. The garment workers' union, for example, administers a health care program for its workers, as well as dealing with the paper work for grievance handling and meetings and many other union related duties.

The most challenging issue concerning the overlap of cultures, was probably that of hierarchy and power. Educators have been trained in a more liberal democratic, consensus oriented culture, one that is inclined, especially in the 1990s, to recognizing diversity and giving voice to its less fortunate members. Communication is a very important factor for educators, particularly ESL trained educators, for the union communication is also important; however it serves different purposes at different times. In the union culture it is sometimes necessary to be secretive in order to protect the organization and its members. It needs to be cognizant of its public face and its image, and not to betray information to the wrong side. For example, the role of the media is important, if information goes out that is incorrect this can result in untold damage to the members' interests. Therefore there is a need for a highly structured, hierarchical and controlling aspect to the organization of the union. For example, all information must be screened by the directors, who are democratically elected. This way of working is inherently different from the culture, of teachers and educators. It can also create an atmosphere that is not as conducive to the norms that teachers often strive for trust, openness, and procedures for conflict resolution. At times these dissimilar goals can be misconstrued and lead to upset and a mistrust of the other organization. Conversely, trade unionists are representing working class culture whereas educators are traditionally from a more middle class place in society. Sometimes unionists bring traditional, stereotypical views to bear on educators, complaining that they are overpaid professionals without care or consideration for the working class and working values and vice versa. A recognition of these

cultural differences and understanding of the diverse objectives of organizations can help to build tolerance and respect in the working relationship.

6.3.2.3.2 Company and Union

It is also important to examine the differences between company initiated EWP and the subject of this study; a union initiated program. Harper et al. (1996) and Burnaby et al. (1994) have written extensively about aspects of an EWP program initiated by a company for its workers. Their research shows that the company, Levi Strauss, did not provide clear guidelines or policy for the direction of the program, including the content and its delivery. The study indicated in its findings: "The most important and general factor is the need for the company to develop a policy on the purpose and nature of the ESL classes" (p. 313). They explore three possible reasons for a company initiating EWP classes: "Is ESL provided for altruistic reasons, to promote equity in the labour force and/or the community, or is it there to improve productivity?" (Burnaby et al., 1994, p. 326). Each possible reason for establishing the program has its own set of accompanying decisions which would have to be made; for example: if productivity is the main focus of an EWP program, then "decisions would have to be made about the extent to which worker participation in various aspects of the activities of the plants (for example, health and safety committees, social activities, union work) is relevant to actual productivity" (p. 326).

Although the Levi Strauss company initiated the program and obtained the funding, they did not provide much direction for the content of the program. It appears that the teachers were the ones, in conjunction with the learners, who decided what would and what would not, be included. In this case the company, Levi Strauss, was responsible for all

aspects of the program including hiring the teachers, establishing the criteria for registration, attendance, remuneration for the workers and presumably content of the program.

The company stands to benefit in two obvious ways from workers having improved communication skills, which are directly related to production and profit; firstly they would better understand work procedures and secondly they would have improved knowledge of health and safety regulations. If the workers are better equipped in terms of knowledge of the product and production techniques, then the employer stands to benefit directly in improved productivity on the part of the worker. A concern with how the worker feels at work obviously has an impact on the productivity level – a happier, healthier worker will likely be more productive. It could be argued that it would be a benefit to the employer if the curriculum doesn't discuss employee benefits such as longer coffee breaks or health and safety regulations because these all have the potential for greater costs to the employer. However, it is also the case that an employee who is familiar with the health and safety rules is less of a liability to the company than one who does not have such exposure. Companies can and should be held responsible for workplace health and safety, so it is in their interest to include some of a worker rights focus in the curriculum.

Many employers, including the company informant interviewed in the current study, express concerns regarding the fear of losing trained workers to other occupations as a result of improved English skills. The findings in both this study and Burnaby et al.'s (1994) indicate that English language skills either spoken or written are not a requirement for doing the job. It is, however, in the interest of the company to cultivate a climate where workers are valued and there is a concern with their needs as immigrant workers. This can only help to create a more loyal work force. Burnaby et al. report in their findings that workers do not

leave when they acquire more English skills, in fact they often have a greater loyalty and report a greater attachment to the company when they are treated fairly at work. This would result in a benefit to the employer, as employee turnover would be less frequent and therefore the need to train more workers would diminish, resulting in a cost saving to the company. Finally, in the words of Burnaby et al. "Critically, a company must decide where it stands, delineate the practical implications, and make those decisions known to all employees" (p. 327). In sum, there are several compelling reasons for companies to be involved in EWP.

This particular study is unique because it is concerned with an EWP program initiated and controlled by a union, as opposed to a company. This section will look at the strengths, limitations and possibilities of such a program from a union perspective. A union focused curriculum would include material related to union goals as shown in the findings; to protect worker rights as well as increasing workers' benefits and pay. A knowledge of worker rights information means the workers are better equipped to deal with unfair treatment at work. This, in turn, can lead to greater interest and participation in the workplace and its structures which promotes an improved potential to function in the public world of work. Participation in a union creates the possibility to increase the standard of living of the workers by providing more benefits. Finally, it can create more civic-minded people who are aware of the agencies that are there to support them, beyond the employer or the workplace; for example the Workers' Compensation Board, the Employment Standards Branch and other work related organizations and legislation which mediate the work environment.

The limitations of such a program would include the learners' concerns regarding content; they reported a desire to learn English for social purposes, as well as survival skills and Canadian cultural content rather than the narrower focus of worker rights. They also

expressed a concern with the presentation of material; while a problem posing approach is more suitable for some aspects of the program, there can be resistance to this methodology from both the learners and the teachers. The students expressed a concern about learning grammar and an interest in a more traditional style of delivery. The teachers have an important role in the delivery of the training. The teachers need to be convinced of the benefits of the program from the beginning, so the issue of hiring is very important, as was mentioned earlier. In the current study, the teachers were hired through a labour studies program and this allowed for a labour orientation to be introduced into the hiring criteria.. Teachers are used to a great deal of autonomy in the classroom, and in ESL there has been more of a focus on survival skills, not worker rights. Hiring teachers who are committed to the notions of worker empowerment and equity in the work place would seem to be very important in the success of the program. In the program of this study, teachers indicated a need to pursue other directions at times.

In the end it is the participants and the teachers who have the most say about what will form the content of the program and the way it is going to be taught, The interviews with the teachers demonstrated that a needs based approach combined with critical pedagogy can produce an effective program. It is certainly the case that what is taught in the classroom will serve the interests of those groups who have been influential in putting together the curriculum.

6.3.3 Implications for Future Research

There is an inherent tension between a union – an organization which provides support for workers, and the management at a work place – whose goal is to manage the productivity of the workers. Unions are concerned with typical workplace issues such as

worker rights, health and safety at work, improved benefits and pay. The company, however, is more concerned with productivity and profits. The conflict of interest lies, of course, in the area where productivity and profit motives conflict with the rights of workers.

For these kinds of programs to survive in the future, it is necessary to focus on what interests companies and unions have in common. In the current economic climate, where profit margins are extremely narrow, and cheap labour is available in other countries – free trade zones – unions and companies are inclined to be more accommodating of each other and less adversarial in order for the company to be a viable business. Both organizations are concerned with the potential of the business to make money; the company wants profit and the union wants decent pay for its members. The union works hard to maintain the viability of the business on behalf of its members and also fights for the right to a fair share of the money that is made.

There is a need for flexibility and a willingness to be open to change in the work place, but the fundamental differences in interests between the employer and the worker do not, in essence, change. However, the points at which their interests do coincide should be optimized. If the company has a need for workers to be more involved in the production processes or is desirous of workers being more involved in order to develop an equitable work place, then a partnership can occur to create the opportunity for needs to be met. In this particular study the company had chosen to put most of its efforts into providing on site support to cover the deficit of language skills in the workers. Other viable choices can be made with long and short term benefits for the company as well as the union and the worker.

These different interests indicate that the content and delivery of the program needs to be developed by those whose interests it is trying to represent. If the EWP program is

controlled by the employer, certainly the workers would be able to practice conversation about shopping or making an excuse for lateness or appointments, and learn how to make polite requests and clarifications, follow directions and use proper procedures for communicating with the supervisor and the boss. However, they would not learn how to stand up for their rights, how to start a union, how to enforce safety standards, how to complain about a human rights abuse such as racism, or sexual harassment. This reinforces the need for ownership of the curriculum to be in the hands of advocates of workers from a working person's perspective. In this case the garment workers in conjunction with a labour studies program.

As has been shown, the interests and agendas are not always entirely different and that will influence the content of the program. There is a role for and a need to educate management so that they are able to see where it is in the best interests of the company to advocate on behalf of workers rights. The findings from this study indicate that the role of the union in the development of the curriculum was an important factor in ensuring a worker rights focus.

The title of this study – *Work Smarter Not Faster* – is a quote from one of the union officials and it was used to summarize the tensions and different interests of the union and the employer, especially in relation to the garment industry. The tension hinges on the fact that the union and the employer are inextricably linked; an increase in pay for the worker can result in an increase in productivity for management. An increase in productivity from which the worker derives concessions in pay and benefits is a mutually advantageous situation. Viewing organizations like these as having complex structures; teachers and students, union officials and company managers have to negotiate their way through the different interests

and contradictory tensions and conflicts together, to provide a program which satisfies all of the stakeholders.

Suggested areas for further research include:

From the perspective of learning more about the needs of a garment workers' union in the provision of EWP, this study has been informative, but further studies need to be undertaken in this area of research. The findings of this study would be enhanced by an examination of the conflicts and dilemmas posed by the demands of the various stakeholder groups. A consideration of questions such as; *what are the tensions operating behind the various groups ?*, *what can work to resolve the conflicts?*, *what factors contribute to exacerbating the conflicts?* would be appropriate as part of a long term case study. In terms of pedagogical issues, a focus on the question of *how do instructors evolve, develop and work to resolve these conflicting values?* would be beneficial, as well as a study undertaken on discourse processes and communication patterns of the participants, in order to ascertain whether the program was meeting their long and short term needs. More studies into unions which are interested in, or directly involved in, providing ESL and Adult Basic Education training for their members, would be valuable in expanding the scope of the findings. In conclusion, a replication of this study would be useful, but in another site and with another group of participants, in order to compare and contrast the different tensions, conflicts and dilemmas.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Sample of questions for informants:

Garment Workers:

- Did you work as a garment worker in your country?
- How long have you been a garment worker in Canada?
- How did you get your job?
- Is there a union at your factory?
- Tell me about your job at the factory.
- Do you speak English at work? When do you need to speak English?
- Who do you speak to in English at work? What do you talk about in English?
- Are there any people who only speak English at work?
- What things would you like to change at work?
- What / Who could help you to change things at work?

Union and English classes:

- What is a union?
- How do you feel about the union?
- Tell me about your English classes.
- What did you learn?
- What other things do you want to learn in English classes?

Union informants:

- How did you get involved with the union?
- What were the most significant factors which lead to your becoming a union activist?
- Tell me about the working conditions in the factory

- What are the major issues facing immigrant women in the garment industry?
- How can / is the union helping with to resolve these issues?
- What are the major issues facing the garment industry?
- What communication do workers need between each other and with management?
- Why does the union want the ESL classes?
- How does the union see its role in providing ESL classes for garment workers?

Teachers:

- What was your understanding of the mandate of the program?
- Did you feel the program was able to achieve the mandate or did you modify your expectations of what was achievable?
- What were the language needs of the students according to your needs assessment?
- What did the union mean for you in your teaching?
- What role did the union play for the students in your classes?
- What is the value of a union providing ESL classes to its members?

Company:

- What is the future of the garment industry in Canada/ B.C.?
- What kind of English skills are needed to do the work effectively?

APPENDIX B: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. **How many years have you worked at your present job?**

2. **How many years have you worked in a garment factory?**

_____ years in Canada

_____ Years in another country

3. **What other jobs did you do?**

4. **How many years have you worked as a home sewer?**

5. **Do you belong to a union?**

☐ Yes ☐ No

6. **What other jobs would you like to do?**

7. **Where have you learned your English?**

☐ ESL Classes ☐ Work ☐ Home ☐ In the Community

8. **Did this class help you improve your English?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

9. **Do you want to take more English classes?** ☐ Yes ☐ No

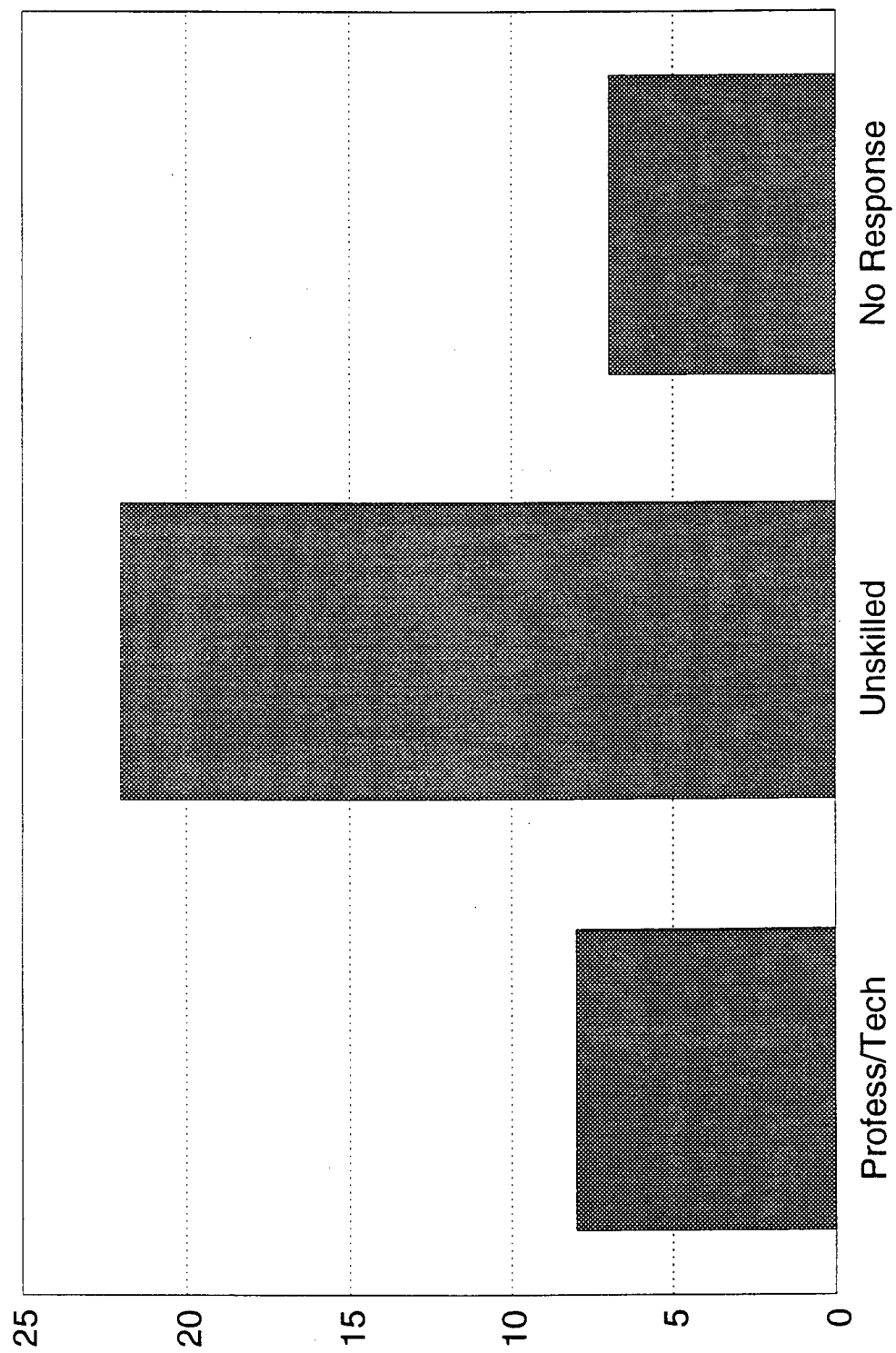
10. How do you rate your level of English:

- | | | | |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| for speaking? | <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced | <input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate | <input type="checkbox"/> Beginner |
| for reading? | <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced | <input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate | <input type="checkbox"/> Beginner |
| for writing? | <input type="checkbox"/> Advanced | <input type="checkbox"/> Intermediate | <input type="checkbox"/> Beginner |

11. Where do you use English most?

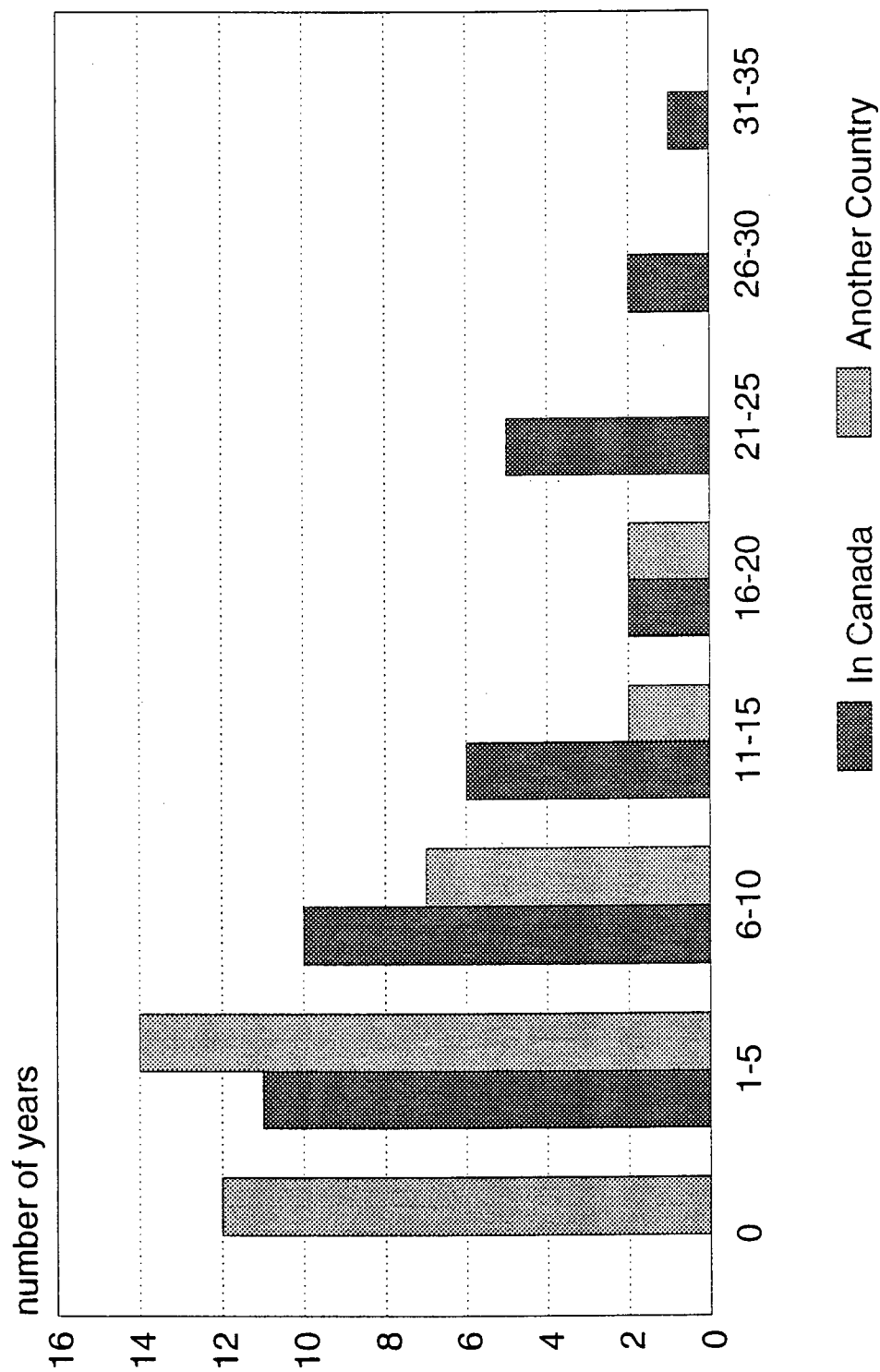
- ☐ at work ☐ in the community ☐ at home
-

Work Smarter Not Faster Other Jobs

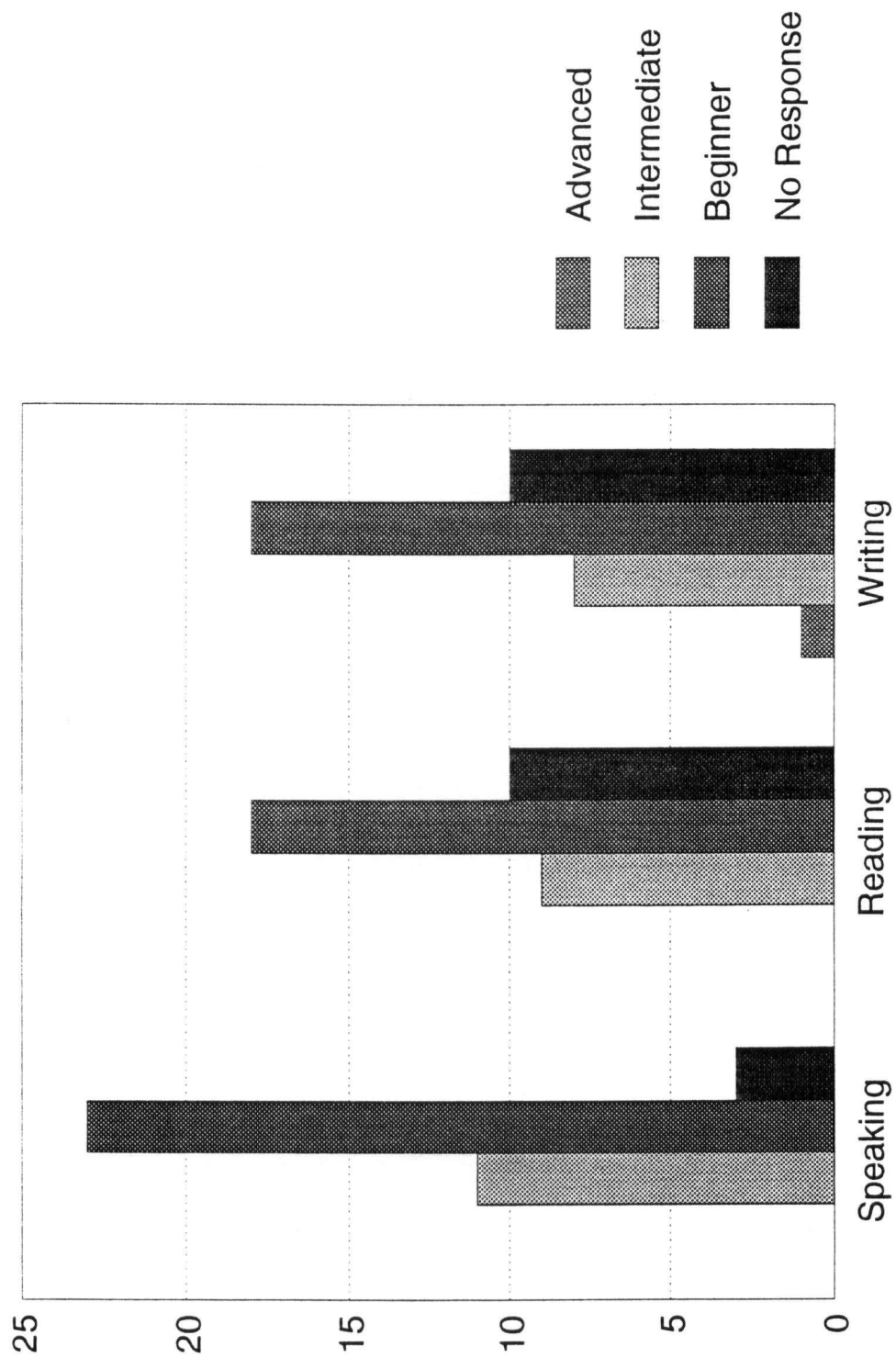


Work Smarter Not Faster

Years Worked in Factory

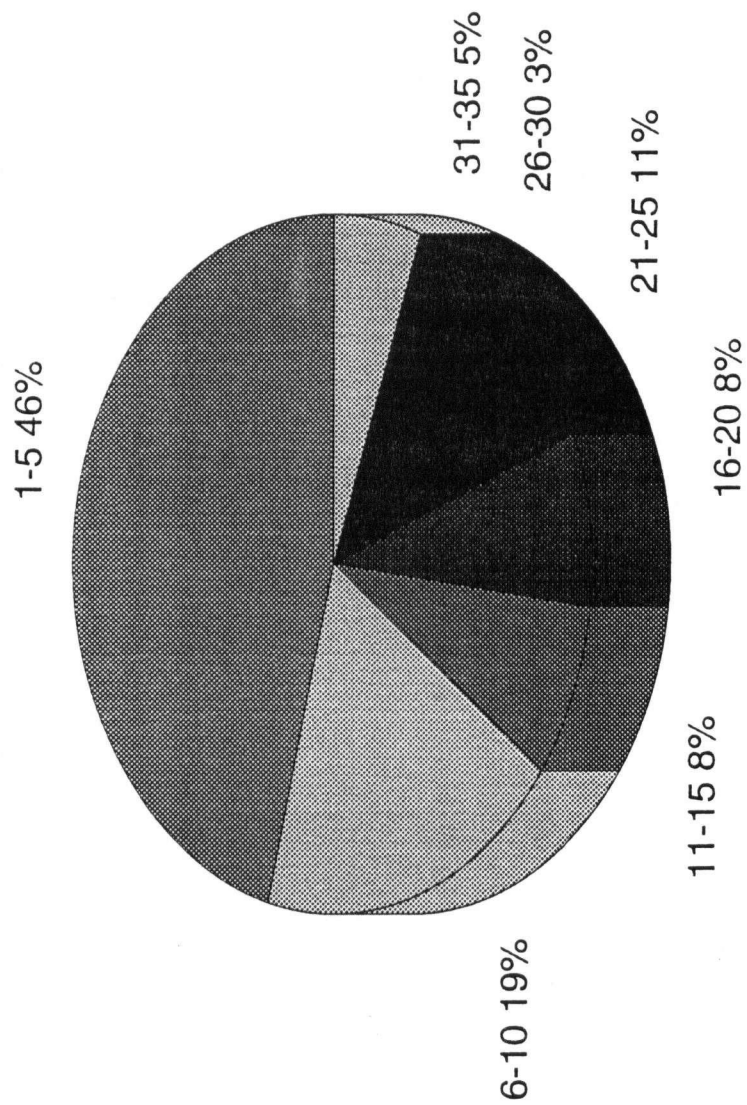


Work Smarter Not Faster Level of English



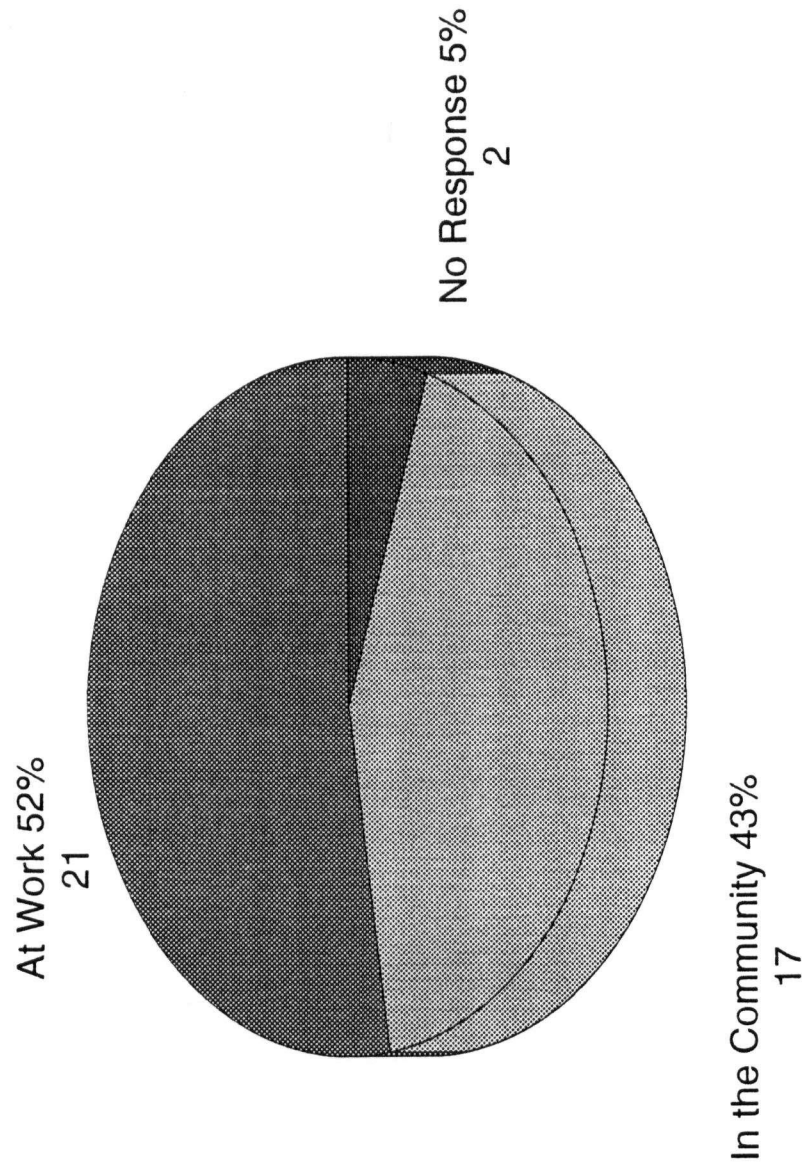
Self Assessment

Work Smarter Not Faster # Years at Present Job



n=37

Work Smarter Not Faster English Used Most Frequently



Some Respondents checked both

Work Smarter Not Faster Belong to Union

