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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# BEING A TEACHER IN AN ADULT MULTICULTURAL ESL CLASS

BY

SARA MARIE GNIDA

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

ADULT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF ADULT, CAREER AND TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

SPRING, 1991

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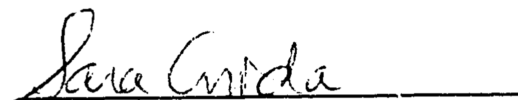

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M. Haughey

(Supervisor) M. Haughey

B. Bain

T. Derwing

Date: February 26, 1991

# DEDICATION

To the students, teachers, professors, and many friends and family members who have contributed to a broadening of my horizons.

To my parents who initiated this process as they modeled an ability to adjust and readjust numerous times to different cultures.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe English as a second language (ESL) teachers' perceptions of the impact of cultural differences and acculturation on the adult ESL class. A few hours of classroom observation served as a springboard for discussion during naturalistic interviews with eight ESL teachers. The data were analyzed in terms of the following five categories and two themes.

The first category includes the participants' reflections on the impact of their past experiences on their decisions regarding the cultural content of their classes and on their ability to understand, identify with, and serve as role models for their students.

The second category includes the teachers' sense that their students are under tremendous pressure as evidenced by the realities of their students' lives and the symptoms of stress their students displayed.

Third, the teachers evidenced a concern for their students' comfort by (a) providing an informal, relaxed and tolerant classroom; (b) respecting students; (c) making themselves available; (d) developing a positive relationship with students; (e) acknowledging and dealing with different classroom expectations; and (f) acknowledging the potential for, and avoiding, misunderstandings.

A fourth category includes the teachers' perceptions of student relationships in the classroom and their efforts to help their students interact positively with each other by (a) emphasizing the similarities among students, (b) encouraging bonds between students, (c) avoiding certain topics/activities, (d) encouraging students to change offending behaviors, and (e) encouraging students to be more tolerant.

The fifth category includes the teachers' discussion of the dual purpose of dealing with "cultural topics": (a)they provide an ideal content for language activities; and (b) teaching culture is one way to help students "belong" here in Canada. The teachers' efforts to avoid ethnocentricity while teaching Canadian culture were also discussed.

The two broad themes which emerged from the data include (a) the primacy of tolerance, both as a value of the teachers, and as a

characteristic which they attempted to foster in students; and (b) the teachers' efforts to give students a "voice" both in their classrooms and in Canadian society. Both themes are discussed in terms of the relevant ESL literature.

The most important issue in this study is the teachers' rejection of ethnocentricity, in themselves as they taught about Canadian culture, and in their students who were learning to live in a multicultural society.

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# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The typical adult English as a second language (ESL) classroom often contains a more diverse selection of humanity than is found anywhere else in Canadian society. Students in any one ESL class may come from widely differing social classes, language backgrounds, and countries. They may be significantly different with regard to educational background, financial resources, family responsibility, previous life experience, and age. However, as strangers in a foreign country, they usually have at least two characteristics in common: they are culturally "different" from each other and from the Canadians they meet; and they are in the process of adjusting to life in a new country and culture.

When examining the effects of cultural differences and acculturation on ESL students, questions arise concerning the role of the ESL teacher. The ESL teacher must acknowledge and work with the students' cultural differences as well as their emotional trauma in adjusting to a new culture and country. How is this to be done? Is it even the ESL teacher's responsibility to help students through the emotional trauma inherent in the process of adjusting to a new culture? And, if assisting with adjustment is their responsibility, how are they to do it? Also, what roles do ESL teachers take and what strategies do they use to promote unity among students in their classes? Are ESL teachers just language teachers, or are they responsible for teaching culture as well? And, is teaching culture a humane activity or is it an ethnocentric means of forcing students to accept the ESL teacher's cultural values?

As an initial step in my search for answers to some of these questions, I conducted a study which was designed to find out from ESL teachers themselves what impact they perceived the issues of cultural differences and adjustment have on communication, roles and relationships in their adult ESL classes.

## Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study was to disclose how teachers of English as a second language understood the impact of cultural differences and acculturation on interaction, communication, relationships and roles within the adult English as a second language class. The following questions served as guides to the development of the study:

1. What impact do cultural differences among the students (different expectations, values, behaviors, biases, prejudices, etc.) have on interaction, communication, and relationships in the ESL class? How does this affect the teacher's actions?

2. What impact does the process of adjusting to a new culture and country have on interaction, communication, and relationships in the ESL class? How does this affect the teacher's actions?

3. What past experiences do ESL teachers count as valuable in helping them interact with and assist ESL students in their adjustment to Canadian society?

## Significance of the Problem

Most of the research in the area of acculturation and cultural differences in the area of ESL examines ESL students and their experiences learning the English language and adjusting to the English culture; very little of the research actually looks at the experience of ESL teachers and how they relate to and understand their ESL students. Similarly, very little has been written on either the impact of having students from a variety of cultures in the ESL classroom, or the teacher's role in dealing with prejudice and intolerance. Although there has been much written about culture shock and the ESL student's experience of adjusting to a new culture and country, the literature dealing with how this affects ESL teaching practices and actions is again largely theoretical and prescriptive. This study is significant

because it provides a researched understanding of the experience of the ESL teacher.

Describing ESL teachers' understandings of the impact of cultural differences and acculturation on interaction, communication, relationships and roles within the adult English as a second language class is of potential benefit to all who are involved in the education of adult ESL students, including student advisors, sponsoring agencies and tutors; however, the study's primary benefit is to ESL teachers, ESL students, ESL teacher training institutions, and ESL program directors. ESL teachers, for example, may become more aware of cultural differences in their classrooms, gaining new insights into how these differences affect interaction and communication in the classroom. An increased understanding of the ESL student's experience of learning to live in a foreign culture and country, and the impact of these experiences on the roles and responsibilities of the ESL teacher, would also be valuable for ESL instructors. Teacher training institutions may become more aware of the skills, information, and experiences needed by prospective ESL teachers who will certainly be working with students of different cultures who are in the process of adjusting to life in a new country. Similarly, program directors may be more aware of how cultural differences affect their teachers and, therefore, be better able to advise them on how to relate to people from other cultures.

In conclusion, this study is significant (a) because the insights and understandings of this study are potentially beneficial to all who are responsible for facilitating the education of adult ESL students, and (b) because of the lack of research in this area.

## Assumptions

Assumptions of this study include (1) the assumption that my interview and observation skills were appropriate for the various situations and (2) the assumption that the teachers were truthful and that their recollections of situations were accurate.

## Delimitations and Limitations

The study is delimited to the teachers who participated in the study in that it does not provide a reader with generalizable truths. However, by including details about the personalities, backgrounds, and teaching situations of the participants, I have attempted to develop "an adequate idiographic statement about the situation. . . accompanied by sufficient 'thick description' to make judgments about transferability possible" (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p.241). Judgments of the transferability of the conclusions would need to take into account the situations, backgrounds, and personalities of the ESL teachers interviewed.

This study has a number of limitations. First, the time and finances available for research limited the number and the depth of the interviews (for instance, the decision not to participate in a second interview by three of the participants seemed to be related to a lack of time). Second, the study was limited by the respondents' abilities to recall, share, and understand their own experiences. Third, the study was limited by my own interviewing skills, my ability to question, probe, and create ambiance or trust between myself and the respondents. Fourth, the study is limited by my ability to rightly interpret, bring meaning to, and detect themes in the data provided by the respondents.

## Definitions of Terms

Culture. A wide, holistic definition of culture is used in this study. Culture is viewed as the "shared value system of the members of a society," having "discernible patterns which can be understood by an outsider to the particular culture" (McLeod, 1980, p.539). Culture is seldom homogenous and is in a state of constant change. It is something that is learned. Culture contributes to a people's world view, values, life style, social interaction, modes of thought, body of knowledge, and customs. It includes a person's socially derived

assumptions regarding "race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and social class" (Bain, 1989, p.1).

Cultural differences. This term refers to the differences in behavior, values, assumptions, world views, and so forth, between ESL students and (a) other ESL students, (b) the ESL teacher or (c) Canadians, which are the result of belonging to different cultural groups.

Culture Shock. This term refers to the emotional trauma which people experience when they find themselves surrounded by a new culture and are no longer able to predict the behavior of people around them.

## Summary

In this chapter, the problem which is the subject of this research project has been identified and its significance discussed. In the following chapters, the relevant literature on the subject will be explored, and the design of the study will be described. The findings of the study will then be discussed in terms of five major categories and three underlying themes. Finally, in the last chapter, I will reflect on the findings of the study and their implications for practice and research.

# CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE AND RESEARCH

The literature that is directly relevant to the research problem falls into three general categories: the relationship between culture and communication, the effect of cultural differences among students on the ESL class, and the ESL students' experience of acculturation and the impact of this experience on the ESL classroom. Each of these areas has implications for the relationship of the ESL teacher with his or her students.

Only a few of the many references cited are research studies, indicating that the subject of this study is an area that is of interest to many but has been researched by only a few.

A limited number of references are reviewed to indicate the nature of the literature. Additional potentially useful sources are listed in the bibliography.

## Cultural Understanding Necessary for Communication

### Definition of Culture

Traditionally, second language teachers have defined culture as the events in history, art, music, literature, theater, dances, poetry, and so forth, of a people. These "civilizing" aspects of culture (Morain, 1986, p.3) are sometimes referred to as "high" culture. High culture, however, is only a part (or perhaps reflection) of a broader, more holistic definition of culture, in which culture is viewed as the "shared value system of the members of a society," having "discernible patterns which can be understood by an outsider to the particular culture" (McLeod, 1980, p.539). Lado (1957) has described culture as the "ways of a people" or the "structured systems of patterned behavior" of a people (p.110-111). Culture, in this broader definition, consists of "all those things that people have learned to

do, believe, value, and enjoy in their history....the ideals, beliefs, skills, tools, customs, and institutions into which each member of society is born" (Sue, 1981, p.37). For the purposes of this paper, the term "culture" will also include all "assumptions about race, gender, ethnicity, religion and social class" which affect and mediate relations between people in the ESL classroom (Bain, 1989). Culture, as it is here described, is seldom homogenous and is perpetually changing.

Relationship Between Language and Culture

The language of a people is intimately connected with the way they think about and perceive reality; the study of a language can lead one to a deeper understanding of the culture of the people speaking that language (Whorf, 1956; Stern, 1983). One way that language reflects the values of the culture is by providing a more extensive vocabulary for those things which are valued by the people in that particular culture than for those things which are peripheral to their concern. For example, Eskimos utilize numerous words to describe snow (Hall, 1959, p.101; Stern, 1983, p.204) while the Masai in Kenya have a wide vocabulary to describe cows. Language also reflects the customs and attitudes of a people, as I noted when living among the Kalenjin people in Kenya. In their language, the word for boy (Ng'etet) literally means "the one who remains behind" while the word for girl (Chepto) comes from the root word for "visitor" -- reflecting the fact that girls are perceived to be "visitors" in their biological homes, leaving when they marry, whereas boys are perceived to be a permanent part of their biological family.

Because the language of a people is a part of and a reflection of their culture, it cannot be separated from the broader "symbolic universe" of a particular people and culture (Bain, 1988). For this reason, language cannot be taught in isolation from its context (all that makes up the culture of a people). Culture, like language is a "form of communication" (Hall, 1959, p.37); therefore, "social

inappropriateness and lack of communication (or even worse, miscommunication) are possible" in both language and culture (Allameh, 1986, p.11). Levine and Adelman (1982) in the introduction to their culture text Beyond Language, cite Winston Bembeck as follows: "to know another's language and not his culture is a very good way to make a fluent fool of one's self." Neither culture nor language can be understood in isolation from the other: "A language is a part of a culture and a culture is a part of a language, the two are intricately interwoven such that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture" (Brown, 1987, p. 123; see also Allameh, 1986).

## Implications for ESL

This close connection between language and culture clearly implies that language cannot be successfully taught in isolation from its "vital context" -- the cultures (assumptions, beliefs, values, traditions, etc.) of those learning the language, the cultures of those teaching the language, and the cultures of native speakers of the language all interact and form a particular context within which a language is taught. Bain (1988) decries the tendency of the education system to separate language from its "vital context":

> In the case of language, the tendency has been to separate it from the general symbolic universe of which it is a part, and to try and treat it in isolation from its vital context. Language, Myth, Art, Music, Dance, Drama, Religion and Science are interwoven symbol systems which together constitute the world in which we live. Isolating language while being numb or dumb to the variegated weave of which it is but one thread is ill advised. The whole curriculum must be designed to strengthen this entire symbolic world. (Bain, 1988, p.2)

Because culture (in its general sense) is so pervasive, and because it is so closely related to language and to communication, ESL teachers need to be aware of the cultural differences between themselves and their students. The ESL classroom is a meeting place of languages and cultures -- in the ESL classroom, individuals from

Teacher/Student Relationships

The goal of the ESL teacher is to teach a particular language, and the goal of his or her students is to learn that language. Any type of teaching or learning necessitates a certain level of communication between the teacher and the learner. If there is no sensitivity on the part of the teacher toward the cultural differences of his or her students, the literature suggests that there will be no communication between them, and therefore no teaching or learning will occur in that class.

Tannen (1983) asserts that "every word spoken in an ESL classroom is cross cultural communication" (p.11) and is therefore a potential opportunity for misunderstanding. ESL teachers, therefore, cannot ignore the different cultural backgrounds of their students; instead, they must "learn about, develop a respect for, and interact with the culture of their students" (Davenport, 1982, p.16). As Davenport (1982) states, "if a teacher does not interact with students' cultural backgrounds, the potential for education within that classroom will continue to shrink" (p.15). Not only will the teacher "[appear] to the students to be insensitive, ignorant, or foreign, and thereby effectively [isolating] him or herself from the students" (Davenport, 1982, p.15), but the teacher will also perceive the students to be rude, uncouth, unintelligent, uninterested and ignorant; and will therefore have lower expectations of them and be less motivated to teach them.

In order to be effective, the ESL teacher must take on the role of learner. Iwataki (1978), in an article regarding the cultural gap between Asian students and American teachers, states that "the adult ESL classroom can be an effective meeting ground where the two protagonists, the American teacher and the Asian student, can acknowledge their common humanity and learn to perceive the world through each other's eyes" (p.77). She then goes on to list various attributes of Asian culture which would affect the student/teacher relationship and indicates the aspects of American culture that Asian students need to be taught.

educational backgrounds of their students, being aware at the same time of their own "culturally determined assumptions regarding the roles of teachers and students and types of techniques suitable for language teaching" (McGroarty & Galvan, 1985).

Student/Student Relationships

Another problem, which is seldom mentioned in the literature, has to do with how the ESL students from different cultures relate to each other. The students' relationships to each other would, in turn, affect the teacher's relationship to the class as a whole. Many ESL students come from 'mono-cultural' societies and have never been forced to interact with people from other cultures. It has been my observation that cliques and feuds can form among the students because of their cultural differences, thereby limiting the learning potential in the class. McLeod (1980) mentions the "disruptive competition" that sometimes occurs between national groups in a class and suggests that the solution to this would be for the teacher to teach "cultural relativity," making it clear to the students that "cultures and

languages differ from each other, but no one culture or language can be said to be superior to another" (p.542).

Harmatz-Levin (1984) asserts that "one of the most unpredictable factors in trying to establish a productive mood in a language classroom is the way in which students will get along" (p.27). If students do not get along, and the classroom atmosphere is characterized by tension, hostility and fear, language learning will be difficult, if not impossible. Harmatz-Levin states that, because language learning is an "interactive skill," learning "cannot be internalized if students feel isolated from or, at worse, antagonized by fellow students" (p.27). Students need a non-threatening, relaxed atmosphere, a place where they can let down their defences, in order to learn. They also need to be able to model, support and correct each other without fear (Harmatz-Levin, 1984, p.27). However, despite teachers' best efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to learning, "the potential for tension...is very much a reality in many ESL classrooms" (p.27). ESL students are already under the extreme stress inherent in adjusting to a new culture and learning a new language. When this is added to the stress of being in a multicultural classroom, and being, possibly for the first time, "faced with other foreign nationals," it is not surprising that negative attitudes and tensions are common in the ESL classroom (Harmatz-Levin, 1984, p.27).

The ESL teacher's responsibility, therefore, is to somehow help students deal with their stereotypes of others as well as other's stereotypes of them (Harmatz-Levin, 1984, p.27). Harmatz-Levin relates one instance w[illegible] she dealt with the tension build-up in her classroom by assigning t[illegible]nt the task of phoning two other students in the class. Alth[illegible]udents did not respond immediately, over time the atmosphe[illegible] classroom changed. According to Harmatz-Levin, "students began to view each other as multifaceted human beings....cultural stereotypes became less rigid....absence of family and friends in the United States was eased, if even just a little, by the awareness that classmates could care about classmates" (p.27).

The cultural differences of both teachers and students within the classroom are the source of potential communication breakdowns within

the class which can affect the teacher/student relationship and limit the effectiveness of language teaching/learning which can take place.

## ESL Students' Experiences of Cultural Adjustment

Not only do ESL students face cultural differences inside the classroom, they also face these differences, in a more exaggerated form, outside the four walls of the classroom in Canadian society. The differences students face in relation to Canadian society cause an intense emotional reaction, often referred to as culture shock. Students going through the process of culture shock exhibit certain emotional characteristics which may affect relationships and interactions within the classroom. The literature suggests that ESL teachers must strive to understand the emotional states of their students if they are to be effective in their teaching, and this must include an understanding of the experience of culture shock as well as a consideration of their role in helping students through this experience. Through this portion of the literature review, I will attempt to promote an understanding of the ESL student's experience of culture shock by discussing the definition of culture shock, the stages of culture shock, and common metaphors of culture shock. I will then discuss the implications of culture shock for the ESL teacher, including the content of the ESL class, the atmosphere of the ESL class, the role of the ESL teacher, and some suggested activities.

### Definition of Culture and Language Shock

Culture shock is precipitated by the "removal or distortion of many of the familiar cues one encounters at home and the substitution for them of other cues which are strange" (Hall, 1959, p.150). It is "the emotional reaction which occurs when a person is no longer able to predict the behavior of others around him" and it occurs when a person lives in another culture for an extended period of time (Molnaire, 1983, p.52). Many ESL students who are new to Canada are going through

the emotional trauma of culture shock as they adapt to a new country with a new language and an unfamiliar culture.

Language shock, contributing to the trauma of culture shock, is the language learner's reaction to the loss of status and security that occurs when the language learner is placed in a foreign language environment (Schumann, 1978; Smalley, 1963; Stengal, 1939; Stern, 1983). When an individual (an ESL student, for example) is placed in a foreign country (such as Canada), he is

> stripped of his primary means of interacting with other people, he is subject to constant mistakes, he is placed on the level of a child again....he meets intelligent and educated people but he responds to them like a child or an idiot because he is not capable of any better response. (Smalley, 1963, p.54)

Adult language learners' fears of criticism and ridicule hinder them in their attempt to learn the language (Stengal, 1939). This often results in a rejection of the language as demonstrated by a student's (a) tendency to spend time only with people who speak his or her language, (b) susceptibility to illness, and (c) animosity toward the language teacher (Smalley, 1963, p.54) -- all of which are also symptoms of culture shock.

Stages of Acculturation

The literature describes four predictable stages of cultural adjustment which most students go through: euphoria, culture shock, tentative recovery, and full recovery (Adler, 1987; Brown, 1987; Damen, 1982). Some would also include the shock of re-entering one's own culture as a fifth stage; however, for the purposes of this literature review, only the first four stages will be discussed. Although these stages are predictable, the time spent in each stage varies with each individual and each situation.

Euphoria. The first stage of culture shock is characterized by feelings of euphoria and excitement about the new country (Adler, 1987; Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981; Brown, 1987). Students in this stage are "captivated by sights and sounds" of the new country, seeing the new

culture through the "eyes of a tourist" (Adler, 1987, p.26). Individuals in this stage have only a superficial understanding of and involvement in the new culture, and are primarily concerned with their own "material well being" (Adler, 1987, p.26). In this stage, students are "comfortable and delighted with the 'exotic surroundings.' As long as they can perceptually filter their surroundings and internalize the environment in their own world view, they feel at ease" (Brown, 1987, p.129).

Culture shock. In the second stage of cultural adjustment, "individuals feel the intrusion of more and more cultural differences into their own images of self and security" (Brown, 1987, p.129). Differences in daily routine, tradition, history, philosophy, life-style, and outlook become more and more noticeable (Adler, 1987, p.27). Daily activities become major hurdles, causing anger and hostility toward the new culture. According to Molnaire (1983), this stage is characterized by "excessive complaining about the new culture; resistance to the language, food, customs, etc. of the new culture; tendency to hang around only with persons of one's own cultural or language group; depression and irritability; strongly negative self-image; paranoia; and excessive sleeping" (p.52). Brown (1987) summarizes the feelings felt by individuals in this stage: "estrangement, anger, hostility, indecision, frustration, unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, homesickness, and even physical illness" (p.128). Damen (1982) would also add distrust, depression, and suspicion.

Smalley (1963) discusses, in great detail, two particular symptoms of culture shock: rejection and homesickness. Rejection of the target country and people is demonstrated by "endless complaining, carping, fault-finding" and the "development of a protective, personal isolationism" (Smalley, 1963, p.51). Rather than rejecting the target country, some sufferers of culture shock reject their home country. This is seen when individuals "go native," resulting in a "life of imitation and emotional dependence on their host country" (Smalley, 1963, p.51). According to Smalley, ideal adaptation would not be based "on a pathological rejection of their past but on a wholesome selection

of what is valuable from all the cultural streams with which they come into contact" (p.51). Not only does the culture shock sufferer reject the target country or his home country, but he often rejects himself; this is seen when an individual blames himself "for every mistake and feels utterly defeated when he is not an instant success" (Smalley, 1963, p.52). The second symptom of culture shock mentioned by Smalley, homesickness, is manifested when the culture shock sufferer "plays up the superiority of things at home." The "symbols of home [food or music, for example] assume enormous proportions" to the person going through culture shock because they are familiar and symbolize the world he or she understands (Smalley, 1963, p.52).

The negative emotions and behaviors mentioned above can be very frustrating when encountered in the ESL classroom. In my own experience as an ESL teacher I found this to be true. For example, I once found myself becoming quite defensive when a student suggested that Edmonton's buses and fire trucks were "antiques" which no self-respecting city in his own country would ever allow on their streets. Also, because he saw so many handicapped people in public, this same man implied that Canadians had some sort of genetic defect that caused them to have so many handicapped children. Awareness of the experience of culture shock, and the realization that it is a normal stage that people adjusting to another culture experience, may help those dealing with ESL students to be more patient, tolerant, and accepting of them.

<u>Vacillating recovery</u>. The third stage of culture shock is a time of "gradual, tentative, vacillating recovery" (Brown, 1987, p.129). During this stage, some of the practical problems (such as housing, travel, school, shopping, banking, finding a job, etc.) are solved. Individuals develop empathy for the people of the target culture, accepting their differences in thinking and feeling (Brown, 1987). Humor becomes both possible and important -- students can now laugh at their troubles and see humor in what was formerly thought to be tragedy (Adler, 1987). It is in this stage that students experience <u>anomie</u>, "a feeling of homelessness, where one feels neither bound firmly to one's

native culture nor fully adapted to the second culture" (Brown, 1987, p.130; see also Brown, 1980). This feeling of anomie typically occurs when a person has begun to master the language (Brown, 1980).

Brown (1980) contends that stage three of culture shock is a "critical period" for language learning. This stage provides the "optimal cognitive and affective tension to produce the necessary pressure to acquire the language" (Brown, 1980, p.161; Brown, 1987, p.135). In this stage, the pressure to learn the language is neither "too overwhelming" (as in stage two), nor "too weak" (as in stage four) (Brown, 1980, p.161). Brown suggests that, if students in stage three attain a "non-linguistic means of coping in the foreign culture," they will "have no reason to achieve mastery" of the language, becoming what language teachers refer to as "fossils" (Brown, 1987, p.135; Brown, 1980, p.161). ESL teachers, therefore, should be aware and take advantage of this optimal time for language learning.

Full recovery. The fourth stage of culture shock is near or full recovery (Brown, 1987). Individuals in this stage have either assimilated or adapted to the new culture (Brown, 1987) and can now derive pleasure from relationships with people of the target culture (Adler, 1987). This stage is characterized by "acceptance of the new culture and self-confidence in the 'new' person that has developed in this culture" (Brown, 1987, p.129).

## Metaphors of Culture Shock

Culture shock has been compared with a number of other human experiences: the reaction to grief, the reaction to stress, a mental illness, and a learning experience. Each of these comparisons yields different insights into the experience of culture shock.

Culture shock as a grief reaction. Culture shock is sometimes compared to grief (Molnaire, 1983; Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981). Grief occurs anytime that there is a loss -- and ESL students, especially those who are immigrants, have lost a significant amount: "loss of

country, loss of culture, loss of family member(s), loss of status, loss of the way of life" (Quan, 1986, p.2).

Like culture shock, the grieving process occurs in stages. In the first phase of the grieving process, immigrants "experience numbness, shock, and disbelief" (Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981, p.377). Their original enthusiasm is dampened by the disappointments and troubles faced in Canada, and they question the wisdom of their decision to immigrate to this country. The second phase occurs when the numbness, shock and disbelief "develop into feelings of pain, despair, and disorganization" (Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981, p.377). Immigrants in this stage are conscious of their loss of family support and their resulting social isolation. They experience a deep longing for their home country, accompanied by anger at those they perceive to be causing their painful feelings (the anger may be directed at themselves, their families, or the people of their host country). In stage three, the immigrant acknowledges the reality that he is "here to stay" and he resolves "to reorganize [his] life, to start anew and to build new relationships" (Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981, p.377). In this final stage, "the immigrant ceases to grieve over her or his losses, so it seems, and accepts her or his role in American society" (Arrendondo-Dowd, 1981, p.377). This metaphor of culture shock as a grief reaction implies that ESL teachers should be aware of the losses their students have experienced and be sensitive to their needs as they move through the grieving process.

Culture shock as a stress reaction. ESL students, especially those who are refugees, are under a tremendous amount of stress. The stressors faced by most immigrants include "loss of country, loss of culture, loss of family member(s), loss of status, loss of the way of life, all these losses compounded by the advent of culture shock" (Quan, 1986, p.2). Compounding their stress, many refugees are also coping with the physical and psychological problems which are the result of torture and long periods of time spent in camps.

Barna (1983) describes culture shock as a "defense mechanism" or a "reaction" to the stress faced by sojourners (p.30-32). Stress is caused by "ambiguity, uncertainty and unpredictability," certainly all

of which are common experiences for ESL students (Barna, 1983, p.31). Barna suggests that "it is the inexplicable minutiae of the entire cultural context that is taxing [the sojourner's] coping skills....The lack of specificity as to the direct external cause is what makes anxiety so hard to dispel" (p.27). Other stressors include the restriction of "meaningful human intercourse," "disconfirmed expectations," "information overload," and "social isolation" (Barna, 1983, p.32).

One study which recognized the heavy amount of stress faced by language learners was conducted by Hartung (1983). In order to provide a framework for orientation materials, Hartung conducted a study to discover which situations Japanese exchange students felt to be the most stressful or difficult. The adjustment difficulties of the Japanese students were examined from the points of view of host families, high school teachers, and the students themselves. Hartung sent questionnaires to 106 high school Japanese exchange students, asking them to rate and comment on descriptions of 54 potential stressful situations. The results of the questionnaire were then compared to the stressful situations identified by host families and teachers. Results indicated that these students experienced the most difficulty with (a) knowing what to talk about and when to speak, (b) understanding the way Americans showed emotions, (c) understanding American humor, and (d) making friends. Clearly, certain aspects of American culture caused stress among the Japanese exchange students surveyed.

When faced with stress, the body defends itself by releasing certain hormones, increasing heart and breathing rates, activating blood clotting mechanisms, tightening muscles, shutting down the digestive system, and sending extra sugar into the blood (Barna, 1983). Unfortunately, these biological reactions are more of a hindrance than a help to the person attempting to survive in a new social context. These biological reactions prepare an individual for physical danger; however, in social contexts, the danger is to "one's self-esteem or social self" and the individual has need of "understanding, calm deliberation, empathy" (Barna, 1983, p.23). The

biological stress reaction actually reduces the ability of the ESL student to "interact with an unknown social structure," aggravating rather than helping her or his situation (Barna, 1983, p.31).

Prolonged exposure to stress results in the "unpleasant emotions" associated with both stress and culture shock, and often results in exhaustion, depression and illness (Barna, 1983). Lopez-Ramirez (1981) lists numerous symptoms of psychological stress that immigrants face:

> homesickness, agitation, tension, irritability, restlessness, loss of appetite, loss of weight, sleep disorders, digestive complaints, headaches, palpitations, and muscle cramps (p.7, cited in Eppink, 1979).

Barna (1983) suggests that culture shock should be treated as a stress reaction and that the methods which have been found successful for dealing with people under stress are appropriate for those facing the stress of adjusting to another culture.

Culture shock as a mental illness. A number of authors have likened the experience of culture shock to a mental illness. Foster (1973) says "culture shock is a mental illness, and, as is true of much mental disease, the victim usually does not know he is afflicted...it rarely occurs to him that the problem lies within himself; it is obvious that the host country and its unpredictable inhabitants are to blame" (p.191). Foster (1973) refers to culture shock as a "malady," a "disease," an "illness" and a "virus" requiring "immunity" and having an "incubation stage"; he refers to the individual facing culture shock as either a "victim" or a "patient" (Foster, 1973).

Clarke (1976), being more specific than Foster, maintains that the trauma experienced by students of English as a second language (ESL) is analogous to the trauma experienced by victims of schizophrenia. Schizophrenia is "a special strategy that a person invents in order to live in an unlivable situation" (Laing, 1967, p.114, cited in Clarke, 1976, p.379). This unlivable situation, experienced by both those diagnosed as schizophrenic and language learners, is described by Clarke as being a "continuous state of double bind" (Clarke, 1976, p.280). Bateson's (1972) description of the double bind situation

faced by schizophrenes is strikingly reminiscent of situations faced every day by ESL students living in a strange culture:

> 1. ...the individual is involved in an intense relationship; that is, a relationship in which he feels it is vitally important that he discriminate accurately what sort of message is being communicated so that he may respond appropriately.
> 2. ...the individual is caught in a situation in which the other person in the relationship is expressing two orders of message and one of these denies the other.
> 3. ...the individual is unable to comment on the messages being expressed to correct his discrimination of what order of message to respond to, i.e., he cannot make a metacommunicative statement. (Cited in Clarke, 1976, p.280)

Both language learners and schizophrenes experience a "sense of helplessness in the face of confusing and conflicting environmental cues" (Clarke, 1976, p.379). They also develop similar "patterns of behavior and communication which help them navigate their way through a complex and threatening reality" (Clarke, 1976, p.381). These "essential, balance-restoring mechanisms which allow one to make sense of the world," and which cause individuals to be classified as insane (p.381), are remarkably similar to the symptoms of culture shock mentioned previously. Clarke claims that language learners could be labeled "mentally incompetent" if their actions were examined apart from the context of being in a strange environment (p.381).

Clarke (1976) also sees the experience of living in a new culture as a "clash of consciousness." ESL students are "forced to confront a different reality," (p.384) and the severity of the confrontation depends on the difference in modernization between their country and the United States (p.383). He describes two forces which each influence the characteristics of the "modern consciousness" found in the United States. The <u>technological production</u> found in modern societies is the source of the following characteristics of modern cultures: "rationality," "componentiality," "multi-relationality," "makability," "plurality," and "progressivity" (Clarke, 1976, p.385-386). <u>Bureaucracy</u> (the concept of organizing people into units for production purposes) is the source of (a) "the thematization of society," (b) "adoption of roles," (c) the distance between "public and private spheres," and, (d) the identification of human rights with

bureaucracy (rather than personal responsibility for others) (Clarke, 1976, pp.387-388). Clarke (1976) concludes that ESL students from less modernized societies face a "major identity crises" (p.388), and that it is the ESL teachers' responsibility to make the modernized society intelligible to the students.

Culture shock as a learning experience. In contrast to the primarily negative views of culture shock mentioned above (culture shock as a grief reaction, stress reaction, or a mental illness), Adler (1987) views culture shock as "a powerful learning tool" (p.24), "a profound learning experience that leads to a high degree of self-awareness and personal growth" (p.29). A person going through culture shock both "examines the degree to which he is influenced by his own culture," and learns to understand "the culturally derived values, attitudes, and outlooks of other people" (Adler, 1987, p.30).

Two types of learning occur through the experience of culture shock: "Cultural awareness" and "self awareness" (Adler, 1987, p.31-33). Cultural awareness involves learning to "legitimatize" different cultural systems (p.32), accepting that "no one culture...is inherently better or worse than another" (p.31). This involves an understanding, and a shedding, of ethnocentrism. Self awareness involves learning (a) that one's own "behavior is grounded in values, assumptions, and beliefs" (Adler, 1987, p.32), and (b) that one's own "behavior affects...how others relate to him" (Adler, 1987, p.33). The increased tolerance, sensitivity, and empathy gained through the experience of culture shock provide an individual with the interpersonal and communication skills "necessary for social survival" (Adler, 1987, p.33).

Fantino (1983) also recognizes the possibility of growth which can occur during the "crisis of identity" experienced by South American immigrants:

> "As in every profound crisis, there are some actual risks and subjective fears of madness and of death, but there is also the possibility of growth. This period is a kind of existential vacuum difficult to tolerate, but it could be a fertile and not a sterile void." (Fantino, 1983, p.80)

Because culture shock is a learning experience that helps a person interact with people of other cultures as well as become aware of his own cultural biases, ESL teachers who have lived for a time in a foreign country, exposing themselves to the experience of adjusting to another culture, may have increased tolerance, sensitivity, understanding and empathy toward ESL students.

Implications for the ESL Teacher

According to the literature, the pervasive and traumatizing experience of culture shock has implications for the content of the ESL class, the role of the ESL teacher, the classroom atmosphere necessary for learning, and the teaching techniques used in the ESL class.

Content of the ESL class. Three content areas have been suggested in the literature: Canadian culture, cultural relativity, and culture shock.

First of all, a number of authors suggest that information about the target culture should be included in the content of the ESL class. Bell (1983) contends that, because the ESL teacher is often the first Canadian that ESL students get to know and is usually the ESL student's primary contact with the English speaking world, the ESL teacher's role "is not only to teach the language but to interpret the new society for them" (p.130). Thus, it is the ESL teacher's responsibility to help students "cope not only with the language itself, but also with all the demands made by the new culture in which our students are living" (Bell, 1983, p.130). Bell (1983) suggests that culture teaching should be the "vehicle by which the language is taught." Language teachers always need a "content to illustrate the language features on which [they] are focusing," and culture is the obvious solution (Bell, 1983, p.131). Similarly, Clarke (1976) suggests that the best way to deal with culture shock is "to make explicit all those presuppositions which form the fabric of modern consciousness" resulting in a "content [culture] as well as a skill [language]" for second language classes (Clarke, 1976, p.389). McLeod (1980) lists a number of reasons for the

explicit teaching of culture. First, most learners do not have the time to master the culture implicitly. Second, the very fact that the teacher is part of the native culture and is teaching the language assumes that culture will be taught at least implicitly; however, students may get confused or may "not get the message" unless it is made explicit (p.540). Krasnick (1983) would seem to agree with McLeod (1980) when he suggests that the teacher should be prepared to provide the ESL student with "a systematic presentation of the major values and norms that govern everyday life" (Krasnick, 1983, p.215).

Culture is a broad concept, and various authors emphasize the different aspects of culture which they consider a necessary part of the content of the ESL class. First of all, it has been suggested that ESL students must be taught the social customs of Canadians:

> Canadians will forgive newcomers who break these rules [matters of etiquette]. More important are the unspoken rules, such as whether one looks the boss in the eyes..., how seriously to take a suggestion that 'we must get together for lunch one of these days' and what are the taboo questions (Bell, 1983, p.132).

Since Canadians don't feel it's polite to criticize an adult's behavior, ESL students get little constructive feedback when they behave inappropriately. The ESL teacher, therefore, needs to give the students "guidance as to what is expected if they are to make any real use of their language competence" (Bell, 1983, p.132).

Related to the social customs are the "rules of speaking" mentioned by Applegate (1975). According to Applegate, students need to know the rules that dictate

> when to talk and when to keep silent, how loud to talk and with what intonation, what constitutes a polite request and what a refusal, how to initiate a conversation and how to end one, when to interpret an utterance literally and when to take it as a formulaic convention, and so on" (Applegate, 1975, p.271).

ESL students also need to learn the "paralanguage" of Canadians because people "make considerable (sometimes exclusive) use of paralanguage to communicate and ... such paralanguage varies from culture to culture" (Gannon, 1978, p.69). Gannon (1978) mentions three types of paralanguage which ESL teachers need to address in their classes. The first type, kinesic differences, consists of "body

communication, including gesture, posture, facial expression and eye contact" (Gannon, 1978, p.69). The second aspect of paralanguage, proxemic differences, are a person's "use and perception of space via his eyes, nose, ears and skin" (e.g. the social appropriateness of kissing in public) (Gannon, 1978, p.69). The third type of paralanguage includes "vocal gestures (e.g. giggling, crying, the breathy voice, and responses such as <u>humph</u>, <u>uhuh</u>, <u>ugh</u>) which cannot be dealt with satisfactorily within a particular linguistic system" (p.69). These three aspects of paralanguage can be used to contradict spoken language, complete a message, answer questions, and provide a message apart from any linguistic input. Because (a) paralanguage is integral to the communication process, and (b) the "link between language and paralanguage is so strong," and (c) there is no one else who is likely to expose the ESL students to paralanguage, ESL teachers cannot afford to ignore paralanguage in those instances "where identical symbols in the two cultures carry different, radically different, meanings" (Gannon, 1978, p.72).

Inherent in the suggestions above is the concept that, if students learn about the culture, they will find it easier to adapt. I would certainly concur that, to some degree, the teaching of culture in the classroom facilitates cultural adjustment; however, it may be difficult, if not downright impossible, to attempt to explain "<u>all</u>" of the presuppositions of our culture to ESL students, who have neither the emotional stamina nor the control of the English language necessary to comprehend detailed explanations of Canadian culture. Because culture shock is "essentially an emotional problem with emotional solutions" (Molnaire, 1983, p.2), a logical, rational explanation of modern culture may not be the best nor the only answer for students going through a "major identity crisis" (Clarke, 1976, p.388).

The second content area suggested by the literature to be incorporated into the content of the ESL class is cultural relativity (tolerance and acceptance of other cultures). Indeed, empathy, acceptance, and tolerance are characteristics of both those who are able to adjust to other cultures with a minimum of trauma, and those who have reached stage four of culture shock (Adler, 1987; Barna,

1983). Though not dealing with ESL students specifically, Trifonovitch (1980) discusses three barriers to cultural adjustment or cultural learning. First, Trifonovitch (1980) mentions that the "affective nature of culture learning" makes it difficult to teach in a cognitively oriented classroom (p.551). The second barrier to culture learning, ethnocentrism, is "the belief that one's own culture is the best and that [one's own] interpretation of the world of reality is the most reliable and truthful" (Trifonovitch, 1980, p.551). The third and somewhat related barrier to culture learning includes prejudice or prejudgment (stereotypes and "sweeping judgements" of other cultures) (Trifonovitch, 1980). Prejudice and prejudgment seem to be normal human characteristics, and yet they make it difficult for learners to be open minded about other cultures: "We generalize and categorize, we prejudge and predetermine in order to make sense of or give reason to, our way of doing things and seeing things" (Trifonovitch, 1980, p.553).

Trifonovitch suggests that a multi-cultural teacher should be aware of stereotypes and develop cultural awareness in the students by teaching them to be "multicentric," perceiving reality from different cultural viewpoints (p. 554). Likewise, McLeod (1980) suggests an anthropological approach to teaching culture that has, at its core, cultural relativity; in other words, ESL teachers should teach their students to become 'anthropologists'. Jaramillo (1973) mentions that ESL students should be taught "that there are no superior or inferior cultures. There are simply different ways of living" (p.59). Certainly, if students can learn to accept Canadian culture as being neither better nor worse, but only different, from their own cultures, they will progress through the process of cultural adjustment in a less painful manner; however, this does not guarantee that they will then not experience the emotional reaction of culture shock.

A third content area for the ESL class, suggested by a number of authors, is information about the experience of culture shock itself. Barna (1983) suggests that "advanced preparation, not in the form of information about the country of destination, but through the knowledge about oneself, the nature of the stress of culture shock, and various coping strategies" is needed to help people through the process of

culture shock (p.43). In a similar vein, Molnaire (1983) suggests that culture shock has been a neglected area in ESL teaching:

> Everyone knows about culture shock and its effects on students. Everybody except the students....the situation could be radically, almost magically improved by telling the students precisely what was happening to them and telling them that it was normal and would (probably) stop happening to them someday. (Molnaire, 1983, p.51).

Related to his suggestion to inform students about culture shock, Barna (1983) suggests four ways to help an individual deal with the stress of culture shock. The individual must first be helped to accept the differences between himself and others. Next, the individual needs to understand that continued exposure to the culture can cause a "high stress reaction" (however, the key here is in understanding this issue, not in avoiding the culture). Third, the individual must be warned to "guard against reaching that point at which the body/mind stops learning and starts defending itself with such things as limited sensory intake" (Barna, 1983, p.42). Fourth, the individual must be encouraged to provide her or his body with adequate rest. If this is not done, "collapse or illness of some kind is inevitable" (Barna, 1983, p.42).

Characteristics of the ESL teacher. As well as suggesting three content areas for the ESL class (Canadian culture, cultural relativity, and culture shock), the literature also implies that the ESL teacher should possess certain characteristics, or take on certain roles, if she or he is to help students going through culture shock.

First of all, a number of authors suggest that the ESL or Canadian culture teacher be knowledgable of both her or his own culture as well as her or his students' cultures. Jaramillo (1973) states that

> we cannot explain our own cultural patterns unless we have studied them deeply and thoroughly. To be a member of a given culture does not make one an authority on it. To teach cultural traits, we must understand both the culture we live in and the culture we are attempting to work with (Jaramillo, 1973, p.59).

Similarly, Arvisu and Snyder (1978) describe the ideal teacher as one who "knows him/herself culturally, who can come to know others

culturally, who understands his/her impact on others culturally and who can function as a facilitator of learning in a manner which reflects cross cultural understanding" (cited in Allameh, 1986, p.2). Knowledge, of one's own and others' cultures, however, is not all that is required of a culture teacher.

The ESL teacher must also demonstrate an accepting, non-ethnocentric attitude when dealing with ESL students. In order to understand ESL students, teachers must

> value cultural diversity, must not out of our ethnocentric concepts interpret being different as being deprived, must admit the humanness of not only ourselves but the other four billion others through global awareness, must become knowledgable about the world community and sensitive to cultural differences, and finally must understand the cultural barriers to effective communication. (Allameh, 1986, p.14)

According to the literature, teachers should be "anthropologists," becoming "partners" with their students in "cultural research" (McLeod, 1980, p.542). They should engage with their students in "a mutual exploration of their own and each other's cultures" (McLeod, 1980, 542), "[acknowledging] their common humanity and [learning] to perceive the world through each other's eyes" (Iwataki, 1978, p.77).

A number of authors also suggest that it is the ESL teacher's responsibility to take on the role of "effective counselor" (Rampaul, 1982, p.9) or "classroom therapist" (Molnaire, 1983) in order to help students cope with culture shock (Brown, 1987; Molnaire, 1983; Rampaul, 1982). Being a counselor includes demonstrating a "sincere interest" in all aspects of the students' lives, both past and present (Rampaul, 1982, p.7). When an adult ESL student is surrounded by a new culture, he or she

> often feels his own identity attacked. His very roots have been cut from under his feet....By giving the student an opportunity to express his feelings of isolation and uprootedness, to share his knowledge and experience gained in another background, to question values and other aspects of society, the counsellor uses the classroom as a springboard from which the newcomer can progress through the stages of culture shock. (Rampaul, 1982, p.8).

Brown (1987) states that "a teacher can enable learners to understand the source of their anger and frustration, to express those feelings

and then gradually to emerge from those depths to a very powerful and personal form of learning"(p.132).

One study which is particularly relevant to the issue of the ESL teacher's cultural role was conducted by Defoe (1986). In that study, Defoe explored 34 ESL teachers' perceptions of their roles with regard to culture in the adult ESL class. The purpose of her study was "to provide an account of ESL instructors' perceptions of their role as mediators of culture" and "to work towards a definition of the cultural role of ESL teachers based upon the experiences of a group." She described her methodology as an "interview study that takes an ethnographic approach to a research question that demands an insider's perspective" (p.31). Using reflexive, open ended and non-directed questions, Defoe interviewed 34 ESL teachers about their place in their students' adjustment to life in Vancouver in order to find out how they "define their roles and perceive their functions as teachers of Canadian culture" (p.4). Her results discussed the dimensions of the ESL teachers' perceived roles as culture communicators. Included in her results were teachers' perceptions of culture in ESL, and their reactions to the following roles: "Being an Example," "Explaining and Interpreting," "Teaching Interculturally," "Listening and Helping - Being a Friend." She related the teachers' responses to their background and their professed cultural identification. Defoe's study is especially significant because it examines the role of the ESL teacher -- most research studies in the area of ESL and culture examine only the experience of the ESL student.

Classroom atmosphere. The literature also suggests that the ESL teacher must strive for a classroom environment that will best facilitate open communication between teacher and student. This type of classroom was described by one author as "a warm nest" (Rampaul, 1982, p.11). According to McLeod (1980), the most important ingredient for an anthropological approach to culture teaching is a classroom atmosphere of cultural relativity. Questioning should be encouraged, making the ESL classroom a "haven from society, where one is allowed to ask questions about sensitive topics and try out new hypotheses about

the culture" (McLeod, 1980, p.541). According to McLeod, the resulting atmosphere "solves many psychological problems inherent in language learning" while providing relevant content for language teaching (p.542). In a similar vein, Allameh (1986) suggests that the comfort of the students in the ESL class ought to be of primary importance to the ESL teacher; therefore, the objective of the ESL class should be to "create a cheery, pleasant working place that draws the students, attracting them so that they contribute, satisfy themselves, and feel unthreatened in a relaxing atmosphere" (Allameh, 1986, p.14).

Classroom activities. Certain activities, suggested by various authors, have been found to be beneficial in helping students through the process of culture shock.

Damen (1982) suggests using various reading and writing activities (because they are essentially private) to assist students in (a) "shedding ethnocentrism," bringing it to consciousness by examining their own culture and patterns; (b) understanding the assumptions and patterns of Canadian culture; (c) assessing the "cultural chasm" (between themselves and the target culture); and (d) building a "personal bridge" across that chasm.

Donahue and Parsons (1982) suggest using roleplay to establish an "atmosphere conducive to learning" and to teach conversation rules as a means of dealing with "cultural fatigue" (Donahue & Parsons, 1982, p.359). They also propose five stages of "trans-cultural dialogue" which are necessary for the establishment of an empathic atmosphere. First, the teacher should recognize and accept students' "expressions of negativity as statements of their confused feelings toward the new environment" (p.360). Students will then feel accepted and understood "on their own terms" (p.360). Second, teachers and students should "exchange information about their cultures" (p.360). In this way, students are assured that they are not being asked to change their identities, just the "form through which they express that identity" (p.360). Third, teachers should provide students with explanations of the culture (dealing first with situations students have already faced and later with situations which students will have to handle in the

future). Students should then "recognize the differences in the two cultures and accept their need to use forms appropriate to the US culture" (p.361). Last, teachers should, through roleplay, provide the students with "opportunities to enact a variety of situations" (p.361).

Johnston (1983) suggests that the excessive class hours and homework assignments often found in ESL classes "keep students so busy that there is little time left for real language practice (p.233)." Instead of emphasizing classes and homework, Johnston asserts that ESL teachers should encourage students to get out and get to know Canadians in their community. Instead of "allowing the initial culture shock phase to spiral into a more permanent pattern of alienation" (p.229), teachers should help students learn to network with others who share their professional or recreational interests (Johnston, 1983, p.232).

Because culture shock is experienced by most, if not all, ESL students, and because it can be so emotionally traumatizing (especially if it is not understood), the literature implies that the ESL teacher should become familiar with the psychological consequences of adjusting to another culture. According to the literature, ESL teachers should not limit themselves to teaching the English language (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation) in a formal, sterile, or competitive classroom atmosphere. Instead, in order to be effective, they must accept new roles (those of culture teacher, anthropologist, and counselor), incorporate new content into their language classes (culture, cultural relativity, and culture shock), utilize alternate teaching strategies, and provide students with a warm and accepting classroom environment.

## Summary

In this chapter, the literature was reviewed in terms of three general categories. First of all, I examined the relationship between culture and communication (or language) in order to provide a background for the discussion of culture and cultural differences in the ESL class. A discussion of this literature yielded the conclusion that language should not, and cannot, be separated from its context:

culture. Secondly, the effect of cultural differences on teacher/student and student/student relationships in the ESL class was examined. From an examination of this literature, the potential for miscommunication and even strife in the ESL class was identified. However, very little was mentioned regarding relationships among culturally different students in the ESL class and the teacher's role in dealing with prejudice and intolerance among students; therefore, I determined to examine these key issues in my interview study. The third general category of literature I examined dealt with the issue of acculturation in the ESL class. This literature tended to be either very theoretical (describing the stages of culture shock) or prescriptive (telling teachers what they should do to help students through culture shock). However, little was written regarding the effect of the process of acculturation on the relationships among the actors in the ESL classroom. Therefore, instead of either attempting to determine whether students experienced culture shock (proceeding through the four stages described in the literature) or prescribing interventions which the ESL teacher should make when dealing with students facing culture shock, I decided to concentrate on describing teachers' perceptions of the effect of acculturation on interaction in the ESL class.

In the following chapter, I will describe the design of the study which I undertook in an attempt to find answers to some of the questions raised by the literature review.

# CHAPTER III: DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In this chapter I describe the design of the study, including a justification for the choice of a qualitative paradigm, descriptions of the methodology of the study, the ethical considerations, the data collection process, the respondents, and the process I went through as I analyzed the data.

## Choice of a Qualitative, "Artistic" Paradigm

A number of factors motivated my decision to work within a qualitative or "artistic" (Eisner, 1981) paradigm in my exploration of the issue of the effects of cultural differences and acculturation on the inter-relationships of the actors in the ESL class. First of all, I chose to work within a qualitative paradigm because I felt that the constraints of a scientific, quantitative paradigm would prohibit a full exploration of the variegated weave of human relationships within the ESL class. The interactions and relationships within an ESL class are so complex that, in my opinion, it would be virtually impossible to isolate and test any particular variable. As Geertz (1973) so eloquently stated:

> "Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning." (Geertz, 1973, p.5; cited in Eisner, 1981, p.6; also cited in Owens, 1982, p.8)

This study of the "webs of significance" spun by those who participate in ESL classes does not represent a search for a true and certain law, but rather represents a search for meaning. Therefore, I did not approach this study with a hypothesis or theory to prove, which would then "guide and bound" the inquiry (as would be required by a rationalist paradigm); rather, I developed the theory as the "collection of facts grew and insights into their possible meanings matured" (Guba and Lincoln, 1982).

During the months I spent gathering and analyzing the data for this study, I encountered a number of individuals who were actively sceptical regarding the validity of research conducted within a qualitative paradigm. These individuals generally maintained that the purpose of all research, using whatever paradigm, is to go beyond our current state of knowledge and hence to increase our knowledge. They (quite rightly) recognized that a study conducted within a qualitative paradigm does not represent a search for "true and certain knowledge." To them I would reply that knowledge is not necessarily something that can be accumulated, gathered, and added up (like so many bricks which can be gathered, counted and used). Instead, I maintain that one can gain insight and understanding, thereby adding meaning and insight to knowledge that is already there. A key point in this discussion is one's philosophical understanding of what knowledge is, and whether "true and certain knowledge" is a concept that can be applied to human beings and human culture. According to Eisner (1981), the interpretive paradigm does not search for the "indisputable laws" or the "true and certain knowledge" which are sought by the scientific paradigm. Instead, the interpretive paradigm seeks "the creation of images that people will find meaningful and from which their fallible and tentative views of the world can be altered, rejected, or made more secure" (Eisner, 1981, p.9). Therefore, in my use of the interpretive paradigm, I seek "meaning" and "understanding" (i.e., knowledge in a broader and more meaningful sense) rather than '<u>certain</u> truth and knowledge.'

Another objection which I have encountered is related to the concept of generalizability. In a quantitative paradigm, the ability to generalize on a finding is of paramount importance and is determined by random selection and representative samples. However, although qualitative approaches to research have no comparable mechanism for generalization as the scientific method, Eisner (1981) argues that it is possible to generalize from a "nonrandomly selected single case":

> Generalization is possible because of the belief that the general resides in the particular and because what one learns from a particular one applies to other situations subsequently

> encountered. . . . The artistically oriented researcher is interested in making the particular vivid so that its qualities can be experienced. . . . The ability to generalize from particulars is one of the ways whereby humans cope with the world. I know of no one who forms the generalizations that guide his or her actions through a technically rigorous process of random selection" (Eisner, 1981, p.7)

Although the results of this study are not 'generalizable,' according to the scientific method, the insights they yield have implications for ESL teaching practices and practitioners.

## Methodology

In order to disclose ESL teachers' perceptions of the impact of cultural differences and acculturation on interaction and relationships in the ESL class, I utilized two primary methods of data collection. First, I observed each teacher in the context of his/her ESL class for a couple hours. Next, based on what I had observed in the class, I formulated questions which I felt would help me understand the teacher's perceptions of the impact of cultural differences and acculturation on interaction in the class. In this way, the classroom observation served as the springboard for the in-depth, unstructured interviews which followed. During the interviews, I asked reflexive, open-ended and probing questions in order to discover the teachers' perceptions of acculturation, cultural differences, and interaction in their classes.

Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggest that "credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability" (p. 246) should be the criteria used to judge naturalistic inquiry, as opposed to the criteria used to judge rationalistic inquiry, namely, "internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity" (p. 246). Following is a description of how I ensured that this study would be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable.

Credibility. The criteria of credibility questions whether the inquirer's analyses and interpretations are true representations of the realities of the respondent. Guba and Lincoln suggest "prolonged engagement at a site," "peer debriefing," "triangulation," and "member checks" as means of safeguarding credibility (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p.247). Although mine was not an observational study, I did have extensive contact with the respondents, from the contacting phone call, to a few hours of classroom observation, and then the first interview which lasted between one and two hours. After I transcribed each interview, I wrote additional questions and comments in the margin and returned it to the participants for their comments and confirmation. Three of the participants felt that they had little to add that they had not already mentioned in the first interview, so we did not have a second interview; however, in the case of five of the participants, a second interview was scheduled. It was interesting to note that much of what the participants had said in the first interview was reiterated in greater detail in the second, indicating that perhaps the topic of the interview had been saturated. These follow-up interviews were also transcribed and returned to the teachers, and I again contacted the participants to ensure that they were content with my transcriptions of what they had said. Later, after I finished writing the analysis chapter, I sent copies of it to the participants to confirm that what I had written accurately reflected their experiences.

"Peer debriefing" occurred as I discussed my findings with people who were not directly involved in the study. My thesis supervisor played an important role as she read through drafts of the analysis, added her insights and suggestions, and confirmed my categories and themes. Informal chats with ESL teachers (both colleagues and fellow students) also served as peer debriefers. Discussions with other graduate students who (although not ESL teachers) were going through the same process as they wrote their theses, also provided me with the opportunity to "debrief." Other friends and relatives read drafts of my analysis and gave me feedback on whether the categories and themes I had identified seemed to "make sense" and to be grounded in the data.

Triangulation refers to the necessity of using a variety of data sources to verify both the data and interpretations of the data. This was done during the interviews as I often rephrased, summarized, and requested clarification for confirmation of my understandings. Returning the transcripts to the teachers, along with my own conclusions and responses, provided another opportunity for triangulation. The review of the literature and class observations provided opportunity for external triangulation.

Member checks occurred both during the interview (as I requested clarification and confirmation), and after the interview (as I provided the participants with copies of the interview transcripts and the final analysis, giving them the opportunity to respond to my own conclusions).

Transferability. Transferability refers to the degree to which the findings of this study are applicable to other people, in other contexts. In order to maximize the transferability of this study, I included teachers from a variety of backgrounds and teaching experiences. I also provided as much detail (or "thick description") about their situations as possible while not compromising their anonymity. By providing this "thick description," I was attempting to convey "the sense of the web of interrelated contextual factors" which were associated with the issues I was exploring (Owens, 1982, p.8). By providing detailed descriptions of the contexts, conversations and actions, I was attempting to do more than just provide a reader with interesting information and anecdotal experiences to peruse. Rather, through this thick description, I was attempting to convey "a literal description that figuratively transports the readers into the situation with a sense of insight, understanding, and illumination not only of the facts or the events in the case, but also of the texture, the quality, and the power of the context as the participants in the situation experienced it" (Owens, 1982, p.8)

Dependability. One method of ensuring dependability is to use a variety of data gathering techniques. Although the interviews provided

the primary source of data, information from the class observations were used to confirm the participants' account of their experiences. Thus, their actions in the class, and their explanations of these actions during the interviews, served to confirm the more general statements they made during the interviews.

A second method of providing dependability is to leave an "audit trail" in which (a) "all methodological steps and decision points" are recorded and (b) access to the data in its various stages is provided to a potential "auditor" (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p.248). This audit trail was built as I maintained the availability of the tapes, the raw transcripts, coded transcripts, and sets of data used in categorizing the data. I kept copies of the notes I made during class observations, and the questions I asked teachers during the interviews. Throughout each step of data collection and analysis, I recorded in a journal all of my "methodological steps and decision points."

<u>Confirmability</u>. Confirmability refers to the "objectivity of the data," rather than the objectivity of the researcher (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, p.247). In order to ensure confirmability, Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggest triangulation, confirmability audit, and "practicing reflexivity." I have already discussed how I provided for triangulation. The confirmability audit, related to the audit trail mentioned above, ensures that each conclusion can be traced back to the raw data and seen to be reasonable by a potential auditor. For this reason, I have kept available all interview excerpts which support the various categories and themes I identified. Similarly, I indicated the line numbers after each quote or reference to a quote in order to ensure that a potential auditor could trace the material back to the original interviews. "Practicing reflexivity" is defined as "attempting to uncover one's underlying epistemological assumptions, reasons for formulating the study in a particular way, and implicit assumptions, biases, or prejudices about the context or problem" (p. 248). This was done through the keeping of a reflective journal throughout data collection and data analysis. Prior to beginning data collection, I also recorded what I expected to find through this study.

## Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct this study was sought through the appropriate administrative channels.

Respondents were informed that their participation was voluntary and that all responses would remain confidential, both prior to and during the interviews. They were also given the option to opt out at any given point. Although quotations from interviews are used in the report, the sources are not identified. In order to ensure the respondents' confidentiality, potentially identifying information has either been omitted or changed.

## Respondents

The teachers who participated in the study did not represent a population sample, but were volunteers whom I chose based on availability, institution, training, level of classes, and amount of cross-cultural experience (Guba and Lincoln, 1982, support "purposive sampling", p.248). Each of the participants were recommended to me by the administration of their organization as competent, experienced teachers.

In order to maximize transferability, and thereby provide readers with a wide range of meanings, I attempted to incorporate a variety of people into this inquiry. For example, I included teachers of each gender (6 females, 2 males), with varying levels of teaching experience (from 1 1/2 to 13 years), both volunteers and professionals, who taught a variety of class levels (from basic survival classes with a high proportion of elderly students to advanced classes with potential university students). Some of the teachers described themselves as "internationalists" in terms of their cultural identity; others were bicultural (members of one other cultural group beside the mainstream Canadian culture); and still others described themselves as mainstream Canadians. Five of the teachers mentioned that they had taught English in another country besides Canada. Three of the participants had married spouses from different cultural and language backgrounds. All

of the teachers had had at least some cross-cultural experience -- ranging in depth from the two teachers who were actively involved in another culture here in Edmonton, to one teacher who had travelled around Europe and North Africa approximately 20 years ago. Although some of the teachers had grown up in a rather international background, other teachers described the shock they experienced as they came into contact with new cultures in their travels.

Following is a brief introduction to the eight teachers who shared with me their insights and experiences regarding teaching culturally different ESL students who were going through the process of adjusting to a new culture. Names and other specific information have been changed to ensure the confidentiality of the respondents.

Linda. The first teacher I interviewed was Linda. She had had extensive cross-cultural and language-learning experience: her spouse was from a different language and cultural background than herself, she had learned at least two languages besides English, and she had lived in at least three countries besides Canada. Linda expressed a keen interest in other countries and cultures throughout the interviews, and said that she had "always seemed to get along with foreigners" (Linda, 2056-2057):

> I've always found foreigners interesting. Well, I'm sure I was attracted to my husband because he was a foreigner! I don't know -- you think about the romantic [things], travel abroad. I've always been interested in other countries. (Linda, 2021-2035)

It was obvious throughout the interviews that she was fascinated by the countries and cultures of her primarily Indo-Chinese students, so much so that she took university courses to learn more about their history and language.

Linda had taught ESL as a volunteer for about five years. At the time of the interviews she was teaching a class of high-intermediate students with a volunteer organization. In contrast to most adult ESL classes, her classes tended to be somewhat 'mono-cultural,' consisting of refugees, immigrants, and student wives, mostly from an Indo-Chinese background. However, as will be noted later, she mentioned that there

were some cultural differen[illegible]ng the Indo-Chinese students in her classes.

Cheryl. Cheryl was born and raised in Edmonton, and she seemed to have a very strong "Canadian" identity. About twenty years ago, she had spent one year travelling through parts of Europe and North Africa. As she described the impact of that experience, and the shock of the differences she encountered, she said:

> And I would say it was a kind of seminal experience for us. First of all, becoming aware that there were other cultures. Because at that time, twenty years ago, Edmonton was pretty homogeneous. We were all mostly white! I never saw a colored person of any stripe during all my school years. Ever! (Cheryl, 325-336)

Cheryl had majored in French and English in university and was able to use her French extensively on that trip. At the time of the interview, she was taking a French language class.

Cheryl had taught ESL as a volunteer for about four years. Her other teaching experience included teaching French as a second language as well as ten years of adult education experience. Although she had taught and tutored a variety of levels of ESL, her present class was relatively advanced.

Helen. Helen was an immigrant to Canada and had both learned and taught English as a foreign language prior to immigrating to Canada. Like Linda, Helen mentioned that her spouse was from a different language and cultural background than herself. Although Helen felt that she could fit in quite well with Western Canadian people, she mentioned that she felt most comfortable, or could identify the most closely, with people of Latin descent. She also mentioned that she "got along best" with people who had been exposed to other cultures -- and her friends tended to be a mixture of people from a wide range of nationalities.

Helen had taught ESL for approximately eleven years. The class that I observed her teach was a high intermediate class, although she was teaching classes of other levels at the same time. She had taught ESL with a variety of institutions in Edmonton, ranging from working

with a settlement services organization to teaching university preparation classes.

Heather. Heather identified herself as both "tri-lingual" and "tri-cultural" as she considered herself to be a part of at least three separate cultural groups in Canada. Interestingly, she found that certain parts of her personality and life were associated with the different languages and cultures of which she was a part. Heather mentioned that she had spent three and a half years at a university in Eastern Europe, as well as spending a couple of months in Korea.

At the time of the interview, Heather was teaching a multi-cultural class of advanced students.

Ali. Ali described herself as coming from a "sort of mainstream Canadian WASPish background." However, after teaching in Africa for two years, and after becoming involved with immigrant populations as an ESL teacher, Ali felt that her values had changed. During the interviews, Ali contrasted her own life style and values with the lifestyle and values of her best friend from high school. She concluded by saying that, although she had lost touch with her friends from high school, most of her present friends shared similar values.

Ali had been teaching ESL for approximately 15 years at the time of the interviews. The class that Ali was teaching at the time of the observation was the most basic level class she had ever taught -- a good percentage of the students were older, and most were not literate in their own language. By the time of the second interview, Ali was teaching an intermediate level class.

Wayne. In terms of his cultural identity, Wayne identified himself with "mainstream" Canadian culture. Like Cheryl and Ali, Wayne had found his travels abroad to be very eye-opening:

> Well, personally, I don't think that I really realized that there were different cultures in the world until I travelled! I don't even think I knew what that meant because I grew up in a small town. It was all white. Really, there was only one culture. (Wayne, 1969-2074)

Wayne had travelled through Southeast Asia, teaching ESL in refugee camps as a volunteer. He mentioned that he had found his adjustment to Canada, upon returning from Asia, to be more traumatic than his adjustment to Asia had been. Like Helen and Linda, Wayne's spouse was from a different language and cultural background than himself. Wayne, however, felt that in his marriage, neither he nor his wife had adopted the other's culture:

> We're both kind of adjusting to our own culture. We're making our own culture. . . . I don't feel like I'm changing a lot. Maybe I am. I think my Mom thinks I am! (Wayne, 580-589)

Wayne had been teaching ESL for approximately six years. Although in the past Wayne had taught advanced students, he mentioned that he found himself gravitating to the lower level classes. The class that I observed him teach was a mono-cultural group of Polish students with very little English. Prior to teaching this class, Wayne had taught a basic level, multi-cultural class of students with little or no literacy in their first language.

<u>Steve</u>. In terms of cultural identity, Steve felt that he could <u>now</u> (but not five years ago) be labelled a "mainstream" Canadian:

> Right now I consider myself your typical Canadian. I'm FAIRLY well educated. I try to work hard -- at least I think I work hard. I want to get ahead. I'm basically your average Albertan capitalist, I suppose. I want my tax breaks. I want to make extra money doing this. I work overtime, when I can. So, I think I see myself as an average middle class type. (Steve, 248-266)

Steve also mentioned that he had spent some time travelling -- in fact, his desire to travel is what first sparked his interest in the field of ESL. Besides living in Canada, Steve mentioned spending time in the United States, New Zealand, France, and England. At the time of our interview, Steve had been teaching ESL for about six years. His class was an multi-cultural class of intermediate ESL students.

<u>Eileen</u>. Eileen classified herself as bi-cultural because she was quite involved with two different cultures in Edmonton. She felt, however, that she had also been influenced by many other cultures.

Eileen's involvement with an international student group during her years in university had piqued her interest in ESL, prompting her to do some work as volunteer ESL teacher. She also spent two months teaching ESL in China. Eileen so enjoyed her volunteer ESL experience that she decided to enter an ESL adult education program at her university. At the time of the interview, Eileen had been teaching ESL full-time for about one and a half years. The class I observed her teach was a multi-cultural class of low intermediate ESL students.

## Data Collection

### Pilot Study

In order to test and refine my own interviewing skills, I conducted a pilot study with one ESL teacher. The data gained from this interview and observation was later used in the actual study. Not only did this interview test my own interview and observation skills, but it also provided me with the opportunity to test out proposed questions and scenarios. Through the experience of the pilot interview, changes were made to the design of the study in terms of the interview questions and style, the observation, and the use of scenarios.

Style of interview questions. Through the pilot study, I was able to test out and refine both my interviewing skills and the questions I used during the interviews. I found during the pilot interview that much time was spent talking about subjects not directly related to the subject of the study. Also, as the interview progressed, I felt that some of the more specific questions I had prepared were too structured and 'leading.' Therefore, I decided that it would be more profitable to first ask more general questions (directly related to the research questions); later, if the respondent had trouble answering the more general questions, I resorted to the specific questions (or probes) to prompt her or him.

Role of classroom observation. Through the pilot study, I reevaluated the role that the classroom observation would play in my study. First of all, in spite of all my efforts not to appear intimidating, and not to ask questions in an intimidating manner, it was clear to me that the respondent was intimidated by my presence in her classroom; in fact, after the observation, she mentioned her nervousness. Some possible reasons for this nervousness were that (a) we were both taking an ESL methodology class at that time (being taught the "ideal" way to teach ESL), and (b) she seemed to perceive me as an "expert" in the field of ESL. Unfortunately, this influenced the way she responded to some of my questions: often when I asked "why" she did something, it seemed as if she felt she was being evaluated or tested and had to either apologize for or defend her actions. Another problem with the observation is that it tended to distract both myself and the respondent from the purposes of the interview: instead of concentrating on the subject of this study, we tended to talk more generally about the interesting things she had done in her class. Also, possibly because we were attending an ESL methodology class together, the respondent seemed to think I wanted to discuss "issues" in ESL, such as pronunciation and grammar teaching (which we had been discussing in class) rather than discussing the issue at hand.

Based on the pilot study, I considered omitting the observation step entirely from my study; however, I was reluctant to do this for a number of reasons. First, a number of very interesting "cultural" incidents had occurred during the observation which would probably not have been mentioned if I had not been there. Second, in the interests of providing opportunity for "triangulation," I wanted to use more than one method of data collection in this study: not only did the observation result in some interesting topics of conversation, but it also seemed to validate and corroborate what the respondent had said. In subsequent observations, I was careful to present myself as a learner, a relatively inexperienced ESL teacher, in order to minimize the threat and nervousness caused by my presence. Also, rather than discussing everything that had occurred during the class before

discussing the questions I had prepared, we discussed what had happened in the class as it related to the questions on the interview guide.

Use of scenarios. The third implication I gained from the pilot interview related to the use of scenarios. I had developed a number of scenarios depicting various cultural incidents which could occur in the ESL class. My plan had been to describe the scenarios to the participants, asking them to describe how they would respond to such incidents. However, through the pilot study I decided that use of the scenarios was ineffective because the scenarios did not generate much discussion and were too "leading."

The teacher's responses to the scenarios tended to be quite vague, rather short, and difficult to analyze. At times the scenarios did lead to additional discussion; however, it seemed to me that this would probably have occurred even if the scenarios had not been used. Because the scenarios were rather "extreme" examples (although they were all true accounts), I felt that the respondent held back some of her own examples on the grounds that they were not as 'sensational' as those in the scenarios.

Also, I felt that the scenarios were somewhat too biasing as they give the respondents 'examples' of what I perhaps wanted to hear. Therefore, based on the pilot interview, I decided not to use scenarios for the study.

Main Study

Data collection began as I contacted the directors and coordinators of a variety of ESL teaching institutions about my study (see Appendix 1 for sample contacting letter). After obtaining the necessary permission from the directors and coordinators of the various programs, I asked them to suggest names of teachers who they felt would be interested in participating in the study. I told them I was looking for teachers who would be interested in the subject of the proposal, who were experienced, and who were from a variety of ESL backgrounds. I then contacted the individual instructors by letter (Appendix 1),

informing them about the study and requesting their participation. The letter was then followed up by a telephone call. Once participants agreed to be involved in the study, appointments for classroom observation and interviews were made.

Unstructured interviews with the individual ESL teachers were the primary method of data collection, although some data from classroom observation was incorporated into the study (see Appendix 2 for sample data from a classroom observation along with my reactions and questions for further discussion). I conducted one to two interviews with each of the eight ESL teachers. A few hours of classroom observation served as the spring board for the interviews; however, the discussion was certainly not limited to the incidents noted during the observation. During the interviews, reflexive, open ended and probing questions were used in order to discover the ESL teachers' perceptions of the impact of cultural differences and acculturation on interaction and communication in the ESL class (see Appendix 3 for a sample interview guide). Although the interviews were by no means standardized, there were some common elements in all of them: I asked participants to describe how their students got along with each other (giving examples from their present classes), and how this affected what they did in the class; I asked them to describe their perceptions of their students' adjustment to living in Edmonton and what they felt to be their role in facilitating that adjustment; I asked them to tell me about the cultural aspects of what they do, and give me examples from their current classes. Like Defoe (1986), I also asked all of the informants about their background in teaching and their knowledge and experience with languages other than English and places other than Canada. In keeping with the reflexive principles of ethnographic interviews, I sometimes voiced my interpretations or inferences for the participants' reactions.

Each interview was taped, transcribed, and then returned to the participant with my comments and questions written in the margin (see Appendix 4 for excerpts of transcribed interviews). Participants were then given the opportunity to clarify, delete, or add to what they had said. Follow-up interviews were scheduled for five of the teachers who

felt that they had additional comments to make, while one interview sufficed for the three teachers who felt that they had "said everything they needed to say" in their first interview. Later, after the data were analyzed, I sent each teacher a copy of the analysis chapter of the thesis (see Appendix 1 for letter accompanying the analysis chapter).

## Analysis of the Data

Data analysis began with the first interview and continued until the final document was completed. After observing a class, I would jot down questions related to the cultural aspects of what had occurred in the class. I then met with the teacher at her or his convenience (sometimes immediately after the observation, and other times at a later date) for an interview. Analysis of each interview began as I transcribed the interview, immersing myself in the data and experiences of the participants. After transcribing an interview, I read and reread it, noting my comments and questions in the margins. I then returned a copy of the interview (with my comments and questions in the margin) to the teacher for her/his confirmation, comments, additions, or deletions. I then followed the same procedure for the follow-up interviews.

The next step in analyzing the data involved reading through the interviews, making lists of potential descriptors (or "code words"), themes, and categories. After I had finished transcribing all of the first interviews, I coded each section of the interviews using the descriptors I had developed. When all of the interviews had been transcribed and coded, I again immersed myself in the data as I reread all of the interviews to determine whether the code words I had chosen were used consistently throughout the data. Finally, I entered both the interview data and the code words into "The Ethnograph," a software program that allows one to retrieve and sort text (Seidel, Kjolseth, and Seymour, 1985) (see Appendix 4 for sample of coded text). Although this was a lengthy process, it was valuable as it first forced me to again immerse myself in the data, and later allowed me to sort through

the interviews, cross-referencing code words in order to pull together all relevant data on a particular subject.

Once I had retrieved all of the information on each of the relevant code words, I then began to immerse myself again in the data, but this time in a different way -- instead examining a participant's comments in the context of his or her entire interview, I was examining the comments of each participant in light of similar comments made by other participants. As I read through the sorted data, I began to sort and collapse and combine the different sets of data into what appeared to be relatively coherent categories. As I started to write the analysis chapter, trying to accurately portray the experiences and concerns of the participants, I constantly reorganized and reordered those categories. I found this to be a very frustrating, difficult, and lengthy process. "The Ethnograph" had done its work too well and I found myself swamped in an abundance of information, all of which seemed (especially at first) to be very relevant and extremely important. The insights and comments of those who were kind enough read first drafts of this manuscript, and listen to my descriptions of the categories I had identified, were invaluable in helping me to refine, condense and collapse my presentation of the information.

Throughout the analysis process, I struggled with how to accurately, fairly, <u>and</u> <u>coherently</u> present the experiences and insights of eight very unique individuals. I did not want the unique individuality of the participants to be subsumed by the organizing principles which I used to order the data. I eventually concluded that the categories fell under the following five broad areas: the impact of the teachers' past experiences; the teachers' perceptions of students as people under pressure; the teachers' desire and efforts to help students feel comfortable in the class; the teachers' desire and efforts to help students get along with each other; and the teachers' reasons for and methods of dealing with cultural topics in the classroom.

While I was organizing the data into the broad categories mentioned above, I was at the same time cognizant of certain themes that seemed to emerge from the data. These themes undergirded the

categories and ran throughout the interview data. Again, the feedback from my supervisor and other interested persons (who were familiar with the categories I had identified) was invaluable in confirming the two broad themes which I had identified. The first and perhaps most important theme which undergirded every one of the interviews can be described as the non-ethnocentric attitude of tolerance and acceptance which was demonstrated by the teachers and fostered in the students. The second broad theme includes the teachers' efforts to give their students a "voice" both in their classrooms and in Canadian society.

## Summary

In this chapter I first provided a rationale for my choice of a qualitative research paradigm. I then described the methodology of my inquiry and my efforts to ensure its trustworthiness. After giving a brief description of each of the respondents in the study, I recounted the steps I went through to collect and analyze the data. In subsequent chapters, I will present my findings in terms of the categories and themes which emerged from the data and will relate those findings back to the literature.

# CHAPTER IV: DESCRIPTION OF FINDINGS

In this chapter, the interview data will be described using the following major categories: impact of teachers' past experiences; teachers' perceptions of their students as people under pressure; helping students feel comfortable in the class; helping students get along with each other; and dealing with cultural topics in the classroom. The two major themes which undergird the data will also be discussed: (a) a non-ethnocentric attitude of tolerance (demonstrated by teachers and fostered in students), and (b) teachers' efforts to give their students a "voice" both in their classrooms and in Canadian society. The extensive use of quotes is an attempt to allow the participants to speak for themselves as well as to retain the flavor of the original interviews.

## Impact of Past Experiences

These teachers thought that their own cross cultural experiences helped them understand what their students were experiencing, affected what and how they taught, and allowed them to be role models for their students.

### Understanding What Students are Going Through

During the interviews, teachers were asked about those past experiences which they felt had done the most to help them relate to and understand their students. Three categories of experiences which enhanced their understanding of their students included cross-cultural experiences in other countries, language learning experiences, and experiences with people from other cultures here in Canada.

Exposure to other cultures overseas. All of the teachers felt that their cross-cultural experiences overseas were valuable in helping

them understand their students' experience in Canada. For instance, when asked whether his exposure to other cultures had any impact on his teaching, Steve responded:

> Mmhmm. All the time! When somebody looks at me, and I've said something simple, and they have a blank look on their face, and I don't go "God, is this guy thick!" I think, "I know exactly what he's talking about because I've been through it." . . . I've been to different countries when I've had lots of money. I've been to a different place where I've had no money. I've been poor, rich. I've been friendless -- I've been with lots of friends. It's just [pause]. Yup! I understand! -- at least I think I do. I've been through homesickness, I've been through culture shock, everything. So I know what it's like. (Steve, 200-238)

In a more specific example, Steve described how his own experiences in France allowed him to comprehend the trauma faced by one of his students who had difficulty communicating:

> And I know what he went through! I was like that in France. We would be sitting in the car or in the bus on the way to somewhere and I would be very quiet where normally I'd be telling a joke. So I know how he feels. (Steve, 891-902)

Heather echoed the idea that the experiences she had in common with her students helped her relate to them:

> It's not the language, it's more the experience. I mean, I've stood in food lineups, which is probably the most humiliating thing I can imagine doing! You feel you're begging for something where you've got the money, you've worked hard, and you can support yourself, but you're not permitted to do that. Engineered fear -- I know exactly what that's like. I know what it's like being questioned, dealing with police, dealing with the paranoia that a lot of them deal with. So, yeah, I've had to make do with all that. . . . Dealing with being far away from people I care about. Dealing with death, too -- that's something everybody deals with. Being lonely, all those things. (Heather, 1705-1740)

As Ali talked about whether she felt that the experience of adjusting to a new culture drew students together or pulled them apart, she used her own experiences in Africa to answer the question. It was clear that she referred to her own experiences to help her make sense of her students' behavior:

> To some extent, I suppose [the adjustment to Canada] pulls people apart. Like, for myself, when I think about myself in Africa, I

> often think that sometimes [pause] -- it wasn't that I was awful, but I was certainly less considerate of other people because I was conserving myself. I was sort of taking care of myself. I was lonely. I was in a different culture. I was in a new job. And so I was really taking care of myself first. And, I've found, at various [illegible] ds of my life, when things are going pretty well in my life, [illegible] I feel comfortable in my job, feel comfortable in my personal [illegible], I'm much better able to reach out to other people, or be much more understanding of other people. And if things are going badly in my life, I need to sort of take everything for myself. And, I think, with some other people, that's true as well. (Ali, 2583-2611)

Helen, who had herself learned English as a second language, felt that both the experience of adjusting to a new culture, as well as the experience of learning a new language, were important in helping her relate to and understand her students (Helen, 2105-2111):

> Well, the process of immigration, having come to Canada. Having been born and raised in another culture and immigrated to Canada certainly helps me understand how they feel when they feel homesick. Like I know the family unit is very, very, very strong and important in Argentina, and many of the Latin American cultures, so I can understand why they feel so protective of their daughters. So, the experience of having gone through that and having learned the language. Because I've basically done everything that they're doing now. Adjusting and learning the language. (Helen, 2154-2176)

The eye-opening experience of living in another culture had made Wayne sensitive to the differences among people:

> Well, personally, I don't think I really realized that there were different cultures in the world until I travelled! I don't think I even knew what that meant because I grew up in a small town. It was all white -- there was really only one culture. And even though you saw everything on TV, I didn't realize what that meant. That they really LIVED differently, and THOUGHT differently. So, when I went to Thailand, and I think that started it. (Wayne, 1967-1983)

His experiences of living in other countries and learning about how other people lived (especially in refugee camps) proved to be especially valuable when he came back to Canada and taught ESL to refugees:

> Well, travelling I think is the most valuable. And not staying in [expensive places] -- travelling poor. . . . I didn't have any

> money, so I stayed wherever I could. . . . [I taught English] only as a volunteer, and I only did that for a couple of weeks. It was only while I was in camp. And being in the refugee camp, that was MOST valuable. And then I came back, and then I worked at [a settlement agency] and that also was valuable. (Wayne, 1990-2012)

Exposure to language learning experiences. A number of teachers saw their experiences of learning a second language to be very important in helping them understand their students. When asked whether she agreed with Wayne's assertion that teachers who had not had cross-cultural experiences would make poor ESL teachers, Helen responded affirmatively. She felt a good teacher should also experience the process of learning another language:

> Yes. Or having learned other languages, probably I would add. Because a language really reflects the culture. . . . The fact that you're interested in other languages shows that you're interested in other cultures, that you want to communicate with other people from other cultures. So that in itself is helpful. (Helen, 655-668)

Linda felt that her language learning experience as an older student had helped her understand the needs of the older students in her classes:

> And you can take into account the embarrassment [of learning a language]. You see, I was the worst in the [language] course -- partly because I was hard of hearing and they didn't teach you very communicatively. . . . Grammar translation. And then, when the teacher talked, I just couldn't figure out what she said. I mean it took me so long! I think this is supposed to be a process that, as you get older, you just need that much longer to process the words and so on. And everyone else in the class is of course much younger, and so on. There was a woman my age in the class. And both of us seem to have similar problems, so I'm laying it at my age. . . . And you also realize that unless material is repeated over and over again, you don't really learn it, which is easy to forget when you're planning a lesson. (Linda, 428-469)

The experience of being immersed in a foreign language environment, helped Cheryl fathom the strain faced by her own students:

> And I remember that fatigue from functioning. I lived in Paris for about three months, went to school there, worked there -- in fact, I didn't speak a word of English the whole time I was there. And I remember the fatigue and the strain. . . . And when

> I see signs of strain, as I told you earlier, on the faces of my students, I think, "Oh, they're really working hard, you know, they're struggling with this." (Cheryl, 2341-2373)

Similarly, Wayne's own experience of speaking a foreign language with his brother helped him appreciate how his Polish students felt as they spoke English to other Polish speaking students:

> Sara I found it interesting that you said that the Polish students were disappointed that they [weren't in a multi-cultural class]
>
> Wayne Yeah. I was a bit surprised, too. But I think that they were kind of looking forward to using English, but now they feel weird. Well, I feel weird, because when my brother speaks Cambodian (and I speak Cambodian a little), I feel weird speaking Cambodian to him. . . . It's a game. (Wayne, 1339-1358)

Exposure to other cultures in Canada. The teachers also mentioned that their previous experiences with international or ESL students had helped them understand and relate to their present students. Cheryl, for instance, described how the experience of eating in a Chinese restaurant with her Chinese students sensitized her to the stress her students experienced as a result of the cultural differences they faced daily:

> A couple of my Chinese students took me out to a Chinese style meal, and were explaining to me the use of the utensils and so on. And they put me, actually, in the same position as I had put them. And it was quite interesting because I felt quite uncomfortable with their utensils and the extent that they would have to explain how to use it. I didn't know that you could cut with chopsticks, for example. And so they showed me how and so on. There were some real profound differences there, that, I don't think you can underestimate how difficult that makes your daily life. (Cheryl, 720-747)

Eileen mentioned that her involvement with international students outside the classroom had increased her understanding of the students in her classroom.

> And I think it's easier to learn about their cultures by seeing how they act in different situations. The classroom setting is really an artificial environment. So, when you see them outside of the classroom, you can better understand their cultures. (Eileen, 1694-1710)

Steve felt that it was his accumulated classroom experience with ESL students that had most affected his ability to relate to and understand the students in his classes:

> I'd say my experience in the classroom -- just the accumulated experiences -- are the ones that that make me know. . . . I think that is the biggest thing, the experience. I can go into a classroom with no preparation and get two good hours out of them, just from what I know. And just the situations that arise, I can deal with them. (Steve, 1361-1386)

Identifying Students' Needs

Not only did these shared experiences of learning a language and living in other cultures help teachers understand what their students were going through, these experiences also helped them identify what the students needed to be taught. Cheryl, for instance, felt that her emphasis on teaching culture came out of her own experiences of living in another culture:

> [Teaching culture] is important to me. Yeah, it's really important to me. And I think it probably comes from having lived in another culture and feeling so disconnected, not knowing what was important to them, you know, not knowing what the essence of that particular culture was. Not that it was painful, it's just that I have sort of a boundless curiosity. (Cheryl, 850-859)

Cheryl's experiences in another culture sensitized her to the shock her students faced as they learned to live in Canada -- thereby influencing her choice of classroom topics.

> If I hadn't lived in another culture, with other eating habits, with other religious backgrounds, with other ways of building houses, with other ways of going to the bathroom, with other things, I think I would not be nearly as sensitive to the changes that these people might be noticing. And I think that affects my teaching in the sorts of things I choose to talk about, which I regard as important. I regard food as important. I regard the surroundings as important. I regard manners and customs as important. Those are really fundamental things that are not just handy ways to get a language across, but they are fundamental. So, in that sense, that has affected me. (Cheryl, 2310-2373)

Similarly, Linda's experience of living in Europe, and the problems she

faced there with regard to dealing with foreign doctors and unfamiliar table manners, helped her to understand and sympathize with students who wanted to know how to act in Canada. As she talked about the cultural differences her students faced, she referred back to her own experiences in Europe:

> I said "Well, is there something particular you want?" And she said, "Well, how to talk to the doctor." So, actually, I had some materials cause we'd done this before, so I got the materials out and I photocopied and handed them to her. And I said, "Is that what you wanted?" I could sympathize with her [desire to] know what to say, and how to explain things (Although, I'm not sure that what I gave her was very helpful). And then Wong asked about table manners, Canadian table manners. . . . He'd actually asked several times before, and I had never really followed up on it, but I did photocopy something out of a book and gave it [to him]. . . . But I know in Europe (much to my surprise, I hadn't realized how different table manners were in Europe), you're not supposed to put your hands in your lap when you eat, which my mother had always [pause]. Put your hands on the table and so on, and that was really difficult for me, because my mother-in-law would become very embarrassing when I didn't, of course. And to me, of course, it all seemed pretty silly, because what would it matter if I did? I don't know. So that was kind of interesting, that he had sort of similar [needs]. He said things, you know, when you go to people's house, what do you do, and so on. And in Europe, you have to take gifts to people. So, you know, people want to know how to act. (Linda, 987-1043)

A number of teachers mentioned that the experience of taking a language course affected what and how they taught their classes. Linda, for example, felt that taking language courses helped her understand her students' desire for both communicative activities and information on the grammar of the language (Linda, 3217-3258):

> I feel the input and the opportunity to speak and express yourself is what's crucial in language, just based on my own experiences. But if people don't see that [pause]. . . . This is also why it was really good if you can always start new languages because then you realize how you want the rules too, how you want the grammar too. (Linda, 3179-3197)

Cheryl also felt that her French class had helped her appreciate how frustrating it could be when a teacher allowed one student to dominate the class, and this realization had implications for what she perceived to be her role as a teacher:

> It's true -- put yourself in the situation and you find out what it's like on the other side. For example, I come out of the [French] class, and I hate students who dominate [laughter]. One student who dominates the whole class. And I feel it's up to the teacher in the class to shift, move it around, encourage, involve, you know. And that makes me very conscious as a teacher that that's what my role as a teacher is. So, I'm more successful sometimes than others at that, but certainly the experience of learning a language has made me aware of that. (Cheryl, 450-474)

When talking about teaching the appropriateness of language to her ESL students, Cheryl referred to her own experiences in speaking French:

> I notice that when I'm speaking French, too. That there's a certain, um, it's a kind of uncertainty about whether what you've said is appropriate to the situation. Now, you're understood, the grammar's correct, the pronunciation is wonderful. Everything, you know, language oriented, is fine. But there's a sort of uh, a slippery area where appropriateness is in question. (Cheryl, 935-945)

Helen felt that the fact that she had learned <u>English</u> as a second language was especially advantageous:

> And going back to your original question, how that affects my teaching. Very much so because I had to learn English from scratch. And I find it a lot easier now to teach English as a second language, easier than teaching Spanish! Even though Spanish is my first [language]. I acquired that language. I didn't have to learn it. So, when I had to teach Spanish, I had to take a special course before I was able to teach [it]. . . . It wasn't just methodology and all that. It was about the structure of the language and how to teach the different structures of the language and to make you aware of all these things. I teach Canadian people, too, and they are very fluent, they were born here, and they speak correctly. But once you start talking about structures, . . . or you start talking about grammatical terms and structures of the language, they don't know the reasons. I find a lot of teachers that I've worked with that are Canadians (not just here but in other places) sometimes they come to me and they say "Well, why is this. . . ?" And I have the rule for that. I have the reason for that because I had to make the effort to learn the language so I had to have the rule first. Or I figure out the rule quicker than somebody else who hadn't studied, or who has never studied another language. And that's just simply because we had to make the effort. Sometimes it's hard when students [ask] "WHY? why?" And you people, some Canadian people, say "Well, that's just the way it is." But actually there is a reason. (Helen, 655-724)

Being a Role Model

It was clear that the teachers' cross-cultural experiences did more than just help them appreciate their students' needs. The teachers often mentioned that they told the students of their own experiences of living in and adjusting to another culture; at times even seeming to offer themselves as models for their students to follow. Helen, for instance, recounted how she used examples of the process she went through as she adjusted to Canadians in order to help her students understand that Canadians were not really "cold." In a way, she was setting herself up as a role model for her students to follow:

> The typical comment immigrants from some cultures make is they say things like "Canadian people, North American people, are very cold." And I tell them that "I had that impression as well when I came here, but on the other hand, it took me a little while to realize that it's not that they're cold, that they're indifferent, or that they don't care about what you do or who you are. It's just that they're very respectful of your privacy. And your privacy is very important. And it took me a while to realize that they did care, and I had to open up if I wanted them to open up and to start a [conversation]. But they will not ask direct questions because it's a matter of respect." (Helen, 468-497)

Similarly, Heather felt that the example of her active involvement in two cultures in Edmonton could help students understand how they, too, could learn to live in Canadian culture without denying their own culture; however, she cautioned that this adjustment may be more difficult for her students than it was for her:

> So, it's good for them to have the experience of teachers from more than one cultural background, who are actively involved in more than one culture, because they can see that it's not necessarily schizophrenic, that [the cultures] are not necessarily contradictory, and they can enhance each other. . . . For them, the dichotomy is going to be even sharper because of the past. I've always lived that way. . . . They're just really novices at it. And it might be all the more frightening because it's come that late to them. (Heather, 2747-2781)

Steve mentioned that he used examples, both of his own cross-cultural experiences and of other students' experiences in Canada, to help his

students understand how Canadians would likely respond to their complaints about Canada:

> I usually bring up an example of another student I used to have, somebody in Canada who couldn't stand it [here]. And he was talking to a group of Canadians and they all shouted out in unison, "Well, then go back to where you came from!" And I say, "This is the attitude that [you will see] anytime you go [on complaining]." Or I'll give an example of when I go to England or New Zealand and I say this, and this is what people tell me. And so I hope they'll get the hint that, sure, that's the way they feel about it but we don't want to hear that's what you feel. (Steve, 944-948)

## Students are People Under Pressure

The second category that emerged from the data was the idea that the students were people under pressure. That teachers perceived their students as being under tremendous pressure was evidenced by their descriptions of the realities of their students' lives and the symptoms of stress their students displayed.

### Realities of Students' Lives

The pressures and stressors that students faced seemed to be an important issue among the teachers I interviewed.

Pressure to support the family. Although many participants mentioned the financial pressures faced by their students, this issue seemed to be especially important to Ali, who felt that her students were in worse financial straits than most ESL students:

> Most of them have virtually no money here, you know, are pretty poor. They are in much worse financial straits than in most classes. It sort of goes with the low level. (Ali, 723-728)

According to Ali, the economic situation of her students had an impact on how well they adjusted to Canada: "When things are really bad [economically], then you look less favorably on Canada" (Ali, 4377-4381). The financial pressures were especially difficult for

those with families to support:

> A lot of them have several children. So they've got that and maybe not much money to go with it. And maybe their spouse (because the spouse doesn't have much English or maybe doesn't have much education) is making the minimum wage or something. And yet they've still got three or four children. (Ali, 2652-2662)

As an example, Ali told me the story of Ith, a Vietnamese woman in her class:

> And she's a very fine woman. But her husband came here nine years ago and eventually sponsored her. She'd been back in Vietnam with the three children -- the one child was a month old when they left. But her husband now works maybe six hours a week, or something like that. So, you know, I think that they're probably on welfare. And she's keen to get out and get a job. So it's very tight for them. And other ones are really tight financially. (Ali 721-750)

Steve also mentioned the financial difficulties faced by students he had taught in the past. He felt that the shock of not having enough money was compounded by the fact that they were living in a society with an apparent surplus of wealth. Again, the students Steve referred to were refugees with very little English:

> It's the shock of maybe going to West Edmonton Mall and, for most of them, not having a chance of spending any money on the stuff. And probably they don't even realize what they would need this stuff for! You know, the things you'd go there and buy, all these little gadgets! I mean, what's the point when somebody's looking for food, shelter, and clothing! (Steve, 816-827)

Not only did teachers feel their students faced the pressure of somehow providing themselves and their families with food, shelter, and clothing, but they also mentioned that this pressure was aggravated in some cases when students were also responsible for those family members who still lived in the home country. Ali, in particular, mentioned the immense amount of stress faced by students who wished to sponsor family members:

> And the pressure of bringing your family to Canada! . . . YOU'RE the chosen one that's been let go, so now YOU'VE got to do that for your family. (Ali, 2666-2671)

Ali's description of one of her students, a young Lebanese man named Isaac, illustrates this issue:

> He's not a refugee. I mean, considering the circumstances, he should be, but he's not. His father died when he was nine years old and basically he went out to support the family. . . . Nine years old! I guess his mother's still a widow. And there were six other children. And I asked him "Where did your mother get money?" And he said "Isaac!" You know, he helped support the family for a long time, and even now he's sort of [supporting them]. . . . An uncle sponsored him, and I think [Isaac's] intention (and it gives him bad headaches sometimes) is to sponsor his family. You know, he has that responsibility. (Ali, 447-479)

Isaac was relatively fortunate, however, because he had mechanical skills and was able to get a relatively good job. Even so, Ali viewed Isaac's job with some scepticism:

> So, you know, he's lucky in that respect, although I would think that he's going to have a very difficult time passing any sort of apprenticeship thing. It's going to be really difficult. (Ali, 480-494)

Other students, such as the young Vietnamese man in Ali's class, faced even more pressure than Isaac, without the security of a good job:

> With Tuk, it's this rat bite for his headache. But he's said a couple of times that he was very worried. He has a girl friend, and a son, in Germany. I guess she got pregnant in the camp or something, and she for some reason went to Germany while he went to Canada. Well, I suppose they weren't related. And so he has pictures of his five-month old son that he's never seen. And he's trying to sponsor her. And there seems to have been a sponsorship breakdown. I think his aunt or something sponsored him but he's moved out of her house under bad circumstances and he has nothing. He doesn't have a phone. He doesn't have a TV. And of course, he has a part-time job as a tailor. . . . You know, the stress of trying to sponsor somebody! He works, I don't know, maybe ten hours a weekend as a tailor. So he makes maybe a hundred dollars and that's maybe enough to help pay the rent or something. But he certainly doesn't have enough money to put aside for this girlfriend, and here's this child he's never seen. (Ali 844-892)

A few of the teachers mentioned the pressure placed on students to learn English quickly so that they could "get out and get a job." Some of this anxiety was imposed on the students by family or sponsors:

> Quite often, after somebody sponsored them to get here, they can't afford to support them. . . . Their relatives are going to have to supply the apartment and everything. So, you know, they're maybe laboring under quite difficult circumstances. A lot of pressure to get out and get a job. (Ali, 2884-2911)

Those students who were refugees and supported financially by Canada Manpower were perceived to be in a somewhat less stressful situation:

> In some respects, because Manpower's cushioning them with this money, it protects them a LITTLE bit from a lot of the problems. Coming to school is sort of not dealing with a lot of other things, too. (Ali, 2864-2883)

However, some teachers felt that Manpower-sponsored students might still experience anxiety about their ability to support themselves and their families in Canada once they had finished school. According to Ali, they "have the disadvantage of knowing they're going to have to get out and get a job -- but how on earth are they going to get a job? They don't understand anybody out there!" (Ali 2621-2626) And language was not seen as the only problem -- getting a job was intimidating because of the different expectations the students faced in the workplace:

> What makes them acceptable or good workers or good employees in their country might not be the same as here. . . . In their country any sort of entrepreneurship, even on a tiny level, would be how you make ends meet. Which is easier said than done here. There are all sorts of rules and regulations and laws and forms you have to make sure that you do. Well, it's not so easy to cope! (Ali, 2982-2998)

Heather emphasized the anxiety her students felt because of their uncertain futures. When talking about one of her students, she said that "acculturation isn't really a problem with him. But I think focusing on further plans is the issue with him. And he's really resisting that" (246-251). According to Heather, this was a common theme in her class:

> But, for a lot of people, it's a tense kind of thing because they're moving out of the cocoon of kind of a rather safe environment into something new and kind of scary. So, they would have to decide about their future, and people are resisting that. (Heather 220-228)

Possibly one reason this fear was so prevalent in Heather's class was that most of her students were experiencing a change in career: "They're all in the position of deciding what to do next. You know, left foot or right foot" (Heather, 329-335).

Pressure to learn the language. Related to the pressure to support the family was the pressure the students faced in learning the language. Ali discussed the situation of two East Indian women in her class who desperately wanted to learn English as fast as possible:

> I could sense how very concerned they both were about learning English as fast as possible and getting out and getting a job. They had children that were working two jobs or three jobs and they said they would do ANY job. They had done some sort of job and been laid off because they didn't have English. And they were just anxious to get out and work and support the family, establish themselves here. And they felt this real responsibility. So the pressure was on them. (Ali, 3057-3086)

When students experienced difficulty learning the language, and perhaps when they did not learn as fast as they had hoped they would, the teachers noted that they experienced additional anxiety:

> When I interviewed the two East Indian women together, I really got a sense that they felt quite frustrated at the time. They'd only been in the class about two weeks, but it was like they had sort of hoped and expected that if they just got in an English class, English would go really fast. And they were really disappointed. And at that time I was able to say to them, "Well, you've got eighteen weeks more." But I also said "You know, you're not going to have really good English after twenty weeks." (Ali, 897-927)

Sometimes this pressure to learn the language was seen as pressure to perform satisfactorily in the language classroom. Eileen told of one student who was so desperate to pass the course that she even offered Eileen a bribe in the form of a gift -- apparently the student's sponsor, an uncle, would be very upset if the student was not passed into the next level. Eileen tells of the extreme amount of stress felt by the same student when writing an exam:

> She was running out of time. Most of the students were leaving. She had to write the last page. All of the sudden she started crying. She held her stomach. She could not do anything anymore, and she was just so upset at the fact that she wasn't feeling well. (Eileen, 1399-1431)

This same student, during midterm exams the following year, was admitted to a hospital for some stress-related illness. Other teachers also described the stress experienced by people who "aren't performing

as well as they would like, or they need to feel that they're better than they are" (Heather 3030-3033). For instance, Helen cited "language difficulties" as a factor in a student's attempted suicide. Ali described the frustration experienced by Peter, a young Vietnamese man, who was experiencing language learning difficulties.

> And he's made, I'd say, absolutely no progress as far as reading and writing. ABSOLUTELY NONE! . . . . And I think, recently, he's become quite frustrated, maybe. And he's become very stubborn in class. (Ali, 530-539)

That Ali perceived Peter's frustration to be very serious is illustrated by the following incident:

> One day he went off. I thought he was quite depressed because he was making so little progress and he was quite frustrating and frustrated. About twenty after nine he said "Go locker!" He went to the locker and never came back! And I began to think "God, he's gone off someplace to commit suicide!" I was really worried about him. (Ali 635-645)

Although Peter later turned up, unharmed and quite cheerful, this incident illustrates his teacher's perception that the lack of progress in language learning can place incredible stress on the students.

<u>Pressure of change in families</u>. A number of teachers mentioned the stress faced by parents in their classes when dealing with their "Canadianized" children:

> For a lot of people it's a big shake-up when they get here. The ones whose children are just getting into their teen years especially seem to go through a lot because they're trying to maintain certain values at home and the kids are just going crazy with all these things that they only saw in the movies back home. . . . The peer pressure and [the desire] to try everything because they've got so many years to catch up on [those things] that local kids are pretty blase about. (Heather, 1943-1962)

> After you've been here for 15 years, if you've been laid off and maybe had problems with your kids because they're being lippy but that isn't what they would do in your culture. . . . So you're not necessarily stress-free, just because you've lived in Canada a number of years! (Ali, 2822-2833)

> And how the children are losing their language and now they speak Arabic at home and the children answer in English. . . . And I'm

> sure, in Abram's case, that's isolated him from his children. . . He's such a loving man, I think. I'm sure that must really be painful. (Cheryl, 2127-2140)

Sometimes teachers mentioned that the family problems involved not two but three generations: grandparents, parents, and children.

> I remember one Chinese man in particular. He was a grandfather, living in his son's family, and dealing with his grandchildren. And of course, that was the three generations at once. And for him it was really troubling. . . . He saw the changes over the generations: His son and daughter-in-law, and then his grandchildren's expectations. (Cheryl, 1972-1988)

Some teachers noted that this problem was exacerbated when individuals were sponsored by families who had already lived in Canada for many years. For instance, Wayne mentioned that the lack of respect for the elderly was difficult for students to deal with, especially for those students who lived with relatives who were already "Canadianized":

> Well, cultures who respect elders for being old, that's a really big adjustment for a lot of people, . . . especially when they come here after some of their family is already here. So that part [of the family] is pretty well Canadianized, and then another part of the family comes. Then there are REAL big family problems! (Wayne 1459-1475)

Some of the teachers interviewed felt that changes in family structure also affected the relationships between husbands and wives. For example, both Wayne and Helen mentioned the upheavals that occurred in the family systems of their students as a result of the differences in Canadian society with regard to the roles and relationships of husbands and wives. The changes seemed to be especially threatening to the men.

> And husband/wife relationships -- they are a real big [problem], too. And when the wives find out that they are being mistreated [pause]. They didn't KNOW that they were being mistreated before. Now they've started to realize some of the freedoms that people have here inside relationships. And it can cause big problems. . . . Like some people would like to adapt to some of the things in Canadian culture, and then the husband or father or whatever doesn't want them to do that. And then, oh boy, it makes for SUCH big problems! (Wayne, 1477-1502)

Helen told about some of the women she had worked with at an immigrant

aid organization. The women desired the freedom they saw in Canadian society, but found that this freedom was extremely threatening to their husbands:

> So they felt strongly that they wanted to do something for themselves, but their husbands were totally, TOTALLY uncooperative! Like they would expect them to STILL do all the housework and absolutely all the cooking. I had a student who used to get up in the morning at about 5:30, 6:00 o'clock, to get all the meals ready before she left -- so that her husband would have everything right there because sometimes she would get home after he did, and there were problems. (Helen, 1462-1486)

Helen also worked in a program that sent ESL teachers right into the students' (generally women with small children) homes to teach. In some cases, Helen confronted outright resistance from the husbands of potential students.

> I called them and talked to the women and it was fine to go. They were all very, very willing, and happy and DELIGHTED to get someone to come and teach them English. . . . And some of the husbands simply told me "Go away. I don't want you here. Why does my wife have to learn English? She can stay at home! She doesn't need English, she has me!" And the women didn't say a word. They were totally disappointed. One was crying. [The husbands] wanted them to be totally dependent on them! They were too scared. It was too threatening for them. (Helen, 1510-1534)

Cheryl also mentioned that this issue, addressed by an immigrant theatrical group, was a concern to her students.

> If the wife goes out to work to support the family, finds a job she likes, and then the husband gets a job and comes home and says "Well, now you don't have to work anymore. You'll stay home with the children." And she says "Wait a minute! I enjoy my job!" This is a CLASH, right? But that was a felt need amongst the group that was involved in that theatre. (Cheryl, 1934-1944)

The teachers felt that the problems and stresses in immigrant families were intensified as some members became more and more Canadian while other members, threatened by the changes, attempted to hold on to their own cultures.

Pressure of isolation and loneliness. Another problem that many teachers mentioned was the incredible loneliness and isolation experienced by their students. One example of this was Ali's student, Tuk, who was alienated from his sponsoring relatives, had no other family support in Canada, and didn't even have a telephone or television in the house. Although isolation and loneliness were considered to be potentially serious problems, Ali did mention one positive spin-off: "people tend to get along better, because otherwise they're all going to be isolated."

In many cases, teachers noted that the loneliness of their students was the result of losing their support systems, their families. When asked what was the biggest adjustment her students had to make in Canada, Heather answered:

> I think for most people it's going to be aloneness. You know, being far from the familiar. . . . Being far away from people you care about and not having contact. . . . I mean, we've all heard stories about our students having four and five hundred dollar phone calls because they couldn't handle the loneliness. And, you know, not having the support systems here to deal with the aloneness. [pause] I think it's the aloneness at first, because you know, if you feel connected and you have got support systems, you can be helped through the others. But if you're alone and you really FEEL alone... You know, [you feel so alone that] you could drop dead tonight and nobody's going to know tomorrow -- they'll only come to the room because of the smell or something." (Heather, 1305-1330)

Heather noticed that this loneliness or homesickness was magnified at Christmas and during holidays:

> I think, when you're getting close to Christmas, [complaining about Canada] is really bad because people are homesick. People miss their families, especially among the Christian students where Christmas observation is strong. And, among non-Christians [it is also a lonely time] because they figure out that it's a time for friends and family to be together, and they are not with their friends and family. (Heather 1244-1251)

She also commented that teachers often assumed, quite wrongly, that their European students would adapt quite quickly and rather painlessly to this culture; this, she felt, was not necessarily the case:

> I think very often we underestimate the impact of settlement here on Europeans, the [impact of] separation from family. Their family ties are really pretty close. . . . And they take

> separation from these familiar people, places, things, notions [very hard]. (Heather, 1134-1146)

Eileen also mentioned this issue as she described two students in her classes who found it difficult to be separated from their support systems. In one case, it was a newly married student who found it difficult to be separated from her husband. In another instance, one of her former students was so lonely that he refused to stay in Canada. He told her, "I have to go back to Mexico. I'm sick and tired of living here. I need to be with my own people." That particular student actually left midway through a course, returning to Mexico to run his father's business.

According to Helen, it was those students who were still closely attached to their home country and who did not choose to come to Canada in the first place (such as political refugees), that had the most difficult time with homesickness:

> They are always looking forward to going back. As soon as the military dictatorship is out of the way, they'll go back. It happens a lot with Chileans. They have very strong patriotic feelings. They're very nationalistic and they are against the military regime. And they really want to go back very badly, but they CAN'T, because they're going to be persecuted. (Helen, 1636-1653)

The teachers found that with the loneliness came frustration and a debilitating feeling of helplessness when students heard of difficulties back home but were unable to do anything about them. Heather, especially, talked about the frustration her students faced when they heard of "family difficulties back home, and they can't help, so their minds are off their work" (Heather, 2150-51). She mentioned one student who

> wasn't able to produce homework, and normally he's a very conscientious fellow. And he said "Well, I'm in an uncomfortable situation. My mother passed away not long ago." And of course, he's thousands of kilometres away from his mother! (1571-1578)

Sometimes this loneliness and helplessness could have serious repercussions. Helen, for instance, felt that one factor in a students' attempted suicide was being separated from her family in a time of trouble:

> The woman was by herself. She felt really, really lonely. . . . Her family was in Ethiopia. Her brother had just gotten killed. She found out about it. (Helen 1591-1598)

Sometimes the sense of helplessness came, not from difficulties in the students' families, but from difficulties in their countries. Ali told about some students she had taught from war-torn Vietnam: "They would be thinking so much about their country, and worrying about it and all the rest that they couldn't sleep" (Ali, 4355-4359).

<u>Scars from past experiences</u>. Some teachers demonstrated a concern for the impact of the "horrendous backgrounds" of students from war-torn countries. In some cases, teachers noted that past experiences had left lasting scars on their students. Wayne, for instance, mentioned the paranoia experienced by some of his Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian students. It was normal for them to be

> Always paranoid. Always! Nothing is safe. . . . And many of them don't think that those ARE psychological problems. They think that it's normal, that it's the way everybody is. (Wayne, 1534-1559)

Along similar lines, Helen described the fear and distrust her students had for police officers, and her attempt to help them overcome their fears by inviting a police officer to speak to the class:

> They didn't even want to come to class because there was going to be a cop, a PIG, coming to class to talk. . . . Okay, they're still going to believe that police officers, some of them, are corrupt and you should keep your distance. We're never going to be able to change their attitude. But at least they will know that, in general, police officers are not terribly corrupt, and that they are here to help them. . . . That they're here to protect you, they're not here to persecute you. Because there are people that will not go to the police about something because they are AFRAID! (Helen, 2198-2229)

Ali mentioned that students in her classes tended to get along quite well "unless there's brain damage or somebody that's been tortured in prison or something and is really quite off the wall" -- indicating that it was distinctly possible to have such students in her classes. Helen confirmed this possibility: "and I've had students who've been in

jail, who've been tortured" (Helen, 1563-1564). Linda was very conscious of not prying into the terrible experiences her students may have faced:

> [Trying not to] pry into their backgrounds, not even asking them, sometimes, even what city they were from. . . . I think, in the beginning, we'd been warned, with refugees, that many of their families might have been killed. Like, not asking how many brothers and sisters they had." (Linda, 2641-2647)

Issue of changes in status. One problem which Heather mentioned as an important issue in her class of advanced students was the loss of status which some of her students had experienced. She suggested that, although students in advanced classes may be confident linguistically, they still experienced the same adjustment problems as other students, one of which was related to a loss of status:

> They go through the same sorts of culture shock problems and settlement problems that a lot of other people do, although in their case it's more psychological than anything else. That they are people of reasonable status back home, for the most part, generally well educated [is a factor]. And to be at a much lower social level here than they were back home is quite a conflict for a lot of people. (Heather, 2039-2058)

One of Heather's students, Andrjez, had lost a lot of status by coming to Canada. This loss of status was compounded by the fact that Andrjez was now a student:

> He was a neurologist back home and had worked in his profession for fifteen years. Now he's a student in a classroom. That's a big jump. And he comes from a country where being a professional person like that really gives you high status, much higher than such a position would entail here. And now he's Joe Student, in with the farmers and the housewives and laborers. (Heather, 283-295)

Another issue related to changes in social status was the change in status students faced as they learned a new language. The teachers felt that some of their students experienced humiliation (or embarrassment) as they learned to speak English:

> Feeling self-conscious that you talk worse than a child does, and you have to use your own child as an interpreter. I mean, for most of us, that would be really, really humiliating. (Heather, 1985-1991)

This problem was also an issue for one of Steve's Japanese students:

> He has been telling me that he would like to get out and meet so many people, but he can't communicate properly because he sees himself as a good speaker in his own language! He can pick up girls. He can make conversation with anybody! But here, he struggles, and so he withdraws. (Steve, 866-896)

<u>Issue of changes in weather</u>. Heather, Wayne, Helen, Steve, and Cheryl all mentioned the shock that our Canadian winter is to their students. The issue of adapting to the environment, however, seemed to be most important to Cheryl, likely because one of her students from a previous class had frozen both of his hands and was now unable to work at his trade.

> But weather -- I think it's vitally important for them to adapt to the weather! They will DIE if they won't, if they don't learn to dress properly, of course. Witness that young Hungarian man. I mean, he came and thought "Ah, it's not fashionable to wear gloves -- nobody wears those in Hungary!" First thing he did was freeze both hands! So, I think there are things that are of vital importance that they adapt to. Some have told me stories about going out for a drive in the winter with the baby, wearing a light coat. Get outside the city, and the car dies! What do you do? Well, I know what WE do. WE take stuff from the trunk! We take blankets, we take a safety kit. . . . There was a man from the West Indies that I met in another group and he said "you know, you can always tell the guys who just got here from the West Indies. They walk down the street, in the middle of winter, with their jacket open to their navel!" And he says "You know they just came off the boat!" So, yeah, yeah, that's an adaptation that's necessary. (Cheryl, 3280-3881)

<u>Issue of changes in technology</u>. Steve and Ali, both referring to very low level classes, mentioned the shock of our modern, complex, technological society on students from rural areas in developing countries. When I asked Steve about the biggest adjustments he thought his students had to make, he said

> Just the standard of living, what it involves. . . . The poorer immigrants, or the refugee status people, when they come here, maybe they're overwhelmed by the fast moving cars, the newness of everything, and the technology that we've got. And I think they may have trouble adjusting, especially if they're from the back woods of some South American country. (Steve, 796-810)

Ali felt that the process of learning to negotiate the new technology was very stressful for her students from rural, non-urban cultures:

> They have really weird problems here. The student advisor sees people for all sorts of strange things that they don't see [in advanced classes]. . . . Maybe they've come from rural Vietnam or rural Iran. And some things that we take for granted -- just the physical things like high rise buildings, the elevators -- all this sort of stuff that other people can easily negotiate, they can't! That's somewhat stressful. Not being able to read at all, not knowing the signs -- there are so many things that must be difficult! Just trying to figure out where you are downtown. So they have those pressures. (Ali, 2626-2652)

Issue of cultural differences. Sometimes it was the cultural differences faced daily by students in Canadian society that the teachers perceived as stressful for their students.

> It's mostly people's attitud[illegible] or and moral values, and in some cases, laws. People [illegible] know[illegible] that certain things are illegal, like spitting, and things like drinking wine when you're having a picnic. (Helen, 1382-1395)

When referring to cultural differences in the area of table etiquette, Cheryl said "There were some real profound differences there. I don't think you can underestimate how difficult that makes your daily life" (Cheryl, 744-747). Because her students were "from an experience where what was practiced at home was commonly practiced by their neighbors," Heather noted that students' homes were their "refuge" from the "sharply different" society they encountered daily (Heather, 2724-2729). Helen told the story of one of her students who was devastated by a cultural difference she neither knew nor could do anything about:

> It happened to one of our women. She was from Hong Kong. She had a problem with her stomach -- I think she had an ulcer or something like that. In fact she was being trained on the job at the Treasury Branch downtown. And she was doing very well, but they told her that if she continued to burp she would not be hired at the end of the program. This was the manager of the branch! And she was devastated. She cried and cried. Totally humiliated. (Helen, 1245-1259)

Misunderstandings in the workplace, as a result of different expectations regarding nonverbal communication, were also seen to be

very stressful:

> All kinds of misunderstandings on the job. Like the Latin American women getting physically too close to some of their male co-workers, AND female co-workers! But the male co-workers mistook one of them, I remember, misinterpreted her and tried to make a pass. And she was very offended! She didn't mean anything! (Helen, 2300-2348)

Sometimes, the problems faced by the students were the result of an incorrect understanding of the English language -- misunderstandings which resulted when students assumed that the Canadian meaning of a particular word was exactly the same as the meaning of a similar word in their language. For instance, Eileen mentioned that some students were hurt when they did not understand the concepts included in the word "friend" in Canadian society (Eileen, 1987-1993). Similarly, Steve mentioned that some students were offended because of an incorrect understanding of the meaning of "Hi!":

> If a Chinese student says "Good morning" to you, they don't expect you to say "Hi!" They expect you to say "Good morning"! . . . You've got to watch that. And if some of them don't understand that, they're going to go through life thinking "that person I'm living with is really, really rude!" (Steve, 1176-1200)

Heather described the anxiety experienced by some of her students because of an incorrect understanding of the word "spanking." Some of her students thought that in Canada you could "go to jail for just spanking your child":

> So, if you said "spanking" a lot of people translate that as beating and it doesn't mean [the kind of] beating that you're breaking bones, not that kind of beating. It means, you know, spanking! And actually, they're afraid: "Oh, I gave my child a spanking last night. And she promised she was going to tell her teacher if I spanked her so that the police would come and arrest me." And these parents, students of ours, were a little apprehensive, to put it mildly! (Heather, 3187-3211)

Clearly, the teachers felt that these misunderstandings caused their students anxiety and stress.

Issue of limited classroom experience. Those students who had had little or no previous education, and whose experience in the classroom

was extremely limited, were seen by their teachers to be facing special problems. Ali and Wayne especially emphasized this issue. At the time of the interview, Wayne was teaching a class of students who were literate in their own language; however, his previous class had included students with little or no literacy from a wide variety of cultures. According to Wayne, his students' unfamiliarity with classroom practices affected the formality of his classes.

> You know, many of [illegible] students aren't used to being in classrooms, with having only two or three years of education. . . And the more formal things you do, the more uptight they become. (Wayne, 810-819)

Ali had the lowest level class among all the teachers interviewed: most of her students had had only had one or two years of education in their own language, were almost completely illiterate in English, and spoke very little English. When I observed Ali's class, I noticed that her students were constantly getting up and wandering around. They would walk out of the class, plug in a kettle, water the plants -- all while Ali was teaching. Ali later explained why she tolerated this behavior:

> I don't want to be really strict with them, about how they behave, as long as they don't offend anybody, because I think they feel quite -- they're not familiar with being in a classroom! It's a big enough shock for them to sit in a classroom all day long. They wander as it is. They come and go. Some people go to the washroom two or three times in one class! . . . I mean, they just get up. People go to the washroom. People go and plug in the kettle. I've tried to stop them from doing that because they do have a coffee break, but somebody's always going and plugging in the kettle! They DON'T just sit and attend, most of them! (Ali, 688-718)

Ali blamed her students' inability to sit and attend for long periods of time on their lack of previous education:

> They don't feel comfortable sitting in a classroom. If they had a high school education, they would know that, okay, you just sit. And they would know that two hours isn't a big deal. But for these people it is! (Ali, 2701-2714)

When asked whether her students had expectations of the class which differed from her own, Ali responded:

> I think their LACK of expectations of the classroom is a bit of a problem because some people would expect: "Okay, when we come to

> the classroom, we're gonna sit here." Or, "the teacher is going to teach us something." Or, "we're going to have to repeat a lot." Or, "we're going to have to write things down." And they don't even know the positive expectations, let alone being picky about the teacher! (Ali, 2930-2941)

Ali perceived this unfamiliarity with the classroom as stressful for her students; for instance, she described how the stress of being in school had contributed to the illnesses experienced by one of her students:

> On the weekend she apparently isn't sick. On the weekend, she doesn't have upset stomachs and she doesn't have headaches. But every day she came [to class] she had an upset stomach. Everyday!. . . . Imagine how it would have been if she were in a real STRICT classroom! And she seemed to be quite relaxed, but obviously it was an extremely difficult thing for her. She had a headache every day -- not a really bad headache, but a headache every day. She had quite an upset stomach -- she would go off to the washroom a couple of time in a two hour class. And, you know, it was persistent! And sometimes she had backaches and stuff. And then one day she said well "not on the weekend." (Ali, 3001-3041)

As Ali mentioned, education (the attempt to "learn something formally"), was "a kind of culture shock" for students with a lack of previous education (Ali, 2965-2976).

<u>Issue of limited exposure to other cultures</u>. Teachers also felt that the multi-cultural nature of the ESL classroom (and, indeed, of Canada itself) was a shock for students from "mono-cultural societies."

> I suppose they're encountering culture shock in a big way here. Maybe less with Canada than with the other people who are in Canada. (Ali, 2299-2311) . . . Yeah, it's a shock for them to get used to EACH OTHER! (Ali, 3663-3664)

Ali, Heather, and Helen all mentioned how difficult it was for students from mono-cultural countries to get along with people from other cultures. When referring to problems she faced when some Eastern European women were blatantly prejudiced against the Orientals in her class, Ali said:

> It's certainly not atypical! There are certainly Poles who ARE cooperative and WILL work well, but there are an AWFUL lot of them

> that won't, or find it very difficult. . . . I guess it's partly because they have very little contact with [Orientals]. There's not much immigration there or anything like that. (Ali, 3342-3354)

Heather also indicated that it was her students' lack of experience with other cultures that made it difficult for them to relate to students of other cultures or races:

> Largely it depends on their experience with people of other cultures. And the ones who come from a homogeneous country, they're going to have maybe a little more difficulty. (Heather, 806-817)

Likewise, Helen identified a lack of experience with a multi-cultural society as being one factor in the prejudice and discrimination displayed by her European students:

> We were talking about prejudice and discrimination, mostly, perhaps, [on the part of] the Eastern Europeans. And I think that's typical of Europeans. When I've been to Europe, I noticed that they're very nationalistic and they do quite a bit of discrimination there. Canadian people are certainly more used to a multi-cultural society. (844-854)

The issue of prejudice and discrimination will be discussed more fully later on, both in terms of teachers' perceptions of the impact it had on a classroom, and in terms of what they did to prevent it or deal with it once it had occurred.

## Impact of Realities on Students

According to the teachers I interviewed the pressures the students faced affected the students in various ways. In some cases, teachers felt that the difficulties provided the students with an incentive to master the language and learn about Canadian culture; in other cases, however, the opposite was true. Students were unable to learn the language; they were over-sensitive and short-tempered, depressed and apathetic. They experienced personality changes, exhaustion, illnesses, and sometimes complained bitterly about Canada and Canadians.

Motivation to learn. First of all, the teachers mentioned that the pressures faced by their students provided them with an ideal language teaching environment: they felt that the pressure provided the students with the needed motivation to learn the language. I noticed, while observing classes, that students seemed eager to learn, often asking their teachers about the meaning of words, phrases, or cultural practices which they had encountered outside the classroom. During our interview, Linda affirmed that "the students are really eager to learn!" (Linda, 1534-1535). Steve mentioned that it was this enthusiasm and eagerness to learn that kept him from moving on to another organization or another job: "That's probably one of the reasons I've stayed, because they're enthusiastic" (Steve, 996-1024). Similarly, Wayne felt that the students' eagerness to learn made his job as an ESL teacher easier:

> Well, the students are all really eager, because of those things. And they're really open, most of them. They feel like they have lots to learn and are motivated. Like, all these things make the job easy, right? . . . It's like me learning French in Alberta. I'm not motivated. There's no reason for me to learn French. I may have bad attitudes towards French people. All those things would make it difficult. But here, everything seems to be going to the advantage of the teacher. (Wayne, 2097-2127)

Ali mentioned that it was those students who felt that they had a lot to learn, and didn't try to cover up or hide their needs, who learned the most:

> Some of the women are blessed with the advantage of thinking that they're not too bright because they're women, and it's an advantage to them, you know. They don't have the pressure to cover up. So I think that Thu thinks, in a way, that she's stupid because she's never been to school. And so she's actually making very good progress. She's not trying to cover up anything. She just will try anything. And consequently, I think she is quite bright and is doing fine. (Ali, 1053-1068)

When the pressure to learn the language was absent, or compensated for in other ways, the teachers felt that the students did not learn English as quickly. Students who "covered-up" for their lack of language seemed to have a much more difficult time learning English, as demonstrated by two of Ali's students, Peter and Isaac. Peter, for instance, was able to give the impression of being a good student:

> He's made almost less progress than anybody else in the class, and yet he comes across as being fairly bright. (Ali, 591-594)

Compensating for his lack of language was Peter's special ability to wander into all sorts of situations while giving the impression that he belonged. For instance, Peter wandered into an advanced pronunciation class -- and managed to fool the teacher into assuming he belonged there:

> Somehow, he had the NERVE -- and he's quite relaxed about it. He doesn't think "Oh gee, I better not go in here!" So he's not the least bit nervous, and he walked right in. . . . And one day I gave them a coffee break, and he wandered into a tea party in another classroom, and had no qualms about it! (Ali, 621-635)

> . . . So, somehow he has this incredible facility to wander in places. And he goes to the library. I've never taken them to the library, but he feels quite comfortable there! He can't read anything there, but he's very comfortable there. So he has that ability, but he's learning English very slightly. (Ali, 645-660)

Isaac had different strategies for covering up his inability to speak the language, but the result was the same -- he learned very little. Isaac was the first student one would notice upon walking into Ali's classroom -- he was the centre of attention with his running commentary of jokes, and he exuded charm. At one point during the lesson I observed, Ali "phoned" different students, giving them the opportunity to practice a telephone dialogue they had learned; however, every time she phoned Isaac, he answered in Arabic or French. Isaac kept asking for another chance, but each time Ali gave him that chance and "phoned" him, he refused to cooperate and answered in French. After numerous attempts, Ali finally gave up, 'hanging up' on Isaac. Later, after begging for one last chance, Isaac finally answered Ali in English -- and I was amazed at how difficult the activity was for him. Somehow Isaac had managed to give me the impression that his English was much more advanced than it actually was. Later, when I mentioned this to Ali, she said:

> Also, he's quite deceiving, too, because he's quite cute and charming, and because he smiles a lot. He says "Oh, okay!" and he's in there like a dirty shirt. I was fooled for quite a while, and even sometimes I'm taken aback when I realize, still, how little he knows. . . . He's covering up! That's right!. And I

> suppose, you know, like one or two of the others, because they're basically illiterate in their own language, they've learned to cover up, so it carries over. He's got all sorts of skills for covering up. But, in a way, that maybe makes it more difficult for him to learn. . . . He thinks he can get by, and maybe, in a way, he can. (Ali, 989-1027)

Sometimes the pressure to learn the language was lessened because students had already lived in Canada for a number of years. Helen, for instance, mentioned that she found it disruptive to have students in the class who were already familiar with Canadian culture. They were not interested in the cultural content of her classes, and they also had a more difficult time mastering the language. When I asked Ali about students who had been in Canada for a long time, she said:

> I think people that have been here for fifteen years maybe CAN concentrate but DON'T. I'm not sure that's an ideal time to learn. (Ali, 2839-2851)

Both Helen and Ali attributed part of the problem to the fact that the students had already learned a lot of "broken English," which was constantly reinforced by society:

> Perhaps they can speak, but their mistakes! That's what they call fossilized English. You know, it's difficult to change it because they've been exposed to the errors for so long. They speak broken English all the time and that reinforces it. (Helen, 1706-1713)

It seems, therefore, that teachers felt that if students could get along without the language (or with an incorrect form of the language), they did so.

<u>Inability to learn the language</u>. Sometimes, however, the teachers felt that, instead of motivating their students, the problems faced by their students had quite the opposite effect -- sometimes the pressure was so great that students were unable to concentrate on learning the language.

In some cases, teachers mentioned that it was the frustration of not being able to learn the language which made the language even more difficult to learn -- and this would become a vicious circle. After talking about the frustration two East Indian women in her class felt

because they were not learning English quickly enough, one participant explained

> So, there's that frustration, because at this level they're starting with nothing. And the way they learn, considering their handicaps, and considering they are worried and all the rest of it, they make very, very slow progress. So, there's that frustration, too, and it makes it more difficult for them to concentrate. There are various things that make it difficult for them to concentrate. (Ali, 913-925)

Some teachers mentioned that it was the bewilderment faced by some students who were absolutely new to Canada which hindered their language learning.

> I think that there are some people that don't learn English very well at a certain stage, all right, because they feel so badly about being in Canada, or they feel they're having a hard time coping with some things. It's true -- they can't concentrate. (Ali, 2839-2846)

The most vivid example of students who couldn't learn because they were just so bewildered with the newness of everything came from Steve:

> I had a group of Cambodians. Just off the boat. No English. They didn't even write or read in their own language. And they're shoved into an apartment. They have to take the bus to school. It must have been tough. . . . They were right out of the jungle, a little village in the jungle, and here they are, having to learn this -- whatever the language was. And it was tough! We spent thirty weeks, five hours a day. And you could ask them at the end "Hello, how are you?" And they couldn't answer! . . . The learning wasn't there. (Steve, 831-860)

Heather suggested that perhaps these types of people should not be placed in ESL classes because they just are not psychologically ready to learn the language. She felt that a bilingual orientation class during their first few months in Canada would be more appropriate.

> Because I find a lot of people who are taking ESL really aren't ready to take ESL -- psychologically they're not ready. . . . They're thrown in too fast. I think they need to be eased into it a little more slowly. . . . They're still preoccupied by the novelty of [being here]. They still have questions on their minds that haven't been answered that could be answered in a bilingual class. (Heather, 3388-3409)

Sometimes the participants mentioned that family difficulties,

loneliness, or other problems caused students to perform poorly in class. Heather reasoned:

> If the student isn't producing, or isn't measuring up to what we expect of that student, then there's a reason for it. Either our expectations are really out of wack or there's some reason this person can't perform. And often the reason has to do with either being very far from home, some family difficulties back home and they can't help it, so their minds are off their work. (Heather, 2142-2153)

Over-sensitivity (low boiling point, defensiveness). The teachers also mentioned that the students sometimes seemed to be unduly sensitive or defensive, feeling threatened by their new position as language learners in a strange country.

This feeling of being threatened was apparent when students refused to speak in order to avoid humiliation. A number of teachers mentioned that this silence was a hindrance to language learning. For instance, Ali described the situation of two of her Eastern European students who "really couldn't stand being corrected in front of the Orientals. So, of course, they didn't learn very much" (Ali, 3361-3366; also 2272-2287). Similarly, Heather mentioned that embarrassment over a lack of literacy hindered the learning of two of her students:

> They're very sensitive about it. And I'm sure that the embarrassment, compared to the other students, the embarrassment they feel is holding them back. (Heather, 344-356)

In a similar way, Linda felt that one man's refusal to speak (possibly because he was embarrassed because of his poor grammar) was related to his lack of language acquisition:

> Like the one you saw in the class, the young man in the class. His grammar is pretty strange. And I'm sure, actually, that it would improve a lot if he spoke more, but I have the feeling he is a little bit reluctant to speak (Linda, 2819-2828)

Related to this fear of a loss of face was the loss of confidence which some students experienced as they learned a new language and lived in a new culture. For instance, Heather mentioned a student who she noticed was feeling a little unsure of himself:

> And not that he's not sure of himself, but perhaps he may not be totally convinced that anybody wants to hear what he's got to say. I think he has these kind of moments. (Heather, 2390-2398)

In some cases, this loss of confidence seemed to assume the proportions of an identity crisis. Steve described this lack of confidence in one of his Japanese students:

> He would like to get out and meet so many people but he can't communicate properly because he sees himself as a good speaker in his own language! . . . But here, he struggles, and so he withdraws. . . . He can't say to anybody "Listen to me! This is what I'm saying!" He just is very quiet, and that's not him! And of course that can affect your personality! (Steve, 866-894)

Sometimes teachers mentioned this feeling of being threatened in terms of students who were overly-sensitive -- students crying or becoming unduly angry over what seemed (to the teacher) to be a very small issue. For instance, Cheryl told the story of one of her students who burst into tears because she had missed some of the classes -- part of this student's over-sensitivity was related to a sense of embarrassment:

> And she said "I'm so embarrassed that I missed classes. I'm so ashamed." And she was also ashamed that she had not been accepted into the other program. (Cheryl, 1777-1786)

In another instance, one of Cheryl's students who seemed to be self-conscious about the fact that she had been to a doctor for depression, completely misinterpreted something that Cheryl said:

> She got gloomier and gloomier until finally there were tears in her eyes. And finally, towards the end of the class she said "Are you calling me mentally defective?" (Cheryl, 2728-2738)

Ali talked about one of her students who had what she termed a "low boiling point":

> And one day he just stood up and threw his paper. And several times he's left the room for ten or fifteen minutes. He has this very very, very low tolerance. . . . he has a very low boiling point! And a very, sort of, immature way of dealing with it. (Ali, 931-964)

Sometimes teachers reported that this over-sensitivity resulted in antagonism among students. Ali, for instance, told of a student who had reacted with anger over a relatively innocuous joke:

> Somehow, with some sort of innocuous joking, the Russian woman offended the Chilean woman -- something funny happened, I don't know what it was. But the Chilean woman actually slapped the Russian woman and said "You Jew!" which she was, but I mean, she was using it derogatorily. And so the Russian student said "You communist!" which she was, but she was using that derogatorily. And it was very bad. In fact, I had to stand between them and separate them and send them home. . . . Take somebody who's hypersensitive, and you can't joke around about that. . . . You never know what's going to set somebody off. (Ali, 3099-3125; 3142-3144; 3177-3178)

In a similar instance, a physical fight ensued when one of Steve's students' felt that he had been insulted and had to fight in order to "save face" in front of his wife:

> What happened was the Korean's pride was hurt in class and he took it out on the Polish guy. The Polish guy said something to him and the Korean took offence to this. And I had to break it up -- they were actually physically fighting. . . . But the Korean, his wife was there and he couldn't let this sort of thing happen to him with his wife there. He couldn't take it. He would lose face. . . . Something happened where usually he would have said "Oh, you just don't know. Just be quiet!" But he had to do something so he decided to fight him. (Steve, 1574-1601)

Heather felt that some students displayed antagonism towards other students in an effort to reassert themselves when they felt threatened:

> Feeling threatened, feeling like a nobody, sort of feeling lost. And you try to reassert yourself. And some people try to reassert themselves simply by putting other people down. And it's a phase. In a lot of cases, thank heavens, it's a phase. They get through it and then they're very well balanced. (Heather, 826-835)

Ali told of two women who were extremely antagonistic towards the Oriental students in her class. Part of their problem seems to have been a feeling of being threatened:

> But, these two women were compatible for the class but they really couldn't stand being corrected in front of the Orientals. So, of course, they didn't learn very much. And the Rumanian woman, particularly, [would say] "NOOO! We don't do this!" and "NOOO! That's not right!" One time, a Buddhist monk was explaining something about Buddhism and this Rumanian piped in and said "No. That's not right!" I mean, really! She was an expert on everything, including THEIR culture and their religion and everything. (Ali, 3361-3395)

Apathy and depression. The teachers also mentioned that their students were often very quiet, almost apathetic, in class; in some cases they felt that this apathy and silence was related to depression. When I observed Steve's class, for instance, although he joked a lot and made the class quite interesting (at least in my opinion), the students seemed to be rather withdrawn and unresponsive. I observed a similar phenomenon in Wayne's class -- the students seemed extremely apathetic and disinterested in spite of the fact that Wayne was telling them about news of their home country, Poland. Wayne felt that in some instances, this silence was caused by depression:

> Depression. Well, that comes out in being really quiet in the class and them not saying anything. . . . And some of them come out of it in the class -- once in a while, all of the sudden, they'll start talking! And that's happened before. That's kind of neat when it happens, but sometimes it doesn't, you know. (Wayne, 1657-1670)

Similarly, in Cheryl's class, I noticed that one of her students, Abram, seemed to be rather unresponsive. Later during the interview, Cheryl connected this apathy with the difficulties Abram had been experiencing (Cheryl, 2085-2087).

Ali mentioned depression in connection with a student who had disappeared for the day (Ali, 635-645). Although Ali's fear that Peter was so depressed he could potentially commit suicide was not borne out, other teachers did mention that this was a possibility. Helen, for instance, mentioned that she had had several students who were severely depressed, two of which attempted suicide:

> I've had several students who are severely depressed. I had a student who was very suicidal, one that tried to commit suicide about three times. . . . And it was a woman. There was another one that was also suicidal that was a man. . . . [They tried to commit suicide] because of the depression, the overall depression. (Helen, 1568-1590)

Linda described one of her students who was suffering from depression; however, she did not feel that the depression was necessarily connected to her student's adjustment problems:

> Okay, the one student I mentioned that had all these emotional problems, he was suffering from depression. Now, I found out that his family was all here -- I thought he was by himself! His family was all here and supposedly the rest of the family got

> along fine! . . . Possibly he had he same problem in China. It was hard to say. (Linda, 1054-10ι7)

Not being their "usual selves." Teachers also mentioned that their students sometimes exhibited a change in personality or behavior -- sometimes this change was identified by the students themselves and other times this was identified by the teacher:

> I've had some students come up to me and say "I'm just not myself. I don't know what's wrong." . . . If I notice that something is wrong, I try to say "What's the matter? You don't seem to be your usual self." (Eileen, 1382-1394)

Steve also talked about this change in personality, both in relation to the experience of one of his Japanese students as well as in relation to his own experience of living in another culture and learning the language (Steve, 866-902).

Cheryl mentioned that she had seen a change in Abram's attitude over the year she taught him (Cheryl, 2576-2584)

> I've seen him over the course, now, of a whole year and a bit. . . I've seen his whole attitude change, from one of enthusiasm, openness, outward looking, positive, and so on to one of -- In fact, he said once, "If I had known how hard it would be, I would never have come." (Cheryl, 2078-2099)

On a more positive note, Ali mentioned the possibility that the negative behavior of some of her students was temporary:

> I think . . . that, if you saw people five years down the line, you'd think "What a charming person." And maybe they were a complete bitch in your class, or something, because they were going through a lot of adjustment. (Ali, 2603-2611)

Similarly, Heather described the positive changes she had noticed in one student over the course of twenty weeks:

> And I saw changes like a greater sense of humor, a little bit of cynicism, yeah, but not terribly worried about it. . . . [During the first ten weeks] he was a lot more despondent about it. (Heather, 2087-2120)

Exhaustion. Another reaction to the pressure faced by the students was exhaustion. As I observed classes, I noticed that the

students often seemed quite tired and listless. In Eileen's class, for instance, I noticed that one student put her head down on her arms and apparently took a short "nap" while students wrote about their weekend. When I asked her about the student I had observed, Eileen mentioned the student's exhaustion in connection with her loneliness or homesickness:

> She's another one who often looks tired. She was married recently, so she's away from her husband, so that's difficult for her, too. (Eileen, 1351-1354)

In another instance, a student's inability to sleep was connected with his desire to return to Korea: "And he was complaining that he couldn't sleep very well at night and that he wasn't healthy and he wanted to go back" (Eileen, 1358-1366). Eileen also mentioned a student's exhaustion in connection with his job responsibilities and the pressure of language learning:

> Well, recently [when] this guy comes to class, he's extremely tired. He finds it very difficult to listen. He's a Korean student and he's been here about a year, and it's very, very difficult for him. He's working, also, so that may be part of the reason. (Eileen, 1329-1337)

One of her students was also tired for more mundane reasons: he "stays up and parties all the time, and so he's very tired" (Eileen, 1357-1358). Cheryl had also noticed that one of her students was often tired:

> He did look tired, I could tell. Just really silent. . . . I don't know how he's been sleeping, but I knew he looked tired. (Cheryl, 2605-2616)

Heather also recognized this as a problem as she described the procedure she went through when it came to her attention that a student was having problems sleeping: "then we need to refer this person to the school nurse who would then refer them to a doctor or a specialist" (Heather, 3720-3726).

Ali mentioned that some of her Vietnamese students had found it difficult to fall asleep at night because they were so worried about their country.

> They would be thinking so much about their country and worrying about it and all the rest that they couldn't sleep. And I

> remember this one guy [who couldn't sleep] and then he would fall asleep about 6:00 o'clock in the morning and then he'd sleep in. He'd be late because he couldn't get to sleep in the first place and then he finally fell asleep and couldn't wake up. (Ali, 4352-4373)

One of the students I met in Wayne's class seemed to be in a situation similar to the one described by Ali. During the break, the student came up and told me that he was really tired (possibly he realized I was observing the class and felt he should explain why he had fallen asleep). He told me, "Since I came to Canada, I can't sleep." As we talked a little bit more, he mentioned that he would not fall asleep until about 4:00 a.m. each night (or morning), and then would have to get up for class at 7:00 a.m.

<u>Illnesses</u>. Some of the teachers I interviewed mentioned that their students were often ill:

> Lots of illnesses come up. I don't know why more with Asians. I don't know why that is, but they seem to [be sick a lot]. Especially with the older people. There's always something wrong. Sniffles or something. The room is always thick with Tiger Balm. Well, they blame it on lots of things -- it's the food or the weather or whatever. And I go along with whatever they say. (Wayne, 1615-1629)

Ali's description of the medical problems her students faced was especially vivid:

> Lots of them have all sorts of medical problems! Generally when I ask "How are you?" and we go around and see, almost everyday ten people will have some sort of ailment, out of twelve! It's VERY high. Today I asked and only about two or three of them had a problem. But Isaac has very bad headaches. He gets very bad headaches. Like on Friday he had a headache. On Thursday he missed going on a fieldtrip to the LaRonde Lounge because he came to school a little bit late because he had a very bad headache. And then he sat there all scrunched up and looking in quite a lot of pain. At first he was going to go, but not drink. And then he decided he couldn't go. So he went home. Tuk, the Vietnamese man had very bad headaches and was absent all of Thursday. He's been absent a fair amount. And on Friday he still had quite a headache and he's sort of frowning. And it turned out that he was bitten by a RAT in Thailand and ever since then, somehow, his blood hasn't been right. [He gets a headache] whenever he gets tired, very tired or worried. And so quite often I'll ask him how he is. And he's got a headache but he's at school, and so the nurse arranged for him to have a checkup. And the funny East Indian

woman -- almost everyday she has an upset stomach, a sore back, sore eyes, a sore neck. And in fact today, for the first time in about a month, when I asked her how she was, she said "No problem" And then the other East Indian woman said "On the weekend, no problem." . . . She had really quite red, sore eyes for a while. . . . She had bifocals and didn't know how to wear them. She was sort of looking through the middle all the time. So, I guess she was trying to study English but was getting tremendous eye-strain. So that was a problem. But that seems to have been remedied -- her eyes are fine now. But EVERY day her stomach is upset. EVERY day, maybe twice in class, she goes to the washroom. I just think her stomach is so upset. And sometimes you hear it! And there are other people who must have stomach related problems -- there's all sorts of burping, mostly from the women! I mean, big sort of burps in the middle of class! What other sorts of ailments do we have? Well, various people got colds and stuff. Two or three people have missed a fair amount of school because their children are ill. (Ali, 757-843)

Ali felt that these illnesses were connected with the stresses her students faced. Similarly, Eileen mentioned a Japanese student's severe stomach ache in connection with an exam she was writing:

And she was really in terrible shape. She couldn't think anymore. She was just holding her stomach very tightly. . . . And she was the same student that the following year (I think around midterm) had to go to the hospital, and that was stress-related, too. (Eileen, 1399-1431)

Complaining. Another symptom of the pressure the students were under which the teachers identified was complaining (especially about Canada).

Some teachers mentioned that students complained when they felt that their high expectations of Canada were not met, especially with regard to the establishment (government, school systems, politics, etc.).

Wayne [Eastern European students complain] mostly about the school systems and the government systems and Manpower, and bureaucracy that they have to go through. They're used to going through all that and they HATE it. And they have to do the same thing here.

Sara They sort of thought they'd get away from it?

Wayne Yeah. And it's the same thing here. Can't get money for

> this, or the apartment's no good. That kind of stuff. (Wayne, 1696-1610)

Cheryl recounted the example of a student who had come to Canada partially to get away from government corruption -- and when he found what he considered to be government corruption here in Canada, he was extremely upset:

> It came up that Don Getty had been defeated in Edmonton but was running again in Stettler. I introduced the topic because it was of interest to see how our electoral system worked, that one deputy can resign in favor of another. And I thought it was just basic information. Abram who comes from Syria (which has a history of government manipulation of elections) was most offended, most upset! He felt that this was corruption in the electoral process, manipulation of the electoral process. (Cheryl, 530-540)

Another of Cheryl's students was, perhaps justifiably, quite bitter about the social assistance programs in Canada:

> When he was young and fit, he couldn't get a job anywhere and no help from Social Assistance. And his first winter he FROZE his hands, both of them, this winter. And so he lost the use of his hands which he was using in his trade. And he went to the doctor and the doctor gave him a certificate. All of the sudden, all of these social assistance avenues were open to him and he was so ANGRY about that. I mean, he really was angry that, when he was young and fit, there was nothing. And now that he had a disability, everyone's bending over backwards to help him. (Cheryl, 2618-2638)

Linda's Vietnamese students were upset with inaccurate weather forecasts:

> I can remember my students from Vietnam asking "Why is the Canadian weather forecasting always wrong?" . . . I said "Well, I guess it's because we're so close to the mountains." They said "Well, we had mountains in Vietnam and they were never wrong in their forecast and here they're always wrong." Of course, Canadians say the same things, too, I mean we're always complaining about it. So, I guess again, this is change. They're accustomed to relying on certain things and the certain things are just not there. (Linda, 240[illegible]-2438)

Some teachers mentioned that some of their students' complaints were the results of misunderstandings and over-generalizations:

> The famous [complaint] -- "Canadians are cold!" "Canadians are pretty stupid: they don't know anything about world events; like,

they didn't even know where MY city was!" . . . And that you can go to jail for spanking your child -- "Canadians are a nation of whimps!" . . . They'll generalize. Their knowledge of Canada is basically Edmonton and they'll say "Well, Canada's really provincial. They don't have a lot of theatres here. Nobody goes to the ballet. They only have American movies. Canadian culture? Canadian literature? There's no such thing! Canadian film industry? What Canadian film industry? They just shoot American movies up here so they get a tax break. Canadians generally don't know anything about politics!" And they'll base that on maybe discussing with Canadians something they've heard in the news and the Canadian will say "I don't know." But THEY don't realize (the students, that is, don't realize) that "I don't know" doesn't mean "I don't KNOW." It just means "I choose not to talk about it or get into it right now." (Heather, 3172-3235)

Ali felt that the complaint that "Canadians are cold" was a misconception which would be remedied as people lived in Canada for a period of time:

One thing they will almost universally feel is that Canadian people tend to be quite cold. And so you ask them to elaborate on that. And at a higher level you can deal with it, a little bit. There are classes where people are fairly fluent but not very correct, with people who've been here for a while. They are probably more likely to say that Canadian people AREN'T cold. . . So, by the time they've been in contact with Canadians, their perceptions may have changed in that regard. (Ali, 2445-2475)

Similarly, Eileen mentioned that the students' complaint that Canadians were superficial in their relationships was based at least partially on an incorrect understanding of the word "friend":

Their understanding of "friend" is very different and that's why they get very hurt when someone says "I'm your friend" or they act as if they're friends because they have different expectations. They think we have very superficial relationships. (Eileen, 1587-1596)

Linda described the indignation of her students who had somehow gained the impression that "Canadian women divorce their husbands when their husbands lose their jobs":

And then there was this big discussion about it and everybody was obviously terribly upset by this! This was when the recession first hit Edmonton. And I felt, of course, that I had to defend Canadians. I wasn't really aware that this was a big problem or anything! But people got so excited. That's the only time they've ever really gotten excited. (Linda, 1071-1087)

In a number of instances, it was clear that the teachers were sometimes quite exasperated with their students' negative comments. Cheryl, for instance, conveyed by her tone that she was not impressed when one of her students felt that Canadian women were poorly dressed:

> One of my Polish students said that Canadian women were very poorly dressed! Yes, not at all fashionable! And I thought, "Well! Okay!" (Cheryl, 2655-2660)

Ali obviously found a student's constant complaining about Canada to be rather aggravating:

> But the Rumanian woman was just plain miserable. she was miserable about Canada, anyway. She was just a MISERABLE woman. (Ali, 3331-3334)
>
> Partly it was her forcefulness, it's true. But it was WHAT she was forceful about that became particularly annoying. We'd talk about how, in Canada, some people have a problem with daycare or something like that, and then she'd sort of say "Yeah. Canada. Canadians are no-good parents. Children are no-good in Canada." or something like that! Well, I mean! Inadvertently, myself as a parent, she's a little bit offensive to me! And then, you know, I said to her "Oh, come on! Do you really think -- Are you telling me that there are no good parents in Canada?" Because of course, it seemed ridiculous -- I mean, really! [And she'd answer] "Yes, that's true!" And I said "Now, how would you know that?!" [And she'd say] "I've seen it because -- " She used to go to a church where everybody else was English speaking, so she insisted she had seen lots of parents and how RUDE they were. But she, herself, wasn't able to accept anything different. You know, maybe she would have been a pain to some people in Rumania, too. I don't know. (Ali, 3682-3716)

Like some of the other teachers, Ali mentioned that this constant complaining could be very annoying in the classroom. However, as she felt this was a stage that the students were going through, she mentioned that she would rather that they go to school during this stage than that they lose a job because of their bad attitude:

> But it gets quite annoying after a while. Like, you just completely lose patience. And it may have had something to do with culture shock. I mean, maybe they're bitter and miserable enough -- a certain stage of culture shock is being really picky and petty. And so nobody wants to be around them and they're their own worst enemies. It's not the greatest time to employ them. In a way, they might as well be in school at that time because they'd lose their job if they were on the job or something! (Ali, 3771-3805)

As Steve described the kinds of complaints he heard from his students, it was obvious that he also found their complaints to be rather annoying, and unjustified:

> [They complain] about the way the education system is set up here. For example, if you've got somebody from Poland who's complaining about the education system here. All I can do is laugh! For example, if you're doing postgraduate work in a Chemistry lab, what sort of equipment are you going to be using? Are you going to be using lasers and particle beams or whatever they do in physics? So, don't give me that stuff, buddy. (Steve, 961[illegible]

The fr[illegible]ion of teaching a class where students constantly compla[illegible] about everything -- the class and Canada -- was apparent as Steve talked about the class he was teaching at the time of the second interview:

> I was talking about the Polish woman who doesn't ever seem to be happy. She's never happy no matter what we give her. She says, "Oh, we should do stuff on Meech Lake." So, I give her stuff on Meech Lake and she doesn't say "Ah! This is perfect. Thanks!" She says "Oh, this isn't exactly what I wanted." And so I go, "Please, please, give me a break and quit bloody moaning and groaning!" That's what she's doing and we've got more than one of those. Oh boy, do we ever! . . . I'm just tired of it now. [My team teacher] tries to explain things in class and I just say things now like "Forget it!" And my attitude that I think comes out this time around (especially these last few weeks) is "This is the way it is here, gang. You don't like it? Go home." And for some of them, they can go home now. "You want to go back to Poland?" Imagine how much they'd complain if they went there! This is the attitude I'm picking up with these people because it's just -- boy, what a pain! (Steve, 1446-1479)

Heather was the only teacher who mentioned the opposite problem in which students were unduly positive about Canada and very negative about their own country. She felt that this was a different symptom of the same problem:

> Canada bashing is one extreme. The other extreme is how the home country is the worst. . . . They're going to be more Canadian than Canadians. But it's basically the same thing. (Heather, 3700-3709)

It is important to note that many teachers felt that complaining was <u>not</u> a big problem in their present classes (although all had experienced it at one point or another). Both Linda and Wayne, for

instance, mentioned that their Asian students seldom complained (Linda, 1071-1073; Wayne, 1635-1642).

## Helping Students Feel Comfortable in the Class

An important concern expressed by each participant was the comfort of the students in their classes. As was seen in the last section, teachers felt that reality was particularly harsh on their students; therefore, they attempted to protect their students from that reality while still not entirely divorcing the class from the outside world.

> And you know, in a way, reality is out there and we can protect them a little bit; although, you know, we're supposed to try to really reflect reality. But we also want them to feel comfortable in class. (Ali, 2408-2414)

As will be seen later, teachers used the content of their classes to "reflect reality"; however, the kind of class atmosphere which they attempted to foster in their classes was meant to protect students, on an emotional level, from that same reality. Participants went to great efforts to take the tension out of the classroom, to ensure that the students felt comfortable in their classroom: (1) they attempted to help the students relax by setting an informal, tolerant, and humorous tone in the classroom; (2) they recognized and dealt with different student expectations of the classroom; (3) they attempted to treat the students with the respect due adults; (4) they provided students with opportunities to express their feelings and frustrations; (5) they attempted to build an open rapport with the students; and (6) they avoided activities or actions that could possibly result in misunderstandings.

### The Classroom: Setting the Tone

Language learning was seen by most of the teachers to be a potentially stressful activity, especially for those whose students lacked previous educational experience and felt uncomfortable with just being in a classroom. Therefore, they attempted to make the classroom

a place where the students could relax -- informality, tolerance, and humor were all used by teachers to set the tone of their classroom.

An informal, tolerant classroom. One way that teachers helped their students relax was to keep their classes informal -- this was especially true of teachers of lower level classes, although it was, to a lesser degree, a concern of teachers of advanced classes. Teachers felt that those students with limited previous classroom experience would be threatened by a formal, or strict, classroom environment. Informality, therefore, was especially important to Wayne since some of his students from previous classes had had less than three years of education. As mentioned before, Wayne felt that "the more formal things you do, the more uptight they become" (Wayne, 810-819). The importance of informality to Wayne was evident as he explained how he worked to help his students learn to understand and tolerate each other -- formal teaching was definitely not appropriate:

> It's not like "Okay, now I'm going to teach the Polish people how Cambodian people eat cake." You can't do that. It has to be quite informal, and it has to be relaxed. (Wayne, 737-742)

Some teachers specified that the beginning of each lesson was particularly strategic in establishing this informal atmosphere. A number of the teachers mentioned the importance of gradually, slowly, beginning a class:

> But I really think it's important to be informal, especially in a very basic class, a beginning basic class. There, if you get too formal, then you get nothing back. But if it's around a table -- lots of my activities start at coffee time, or start before the class starts, so that it's not "Here we go now! Here we go!" No. It starts at coffee time. Everyone at their own table or standing around outside [the classroom], looking out the window. That's where the class gets started. (Wayne, 793-808)

The opportunity to interact individually with their students in an informal setting seemed to be one of the reasons why teachers started their classes gradually. I noticed this while observing how Ali began her class. As she walked into the classroom, she noticed that a Vietnamese woman was eating some Vietnamese food with which she was unfamiliar. When she asked the woman what the food was and how it was

made, all the students at the table worked actively together to try and describe the food to Ali. Through this activity, Ali gained her students' attention. As they completed their discussion, the students gathered at the front of the class in a semicircle, and the class "began" (or, perhaps, continued). This concern was also evident among teachers of more advanced classes. Heather, for example, also mentioned that she helped her students relax by starting the class off gradually and informally:

> And just before class, I might come in a few minutes early and say "Oh, is the water on?" And then have a cup of coffee with them before the class gets going, and then just sort of slowly move into the class. (Heather, 2305-2311)

Although Eileen's class was slightly more formal, she also began her class with an 'informal' chat, asking each student about their weekend. When I mentioned this during our interview, Eileen responded:

> Yeah, it's a kind of opener. And it gets them relaxed. It gets them talking about what they have done. And it even makes the shy people comfortable with expanding on their ideas. (Eileen, 360-376)

Teachers also described bringing coffee and tea into the classroom, encouraging students to bring family pictures to share with the class, and participating in informal activities like birthday parties, rummage sales, and baby showers.

Informality in the classroom was also associated with a lack of structure. The teachers allowed their students a lot of freedom, especially in the lower level classes, and did not expect their students to follow the stereotypical behavior commonly expected of Canadian students. This was especially true of Ali's class. As has been mentioned before, Ali tolerated a great deal of "wandering around" in her classroom. When I asked Ali about this during the interview, she mentioned a reluctance to be strict with her students because of their lack of experience in a classroom setting (Ali, 688-718). As Ali described an end-of-term party with her class, the informality, and her tolerance of atypical behavior, was again apparent. She described how, while most of the students sat around a table making objects out of paper and one student wandered around the hallways stopping in at other

class parties, another student curled up on the top of one of the tables for a nap. My reaction to this behavior, as I spoke to Ali, was that it was rather "strange" -- and yet Ali said that, for her class, it was quite normal. It was her students' unfamiliarity with the classroom that prompted Ali to be so lenient with them.

> I want them to be relaxed because at this level they have virtually no education. They don't feel comfortable sitting in a classroom. If they had a high school education, they would know that you just sit, and they would know that two hours isn't a big deal. But for these people it is. So, yeah, I try to maybe joke more or be more relaxed with them. (Ali 2701-2713)

Ali's tolerance of non-traditional behavior in her classroom was partially in response to her perception of her students' needs to communicate:

> So, like the Cambodian woman who's absent, she is an absolute hoot! She doesn't understand things and quite often she'll stand up in the middle of the class and put her head on my chest and give me a big hug, for maybe thirty seconds in the middle of class! Well, I mean, it breaks up everybody! It breaks ME up! But it's how she communicates. So, if you try to have everybody sitting still and behaving in a certain way, it sort of takes away from that. Now, I've never had a class where there's so much hugging. Ravi, the East Indian woman, also sometimes will give me a big hug or something like that. And again, it's her way of communicating. (Ali, 1388-1409)

Ali accepted these 'strange' behaviors from her students because she saw that, while the students needed an outlet to express their feelings, they lacked the necessary language skills to do so. In fact, Ali even went one step further -- because she perceived that her students were so "touchy," she became like them in an effort to help them relax:

> Because some of them were quite nervous, if I was going around to see how they were doing or helping them, I would put my hand on their hand or my hand on their shoulder, or something like that. (Ali, 1436-1444)

A classroom filled with laughter. Jokes, humor, and laughter were important characteristics of every classroom I visited, contributing to the sense of informality. At times it was the teachers who initiated the joking -- sometimes the students responded, and sometimes they

didn't. At other times it was the students who initiated the joking, laughing at and with each other. This seemed to be such an important part of each class that I asked some of the teachers about the role of humor in their classes.

Both Eileen and Helen indicated that their use of humor wasn't deliberate (or planned), and yet they both felt that it was a useful and important tool for making classes more enjoyable and reducing the stress inherent in language learning:

> I don't do it deliberately. But I also find (you've read all these papers and research and whatnot) that it makes people relax and therefore it facilitates learning. Because a more pleasant atmosphere is created, they're not as tense as they could be. (Helen, 2112-2121)

> I think it's a part of my personality, and I think that classes are a lot funner if you're allowed to laugh. It takes the seriousness off it. It is serious learning, but it doesn't have to be serious all the time. Also, I think the students feel more comfortable also. And if they come to class thinking this can be a fun experience, then I think they're more prone to learning. And also for them to be able to laugh at situations. I think it reduces a lot of stress. (Eileen, 1635-1654)

Steve, perhaps, made the most deliberate use of humor. He used humor as a diagnostic tool:

> It also tells me how the person feels towards things. If somebody doesn't laugh at 18 jokes during the day, I'll say "Are you okay? How long have you been here?" So I find out all about them and tell them that I understand.

He also used humor to help students relax while building a rapport with them:

> I use humor for a number of things. It makes the students feel comfortable, if they can understand me and laugh at my jokes, even if [my jokes] are stupid, and most of them are. It shows they have an understanding, we have a rapport. And that makes a big difference.

Like the teachers mentioned in the last section, Steve felt that the way he began a class was important. However, instead of a gradual, informal opening, Steve used humor to set the tone at the beginning of the class:

> So it's a rapport that we build up and it really helps in their enthusiasm because sometimes, [like at] eight o'clock on a

is a weekend. Gee, you've got to have people who, [when] they know that you're coming, hopefully they're going to say "Oh, good! We've got Steve for a teacher today!" So I'll come in and I'll say "HEY EVERYBODY!" or something. And I just do something that shows that I'm enthusiastic and hopefully they'll go "Okay! All right! He's here! We've got to work!" Rather than going in and saying "okay. who's here? okay. turn to page six." I've got to go in there and show them, and say "OKAY! [clap!]" For example, I'll say "Okay! [clap] HOMEWORK! [clap]. I want your homework!" And I'll walk around and say "C'mon, c'mon, c'mon, c'mon!" And I hadn't given them any [homework]! And they're going "Oh no! Oh no!" So, I've got them thinking. I've got them worried. And then I say "Oh yeah, there's no homework!" And then they think I'm stupid! And so we've got some communication where they're all going "Ohhhh!" Of course, you can only do that so many times. I do that sort of thing ALL the time with them. And I make mistakes on purpose. I'll put the wrong verb in. And sometimes I'll look around the room until somebody says "Excuse me!" And then I'll say "Thank you! You saw it! You spotted it! I did this on purpose!" But sometimes I don't. [I'll say] "Fix it!" And things like that just to make sure that they're not getting into a routine of anything and just go and write it down -- blah, blah, blah. (Steve, 1080-1156)

Heather also emphasized the importance of humor in her class; however, she made it very clear that humor did not replace the hard work she expected of her students.

Heather HUMOR! Humor, humor, humor!

Sara Yeah, I noticed there was a lot of humor in your class.

Heather Oh yeah. I would DIE if there weren't. . . . But, you know, it's humor, but they do have to produce. It's not like it's daycare, you know! (Heather, 1848-1870)

Ali also mentioned the importance of laughter in her class for helping the students relax; however, humor was especially important to her because (as with the touching and hugging), it provided her students with another means of communication:

I think for most of them, to be relaxed and be able to laugh quite a lot is valuable to them. But, especially, it's one way they can communicate, you know, just joke with each other. (Ali, 976-981)

Eileen mentioned that her students seemed to enjoy the cultural differences in the class, finding them humorous rather than stressful. In one instance, Eileen described what happened when a student from

> And he reached out for the Chinese guy who was sitting next to him, . . . gave him a hug, and kissed him on both sides! And this guy [Chinese] was just shaking! He thought it was so gross! He was just shivering from it! . . . And he felt VERY uncomfortable. He turned RED. And all the other students laughed and laughed. (Eileen, 1044-1063)

Dealing with Different Classroom Expectations

Often the participants mentioned that their students had expectations which they did not share (expectations of student roles, teacher roles and language learning activities). In a few instances, teachers modified their behavior to match their students' expectations. Most teachers, however, seemed to expect their students to adapt to the "Canadian" classroom expectations. They helped their students make this change by clearly describing what the differences were and why they were there.

Problems inherent in different role expectations. The teachers mentioned at least two role expectations upon which they and their students differed.

First of all, teachers grappled with the question of who (if indeed anybody) was to be the "authority" in the class. In general, teachers felt that their students expected the teacher to be the authority figure in the classroom, a role that many of the teachers rejected:

> Like, I certainly don't feel like an authority or something like that. The role of the teacher here in the ESL classroom is quite different than what most of them expect and are used to. . . . The Orientals, for example. They expect the teacher to stand up there and be the boss. And if the teacher says "Oh, I don't know," they can't believe that the teacher would have the nerve to say she doesn't know! (Ali, 3880-3895)

related to the students' perceptions of their own roles and responsibilities as students.

> What the biggest adjustment for them, I suppose, in that respect, is that, if the teacher isn't the authority, then they have to take a bit more responsibility for their own learning. For some of them that's a hard thing to do. Or if the teacher suggests a different way of studying rather than memorizing lots of vocabulary items or something, they don't want to buy that. They try to stick to the format that they're used to. (Ali, 3903-22)

Heather dubbed this type of approach, where the teacher was the authority and the students passive, the "totalitarian approach":

> People generally from totalitarian countries really like a totalitarian approach, where it's set up clearly what you have to do. The teacher answers all the questions. You don't draw on the experiences of the students. (Heather, 992-998)

Linda found that the politeness and respect of her students almost forced her into a dominant role in the classroom -- a role which she clearly resisted:

> I suppose that it is nice that people here are always soooo polite. I mean, they're almost too polite. . . . They're not negative. It's easy for you to, terribly easy for you to dominate them -- people are always sitting here nodding, no matter what you do! (Linda, 1291-1304)

This same issue was also evident as Linda described an activity she did with her class. In the activity, students listed the characteristics of a good teacher and a good student on the blackboard and then voted to decide which characteristic they felt was the most important:

> Linda And the best characteristic for the student was respect for the teacher! That was the main, the most important, characteristic, which really astonished me. Not that they mentioned it, but that it would be voted THE most important thing. So, in that respect, I think that they are much more respectful to the teacher.
>
> Sara Does that affect the way you teach, or does that affect your class?
>
> Linda Well, again, you have to guard against dominating people, which is very easy to do. They'll just about do anything you say! (Linda, 1327-1353)

related to their cultural biases regarding the roles of women and men in society. Wayne felt that being a male was a distinct advantage in his class of Polish students:

> Wayne: Well, I think lots of Polish students are used to male teachers. . . . If they get a young female teacher, then that's not what they [expected]. So, I don't have that problem. (Wayne, 1118-1130)

Steve also seemed to feel that it was an advantage to be a man in the ESL class; however, he did mention one situation where being a male was a disadvantage:

> When you're with the strict Muslims from Saudi Arabia, the women. Trying to show them what they're doing wrong in their homework has to be at about a meter away. And you can actually see the physical movement of these women: when you come too close to them, they'll move away the same amount. . . . It's really strange! (Steve, 1691-1704)

However, Steve felt that, generally, it was an advantage to be a male in the ESL class. As a male, he was not a threat to the egos of the Middle Eastern men in his class:

> But, for the most part, I think with a lot of the Middle Eastern men, I would probably get more out of them than some of the women would because there are a lot of egos out there where they don't want the woman to be above them. . . . These males probably wouldn't have any problems with their egos with me. (Steve, 1705-1731)

Helen also identified this problem as being primarily with men from the Middle East. They did not treat her with as much respect as they would have had she been a man -- instead, she found she had to work to gain their respect:

> It's almost like, whatever I said, they would go and talk to a MALE teacher that was teaching another class. And I would give them homework and they'd go over and say "Well, Helen's doing this." It's almost like, because she's a woman, we want to make sure that [she's doing the right thing]. And they were not very respectful. They just felt very uncomfortable because I was in a position of superiority, and women are not supposed to be superior to men. (Helen, 1898-1116)

> It was almost like I had to prove to him that what I was teaching was good, and what I was saying was right. (Helen, 1125-1154)

teachers appreciated that their students' expectations differed from their own, they did not generally feel that, as teachers, they should change their behavior in order to fulfill their students' expectations. One reason for this is that teachers felt that, by insisting that students change, they were preparing them for the expectations society would place on them once they left the classroom. For instance, Heather, who followed a democratic "problem solving" approach, did not feel she should adapt to the "totalitarian approach" expected by her students because she felt her students would encounter this same "problem solving" approach in the workplace:

> Our whole system's geared to problem solving and, in most of their professions, they're going to have to apply problem solving somehow. So, I try to recognize where they're coming from -- I try to accommodate it to some extent -- but I'm not going to become a third-world-type teacher. My colleagues sometimes think I am, but [laughter]. You know, we set rules together. We'll brainstorm and we'll set up rules. We'll decide, also together, what consequences would be acceptable if the rules aren't met. And we enforce them together. I am NOT the enforcer! . . . So that's the biggest cultural difference. (Heather, 1044-1068)

Like Heather, Cheryl did not feel that the teacher should change to match her students' expectations. When talking about a student who dropped a class because the teacher wouldn't change, Cheryl said:

> I know that teachers in our culture are probably not as respected as they are in some other cultures -- the Chinese, for example, springs to mind. But, I feel that if the student can't learn from a certain teacher, perhaps [leaving] is the only way. I don't necessarily think it follows that a teacher should change because a student finds his or her way unacceptable. (1598-1608)

One expectation which many of the teachers mentioned as an example of the difference between their own and their students' expectations was the issue of whether the teacher should be called by a title ("Teacher" or Mr/Mrs/Ms) or by their first name. Generally, the teachers expected, and strongly encouraged, their students to call them by their first names, although they recognized that this made many of their students uncomfortable.

> Eileen I think it's very strange for them to call the teacher by their first name. Some students refuse. They call me "Teacher"

Eileen Yes, and they don't. Or they'll call me "Miss Eileen." Especially the Chinese students and some of the Arabic students, too. (Eileen, 1223-1232)

To Linda, the issue of having her students call her by her first name was very important, possibly because she was older than many of the other teachers in her organization. Again, one reason she insisted that the students change was to prepare them for "the way it is in Canada."

> Well, the very fact that many of the students would rather call me Mrs. So-and-so. At the very beginning, I felt, since I was so much older than all the other teachers, I didn't want to be Mrs. So-and-so, while they were all Bob and Sue and so on. So I felt it was really important that I be Linda. And besides, that certainly is the way it is in Canada. I mean, everybody who calls you up on the phone calls you by your first name. So, I try to insist that everybody calls me Linda. But to one student, it's "Miss Linda." (Linda, 1496-1594)

One expectation which Heather had to do deal with was unique to her situation: because she was Polish, Heather found that her Polish students had certain expectations of her which she was not willing to fulfill. She was quick to disillusion those Poles who expected to "have an edge" just because she was Polish:

> I've had students who try to get favors that are above and beyond what we feel we ought to do, some kind of preferential treatment which I'm not prepared to do. But [they think] I should be doing this just because they're Polish, . . . that I shouldn't be counting absences, this kind of thing. And no. In such an instance, if I'm approached in Polish, I reply in English, and often that takes care of it because one doesn't like to be humiliated in front of people. (Heather 2901-2997)

Although the teachers expected their students to change, they felt it was important to bring the differences in expectations out into the open, clearly explaining their expectations (and reasons for those expectations) to the students. When Heather, for instance, encountered the problem of students not willing to call her by her first name (or, conversely, students not wanting to be called by a first name themselves), she explained to the students exactly WHY she felt titles were unnecessary in her classroom (Heather, 1002-1034). Steve also

[illegible]
roles he assumed; however, he did acknowledge the students' expectations while clearly explaining the reasoning behind his actions/roles:

> I think what I mean is that I won't come to class wearing a Japanese kimono or something like that to make these people feel at home. [I won't] act like a Japanese teacher, where they want more respect and so on. It's just the things I'll say -- I'll say "Yes, I understand that that's what teachers are like in Japan." And that actually happened this morning. . . . The Mexican girl had said "I want that chair you're sitting in, this one isn't comfortable." So, when I was talking to someone else, she went up and changed it. And the Korean girl said "We wouldn't do that because we have more respect." And the Mexican girl said "Well, WE have respect, but it's just that I know this guy and I know I can joke around with him" -- so she does. That was the thing. So, just things like that where I will say "I understand" to the Korean girl, and I said "Sometimes I think that I would like more respect, but I really don't need it." I talk about it, but I won't actually act like a Korean teacher. (Steve, 1512-1549)

Steve knew that he was probably violating some of the students' expectations by wearing jeans and running shoes to class; however, as in the above example, he did not change his behavior. Instead, he brought up the issue with the students, allowed them to express their feelings, and then explained why he wore those clothes.

> I always ask them, "So, what do teachers wear in your country?" And I've been around long enough to know who wears what and what respect you get. I have a laid back class, and by the time I wear my jeans, it's not a shock: "How can we respect this guy when he's not wearing his suit and tie?" But I usually ask them "What do you think of this?" I say "Well, this is the way we do it here -- it doesn't make me any different!" And so it makes them realize that, gee, this is the way it is here. If they don't like it, that's too bad! It's different [here]! I don't try to dress in my Sunday best. (Steve, 616-645)

To Steve, it was very important to "get things out into the open" -- to allow students to express their opinions while explaining why he did things differently:

> If somebody loses respect for me because I'm wearing a pair of jeans, I don't lose sleep over it. Whereas before I probably would have. But I still understand what's going on and I think that nowadays we can discuss this sort of thing with the students. . . . Before I wouldn't have. I would have been thinking "What do

then we get it out in the open, and I think that makes a big difference. (Steve, 1770-1799)

Many teachers mentioned that students, because of their different backgrounds and experiences, had different expectations of the types of language learning activities they would be involved in. While observing their classes, I noticed that some of the teachers (especially those of relatively advanced classes) spent a lot of time explaining to the students exactly WHY they were doing what they were doing, thereby making the language objectives of the various activities quite clear. This was especially noticeable in Helen and Cheryl's classes. For instance, when suggesting that students sign out "read-along" books and tapes to improve their listening skills, Helen explained exactly <u>why</u> this would be beneficial to their language learning. Comments such as "It's in the best interest of your English development to. . ." were also common in Helen's class.

Another example of this occurred when Helen introduced a game which the students had played once before. Before she began the game, Helen asked the students if they remembered the language learning objectives of the game. Helen then expanded on the objectives volunteered by the students, making it very clear exactly WHY they were playing the game. When I asked Helen about this, she said that she felt these explanations were important in order to avoid disappointing those students whose expectations differed from her own:

> They've been exposed to a different kind of teaching. They're used to being taught in a very traditional way, like grammar, grammar, grammar, fill-in-the-blanks. . . . And many of them would perceive what we do as a waste of time. "Well, how come you're not testing us?" "How come you're not teaching us grammar?" "And why are we doing this conversation activity or this reading activity?" And that sort of thing. And so I want to explain that the approach is a little bit different. And I do talk about how we teach English here at the beginning of the course because otherwise they will be disappointed. But they will not be disappointed if I explain why we do it and that they will accomplish the same goal, or even better, their language competency will improve even more than if we use the traditional approach. So, [I explain] mostly because they have different learning habits (Helen, 1011-1075)

teach them grammar:

> Especially with the more advanced, capable English speakers, I let them in on why I'm doing what I'm doing. . . . "Although we're having an interesting discussion, you don't just come here to chat with me, although that's very important. You are learning this through that discussion." And it's a change that I've noticed in my own teaching, too. . . . If I could get them to talk to me at first, at the very beginning, I considered that a significant achievement. But now for me <u>it's important that they understand that they are also learning English</u>. So many of them have come from other backgrounds, where they sat in the classroom and they did exercises and grammar and they could name a past perfect and a past present progressive, or whatever it's called, but they couldn't communicate with me, you see. So, sort of joining those two approaches, I've discovered that if I give a reason and a rationale behind what we're doing, then they say "Oh. Well then, it's okay." (Cheryl, 1138-1181)

Both Cheryl and Helen had found that students were more amenable to new ways of doing things (and less likely to be disappointed) when they were provided with a clear rationale for those activities. Cheryl told me the story of a friend who had actually given up her class because the students insisted that she change her teaching style to fulfill their expectations. Again, Cheryl felt that an explanation of the purposes of the various language learning activities would be the best way to deal with such a problem:

> Cheryl They had very firm expectations of what she should do as a teacher: (a) they wanted grammar, grammar, grammar, grammar, grammar; (b) they didn't want her to do the things the way she wanted to do them. She quit after two weeks because they were inflexible! . . . And the teacher before her had also quit!
>
> Sara Whew, that's a strong willed class!
>
> Cheryl It was a strong willed class! And I don't know what I would do in that situation. I think I would be the way I am with my present class. I would explain to them why I was doing what I was doing and expect them to accept me on those grounds. (Cheryl, 1554-1581)

Linda seemed uncertain regarding whether her students really enjoyed playing games or participating in role plays during class. For this

next class she would tell the students the purposes of the activities, hoping to make them more open to new kinds of language learning activities:

> Regarding playing games with students: I think I felt some of them would not consider it serious. And even doing simulations, I feel some people think it's quite frivolous. So, actually, this Saturday's going to be the first [class] this summer, and I think I'm going to try to make a statement of my teaching ideas at the beginning. I'm not sure if they'll really appreciate it or catch on or really take it all in. But [I will] emphasize the fact that I want people to speak, and we're going to use different ways to do it. (Linda, 2996-3011)

It was Linda's well-educated students, those with the most classroom experience (some of whom were teachers), who seemed to have the strongest traditional classroom expectations. Again, Linda felt that providing students with a clear presentation of the purposes of her activities <u>may</u> make them more open to changes (however, she remained somewhat sceptical as to whether this would really alleviate the problem):

> I wonder whether giving people the purpose, which perhaps I haven't done [pause]. If I can show, especially these people who are themselves university professors or something, if they see the purpose of the games, then they would be more [amenable]. . . . I think many people don't see the purpose, and even if you explain it, they still might not. (Linda, 3137-3155)

Student expectations in lower level classes were different from those in advanced classes. As mentioned previously, it was the LACK of expectations (and classroom experience) that caused the problems in the lower level classes. However, both Ali and Wayne had to work with the students' expectation that, when a person is in school, he or she copies. Both of them tried to discourage their students from constantly copying. While observing Wayne's class, I noticed that he repeatedly asked the students to "Please don't write yet! Just practice talking!" In order to keep them from getting frustrated, he set aside a bit of time at the end of each activity so that the students could copy down everything that had been written on the board.

> They LOVE to copy! Yeah, they love the vocabulary, the written form. (Ali, 567-569)

> He'll be copying something -- he's constantly copying and not really paying attention. (Ali, 931-970)

Teachers of lower level classes expected students to change their expectations without long explanations of the purposes of activities (the students' lack of language would likely make those kinds of explanations impractical). Wayne, however, mentioned that such explanations were necessary in advanced classes:

> The students sort of trust you more instinctively [in lower levels] -- that you know what you're doing -- more than in the higher levels where they tend to be more critical. And that's okay to be critical, but in the lower levels you can do more of the things that YOU think would be good for them without having to explain [everything] to them. In higher levels, you have to take an hour to explain why you think this is valuable, and then go ahead and do it! (Wayne, 1782-1796)

<u>Meeting Student Expectations</u>

Although in most cases the teachers expected their students to change, in a few instances the teachers mentioned that they made allowances for the students' expectations and differences. For instance, Linda mentioned that she had avoided group work activities because she felt they would contradict her students' expectations (Linda, 2678-2708). When she did try group work, she found that (contrary to her expectations) the students really enjoyed it. When Linda was discussing the role of grammar in her class, and the fact that, often, students wanted to be taught grammar, she said: "I try to [illegible] them what they want" (Linda, 1378-1379). Similarly, Heather said [illegible] recognize where they're coming from, I try to accommodate it [illegible] [illegible]nt" (Heather, 1045-1055). Eileen found teaching grammar to be [illegible] problematic because some students wanted the grammar badly whereas other students already knew it; however, like Linda, when her

students wanted grammar, Eileen attempted to fulfill at least some of their expectations. Steve revealed that in some cases he did try to fulfill their expectations, especially when he felt their complaints or expectations were justified:

> I try to fit their expectations as students, and it doesn't matter where they're from. I say "You people are paying this money for the course. I know you expect a lot and I'm going to try to give a lot." And, when I don't, especially with the advanced levels, they let you know that. They'll say things like "You're wasting our time! We can read this at home!" They'll say that point blank, so you've got to be able to counter that. Or, [they'll say] "You're asking a lot of stupid questions." And things like that. They'll say it if they think it. So I say "Yeah, you're right. Let's go on to something else." So, I've never had a problem admitting my errors. (Steve, 646-671)

Cheryl mentioned that her students' respect for her as a teacher, and their expectations of her, changed the way she taught them:

> When I was first beginning, I thought "Oh my, isn't this WONDERFUL, all this respect I get!" And then I thought "That's an expectation that I will be fair and just and teacherly and professional in my approach to them." And, in fact, my behavior has changed in that direction. (Cheryl, 1527-1553)

Treating Students with Respect

Another way that teachers helped their students to feel comfortable in the class was to treat them as if they were inherently "worthy" -- in other words, they treated them with respect.

Respecting students' adulthood. Teachers mentioned the importance of treating their adult students with the respect due them as adults. For instance, it was Cheryl's realization that her students were adults which prompted her to explain the purposes of language learning activities to her students: "Well, I think that's important. I think, [as] adults, they're not stupid, you know" (Cheryl, 1142-1149). This respect for the students, this consciousness that that students were adults, was also demonstrated as teachers allowed students the freedom to make their own decisions. Heather, for instance, felt that it was

important not to force students to talk before they felt they were ready to do so:

> If they're willing to talk about [their homesickness], sure. And if they're not, then, I guess, make all the overtures that you're a sympathetic listener. But, I mean, they are adults and in the end, they're the ones who are going to have to tackle it. But I try to respect the silence as well -- some people need their own time. And again, they are adults and they may know that they need that silent time. So, just be patient, encouraging. (Heather, 3759-3779)

Linda mentioned a similar reluctance to pry into her refugee students' lives, to force students to talk about things they would rather not mention: "I'm more skillful [now] at kind of open ended things where they can put in what they want to. . . . If you have it more open-ended, then they can volunteer" (Linda, 2608-2653). Wayne also mentioned this issue: "They don't want to say anything? Fine. I don't ever push, because they are probably going through that time" (Wayne, 1661-1664).

Heather treated her students as adults by allowing them some of the decision-making authority in terms of what the classroom rules should be, and the appropriate consequences for breaking those rules (Heather, 1054-1068). Not only did Heather give her students extra responsibility in the classroom, but she also encouraged them to use and talk about their talents. She felt this would help students feel more positive about themselves:

> Fieldtrips can be great ways of putting some of the obligation of the class organization in their hands. You could have a team of students (depending on how many fieldtrips you're going to do) each organizing a different fieldtrip. . . . That could be done by the students. Some of them know how to use computers or can type? Well, some activities could be done with them using computers (why do they have to hand-write all the time!). Use these other skills that they have so that it comes together as a whole, it's not a fragmented thing. Somebody who does Tai-chi? Well, okay, why not have them explain what they do and why they do it? Their opinion of themselves is better! Different kinds of things -- classroom presentations, fieldtrips, learning successful use of functions, encouraging them to get out into the community and report back -- so that their opinion of themselves improves, too. And people perceive them as something more than this poor little newcomer! . . . And they also become more competent in talking about what they can do because a lot of them feel that that should be evident. You don't talk about yourself in that way

> (that's another cultural thing). And it's not really boasting, but that there's a time and a place to be able to talk about yourself -- what you're able to do, what your dreams are, what your hopes are, and what your plans are. (Heather, 3451-3476)

Even students who didn't particularly 'deserve' this respect were treated with respect. For instance, Helen identified her respect for a student as the key ingredient in helping her overcome his prejudice against female teachers:

> I showed as much interest towards him as everybody else, although I really didn't feel like showing interest in his progress because he was really giving me a hard time. But because I showed respect towards him and I accepted him and I told him I didn't condemn him for feeling that way, that I understand, it's a cultural thing. . . . And eventually, I think because I treated him fairly, he sort of treated me nicely. By the end he ended up giving me a gift and saying thank you. (Helen, 1133-1153)

Not imposing their opinions or cultures on the students. This respect that the teachers had for their students was demonstrated in their reluctance to 'force' students to accept their own opinions or cultural values. This concern was demonstrated by Helen during the class I observed. I noticed that, after expressing her opinion on an issue, Helen would say "It's just an opinion. You are entitled to your opinion" (Helen, 1980-1982). Later during the interview, Helen mentioned that, although she disagreed with her students' intolerance of homosexuals, she did not attempt to force her opinions on them:

> I'm not going to tell them whether I approve of it or not. I'm not going to tell them that I have a million friends who are homosexual, and that I get along very well with them. . . . Many of my friends are homosexual. But I'm not going to tell them all those things. (Helen, 1842-1851)

Although Helen didn't expect her students to change their opinions regarding the issue of homosexuality, she did expect them to be tolerant and broadminded enough to listen to other opinions:

> At least be broad-minded enough to listen. I don't expect them to like it or not like it. I don't tell them if it is right or wrong. (Helen, 1933-1942)

Although Helen felt that her job as a teacher was to raise her

students' awareness, she objected to teachers who imposed their own moral or cultural values on their students:

> As a teacher, I see it as an obligation to raise awareness -- I DON'T think that you should impose your own cultural values, your own moral values on them. I absolutely object to that. (Helen, 1805-1812)

Linda's discomfort with the idea of forcing her values on others (and the dilemma this caused) surfaced quite vividly during the interview as she discussed an incident that had occurred during the class I observed. In response to a student's question, Linda was explaining the meaning of Easter. As I listened to what she taught, however, it seemed that Linda was avoiding mention of the religious aspects of the Easter holiday (in spite of the fact that the student had specifically requested information regarding "Good Friday, Easter, Christians and Jesus"). As the class went on, Linda did mention the religious aspects of Easter, but she seemed rather uncomfortable doing so. When we talked about this later during the interview, Linda mentioned that, if the student had not explicitly requested it, she would not have brought Christianity into the discussion at all except for just a "passing reference." When I asked "Why not?" she replied:

> Well, actually, I am a Christian. I guess I don't feel like I want to proselytize. . . . I had one student who said to me (he was a very unhappy person and had all kinds of personal problems and emotional problems and so on), he said something about, I guess that he should, I don't know, "get Christianity" or something. And I didn't say anything. And I thought afterwards "I should have said something to him!" But I just felt, as a teacher, I mean, in a way, how much should we really involve ourselves in people's lives? And how much should we try to influence their lives? You know, maybe that would have been just what he needed. And maybe -- of course as a Christian, you're supposed to get people in and pass the good news and so on. I just feel a little ill at ease. (Linda, 656-690)

Similarly, although Linda did admit to promoting democracy and human rights (Linda, 1541-1571), she also made it clear that she tried to be neutral when talking about political subjects:

> I try not to push it. (Linda, 1556, 1601)
>
> You just have to try to present kind of the way it is, trying not to be too partisan, or pushing a political party, or saying it's the only way. (Linda, 1622-1627)

> I guess [regarding] political things, I try to be very neutral. (Linda, 2651-2651)

Linda was also concerned that she not appear to be indoctrinating her students when teaching about Canadian culture: "All the things about culture is not just to indoctrinate them. It's also to give them a chance to [talk]" (Linda, 1751-1760).

Like Linda, a number of teachers were careful not to impose their cultural values on their students. When teaching students about Canadian culture, the teachers allowed their students the freedom to decide whether or not to change. As Helen mentioned above, she felt it was her duty to raise the students' awareness about Canadian culture, but she did not force students to follow it. Heather expressed a similar sentiment:

> And I'm saying, "Well, yeah, although there may be a lot of similarities, we do have some differences, and you don't have to like the differences. That's up to you. You don't even have to observe them. But I want you to be aware of them. That'll make your life here a little easier, your contact with Canadians maybe a little smoother, and that's a major part of living here. So, take it in that light." (Heather, 1079-1091)

During my interview with her, Ali mentioned with distaste the fact that some students would spit in the water fountain or on the floor. When asked how she would deal with such behavior if she saw it in one of her own students, Ali demonstrated a reluctance to force students to change those behaviors which she felt might be a part of their culture. This deep respect for her students' cultures resulted in a dilemma -- should she force students to change for their own good and protection, or should she ignore their offending behavior?

> I think it would be something I would try to deal with in a private way. But, for the life of me, I'm not sure what I would say about it because, if it's somehow against their religion, tradition, or whatever, to swallow their phlegm [pause]. . . but it's really limiting as far as employment and stuff. It's very off-putting to a lot of Canadians. (Ali, 2223-2237)

Later, when talking about the same subject, Ali mentioned the importance of showing students what is or is not acceptable in Canadian society while at the same time allowing students the freedom to

choose: "And then it's up to them, whether or not they want to follow through on it" (Ali, 2484-2496).

Like Ali, Wayne struggled with this same issue. He concluded that it was important to tell students what was or was not acceptable in this culture, but that this had to be done with respect:

> There is still the problem, though, of in Canada, burping ISN'T polite. And you CAN'T say "that's okay" because it's not, you see? And eventually you have to get down to saying that in Canada, no, it's not good. And they accept that as long as they know that you are not looking down on them! All of these activities that I've mentioned before, you are participating as the teacher. You're not above them, you are in the circle. When you're in a circle, you're sitting down, you're not standing up and lording. (Wayne, 1031-1045)

When talking about a situation in which he had to tell one of his students not to spit in the garbage can in order to avoid a conflict between a Polish and Vietnamese student, Wayne said that it was something which had to be done, but that the student "[didn't] have to be looked down on in class" (Wayne, 1059-1063).

Validating students' cultures. Another way the teachers affirmed the value of their students was to demonstrate a curiosity about, or an interest in, their students' cultures. While observing classes, I noticed that the teachers, in various ways, demonstrated an interest in the students' cultures and lives. For instance, when Ali noticed that an older Vietnamese woman was eating some food which was unfamiliar to her, she asked the woman about the food. As mentioned before, the students responded most positively to this question, enthusiastically working together to explain the food to Ali. Wayne demonstrated his interest in his Polish students' country by bringing to class an excerpt from the morning's paper titled "Democracy in Poland." Trying to get a discussion going, he told them of his amazement that Walesa would be sitting beside the very people who had put him in prison a few years ago. Although the students seemed apathetic and sceptical, Wayne had clearly hoped that this would spark a discussion. Linda felt that she was able to affirm her students' values with an environmental game she had brought to class:

> And this thriftiness is something that they like, that they feel that many Canadians have not valued. So they were very pleased to see this. And they said their children were not valuing [their thriftiness] either. (Linda, 3102-3109)

A number of the teachers mentioned the importance of allowing students to talk about their cultures, especially when they were being taught about Canadian culture:

> I think I should teach them WHAT Canadians think, or what most Canadians believe in this situation, the same way as I think that students should have an opportunity to say what THEY think to each other. (Wayne, 1857-1871)

> And what do you do in your culture? So it's partially sharing, allowing them to share something from their culture, and finding out how they feel. (Ali, 2429-2444)

Eileen felt that her interest in the students' cultures kept her from imposing her Canadian viewpoint on them:

> I try to be open to their cultures, too. So I don't know if it really gets in the way that I try to impose my Canadian viewpoint on them. (Eileen, 790-794)

Helen's respect for her students and their cultures was demonstrated by the way she taught them about what behaviors were considered to be rude in Canadian culture. This could be a potentially threatening activity; however, before telling students how they should behave in Canadian culture, Helen (very diplomatically) asked students to describe how she should behave in their culture:

> I usually approach it by saying "If I were to visit China, what are the things that I do that would be considered offensive in your culture? What would you warn me against? What would you tell me not to do?" In Japan, I know that there are a lot of traditions and so on. So they start by telling me a few things that they think are not very polite. And then I say "Well, in the same fashion, there are things that Canadian people will not consider polite, and these are some of the things." (Helen, 1225-1240)

When the teachers felt that students of one culture were feeling threatened by students of other cultures, they tried to validate the weaker cultures. Wayne, for instance, described how he participated in those cultures which he felt were being threatened in the class:

> And when you affirm differences right away,...then the other

> students see that YOU say "This is okay, and this is okay, and that's okay. It's different but it's okay. (Wayne, 1012-1018)

> And maybe taking the part of a weaker culture in the class. Occasionally, some of the Asian students aren't quite as assertive as the European students, so you take their side or their part and YOU eat with chopsticks or whatever. Or, in the way you dress in class, it's better sometimes to dress not as western, not in a suit and tie, but rather dress to fit your students. I'm not saying to wear a sarong to the class, but not to be too flamboyant. (Wayne, 754-782)

Heather was very careful to ensure that she did not show any favoritism to the Polish students in her class in order to avoid giving the impression that she felt one cultural group was better than another.

> The classroom culture is to be run in English...and that's the way it's going to be. . . . The Poles would think they have an edge because we share something. The other students might think they'll be left out or that they'll get the short end of the stick because they don't share the same thing. So I make sure very early on that we're creating a common culture in the classroom that we all participate in. (Heather, 2921-2946)

Another way that teachers validated the students and their cultures was to avoid those activities or actions which they felt could be potentially threatening to their students. For instance, Ali's decision regarding whether or not to discuss birth control in her class clearly demonstrated her deep respect for the students' cultures:

> We did have the nurse come and speak to the students. We did it over three classes, and we divided the men and the women. And I decided, you know, as far as birth control, there was no point in having the forty-six year old East Indian woman go. I also decided that there was no point, really, in having a thirty-five year old woman from Hong Kong going because I think she would have been TERRIBLY embarrassed. And it would have been pointless -- she's probably not going to have any affair or anything, and she may well not get married. But if I'd had somebody in the class -- say maybe a Polish woman who was 35 years old, or maybe a Spanish woman who was 35 -- I might have just said "Would you like to go?" or "Why don't you go?" But, I knew, like with a single Lebanese woman, or a single Chinese woman, it's almost an insult or it's an embarrassment for them. (Ali, 1928-1988)

She disapprovingly described an incident (which had occurred a few years ago), in which she did not feel that students were treated with respect:

> I know years ago, we used to do birth control with ALL the students. And at one time we even used to do it just class by class, so women and men were together! There was always some discussion about whether it was appropriate, but it was just something we did. Several years ago we used to have quite a few Polish priests come. . . . At one time there was a young man who was a Polish priest. And he didn't want to go, and we just said "Well, this is on the curriculum. You have to go." And, maybe in a way, it wasn't such a bad thing. I mean, one way of looking at it is that this is something that people talk about in Canada, that is an issue in Canada. On the other hand, maybe, when it comes right down to it, it is something that he never wants to deal with and never WOULD deal with. . . . So maybe, what was the point of embarrassing him by making him go? But it was something that obviously he was offended by and didn't want to see and didn't want to know about. But we insisted. (Ali, 1990-2050)

Being Approachable and Available

As well as treating their students with respect, the teachers I interviewed described how they made themselves available to listen to and help their student: they set aside certain times to talk to students individually, they were willing to help students with their problems, and they reached out to those students who seemed to be going through difficult times.

Scheduling individual interviews. Several of the teachers mentioned that they set aside special times to talk individually with students in their classes, and it was through such personal interviews that they found out about problems of which they were previously unaware. For instance, the two East Indian women in Ali's class appeared to be quite cheerful, and it was only through an interview that Ali found out how extremely frustrated they were with their lack of progress in learning English. During mid-course interviews with another class, Ali found out about a serious problem between the Latin American and the Eastern European students in her class -- each student who came in described the problem from his or her own perspective. That the extent of this problem was a surprise to Ali is clear from the following quote:

So I though "Oh, god!" I got really quite distressed about it! I thought "Ohhhh, just when I was patting myself on the back that this class was so wonderful, then there's all these problems." (Ali, 3471-3527)

Similarly, Eileen mentioned that it was during mid-term interviews that she found out that many students were upset about a particular student who dominated the class (Eileen, 502-506). Heather mentioned the importance of scheduling individual interviews with students at the beginning of a course:

In the first week there are certain prescriptions according to the curricula we deal with, and one of the best parts of it, for me, is having interviews with the students within the first week. Individual teacher/student interviews. (Heather, [illegible]172-2208)

Although Wayne did not mention scheduling interviews with his students, his job description as part-time teacher and part-time student advisor put him in the position of often dealing individually with students who were facing problems. Like Wayne, Steve did not mention personal interviews; however, I noticed while observing his class that he set aside time to talk to students individually about their homework assignments. While students were looking over the homework assignments which had just been returned to them, Steve moved his chair so that he was sitting across from one student. Together they discussed her homework assignment. He then had similar individual conferences with about half of the other students in the classroom.

Listening, helping, and referring. A number of teachers mentioned the importance of being available to listen to and help students with the various problems they face. Steve, for instance, mentioned that he was friendly and approachable with his students -- so much so that when two of students were deciding what kind of coat to buy for winter, they chose him as their role model:

I usually keep myself apart, but I'm still friendly. I'm very approachable and most students have no problems with that. I'll give you an example of the role model I was for a couple [of students]. I bought some winter boots and a coat and I was wearing it for the first day. It was a cold winter that year, early winter. And, two weeks later, two of my students had the same type of coat. So you could see they had obviously said "Well, if HE wears the stuff, it must be all right for me to wear

> it, so now I know what to buy." And that was kind of cute. (Steve, 1293-1332)

Eileen made herself accessible to the students so that they would feel free to approach her, whatever their problem:

> If they have questions, if they have problems, or if they want to know about what to do with their child who has a kind of sickness or needs to see an eye doctor, I try to help them. So, I try to BE there for them. (Eileen, 1586-1587)

Linda also expressed a similar objective: "I think that I should be a friend to them that they can come to if they have problems" (Linda, 892-894). She told of an incident in which one of her students, quite distressed over her son's problems in school, asked if she could come over and talk:

> Her children were having some kind of trouble at school. Her little boy was daydreaming or something and her husband got upset. And she phoned and said "Oh, can I come over and talk to you?" So she came over. And she had kind of a cry and so on. And she talked about her problems. And I, you know, tried to be sort of soothing, saying "it's okay," and "don't worry about it," and "talk to the teacher." So, you know, I like to be available in case people have problems. (Linda, 892-809)

Linda gave other examples of students who had needed her help (one student who didn't know how to write a term paper, another student who felt that he had not been paid fairly -- Linda, 911-928). She felt that, by making herself available, she was providing her students with a sense of security:

> It actually doesn't happen that often. But, I think that if people feel that they could call me if they needed me, maybe that's some kind of emotional support. (Linda, 929-933)

Similarly, Heather made certain that her students at least realized that she was available to listen to and help them, even if they were not yet ready to talk about their problems.

> How do you deal with homesickness and things like that? If they are willing to talk about it, sure. And if they're not, then make all the overtures that you're a sympathetic listener. . . just be patient and encouraging. (Heather, 3759-3765, 3776)

Although Heather did not allow students to speak to her in Polish during class, she said, "if it's a personal problem, and somebody wants

to talk to me in Polish, well, that's another story" (Heather, 2929-2932).

Some of the teachers mentioned that part of their role included referring their students to others who could help them. For instance, Helen encouraged students to come to her with their questions -- and if she herself could not help them, she told them she would refer them to someone who could:

> I usually tell them to ask ANY questions they want on ANY topics they want, and not to be afraid. [I tell them] that the only stupid question is the question that is never asked because you'll never get the answer. And if they feel it's inappropriate, or they feel embarrassed, [I tell them] to ask me after class. And if I can't get the answer, [I tell them] that I will find out for them. (Helen, 2126-2150)

When her students were experiencing difficulty adjusting to their new life in Canada, Heather mentioned that she was available to refer them to someone who could help them:

> They pretty soon realize that you just need assurance that they are dealing with it, that they know that you're ready to refer them to someone who can help them out. (Heather, 3797-3814)

> Okay, if it's a sleeping disorder, then we need to refer this person to the school nurse who would then refer them to a doctor or a specialist or someone. . . . Sometimes it's counseling that's required, so we would funnel them to, say the student advisor who would then seek out counseling for them and so on. (Heather, 3720-3731)

Like Heather, Linda also mentioned the importance of referring students to people who could help them:

> Well, I think it's a shared responsibility with others, but I think often you can point people to the right person to help. (Linda, 834-837)

Referring students to people who could help them was especially important to Linda because she felt that there was a danger of ESL teachers feeling too responsible for their students. When I asked her what responsibilities she felt the ESL teacher had in helping students adjust to Canadian society, Linda advocated "pointing people to the right person" rather than trying to solve their problems:

> Like the first student I had was a refugee. I went to her house and she had nothing in her house. She had, I think, a sleeping

bag on the floor, a table, two chairs. . . . And I felt so GUILTY that she didn't have ANYthing. And, you know, I really wrestled with this for a long time. I think I gave her some old towels or something. . . . But, you see, I felt she didn't really want this. So, it's very hard to know what to do. So I really decided then, well, you have to point people to where they can get help, but it isn't really my job to do the helping.

Reaching out to students in trouble. Part of being available and helping students involved reaching out to students that they felt were having problems. In other words, the teachers interviewed did not always wait for the students to come to them with their problems.

> If I notice something is wrong, I try to say "What's the matter? You don't seem to be your usual self." (Eileen, 1382-1394)

> If I sense that it [adjustment problems] involves a number of students, then I might do a lesson in culture shock or learning to deal with a new culture. If I feel that it's only one student, and the other students seem to be happy, maybe I might take that student aside and talk to that student individually. (Eileen, 1477-1485)

> Like I mentioned before, if a student, according to all the tests that we've done in placement and diagnosis and so on is not performing according to what we think the potential is, then an interview I think would be called for. And we try to figure out why. (Heather, 3710-3731)

It was during such an interview that Heather found out that a student was having difficulty doing his homework because he had just learned that his mother had died. As Heather used classroom performance to help her determine how her students were doing, Steve used humor. When he noticed that students were not responding to his jokes, he took them aside to find out what was wrong (Steve, 1071-1079). Cheryl told of an incident in which she took the initiative to reach out to a student, an action which prevented that student from dropping out of school:

> She was trying to get into another full-time course and she told me she was taking a test and was waiting to find out whether she was accepted or not. She missed one or two classes. Well, I was quite understanding -- I knew what was going on. And then she missed two more after the date where she told me she would find out [about the test results]. And I inquired with the director at

> the school and she said "Well, why don't you phone her." So I phoned her. I knew at this time that she hadn't been accepted. I said "I'm sorry you weren't accepted, would you like to come back to class?" She said "Okay" and she came back to class. And when she walked in, within 5 minutes she was in tears. And I said "What's the matter?" And she said "I'm so embarrassed that I missed classes. I'm so ashamed." And she was also ashamed that she had not been accepted into the other program. . . . But I didn't realize that she would feel humiliated because she had missed a few classes! So that's a cultural thing that I would not have been aware of, <u>had I not reached out, I guess, personally, and spoken to her</u>. . . . She would have disappeared and I would have said "Oh well, she got a job. She went away somewhere." (Cheryl, 1746-1804)

<u>Dealing with students' concerns in the classroom</u>. Teachers also showed that they were available to listen and help by creating opportunities for students to share their feelings and problems <u>in class</u>, with other students. Some teachers seemed to feel that the language class was a place where students could feel free to express their feelings about Canadian culture:

> You can talk about physical closeness, that sort of stuff. Women going around in hair curlers in public -- is that okay? And various things like that. And what do you do in your culture? . . . Allowing them to share something from their culture, but finding out how they feel. (Ali)

Similarly, when talking about students who complained about Canada in her class, Linda noted that her classroom was one place where students could feel free to express their negative feelings about Canada:

> And it did seem to be, again, a kind of display of emotion, though they could kind of laugh about it. But you could see, once again, the whole class seemed to feel this way. And they probably felt they couldn't express it to every Canadian. . . . Maybe in class they thought there was a chance that they could vent their feelings. (Linda, 2424-2438)

Cheryl also felt that it was important that her students feel free to talk about their feelings and concerns as they learned to adjust to living in Canada. Like Linda, she felt that the language classroom was the one place where students could feel free to express those feelings

> [We] just talk about feelings, change and how you are experiencing it, parents' relationships with children and things they can accept, and how the children are losing their language and now they speak Arabic at home and the children answer in English (Cheryl, 2132-2140)

> In Abram's case, I'm sure that's isolated him from his children. . . . He's such a loving man. I think that must be really painful. And it's very interesting how a language class is perhaps the one place where that will come out. Certainly in the small classes that I deal with. (Cheryl, 2147-2169)

Wayne and Heather both described how they incorporated the problems that their students faced into their lessons, using the students concerns as topics for language learning exercises:

> The sleep problem is really really common. And you deal with that in the class. You can build a lesson around that. You can do modals with that: You should do this, you should do that. Or whatever. But [problems sleeping are] really common. (Wayne, 1606-1614)

> The kids might be having trouble with school. And that could be because of trouble at home. The children might be making unrealistic requests of the parents, and the parents feel this. Well, then we can sit and have a chat about it, make it into an exercise. (Heather, 1615-1623)

Some teachers noted that their students often found support and understanding among their classmates as they shared their concerns and problems in class:

> I'm sensitive to pain from my students, and I'm also very sensitive when they offer those kinds of stories. And I often find that the other students support them. (Cheryl, 2186-2194)

> So, I just try to bring it in and they talk together about these things and they reassure each other as well. (Heather, 1630-1633)

> Certainly one thing that brings people together or creates bonds is when somebody from Chile has a problem with daycare with three kids and is worried about it and somebody else, from Iran, can sympathize and understand it. Maybe they can help each other a little bit, make suggestions. (Ali, 3927-3954)

Developing a Relationship With the Students

The teachers I interviewed often recounted their efforts to develop a relationship, a rapport, between themselves and their students.

Lowering the barrier. Often, in order to build a rapport with their students, the teachers made an effort to minimize (at least to some degree) the barrier between teacher and student. They actively looked for ways to become "one of them," to participate in their students' lives. Wayne's desire to participate with his students became apparent as we discussed a humorous incident that had occurred during the class I observed. Wayne's class had decided together that, if anyone spoke Polish in the class, they were supposed to put a nickel in what they called the "Polish cup" (the accumulated money would then be used for a party at the end of the session). During the class, Wayne asked a student how to say a particular word in Polish. When Wayne repeated the word after the student, another student piped up -- apparently that student figured that it was now Wayne's turn to contribute to the "Polish cup"! Later, during the interview, Wayne talked about that incident:

> Yeah. That was really -- I LIKED that. I liked that. I was trying to think of that before -- how can I contribute money to that? And I could see it coming. I knew it was coming. (Wayne, 427-451)

Wayne mentioned other ways in which he participated with his students. In one instance, the purpose of his participation was to affirm the weaker cultures in his class:

> Occasionally, some of the Asian students aren't quite as assertive as the European students, so you take their side or their part and YOU eat with chopsticks or whatever. . . . In the way you dress in the class. It's better sometimes to dress, not as western, not in a suit and tie, but rather dress to fit your students. (Wayne, 763-782)

Like Wayne who participated with his students by contributing to the "Polish cup," other teachers also mentioned participating in classroom activities through the contributions they made: Ali donated

items for a rummage sale while Heather donated birthday cakes for class parties:

> One day I had a sort of mini-rummage sale from things in my basement -- I was raising money for a tea-party. So I sold it off really cheap. And I had two sets of bed sheets for a double bed, and I could have kept them at home -- it wasn't that I couldn't use them -- but I thought, "Oh, don't be silly! You can donate these." And so I did. (Ali, 322-336)

> Either at the end of the class or the beginning of the class, I might bring in a cake -- get the first birthday party. I'd bring in the cake and put on a candle and say "Well, here's what we do for birthdays." And then we do "Happy Birthday to you" and everybody gets a piece of cake. (Heather, 2316-2333)

As mentioned before, Ali participated with her students by showing an interest in their cultures. She also described how humor and touch allowed her to participate, and communicate, with the students in her class. Like Ali, Steve also used humor to build a relationship, a rapport, with his students:

> [Humor] makes the students feel comfortable, and if they can understand me and laugh at my jokes, even if they're stupid and most of them are, it shows they have an understanding, and we have a rapport. And that makes a big difference. Plus, I find that if they don't like you, they're not going to work very hard. So you try to make them like you first. That's what I do. So I do a bit of entertaining and, gee, if it presents itself, I'll do a joke. . . . So it's a rapport that we build up and it really helps in their enthusiasm. . . . Gee, you've got to have people who, [when] they know that you're coming, hopefully they're going to say "Oh, good! We've got Steve for a teacher today!" (Steve, 1080-1153)

One benefit that teachers associated with this good rapport was the idea that students would accept suggestions regarding changes in behavior from teachers they knew and trusted, from teachers who respected them. Wayne, for instance, felt that students accepted his teaching about Canadian culture because he had taken the time to build a rapport, a trust, between himself and the students. As mentioned before, he built this trust by "participating" with the students:

> And they accept that [teaching about Canadian culture] as long as they know that you're not looking down on them! (Wayne, 1037-1045)

> When you get a good class that trusts you, then you can do all sorts of neat things. Like, you can say what you think Canadians look down on. . . . You certainly wouldn't do that right away, and

> you wouldn't do it to look down on anyone. They would already have to know that you respect them. (Wayne, 1930-1934, 1947-1951)

Similarly, Helen felt that her good rapport with her students, and her careful handling of sensitive issues, made it easier for students to accept the changes in behavior which she suggested:

> And that's why I'd rather tell them, before someone else does because I usually have a good rapport and it's in class and I'm making broad generalizations. (Helen, 1259-1268)

As mentioned before, Helen gained this right to tell students "how to behave" in Canadian culture by first asking them how they felt she should behave in their culture (Helen, 1225-1240). In doing so, she took on the more humble role of a student, and, like Wayne, "participated" with the students.

Wayne considered those teachers who had not had cross-cultural experience to be relatively ineffective -- and the primary reason for this ineffectiveness (in Wayne's opinion) was that those teachers did not participate with their students; rather, they chose to maintain the barrier between themselves and the students:

> There are lots of complaints from their students. . . . Just that the teacher is no good. But when you look at the teacher, a teacher who dresses WAY better than her students, who is CLEARLY not their equal. She's clearly WAY above them in culture, in everything else. More or less not wanting to hear what the students have to say but more telling what SHE's about. I don't know. It's those kinds of people that I don't see how they can be effective. And I don't think they are. We've had a couple of them, that I know of, that aren't teaching ESL anymore. (Wayne, 2044-2074)

A few of the teachers mentioned that they developed close relationships with their students, relationships which remained long after the class had ended. Heather, for instance, described how the rapport which was developed while the class was in session sometimes continued after the class had ended:

> They'll stay in touch. If there's a good rapport between the teacher and the students, the students do stay in touch and phone and come in and see how things are going. So, towards the last days, we might trade names and phone numbers (Heather, 1358-1365)

> Well, there were some photographs taken on our last fieldtrip and

> we're expecting to hear from them and we'll probably all get together to look at the photographs! (Heather, 2353-2366)

Ali told of one student with whom she felt she could have become close friends if only she had been given the opportunity:

> A year ago, I had a student from Morocco who, in fact, was murdered by her husband. But she touched me very, very much. And I felt at the time "When she isn't my student, I would really like to have her as a friend." And she had a very different background from me. She was raised in an Arabic culture in North Africa. She had only five years of education. She married younger than I did and had three children, stayed together in her marriage longer than I did. And her background -- she was coming back to school at a very low level. So her background, her life experiences, had been very different from mine, and yet, somehow, I could relate very well to what she was saying, and I think she could do the same with me. And so it's kind of interesting. It was not talking about the superficial. It was sort of like how you relate to the world, how you perceive the world. You can have similar experiences in different cultures. And I felt very much at the time, "When she isn't in my class, I would really like to have her as a friend." And then, of course, she was killed before she even left my class. But she touched me very, very much. . . . I've had one or two experiences like that. (Ali, 1829-1892)

Similarly, Helen mentioned that some of her former students were now her closest friends:

> Helen: But my friends, if that's an indication of the kind of people I can relate to, are probably a mixture of people from different nationalities. Some are French Canadians. Some are Western Canadians. One of my best friends is Iranian. The other one is from Chile. The other one is from Yugoslavia.
>
> Sara Are all these people that you've taught?
>
> Helen: Actually, they are. Mostly people that I've taught... years and years ago. And we've become very close and we are friends. I never think of them as students. And they don't [think of me as a teacher], certainly not the way they treat me! . . . I consider them as very, very close. One of them, I always think of him as my big brother or something. We're very very close. (Helen, 537-565)

<u>Maintaining the barrier</u>. Although the teachers felt that it was important, in some ways, to bridge the barrier between teacher and student, and although they made an effort to participate with the

students and be available for the students, they still seemed to feel that some distance needed to be maintained between themselves as teachers and their students. They were friendly towards the students, but would not classify themselves as friends; approachable, but still somewhat distant. This need to maintain a distance from the students was apparent as Linda described the dilemma she felt when a student with emotional problems mentioned that maybe he should "get Christianity." Although, as a Christian, she felt that perhaps she should pass on the "good news," she also struggled with how much she should involve herself in her students' personal lives:

> And I didn't say anything. . . . I thought afterwards, I should have said something to him. But I just felt, as a teacher, in a way, how much should we really involve ourselves in people's lives? And how much should we try to influence their lives? (Linda, 671-690)

This theme also came up when I asked Linda what responsibilities she felt the ESL teacher had in helping students adjust to Canadian society. As mentioned before, she advocated "pointing people to the right person" rather than trying to solve their problems and mentioned a danger in the ESL teacher feeling too responsible for her students:

> So I really decided then, well, you have to point people to where they can get help, but it isn't really my job to do the helping. (Linda, 870-889)

Even Ali, who mentioned that she had would have liked to have had one of her students as a friend, specified that she was waiting until the class was over before this could happen ('When she isn't in my class, I would really like to have her as a friend'; Ali, 1858-1861). Clearly, like Linda, Ali recognized a need to maintain some distance between herself and those students in her class. Eileen did not consider her students to be her "friends" for two reasons: (a) she did not want to disappoint them by not fulfilling their expectations of a "friend," and (b) she was concerned about maintaining a "teacher image." Like Ali, she seemed to be more willing to be "friends" with her students only after they were no longer in her class:

> I wouldn't necessarily say "friend." Well, their understanding of "friend" is very different and that's why they get very hurt when someone says "I'm your friend" or they act as if they're friends

> because they have different expectations. . . . Well, I try to be friendly, but not necessarily their friend. I think I have to sort of maintain some kind of teacher image. . . . I try to BE there for them, but I don't know. . . . I have, in the past, gone to a student's house for dinner -- but I don't know if too much contact like that is good. . . . AFTER the class, then it's not too bad. (Eileen, 1586-1624)

Steve also mentioned that he maintained some distance between himself and the students -- one reason for this was that, apart from school, he had little in common with his students.

> I usually keep myself apart, but I'm still friendly. I'm very approachable and most students have no problems with that. . . . But I usually see myself as the guy who teaches them what he's supposed to in the LANGUAGE classroom and sometimes will have social gatherings and so on. But I've found lately that I don't really have time to spend evenings or weekends with students doing things because I'm just doing all the neat things that I do now and they don't fit in. For example, none of my students will go, on a Sunday morning, to Calgary to run a ten kilometre road race. And that's what I do! Or I'd go to the mountains. I go and stay at the Chateau Lake Louise. And most of my students don't want to spend a hundred and forty bucks a night! That sort of thing. So, I don't often do things with students unless there's a party and it's planned and we all go. (Steve, 1293-1332)

Like Steve, Cheryl cited the lack of outside contact with her students as one reason why she did not consider them to be her friends:

> Well, I tend not to have a chummy relationship with them. . . . For me to be a friend means for me to be connected, in some way, outside of the classroom, and we have no opportunity [for that], the students and I. We live in different worlds and I don't encounter them at any other time. So, I FEEL friendly towards them, but it's not necessarily a "friend" relationship. (Cheryl, 3929-3947)

Perhaps related to Eileen's need to maintain a "teacher image" was Cheryl's concern to protect her authority or position as teacher. When asked if she would rather teach a multi-cultural class than a mono-cultural class, Cheryl responded

> Absolutely! Every time! They could gang up on me if they were all from one culture! [laughter] It's safer when there's lots of different cultures. Oh yes! Oh yes! And it also protects the teacher's position of authority, if you want me to be totally honest! [laughter]. . . . If they were all going to gang up and say, mount a palace revolt or whatever, it would be much easier if

> they were all of the one culture than it is when there's many different cultures. (Cheryl, 3537-3538)

Avoiding Misunderstandings

Misunderstandings between themselves and the students, and ways to avoid them, were concerns among the teachers interviewed in this study.

Recognizing the potential for misunderstandings. The teachers recognized the potential for misunderstanding between themselves and their students, and they gave examples of misunderstandings which had occurred in their classes.

In Linda's case, it was the consistent politeness and agreeableness of her Asian students which made it difficult for her to determine how they felt, what they thought. At the beginning of the first interview, Linda seemed to view the politeness of the students as positive, as one of the perks in her job: "Chinese people never seem to complain! So nice to teach them." However, it later became apparent during the interview that this politeness and respect had a negative side as well -- it made it difficult for her to determine what her students were really thinking or feeling. That this was indeed an important issue to Linda is evident from the following quotations:

> It's hard to say [how they feel]. And again, they're always so pleasant and friendly and so on. (Linda, 2281-2284)

> It's of course hard to know what people are thinking (Linda, 1187-1194)

> People are always sitting here nodding, no matter what you do. (Linda, 1300-1304)

> And it's hard to tell whether people are enthusiastic or not. You know, one reads people's minds, but sometimes you can't really tell. . . . I've heard that in Chinese culture people are not supposed to be negative. They're not supposed to show negative feelings. And they're not supposed to let the teacher know if they don't like things. But of course, it's hard to tell (Linda, 2220-2240)

> But you can see how, like when I said "Did you want to play the game?" it fell kind of silent. And then one person said "Oh,

yeah. I liked the game." And then another [said] "If there's time." Sure. But then, did they really want [to play the game]? Or did they not want to? Or did just one or two want to? It's very hard to tell. (Linda, 1850-1859)

Well, I do think they are awfully positive -- They don't really like to say negative things. And I've heard it said in our school, since they are mostly Chinese, that often they don't say anything to the teacher if they don't like [the class]. (Linda, 2731-2756)

I mean, how do I know what's really going on? (Linda, 236-239)

In a different setting, Eileen described the dilemma she faced when a student offered her a gift after writing the exam. Because she was not sure of the student's motivation (she felt that the student <u>may</u> have been attempting to bribe her), she was not sure whether she ought to accept the gift:

Eileen [She gives the gift] as soon as she's finished writing the exam, the very last day. So, it might just be a token of appreciation for the class, but it might be a bribe.

Sara So it's hard to know

Eileen Yes. Because she was always borderline pass, and she didn't pass all the levels. And one time she missed a lot of class and she came with a gift. She said "Sorry I missed all the lessons. Here's a gift.." . . . I didn't feel that I could accept it so I explained to her that, if it was a gift out of appreciation, and I realized it, then it might be okay. But if I see that she's trying to bribe, then I don't feel comfortable doing it. . . . It's an awkward situation because here they have a gift for you, but you realize that there might be ulterior motives, and then to think, at that moment, what you should do, is difficult. (Eileen, 929-983)

Sometimes it was the students' over-sensitivity combined with language difficulties that led to misunderstandings. Cheryl, for instance, told the story of a woman with whom she had had a serious misunderstanding:

I had a really, really serious misunderstanding with one of my students about mentally handicapped people. This woman was from Uruguay, and she's been in Canada for 10 years. And I thought she understood fairly well what was being said. She assured me that she understood everything that was being said. We had arranged a trip to the L'Arche Enterprises which is a sheltered workshop, basically, for mentally handicapped. And they encouraged people

to come and volunteer. . . . So we were organizing this as a trip. And the woman from Uruguay -- who had also told me that she was suffering from depression and had been to the doctor -- she sat in class and she got gloomier and gloomier until finally there were tears in her eyes. And finally, towards the end of the class, she said "Are you calling me mentally defective?"! And I thought "Oh, geez! She's obviously somehow connected the two!" And I thought "Oh, how could I have done that!?" But it was, I think, a language and a communication problem. Everyone else in the class picked it up, but maybe she was especially sensitive. But, in any case, the possibilities for misunderstanding in language classes are enormous! (Cheryl, 2710-2749)

At other times the misunderstandings were the result of the different cultural expectations of the teacher and the student. For instance, Cheryl told of a misunderstanding which occurred between herself and a Muslim student in her class because of cultural/dietary differences:

> And when [a Muslim student] refused the offering of the Vietnamese person, quite bluntly because it was pork, I (foolishly, I could just kill myself!) I said "Oh, go ahead. Try some!" He said "I don't eat pork." I thought "Oops!" Right! And then I remembered that that was a cultural thing. (Cheryl, 1378-1406)

Because of her cultural background, Heather was sometimes placed in the unique situation of interceding between Eastern European students and their Anglo-Canadian teachers when misunderstandings resulted in conflicts. Heather identified the differences between Canadian understatement and Eastern European bluntness as being the primary cause of misunderstandings between these teachers and students:

> Poles might come across as seeming really boorish and ill-mannered when they give their opinions. It comes across to the Anglo-Canadian as if it's like a fact of law and should be taken for granted. I mean, black is black and white is white. But that's not what is meant. I mean, if they said the same thing in Polish, it would come across as TOTALLY appropriate, acceptable. . . . A teacher might come to me and say "Uh, this guy has kind of caused dot dot dot dot dot, and I'm not so sure why." And if it's possible, then I might say "Well, look, would you like me to talk to the student and maybe I can give you an impression of how it came across in Polish." And a couple of times I was able to provide some serious insight there. And it was MISunderstanding -- not misunderstanding the words, but misunderstanding of HOW it was being communicated. (Heather, 1154-1203)

> Well, I know in cases where I've interpreted, I've seen just so many misinterpretations on the part of the teacher that, although

> the words were translated and the student's command of English was good enough, this non-language thing really colored the teacher's response to that student. And that was, in most cases, really unfortunate. With the East Europeans in particular, it'll be this abruptness. . . . They're more likely to sound like they're insulting us. (Heather, 2521-2534, 2559-2560)

A conversation which I observed between Cheryl and one of her students as we were leaving her class also illustrates the potential for misunderstandings as a result of language and cultural barriers. Chada, an East Indian student, was attempting to hold a conversation with Cheryl. Cheryl, however, was ready to leave. In order to close the conversation, she said things like "That's nice, Chada. Well, we'll see you next week." and "Okay. Well, I'll see you at the next class." In spite of the fact that these obvious 'dismissing' signals were repeated three or four times, Chada kept talking, and it seemed that Cheryl was getting a little frustrated. When we talked about this during the interview, I mentioned the idea that perhaps Chada was just not catching the hints that any native speaker would immediately be aware of. Although this was a new idea to Cheryl, she responded, "That's true. That's true. Yeah, that's right. He just didn't pick up the clues" (Cheryl, 901-903). Later Cheryl mentioned that it was often difficult to determine whether students were in the correct class level. She suggested that one possible reason for this lack of clear communication was the possibility that she may not have been picking up on students' culturally determined signals of mis-comprehension:

> Yeah, I've had the experience of teaching below the level of a class and beyond the level of a class, and it's funny how you don't pick that up until well on into the situation. (Cheryl, 1121-1126)

> What I am assuming to be, um, simply a question of communication with students, may in fact be not picking up on the cultural difference and therefore not seeing the signals of mis-comprehension. Do you see what I mean? (Cheryl, 3403-3412)

Avoiding unintentionally offending students. Related to the potential for misunderstanding in the classroom was the idea that it was often terribly easy to unintentionally offend or hurt students. In

some cases, the teachers' fear of unintentionally hurting or offending students was demonstrated in a reluctance to criticize their students. Eileen, for instance, avoided over-correcting her students:

> I think that they can be offended. Sometimes when I correct them -- I try not to overcorrect, but sometimes it is necessary in their pronunciation -- and sometimes I can see a hurt look, almost, on their faces. Or a frustrated look. Not at all times, but sometimes. So, of course, language learning is a very sensitive type of instruction. (Eileen, 829-838)

While observing her class, I noticed that Eileen was very tactful when correcting students. When she asked if anybody knew the meaning of "fascinating," one student responded "It means emotion." Eileen did not correct the student, but accepted his answer and asked if anyone else could add to his definition. Similarly, when a student suggested that "practical" meant "well trained," Eileen again accepted his answer and asked others to build on it. When I mentioned what I had observed to Eileen during our interview, she told me why she was so careful:

> Because I think it should be as comfortable [as possible]. And if they always hear "No. No. No." then they're just going to hold back and no one's going to dare to answer. So, if I can say that it's partially true, then I do that. (Eileen, 839-882)

During our interview, Eileen mentioned an incident in which she had asked a student to speak less in class because she was intimidating other students. Eileen's tactful treatment of this student again demonstrated her concern that the student not be hurt or offended by what she had to say. Her suggestion to the student was couched in a compliment, and was so worded that the requested change in behavior appeared to be a team effort between herself and her student:

> I took her aside and I tried to make it a team effort. I said "You're very good verbally and you intimidate some of the students." I said "Why don't we both make it a project that you tend to hold back a little bit more and in that way we can encourage some of the quieter students to talk." (Eileen, 590-604)

Somewhat related to Eileen's diplomacy was the reluctance of a few teachers to confront students who demonstrated behavior which would be considered "rude" in Canadian society. Eileen, for instance, mentioned that she would be careful not to insult students when dealing with this type of behavior ("I would not want to insult him in front of the other

students. Maybe I'd call him outside"; Eileen, 1005-1008). Ali also mentioned that she would deal with such behavior privately with the student -- again, she was reluctant to do anything that might potentially offend a student (Ali, 2223-2237). Cheryl's reluctance to confront students demonstrating "rude" behaviors also seemed to be rooted in a desire not to hurt or offend students:

> And [when] they eat together, my aunt is appalled, just APPALLED at her table manners, and wants to tell her but finds she can't! And I found that was the same thing when we are actually eating together (Cheryl, 2437-2442)

Wayne mentioned that he would not even deal with such behavior unless he felt that it was bothering somebody in the class (Wayne, 876-883).

In a somewhat different situation, Cheryl mentioned her fear of hurting the feelings of a student whose English was too low for her class. Because she did not want to give him the "wrong" message, Cheryl did not insist that he move to a more appropriate class:

> And [the program coordinator] said to me, she said "You know, we made a mistake putting him in [your class]. If you don't want him in there, we'll just tell him." And I thought "Oh gee, that's the message that he has failed, and I don't think that's that important -- that's not important enough to give him that message. (Cheryl, 1069-1078)

Eileen's effort to avoid using the word "friend" to describe her relationship with her students also seemed to be related to her desire to avoid potentially hurtful misunderstandings (Eileen, 1587-1596).

Ali mentioned that, although she would touch the women in her class, she avoided touching the men because she was concerned about giving them the "wrong message":

> With Isaac, certainly I don't [touch him] even now, whereas with a woman I would maybe put my hand on her hand and sort of talk to her that way or something. I won't do that with him! Uh, I'll nudge him in the ribs or I'll put my hand on his shoulders and say "OK, now go do this!" or something. But there's sort of some sort of touching, a different sort of touching. Because he's silly enough and macho enough without any encouragement, without the slightest encouragement. (Ali, 1725-1747)

> With Tuk, I didn't want to touch him a lot because I didn't want to be patronizing. Because I thought there was this sort of touching coming from the women, I didn't think that it would be misunderstood and that it might facilitate things. But I was

> quite conscious of NOT doing it with the men, particularly Isaac and Peter. Peter, because I thought maybe he was a little bit standoffish, and maybe because he was male and Oriental, and it wouldn't help him. And with Isaac, because he's kind of macho I thought, "well, it wouldn't help ME!" I mean, I thought it could get misconstrued -- the boundaries of what it means get all screwed up. (Ali, 1445-1475)

Cheryl mentioned that she avoided gestures which she felt might be offensive to her students. However, it is interesting to note that Cheryl found a partial knowledge of her students' cultures (in the area of body language) to be more of a hindrance than a help -- her fear of inadvertently offending her students became rather inhibiting:

> In one culture class that I took, somebody pointed out a cultural difference of which I was not aware. It had to do with which hand you passed with. In one culture it was extremely rude to pass things with your left hand because that was associated with bathroom functions for some reason. And it has made me very self-conscious about which hand I'm passing things to people from which culture. But I didn't remember which hand was for which! So it has succeeded in making me more self-conscious. (Cheryl, 3010-3030)

> Some fellow did a class on gestural body language, too, and made me sort of self-conscious of my gestures. So, when I'm in a really mixed class, I try not to make gestures because I'm not sure how they're going to be interpreted! (Cheryl, 3074-3081)

Cheryl found that she was most concerned about unknowingly offending Middle Eastern students:

> Cheryl I find that I am inclined to be aware of walking on eggs with Muslims, Afghans, Arabs -- people about whose cultures I know very little. So that I do have a sort of sensitive [pause]. . . I feel that way. I don't know whether I'm doing things wrongly and I haven't been told.
>
> Sara Sort of worried about offending them?
>
> Cheryl Unknowingly. Yeah. (Cheryl, 3033-3044)

This concern to not offend others could go both ways -- sometimes it was the students who were concerned about not offending their teachers. In Cheryl's class, for instance, a student was quite distressed because he thought he had unintentionally offended her:

> I had a Chinese student from mainland China. He was probably in his late forties or early fifties. Just brand new arrived -- within months he was in my class. Every day [when] he came to

> class (it was the winter) he wore his hat. He sat through the whole [illegible] with his hat on. Finally, after maybe a month of class [illegible] came to me with his hat in his hand, apologizing PROFUSELY for having worn his hat in my class. And I looked at him and said "I don't understand. Why are you apologizing? I thought you were cold!" And he said another Chinese student had told him it was very rude to wear your hat indoors, in our culture, and that he ought not to do that. And he said that for him it was a sign of RESPECT to wear his hat in class!

Cheryl mentioned that both she and her Chinese students took extra care to ensure that they not misunderstand each other:

> And I have had my Chinese students breach the barrier themselves, take me by the hand, take me to what they wanted me to see, to make sure I understood -- because they were having trouble communicating. And I do the same with them. If I sense they are not following what I'm doing, I will go and I will point and I will show and I will be very precise with them. I tend to disregard their nods. Yes. I tend to disregard that. I do. If I'm particularly anxious that a point be communicated, I don't just look at the nod of the head anymore. And I do single out my Chinese or East Asian students in that respect. For example, if my Polish students nod yes, I take it as a "Yes", but if my Chinese students nod yes, I'll be more inclined to make sure: "Have you got the right page?" and I'll look down and make sure. (Cheryl, 2980-3006)

Reserving judgement. One precaution which teachers took in order to avoid misunderstandings in the classroom was to avoid making assumptions about their students. Heather, for instance, identified "jumping to conclusions" as one factor in the misunderstandings between Anglo-Canadians and their Eastern European students (Heather, 1182-1182). Later on Heather mentioned that she avoided "jumping to conclusions too quickly" when working with those students who were from cultures with which she was unfamiliar. Wayne also emphasized the importance of not making assumptions about the students:

> I think that in the class you have to almost assume that you don't know anything sometimes. . . . How can I say this right? You can't assume things of your students. You can't assume that, "Okay, now we're going to do 'where are you from?' and point to where you come from on the map" because you can't assume that they know maps. You can't. If you start out assuming nothing (that's not right, either, though, because you have to assume that they're intelligent). But a lot of the assumptions that we have when we meet people in our own circles don't work. Especially in

> educational background, historical background, and cultural background. Like, if you say "Tomorrow we're going to bring a cake and coffee into the class," you can't assume that [they will eat it]. Maybe the Polish people won't eat the cake unless there's a fork there. Or maybe some other people won't eat it BECAUSE there's a fork there. You can't assume things like that. And, when there are other cultures in the classroom, then you have to be aware that there's a good chance that they will assume certain things. So, you have to make them aware, somehow, of each other's cultures without making it embarrassing. (Wayne, 687-731)

One reason Wayne advocated not making assumptions was to avoid inadvertently "putting down" those students down who did not fulfill those assumptions or expectations. Not making assumptions, therefore, was one means of 'validating' or building up students:

> One time we were doing past continuous, and [the question in the textbook was] was "What were you doing when John Kennedy died?" That was the question! And if I as the teacher would have gone ahead and just said "Okay, Heung, what were you doing when John Kennedy died?" and he would have said "Who's John Kennedy?" But, in that way, you would have kind of put all the people who know who John Kennedy was on a higher plateau than all the students who don't know who he was. So, first, we had to kind of be aware that maybe some students don't know who John Kennedy is, so you can explain that, or even ask a student. And that's not plateauing -- if you ask a student, "Who knows who John Kennedy is?" one student can show off. That's okay! So, in those kinds of things, being aware of some of the assumptions in the books, too. Sometimes you play really dumb. As a teacher you play like you don't know anything. . . . Like, you're really elevating any student who has knowledge. Like, "Oh, you know this? Great!" "Oh, you know John Kennedy? Oh, that's good!" Or, when you start doing restaurants in the classroom, you assume they know nothing and then some of them know something. "Oh good! You know!" Instead of starting at this level and then going down. Yeah. Start at zero. (Wayne, 1173-1226)

Cheryl also mentioned that she tries "not to make any assumptions about what the people know about our culture or what I know about their culture" (Cheryl, 209-213). Cheryl related an incident in which she had made what she felt were unwarranted assumptions about her students' educational backgrounds. The students had been involved in an activity in which they cooked a meal together:

> I presumed that they had more education than they did in one instance. One [student] had NO IDEA about the difference between quarters and thirds and halves and wholes -- it made no sense in fact! So it really pointed out to me some of the assumptions that

> I was making. Because they were adults I assumed that they had been through grades 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 and would know that. I forgot that many of them had been in war situations and turfed out of school and lived in the jungle and done all those things. (Cheryl, 3649-3667)

> And learning about ingredients. What's a currant?. . . . It pointed out MY [assumptions] -- the things that I knew that I thought they would know but didn't know. (Cheryl, 3705-3710)

To Ali, not making assumptions was connected to the need to accept students as they were:

> I sort of have to try to suspend my expectations, and sort of accept them as they are. (Ali, 2947-2950)

## Helping Students Get Along With Each Other

How students related to each other in the classroom was an important concern among the teachers interviewed. The students' ability (or lack thereof) to get along with each other had a profound effect on the atmosphere of the entire class: when they did get along, the students had the potential of providing each other with a needed support system; when they did not get along (as a result of prejudice, cultural differences, or misunderstandings), the learning atmosphere in the classroom often suffered. First we will examine the teachers' perceptions of potential problems in student interaction, and then we will look at what the teachers did to encourage students to get along with each other.

### Teachers' Perceptions of Student Interaction

Teachers mentioned that, at times, students in their classrooms did not get along with each other. Generally, the conflicts and cliques were caused by prejudice, cultural differences, or misunderstandings among the students -- all of which were exacerbated by the oversensitivity of students experiencing adjustment problems.

Prejudice. Each participant mentioned that he or she had

encountered prejudice and discrimination in the classroom, although some noted that this was not necessarily a common experience. Certain cultural groups were known for disliking other cultural groups of students:

> There are problems, sometimes, between students of different cultures. Sometimes, I suppose, Eastern Europeans don't want to be in a class with a whole bunch of Vietnamese because they think they are better. Like, I gather in Eastern Europe that there really aren't all that many Oriental people, so they tend to think. . . . Once, a long time ago, I had this sort of alcoholic Polish man who would sort of come out of his haze and say "I don't like those yellow people." And then I'd say "Just go back to sleep." And he was just IGNORANT. He was an ignorant man. And quite often there's a little bit of standoffishness or a little bit of superiority on the part of the Eastern Europeans over the Orientals. Or the Polish people tend to think, because their pronunciation is better, they don't want to have to work in a group with the Vietnamese. And sometimes the Spanish people don't want to be in a class with -- I forget who they don't like. It's also an individual thing, too. It sometimes depends on how snobby they are, or how insolent they are in their own culture, because there certainly are great exceptions to it, too! (Ali, 2078-2115)

Although Linda's classes were almost entirely made up of Oriental students, she also mentioned that she had encountered discriminatory attitudes even among students who shared similar ethnic backgrounds:

> One interesting thing is that one time we had a woman from China who was kind of a little bit crude in her manners. And nobody seemed to want to have anything to do with her. . . . She probably was from some kind of a social class or she somehow revealed herself in some way that other people thought she wasn't their type -- she was kind of a non-academic type or whatever it was. But I noticed that when I'd say "Get a partner" people wouldn't choose her. I'd have to say "Now, you go with her" and so on. You somehow think of this in terms of Chinese or non-Chinese students. It was kind of interesting that the same thing was happening between Chinese. (Linda, 205-223)

Although Linda seldom confronted racial prejudice in her own classroom, she had heard rumors of such prejudice at other institutions:

> And I'd be interested to know whether this comes up because one of my Polish students [who was a student at another institution], said something about how hard it was to understand Chinese students. And one of my Chinese students told me once that she didn't like to go to [that school] because people there didn't like to talk to Chinese students. Since I got it from these two places, I just was curious to know whether [pause] (Linda, 72-89)

At the time of the interview, Steve mentioned that he was becoming more and more aware of prejudice among the students. He mentioned the surprise he felt when he realized that non-white students could be prejudiced against other students:

> Lately I've been noticing that the prejudices are coming out and it seemed to happen [pause] -- maybe it just came to me because I read somewhere in the newspaper that the Chinese were fighting in China against the black students. They had a big riot in Northern China. And I thought "That's strange! I never thought that a Chinese person could be prejudiced against a black person!" But then this opens up a whole new area because I thought only white people were prejudiced! So, obviously I have my own prejudices about that -- the way I think about who should be, if indeed anybody should be, prejudiced. So that really opened my eyes. And I started noticing it more in my classes. (Steve, 294-315)

Steve then described one recent incident which illustrated the prevalence of bigotry in the ESL classroom:

> This Mexican girl comes out of the class and says she's not happy in this class. She finds that she can't understand the Chinese students when they speak English. That was okay, I suppose, because some of them don't speak very clearly. So she went up to the next course. She went into [the classroom] with the teacher. She turned around. Opened her eyes with surprise, and turned to the teacher and said, in front of everybody, "They're all Chinese!" And this went on right in front [of the class]! So this gives you an idea of what's going on here. A lot of the Eastern Europeans who are blond and blue eyed, I think they still have their little bit of Aryan supremacy in them and they can't see that these Orientals are worth much, especially for friendships. And also, I'm sure the Chinese, who consider themselves brighter than the others, for the most part, look down on us. And just talking to the other instructors the other day, that's what they're saying. (Steve, 294-351)

Steve felt that some students had brought with them attitudes of superiority which had been ingrained in them for generations. He found these attitudes to be difficult to change:

> When I'm talking about "Some people think that they're better than others because they're a different color or a different social standing, where they come from, and so on," some people will sit there, listening to this, not taking any heed because as far as they're concerned, they KNOW they are superior. So, this talk is all rubbish because the world wasn't created equal and they are superior to these people. For example, somebody comes out of the jungles of Cambodia and is compared to somebody who has blue blood in them from the Polish aristocracy for five or six hundred years. That person could sit there and smugly think that they're

> superior to that other person, especially if the Cambodian is hard to understand. And maybe the Pole is hard to understand, too, but he or she thinks that they're not. And they get this attitude sometimes. (Steve, 1646-1675)

The teachers found that students of one background often refused to work with students of another background, and part of this problem seemed to be related to the fact that students from different linguistic backgrounds often had a difficult time understanding each other. For instance, Steve found that Polish students seldom voluntarily talked to the Asian students in his class:

> The Poles. When the Poles get together in a class, and you've got five Poles and six or ten Orientals, the Poles will stick together at the coffee breaks. You'll rarely see one go across the room to join the other groups. It's always the same thing: "I can't understand what he's saying!" And I'm sure the Chinese are thinking "Who do these Poles think they are?" And that's the way it works. (Steve, 398-410)

Eileen mentioned that she experienced the same problem:

> I don't know if this is also prejudice, but often I'll have students who come to me and say "I don't really want to be with the Chinese people because they don't express themselves as well." (Eileen, 608-624)

Heather described how students in one class refused to alter their seating arrangements -- and part of the problem seemed to be related to the differences in language and culture in the classroom:

> They said "We need to be in this position because we see the blackboard better this way!" You know, really! If you're on one side of the classroom, and you're equidistant from the blackboard, it shouldn't really matter! . . . It was because of quirks, and maybe it was a little bit of defiance to the teacher, who knows? And it seemed that there was an imbalance of language and culture involved. (Heather, 1423-1447)

Prejudice or superiority among a few students was seen to be detrimental to the atmosphere of the whole class. It was Ali's experience, for example, that any type of superiority could place a damper on the classroom atmosphere, especially with regard to the use of humor:

> Certainly sometimes you have to be really careful about how they are to each other. It can create quite a bit of tension. Like, if there's any sort of sense of superiority or something, then joking doesn't go over very well. It really cuts it dead for

everyone because you can't tease each other if it can be misconstrued, if you don't really accept the other person. And that happens quite often. And to some extent it has to do with ignorance. To some extent it has to do with isolation, I suppose, from other cultures. (Ali, 2129-2145)

She told the story of how the attitudes of two Eastern European women towards Oriental students had inhibited the atmosphere of an entire class:

> The atmosphere was just DREADFUL in the class. The Polish woman was a little bit stuck up, but the Rumanian woman was just plain miserable. She was miserable about Canada. She was just a MISERABLE woman. And I think, for both the Polish and Rumanian woman, it's FAIRLY typical of them to be stuck-up about Orientals, to think that they're better and be sort of insulted to be in a class with a whole bunch of them, or they don't want to work in pairs with them. That's not atypical. There are certainly Rumanians and Poles who ARE cooperative and will work well, but there are certainly an awful lot of them that won't or find it very difficult (Ali, 3323-3348)

This attitude of superiority on the part of the Rumanian woman may have been exacerbated by adjustment problems, as she was extremely negative about everything and her pride seemed to be threatened. Ali found that the Oriental people in her class eventually isolated the Rumanian woman. She mentioned that, although this type of incident was not particularly common, when it did occur the consequences could affect the well-being of the entire class:

> But it really puts a damper on things. Intimidates people if somebody thinks they're superior. You can joke around as long as people are going to accept it. But if somebody's always going to be saying "Oh, you're so stupid" or "that's silly" or something, then. . . . She was quite a miserable woman, but certainly put a damper on things. I guess, lots and lots of times in class you don't have that problem, but it's not all that uncommon, either. And all it takes is one person. (Ali, 3377-3419)

<u>Cultural differences causing prejudice</u>. It was the experience of some of the teachers I interviewed that the cultural differences between students often precipitated, or caused, the prejudice among the students.

> Sometimes we've had some conflicts where one student may get quite angry at another student because of something that's okay in their

> culture but it's considered rude in someone else's culture. (Eileen, 468-474)

Steve told of an incident in which his Polish students felt that a Korean student had reacted inappropriately (and quite unexpectedly) to a comment by a Polish student -- and this inappropriate reaction brought out the latent prejudices of the Polish students:

> So I had a fight. Had to break it up. And after that, I think the Polish students in the class -- you could see the prejudice against the Orientals, especially this Korean guy, because he was so DIFFERENT in that reaction. They saw that he was a completely different person from the student, the classmate, they had seen before. Now he was a REAL foreigner: "This guy's strange!" I think that's what happened. . . . They didn't mind [him before], they didn't seem to, anyway. But some groups of people will have all this latent prejudice, and it will come out. And in that case it really came out. (Steve, 1596-1622)

Helen mentioned that the different cultural expectations regarding body odor, and spitting (etc.) could result in prejudice among the students:

> Sometimes people get very offended and they look like that [Helen demonstrated an expression of scorn]. And that's why we sort of have to address it. If it isn't a problem, I don't bring it up. We talk about cultural differences. People not wanting to work in groups with those other people. Or sit next to them. And I can't blame them because some of them really smell! (Helen, 1322-1332)

Similarly, Wayne described an incident in which a Polish student was offended with the behavior of a Vietnamese student:

> In one class I remember, a Vietnamese student was always getting up and spitting into the garbage can! And it was really annoying to one Polish student. And it wasn't a polite request. He really looked down on that. (Wayne, 1031-1063)

Ali also felt that this could be a potential problem, but in her current class she felt that her students displayed a commendable level of tolerance:

> One of the things that is somewhat cultural is the funny habits the students have, like the Cambodian woman. I don't know what she does, but she's not all that healthy and every now and then, well, she spits out something. But she goes to the garbage can and is fairly discreet about it. . . . And, like the East Indian women. It's not that they're so culturally superior, and actually, they've been pretty tolerant. But I have seen, especially the one who's somewhat better educated, I can see a couple of times that they go [grimace of distaste]. And she's a bit taken aback by that sort of behavior. (Ali, 2146-2178)

Ali's previous class had included both El Salvadorian and Polish students. During her mid-course interviews, Ali discovered that her El Salvadorian students were quite distressed because they felt that the Polish students were prejudiced against two of the El Salvadorian students:

> When I started the interviews, the first person I spoke to was this lovely mid-forties woman from El Salvador. She had been a teacher. And she started with tears in her eyes. She said, "Oh, I feel badly for poor Jose." There was this sort of peasant Jose, this big galoot that just sat there like a lump and looked like he was uneducated -- he felt he was uneducated. Just this big guy that sat like a lump. And she said "Oh, I feel so badly for him He's such a humble man. People don't understand that, and Tony and Beata make fun of him." I said "Ohhh, I know there's a problem with [Tony]." And she said "Well, I know they're young, but they're rude." She gave me an example of how Beata seemed to push her chair away and didn't want to sit near him. And I said "Well, I hadn't noticed anything with Beata" -- although I wasn't that surprised. But I said "I was going to speak to Tony anyway."
>
> So then the next person [a Latin American] comes in and says "Oh, I'm worried about Jose, he's a humble man." Another person came in. He was worried about [the woman who first came in worried about Jose] -- "She's a humble woman, you know"! So, someone was worried about her because she felt intimidated by these two people. It was all Tony and Beata. So I though "Oh, god!" I got really quite distressed about it! I thought "Ohhhh, just when I was patting myself on the back that this class was so wonderful, then there's all these problems. (Ali, 3471-3527)

Ali's account of her interview with Beata provided an entertaining and clear illustration of how a relatively insignificant cultural difference could cause such a major division in an ESL class:

> But the funniest thing [happened]. Beata was a very attractive young Polish woman who dressed in expensive clothes and everything. She was the last one I interviewed. And I said to her, "Is there anything you like or don't like about the class?" She said "I don't like the two Joses!" [laughter]. I just sort of looked at her and I said "Ohhhh????" And she said "They wear HATS!" And I said "Yes????" And I said "I see that's really upsetting you." And she said "Well, I've never seen anything like that before! Do you think that's okay? I think that's just terrible! Do you think that's okay?" And I said, "Well, frankly, it really doesn't bother me." The one Jose was this peasant guy, and he would wear this ski cap with the flaps down and stuff, and he would sit there like this bit galoot. He wouldn't take his hat

> off, but I don't know -- I didn't care one way or another! The other guy, also a Jose, was this soft macho guy from El Salvador also. And he wore a racing cap sometimes. And he'd wear dark sun-glasses, sometimes, and other times he'd wear them hanging from his shirt and wear his shirt unbuttoned to his navel and stuff. And he was kind of fun[illegible] kind of hopping around. Certainly he did his homework, he was attentive, and he participated. And I said, "You know, if he didn't participate or something, maybe I would take his wearing a [illegible] sign that he wasn't interested or a sign of disrespect, but I [illegible] nothing about it!" [She said] "Well! I've never seen anything like that! It's just AWFUL!" Anyway, I said "Well, on Monday we're going to have a new seating plan" so that [the Salvadorian woman] didn't have to look at the two Polish people and so that the two Polish people didn't have to look at the two Joses! But it ABSOLUTELY dumbfounded me when she said "I don't like the two Joses that wear hats!" And it was based on that! And I said how absolutely ABSURD! I mean RIDICULOUS! But it was really a big thing for her! I mean, it was so silly, but really a big thing for her. And certainly her unspoken disdain! They felt it. They knew it! I think, actually, the one Jose didn't know it at all, and I'm not even sure that the other Jose even cared! But OTHER people noticed, and felt it and were intimidated and didn't like it. Yeah. You get these funny vibes for the strangest reasons. And it could be hidden for awhile. I mean, it's funny, all right! They bring their problems; they bring their biases -- it's really such a treat when you really meet somebody who's very accepting of all sorts of people. But that's part of the job! (Ali, 3550-3625)

Although the two students being discriminated against were either unaware or unconcerned, clearly Ali felt that the biases of the two students had profoundly affected the class as a whole.

Misunderstandings among students. As mentioned previously, teachers were concerned about the potential for communication problems, misunderstandings, in the ESL class. However, their concern was not limited to misunderstandings between themselves and their students; they also felt that there was a great potential for misunderstandings between students of different cultures. Misunderstandings were common in the ESL class because of the cultural differences among the students, the over-sensitivity of students experiencing adjustment difficulties, and the language barrier. One teacher suggested that many of the interaction problems in the classroom could be traced back to misunderstandings:

> Lots of the problems in the classroom that come up are communication problems, misunderstandings (Wayne, 1284-1295)

I noticed, while observing Eileen's class, that she seemed to be quite concerned that the students not offend each other unintentionally. The students were doing a group activity that involved following directions in order to analyze each other's handwriting. As the students analyzed their classmates' handwriting, Eileen walked around the class, reading what the students were writing. After reading what two girls had written, she suggested that perhaps they should consider changing what they had written because it "might sound funny." Later, when the personality analyses and handwriting samples had been handed back to their owners, Eileen told the students that "It's all FUN. Don't take it seriously!" -- and she repeated these phrases three or four times. When I asked her about this during the interview, Eileen responded:

> I was looking around the class and I saw that some of them wrote "This person is very shy" or "This person almost cannot be trusted." And things like that. So I was worried that, if comments like that would come out, that students would be offended. . . . I want it to be a comfortable learning environment, and if they feel threatened, or if they think that "Oh, I'm labeled as shy" then that would sort of impede their learning. (Eileen, 806-824)

Teachers mentioned that cultural differences among students could precipitate misunderstandings in the class. Eileen, for instance, was concerned that students might unintentionally offend each other with their reactions to different ethnic foods:

> We had a party and they tried all sorts of different foods, but they blatantly despised some of the food. They showed it on their face! And I thought, "Oh, this might be insulting!" (Eileen, 1290-1297)

She also felt that the "loudness" or exuberance of students from some cultures could also be misunderstood by students from more reserved cultures:

> There was an Italian lady. A wonderful lady, but she could talk very fast. And she almost made the other students feel a little bit bad because her English was so good. . . . She would make the other students feel uncomfortable. But it was, I think, part of her Italian culture that she's so expressive and dynamic. And a

> lot of the students almost thought that she was angry because of the way she expressed herself -- very loud, very forceful, very direct. (Eileen, 536-555)

> Well, there are some Europeans [who] tend to be more loud. They speak with a louder voice. And you can tell that some of the Asian students almost sit back like they want to ward off this loud noise! So, also, when some people speak forcefully, you can just sense that people are putting their arms across themselves and they kind of feel more uncomfortable. (Eileen, 889-899)

Ali described how one student, through his body language, gave the impression that he didn't like other students in the class:

> There was a young Polish man who, . . . by his body language and everything, showed that he was quite disdainful [of the Hispanic students]. (Ali, 3471-3478)

During mid-course interviews with students from that class, it was clear that Ali's Hispanic students felt this disdain and were quite distressed about it. However, the Polish man insisted that this impression was quite unintentional:

> So then finally I spoke to Tony. I [told him] how things were. And he said "Oh, no, no. I don't feel that. Everybody's the same." And I said, "Well, if you really feel that, then your body language isn't saying that and you're going to have to change. If you're going to sit in this way, or look this way, it gives people the impression that [you don't like them] -- and you know, you can't afford that!" [He said] "Oh yeah. Okay. I'll change. Ah, it's nothing for me!" (Ali, 3530-3541)

Sometimes adjustment problems were seen to cause, or exacerbate, misunderstandings among students. Heather, for instance, described how a student's reluctance to participate in the class could be misunderstood by other students:

> If somebody is withdrawn and not willing to participate in activities, it's going to be noticeable and it's going to affect the others, too. . . . Someone's reluctance can be interpreted as unfriendliness, if someone's reserved. And that may not be what it is. (Heather, 3049-3061)

The over-sensitivity of students experiencing adjustment problems also contributed to the misunderstandings in the classroom. Ali mentioned the need to be "very careful" in the class as the students' over-sensitivity combined with language difficulties could result in an explosive situation:

> And you never know what's going to set somebody off. Somebody can say something and, because of a language barrier, it can be misinterpreted -- it gets interpreted wrong. So, that happens periodically, and it certainly means that you have to be really careful. (Ali, 3177-3185)

Ali described an incident in which a "hyper-sensitive" student had reacted quite negatively to an innocuous joke:

> Years ago I had a class where there were Russians and Chileans in the class, during the time when the Chileans were very volatile and the Russians were very Jewish. The Russian woman I'm thinking of was FAIRLY laid back and could joke around and everything -- and people could joke with her. This one Chilean woman was VERY intense. And somehow, with innocuous joking, the Russian woman offended the Chilean woman. . . . the Chilean woman actually SLAPPED the Russian woman. . . . In fact, I had to stand between them and separate them and send them home. . . . Take someone who's hyper-sensitive, and, you know, you can't joke around! (Ali, 3099-3145)

According to Ali, humor could be misunderstood if there was any prejudice in the class.

> If there's any sort of sense of superiority or something, then joking doesn't go over very well. It really cuts it dead for everyone because you can't tease each other if it can be misconstrued, if you don't really accept the other person. And that happens quite often. (Ali, 2129-2145)

Over-sensitivity, combined with misunderstanding, had precipitated the fight in Ali's class. The fight which occurred in Steve's class was similar in that the Polish student did not intend to offend the Korean student (at least not to such a degree) (Steve, 1574-1600).

Teachers also mentioned that misunderstandings could be the result of confusion over the meanings of words, particularly with regard to politics. For instance, in the conflict between the Chilean and Russian women in Ali's class, part of the problem was the result of a confusion over the meaning of the word "communism":

> And there was a misunderstanding, partly because of the language, but also because of what Communism meant and what Marxism meant. You know, it's not the same throughout the world. Marxism can be good in some countries and not good in other countries -- but it's sort of all lumped together. . . . But certainly, in any class, I would be QUITE careful about whether there was any point in discussing politics or stuff like that. It gets very emotional at that level. (Ali, 2312-2374)

Heather also described facing a very similar problem, in which students were in conflict because of a misunderstanding based on the meanings attached to the word "communism."

> [The class] was mostly half Hispanic, and half Polish speaking. And the Poles are, generally, supremely anti-communist because of their experience with communism, and most of the Hispanics would be anti-capitalist -- pro-socialist or pro-communist -- because of their experience. And they were at loggerheads without the language to communicate in. . . . They found that, although they had different points of view, they had them for the same reasons. (Heather, 666-764)

Cheryl also mentioned the potential for problems in the class when dealing with political subjects:

> But, politically, for example, some of the Polish people I have had who have come to Canada are just very right wing, hard line, you know. And we have some real debates, and some real dangerous things. . . . We were talking about how to buy things and working and money and that sort of thing. And they were just very gung ho the Canadian system, where everybody works hard and everybody has lots of money and so on. And them some of them who are at the other end of the extreme and were struggling and they are trying to make ends meet and they are dependent on the social system -- they feel quite strongly that it's necessary, that the safety net is necessary. (Cheryl, 1300-1334)

Helen and Ali mentioned that political (or perhaps religious) differences could sometimes cause conflicts in the classroom.

> I had a problem -- I had a fellow from Iran and one from Iraq. And of course that was more political than racial, obviously. And they almost got into trouble. (Helen, 832-840)

> A year or two ago, having people from Iran and Iraq in the same class was sometimes, with some people, a problem. And you just had to say "You keep your politics to yourself while you're in school." (Ali, 2312-2374)

<u>Recognizing that students usually get along with each other</u>. Although the participants experienced <u>some</u> problems in <u>some</u> classes with students who were not getting along, they did not seem to think that this was (or had to be) the norm. For instance, most participants felt that the students in the classes they were presently teaching supported and tolerated each other rather well. When talking about the class she was teaching at the time of the interview, Heather said:

> But this bunch worked well together, considerate of each other. So that was nice. (Heather, 3011-3013)

The teachers, however, did not seem to take this "working well together" for granted. Heather, for instance, indicated that the tolerance in her class was somewhat surprising to her. She did not expect the students to get along with each other as well as they did, considering the differences represented in the class:

> We have everything from teeny-boppers (the bubble-gum thinking) to rather professional behavior. And I think they tolerate each other very well, which was a pleasant surprise for me. I didn't expect them to tolerate the differences too well. . . . I was more concerned about how they would tolerate the different backgrounds, different professions, different intentions, more so than the different countries. . . . We have doctors, and engineers. We have housewives. We have people who were just students before. [We have] technical people. And then the bank teller. And then people just changing completely and deciding what's to come next. (Heather, 305-332)

Similarly, Ali considered herself fortunate that the students in her class got along well with each other: "They do [get along well]! I'm really lucky about that" (Ali, 927-931). When observing her class, I noticed that Ali's students seemed to be incredibly tolerant of Isaac, a student whose behavior I found to be quite distracting: he made fun of other students' answers to questions; he answered for other students (and yet he refused to answer when it was his turn); he teased other students (e.g., when one of the East Indian woman said that on the weekend she was going to work in the garden with her husband, Isaac laughed and then asked her if she kissed her husband) -- and yet, in spite of this behavior, the students seemed to be incredibly tolerant of him! When I mentioned this to Ali, she said:

> They tolerate him pretty well. They know he's pretty good-natured. . . . But, on the other hand, I would say that he's pretty tolerant of some other people in his own way. (Ali, 307-322)

To illustrate Isaac's tolerance of other students, Ali described an incident which took place during a rummage sale in her class. Apparently, a Cambodian woman in her class had appropriated a set of sheets which rightfully belonged to Isaac:

Well, the Cambodian woman got it into her head that she really wanted sheets, but she didn't like the flannelette ones for some reason. And she just TOOK the other ones! After he had paid money for them and everything, she just took them! And I said "Well. No. I mean, you can't. No. I mean, Isaac bought those. If you want the other ones, that's fine. But, no, you can't take them." So, I put them back. And then she took them again! And she really wanted to change, and he didn't really want to change. But she was very insistent upon it! She's very sweet. She's not a mean-spirited person, but she was just very insistent. She got it into her head that she wanted those other sheets. And she just kept pursuing it. And finally she took them! And he just said, "Eh? Okay!" And he's done that on a number of occasions. . . . And so, really, in the same way that they have to tolerate his blithering, sometimes, he's very tolerant of them, in some of their strange behavior, too. So it goes both ways. They're quite funny! I'll never forget them, I'm sure! (Ali, 369-387)

Ali felt that, generally, students at the lower levels were more tolerant than those at higher levels:

Unless there's brain damage or somebody that's been tortured in a prison or something and is really quite off the wall, generally I think they get along quite well because at least humor and physical contact is a way of communicating, and it takes some tension off. Maybe, in general, at this level, people tend to get along better because otherwise they're all going to be isolated or something. (Ali, 2063-2077)

By the time of the second interview, Ali was teaching a different (and more advanced) class of students. She again found that students in her new class seemed to get along well with each other, in spite of their diverse backgrounds:

There's some joking around a little bit. It's not just everybody sticking to their own ethnic group. And I've noticed at lunch break people will be peeking in the door, people that have been in class with some of them before. And it's not necessarily people of the same ethnic group. Like I noticed a Polish man and a Lebanese woman will joke a little bit together. And it's fairly comfortable. It's not really a relationship, but they're not afraid to do that. I noticed from another class that there is a Lebanese man and a Salvadorian woman who seem to sort of joke around or talk a little bit and stuff, so it can happen.

In order to illustrate the friendships which could form across cultural boundaries, Ali told me of a romantic relationship she had observed between two students of different cultural and racial backgrounds:

And actually, about maybe nine years ago, I had a lovely young Chilean woman, about 18 years old, who sort of fell in love with

> this lovely young Vietnamese guy in my class. They had this sort of lovely little [romance], I mean, it wasn't sexual (I don't think). But they were really very romantic. It was like a Romeo and Juliet. It was very, very sweet, and you'd look up from the board and they'd sort of be mooning at each other. It was very sweet. And three years ago or so I met the Vietnamese guy and he married a Vietnamese woman eventually and stuff like that. But they did go around as a couple for a while. And that kind of stuff can happen -- a bit. (Ali, 3257-3300)

As mentioned before, the teachers found that their students were able to provide each other with support and understanding. Heather, for instance, mentioned that as students shared their problems they found reassurance among their classmates (Heather, 1630-1633). Wayne mentioned that the students gave each other "lots of sympathy in the class, but not a lot of direct help" (Wayne, 1503-1510).

<u>Emphasizing Similarities: A Common Humanity</u>

Because they realized that shared or similar experiences drew their students together, many teachers emphasized the similarities among the students, the common humanity which each of them shared, rather than the differences which divided them:

> Enjoy the differences, and I guess, really emphasize the commonalities. (Heather, 1800-1801)

> It's just a question of time and being shown the commonalities rather than the differences. (Heather, 835-843)

During the interviews, a number of the teachers described instances in which similarities among students resulted in bonds of friendship across cultural barriers. Heather, for instance, described how the shared experiences and similar values of her Hispanic and Eastern European students neutralized a potentially explosive situation in which the two groups were at loggerheads over the political concept of communism:

> And as to the classroom conflict, that did work out well. They found out that, although they had different points of view, they had them for the same reasons. And so they were able to talk about their commonalities and their common experiences, rather than the names that got attached to them. (Heather, 756-764)

Wayne described how the experience of showing each other pictures of their families could help students realize that, underneath the differences, they shared some common bonds:

> Yeah, I have two children, you have two children. And then that's neat. And then they know that they have got something in common, right away. (Wayne, 941-945)

Ali related how bonds had developed between students in her class who shared the same habit -- smoking:

> Sometimes, like in the last class I had, the ones who smoked became sort of friendly because they went off to the smoking room together. So there was some more camaraderie among them. (Ali, 2124-2129)

Ali told about a relationship which formed between two women, despite the fact that their ability to communicate with each other was severely limited by disparate language and cultural backgrounds. Ali attributed their relationship to the fact that they shared many similarities:

> And so this Cambodian woman and [East Indian woman] joke together, sort of. [They say] "Same! Same!" They figure they are the same. They both have lots of ailments. They both don't understand anything. They're both, sort of, in a fog. And they joke. They'll say "My frieeeend!" So there's that bond between them that has developed because they're both [the same]. They're from different cultures, but they're the same because of their ailments. So they see that bond there that has nothing to do with culture. Both of them hug quite a bit -- mostly me, but sometimes each other. (Ali, 1409-1426)

Although Ali felt that this particular relationship was inevitable, given the similarities between the two women, she did not feel that such relationships across cultural boundaries were a common occurrence:

> I don't know that it's really common. . . . I think in a way it was inevitable with these two people because they were both so low and they both sort of laughed a fair amount. . . . Maybe it was inevitable that it happened there, but no, it doesn't happen all that often. (Ali, 3232-3245)

The teachers I interviewed also mentioned that bonds formed between students who were experiencing the same or similar problems; for this reason, the teachers provided students with the opportunity to share their problems in the class:

> Certainly one thing that brings people together or creates bonds is when somebody from Chile has a problem with daycare with three

> kids and is worried about that. And somebody else from Iran can sympathize and understand it, has the same kind of problem. Maybe they can help each other a little bit, make suggestions, or they can certainly understand that problem because it's a universal sort of thing. (Ali, 3927-3954)

Wayne felt that just making students aware of the problems their classmates had faced (although they may not share those problems) resulted in increased understanding, and sympathy, among the students:

> There are things that you can do in the class to show them that other people have problems, too. And that really helps. Sometimes, especially the Eastern Europeans have no idea how bad things really were in Cambodia. And it's been really eye opening to see what people from Vietnam [went through] coming by boat to Malaysia. And they just can't believe it. And then they kind of compare [that experience] with their own problems and, although Poland isn't great, it's sure a way lot better than that! So, in a way you can do things like that. I think that helps -- sympathy. (Wayne, 1711-1730)

One problem which all the students either were experiencing or had experienced was adjusting to living in Canada. Many teachers felt that the experience of adjusting to another culture was a common experience that drew the students together. For instance, when Cheryl was asked how the students' experiences of adjusting to the culture affected the class, she said:

> They tend to relate. I don't know if that would work in a larger classroom setting. I don't know if I'd have as strong a sense of that if I wasn't dealing in a small classroom with a limited number of people. But certainly, yes, my impression is that they support one another in that respect. Yes. (Cheryl, 2267-2284)

Wayne also felt that this shared experience of adjusting to a new culture drew students together.

> Yeah, I think it really draws them together -- they're in the same position. And I stress that in the class, too. Not as much in this class [where all of the students are Polish], they get enough of that already! Where most of them have had problems in their country. And after they know each other well and they know you well and they trust you, then they talk more about their backgrounds. And it's really therapeutic, I think. . . . Now, that has to draw them together! It can't draw them apart! (Wayne, 1737-1753)

Although Eileen and Heather felt that adjusting to the culture could

potentially draw students together, they also mentioned that it could have the opposite effect:

> Some students it draws together because they find that they share a common ground. It depends. You find this in [certain] culture groups. And other groups I find that they want to associate more with people from their own culture because then that's familiar to them. They don't want to together tackle this new culture. They want to stay together and retain as much of their old culture as possible (Eileen, 1666-1679)

> It could pull them apart also, as well as join them. If the interest among the students is to help each other through these things, to understand and share their experiences, that's fine. [But] if somebody has a really strong chip on their shoulder and doesn't want anything to do with anybody, won't listen to anybody, he or she is sort of isolating him or herself. (Heather, 1642-1654)

Cheryl described an incident in which the shared experiences of adjusting to Canada had pulled two students together, two students who differed in gender, life experiences, language, and culture. When the one student shared his feelings about the difficulties he was facing as he adjusted to living in Canada, the other student who had lived in Canada for ten years was able to offer him sympathy and support:

> Over the last three months or so, he's been finding it very difficult. . . . We talked about this in one class, Abram's feelings, his changes, particularly his feelings. And Mary (who had been here 10 years) smiled and said "Oh, I remember that! and then she told the story of when she came and they lived in Cold Lake. From Korea to Cold Lake, and having to adjust, and meeting people, and having to deal in English, and no other Koreans. I mean, she identified immediately with what he had said, and for her it was ten years ago! (Cheryl, 2112-2126)

Cheryl felt that these kinds of shared experiences provided students with a common frame of reference, a common ground for communicating. Therefore, she organized her class in such a way that students were encouraged to interact with and respond to each other:

> It is a common experience, I think, and it provides a ground for communicating amongst the students. . . . I hope to set the class up so that they will talk to and interact with one another. And so then I think they feel free and empowered to respond to one another in that way. I think that's very important. In fact, I think that's way more important than the language they might learn from me! . . . The sense that we are all human beings together, and we share common things, whether it's learning a language or

> culture shock, or whatever it is. If you ask me what my philosophy is, that's what it is -- that we are human beings together, and that although our experiences come from different cultures and in different ways, there is a commonality amongst us, simply because we are human beings. (Cheryl, 2186-2231)

The concept that she and her students shared a common heritage as human beings was very important to Cheryl, and she reiterated this idea numerous times during our interviews. For instance, when talking about the effort she made to help her students "feel part of their environment, finding ways to plug into what's here: the sky, the sun, the air, the people, the manners," Cheryl said:

> And for me it's a process of just opening their eyes to what is here. In a way, I suppose, that's putting cultural differences aside in favor of saying "Hey, we're all human beings and we have these things in common." And I think the kinds of things I choose to get into are [neutral kinds of things]. So, the common humanity that we share is very important to me, I guess. . . . Yes. It's very important to me as a person, and as a teacher. So, that's probably an important message that I would like to come out of all this. (Cheryl, 3135-3160)

This philosophy was again expressed as Cheryl made it clear that she did not want to think of her students as being different from herself or other Canadians. Because of a comment which she had made in our first interview, I asked Cheryl if she thought that her students felt disconnected here in Canada:

> My answer to that is I think we all feel disconnected. I think you feel disconnected. I think I feel disconnected. And that in that feeling of disconnectedness is our common bond. . . . [And I deal with] natural things -- like food and things -- that give us a way around that, and give us a common human experience to share. And that's a great way to teach language, it seems to me. And I think it's also a great way to reach other people, whether you're both speaking English or whether one of you is speaking English as a second language. (Cheryl, 3191-3220)

Similarly, when asked whether she felt that it was easy to offend her students, Cheryl again resisted the idea that the students were more easily offended than other Canadians, that they differed in any way from other people:

> Well, again, I guess it comes back to my philosophy and the way I approach people. I think that everybody's delicate. I think everybody is fragile. I mean, in spite of what their appearance of competence, or anger or frustration or whatever. Knowing

myself as delicate, I can pretty well assume that other people are like that, too. I don't think of them as delicate. I am sensitive to what they feel. I don't put a label: "Student, therefore delicate." I say "Human being, liable to be fragile, where you can take care, take care." (Cheryl, 3364-3381)

Heather did not verbalize this philosophy as emphatically as Cheryl; however, by making it clear to the students that her authority came only from her position as teacher (and that someday they may be in a position of authority over her), she was emphasizing the common humanity which she and her students shared:

"My English is better than yours, so I'm the teacher, THIS time. But who knows? In the future, I might be coming to you with my children when you become a doctor. You might be teaching my kids, and then I'm coming to you and you have the higher position. So, why should I now be calling you Mr. and Miss and Dr.; and why should you be using a title for me? In many ways, I'm no higher than you are." (Heather, 1002-1041)

Like Cheryl and Heather, Ali also expressed this sense of a common humanity which she shared with her students. According to Ali, the cultural differences that separated people were only superficial:

The person could be a very good student or a really nice person, but it's those differences, the surface things, that make us think that we're really different. Whereas, maybe deep down, we're fairly much alike. (Ali, 2247-2253)

Developing Bonds

The teachers I interviewed described the efforts they made to encourage bonds, friendships, between the students in their classes.

The first few weeks. To Heather and Wayne, the first few weeks of a course were crucial in their efforts to develop bonds between the students. Wayne, especially, felt that the bonding activities he initiated during the first few weeks laid a groundwork of caring and trust among the students which later prevented cultural differences and misunderstandings from becoming too disruptive:

I think all these kind of touchy situations, they all work themselves out a lot better if, in the first two weeks, the students are caring about each other. And all the bonding activities that we do in the first week, the first two weeks, are really, really important. . . . I'm thinking about one class that

> had a lot of different cultures in it -- I think about ten. There were ten different languages, and fourteen different students. And, in that class, after a month, some of the students were upset at, uh, burping in the class. They didn't like that. And they told the other students that that's no good. And they said "Okay." You see? -- It didn't bother them at all because they were friends! Their mutual respect or whatever had already been established so that it wasn't touchy. (Wayne, 885-910)

> Lots of problems in the classroom that come up are communications problems, misunderstandings. . . . But if you use bonding activities at the beginning, it sure cuts down. (Wayne, 1284-1295)

Wayne's goals, at the beginning of a course, were not primarily related to language learning: "at the beginning, I am NOT teaching vocabulary!" (Wayne, 989-990). Instead, his aim during the first few weeks of a course was to foster bonds among the students, thereby avoiding potential problems later in the course:

> Every time, so far, there have been friends across cultures. They tend to stick with each other (with their own cultures) less. And I think that's VITAL. During that first two weeks, that's the aim. So that afterwards, when you get to some of these problems, it's not like one culture looking down on another culture. And, when you affirm differences right away, at the beginning, then the other students see that YOU say "This is okay, and this is okay and that's okay." (Wayne, 995-1018)

As long as he was able to build this foundation of trust among the students, Wayne did not feel that the cultural differences or misunderstandings in his class were particularly disruptive; however, he felt that if something negative happened in the class before he had had the chance to foster those bonds among the students, the consequences could be far reaching and somewhat permanent:

> I'm always nervous at the beginning of any class -- I mean, just that first day. How is it going to work? If something bad happens that first day, it's hard to reverse it. I'm nervous about that. (Wayne, 1301-1309)

Wayne felt that teachers of lower level classes were more likely to incorporate bonding activities into their classes than teachers of advanced classes:

> Well, I think that higher classes and lower classes have really different mentalities. And I think that the higher level teachers do, too. I think that, in the higher levels, you tend to be a lot

> more academic, and maybe then don't have the time for some of the stuff, and the students sure don't have the time for bonding stuff and all that. They think it's a waste of time. But, in the lower levels, you can take time for that. (Wayne, 1764-1777)

However, Heather (a "higher level teacher") did take the time for "bonding stuff" in her class of advanced students. Like Wayne, she felt that the first few weeks of a session were important in helping students feel at home with one another:

> So I try to deal with that stranger, outsider feeling, especially in the first two, three weeks of the session. (Heather, 2163-3166)

Like Wayne, Heather's goals at the beginning of a class were not primarily related to language learning:

> And I would spend a lot of my first days just making sure that I get that comfortableness going. So that they're not so hyper around each other, that they feel a little more relaxed around each other. Because, if they're not relaxed, you could teach them the simplest thing in the world and it's not going to get in there. (Heather, 1459-1479)

Classroom organization. Teachers physically organized their classes in ways which encouraged communication across cultural and language barriers. In most of the classes I observed, I noticed that students seldom sat next to people of their own cultures. The groups in Heather's class were especially diverse: at one table were an elderly Polish man, a young Romanian girl, and a middle aged Oriental woman; at another table were a middle aged Hispanic woman, a young Lebanese man, and a young Chinese man. A lot of joking and bantering seemed to go on between the students in the different groups. When asked whether bonds formed among students across language and culture barriers, Heather responded:

> Yeah, Yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah. And those are, sometimes the more fun. Like you saw today at one table -- these were my old students but they don't share a language -- One is Polish, one is Hungarian, one is Chinese from Brunei and the other is Iranian! And they'll work together. . . . And at the table you were at, that's another group. We've got a Spanish speaker there, an Iranian, Eritrean, and Polish. . . . I mean, I would have made sure that there would be different languages at each table, anyway. (Heather, 1392-1437)

One reason for this type of seating arrangement was so that students would be forced to speak in English:

> Well, what I try to do, Sara, is in my class I split them up in the class so that . . . if I'm individually helping some student, and if students are talking somewhere else in the class, I know they're speaking English. (Steve, 527-562)

Like Steve, Eileen put people in mixed groups in order to ensure that they would speak English; however, she also mentioned that she felt her students found these mixed groups to be more interesting:

> I've sometimes put them in small groups and they discuss certain aspects of their culture and they really intently listen and they want to learn about different cultures. So, I try not to keep people from the same culture in their group because they seem to slip into their own language because it's so much easier for them to express themselves in that way. So I try to vary the culture groups and I think they do mix quite well. . . . I think it's much more interesting for them. (Eileen, 417-447)

Other teachers mentioned that they used seating arrangements and group work to encourage students to get to know each other:

> Sometimes they do that by themselves. Otherwise I encourage them by having them sit in different places, or, every time they work in groups, I have people from different nationalities working together. One time I asked people to sit next to a different person every week. So, they'd spend a week sitting next to whoever, and then the following week they'd be sitting next to somebody else. (Helen, 888-903)

In a similar manner, Heather used activities which forced students to switch from group to group to help build bonds among the students:

> And you can always use the activities that involve them switching groups so they're not really aware of it. They've all got the same activity to do. They all have the same problem in English, so there's no embarrassment after they get to feeling a little more comfortable. And I would spend a lot of my first days just making sure that I get that comfortableness going. (Heather, 1459-1479)

Heather mentioned that she expected her students to participate and mix with each other:

> We expect them to work well together, to make the effort to cooperate and help each other. And if we see that that's not happening, then we try to find out why, and, maybe through classroom activities, strongly encourage this person to take part. (Heather, 1649-1687)

As mentioned before, Cheryl arranged her class so that the students would feel free to talk to and interact with each other.

> I'm always at great pains at the beginning of a class to say "Look. If you all talk to me, that makes me the centre." I hope to set up the class up so that they will talk to and interact with one another. (Cheryl, 2186-2231)

Bonding activities. In addition to maintaining some (but not usually total) control of the classroom seating arrangements and gr populations, teachers also mentioned using a variety of activities especially designed to help students get to know each other. For instance, Cheryl told of a very successful cooperative learning activity in which her students cooked a meal together. One reason she felt it had been a valuable activity was that is pulled people together:

> But the sense of it being a cooperative experience, for pulling all these men, women, different cultures, together. It was really interesting. (Cheryl, 3684-3688)

Wayne described a number of activities which he used to help students get to know each other. One activity which he felt to be especially valuable was the "Life Journey," in which students with low English proficiency drew a pictorial representation of their lives and travels to share with the class (Wayne, 496-505). Another way to encourage students to get to know each other was to have them bring pictures of their families into the classroom. Wayne did this even before a class begins:

> Wayne The first thing that I always do is bring pictures of my family. And I do that even before they come here -- [when they are being tested to find out which class they should be assigned to]. And then I ask them to bring pictures of their families the first day. Almost every culture, at least that I know of, thinks that that's really important. And [with] some people it's really sensitive because they have real problems with their families, family members dying and everything. But so far, that hasn't made them reluctant to bring pictures. They still wanted to bring pictures and show off their family. And I think that creates a bond right away.
>
> Sara It would overcome language barriers a little bit, too.

| | |
|---|---|
| Wayne | Yeah. I have two children, you have two children. And then that's neat. And then they know that they have got something in common right away. That's always first. And then, when we do family, we do the class family -- have you done that? |
| Sara | Yes. I did that with a class. That was fun! And then the rest of the time they had their "uncles" and their "aunts" in the class -- |
| Wayne | Yeah. That does make relationships in the class. When you say that this is my father, this is my mom, they remember that through the whole class. And I think that that's really important. And after that I do different things, but that's what I do first (Wayne, 918-961) |

The "Class Family" mentioned by Wayne is language activity in which a family tree is built using the names of people in the class (students take on the roles of mother, grandfather, son, grandson, aunt...), fostering somewhat artificial relationships in the class. Wayne's (and my own) experience was that these artificial relationships generated lasting bonds between students. Another strategy which Wayne used to help students get to know each other included involving a group of students in a discussion and then backing out of the conversation, allowing the students to continue the conversation on their own. He also felt that informal activities such as fieldtrips and coffee breaks were important in helping students get to know each other:

> And then a fieldtrip in the first week is important to me, too. To go somewhere -- it doesn't have to be a heavy fieldtrip. It can be to the AGT tower or to show them how to go to Manpower or just to the Lee Pavilion where there's lots of trees and flowers and things. And then to try to get yourself away from the class. Not AWAY, but withdraw when there's a group of four people around you -- you withdraw and the three people will continue [talking]. . . . Another thing is to bring coffee and tea into the classroom at the beginning. Most of them like coffee or tea so they like to sit down, talk to each other, with pictures. (Wayne, 963-977)

Heather described similar "ice-breaking" activities which she used during the first week to help students get to know each other.

> But I feel it's really really important, again, to be able to break that ice and get them working together as a team. So, have group activities and some brainstorming activities within that first week. Maybe even get the class culture going by, if there's enough coffee drinkers and tea drinkers, maybe we can get together and get a kettle. . . . And they can organize that among

themselves. Everybody brings in their own, or they buy together, or something. (Heather, 2276-2295)

Heather felt that encouraging students to make the effort to learn the names of fellow students was a key issue in helping them to get to know one another. She also orchestrated other activities in which students were encouraged to find out about each other in a relaxed atmosphere:

> For example, to pronounce somebody's name, you give up, right? "Oh, that's too hard to [remember], forget it." And so you just get around it by saying "You." You avoid saying the name, you don't make the effort to pronounce it. Somebody mispronounces your name and you don't have enough interest to correct them. And I would tend to encourage students, that if your name isn't said the way you want it, you can encourage the other guy with a smile, encourage the person to say your name the way you like it. And if you're convinced the person's made the best effort possible, accept it. So we do some name games: "Does your name mean something?" "Why were you given that name?" Another activity we might do is we prepare a list of pseudo interview type questions, have some background music, and each person has to go around to somebody they don't know, introduce themselves, note down the person's name, and ask one or a couple of those questions and scribble down the information. Music stops and they have to move on to somebody else. And you keep that going as long as it looks like it's going well enough. And then you can say "Well, can you tell me something about somebody you've met today? Who did you talk to?" "Joe." And if he mixes up the name, by this time they're a little more comfortable and they'll try to get it right. (Heather, 2224-2270)

Heather felt that the real problems faced by the students often started <u>after</u> her class had ended (with the "shocking aloneness after class"). Therefore, she encouraged her students to keep in touch with each other after the end of the class (especially with those classmates who did not share the same cultural/language background):

> Sometimes for homework assignments I have them call each other and interview each other so that they start, in spite of themselves sometimes, getting to know each other. . . . Towards the last days, we might trade names and phone numbers, and talk about activities we all like doing that are cheap, or free! Like, you can always in the summer go to the park, right? The Klondike days are on. There are some Klondike breakfasts: "Well, why don't you call up ________? Why don't two of you go together?" When you're not alone, everything is less scary, so if you're going to a new place, go together. . . . Especially for the ones that don't have friends. "You want to improve your English? Don't always hang out with somebody else from your country." (Heather, 1331-1391)

Avoiding Controversial Issues

Related to the idea of emphasizing similarities among the students was the teachers' desire to minimize differences between students. One way that the teachers encouraged students to get along was to NOT put them in situations which could result in confrontation and disagreement. Although some teachers did mention that they used controversial topics to spark discussions, others mentioned that they avoided any activity or topic which could result in a confrontation. For instance, when two groups of students in Linda's class evidenced opposing political opinions, she did not encourage them to pursue the matter:

> There were two from Communist China in one group and they said "Of course, we must have a social system because it's the best"; and then the other group. . . from Hong Kong, said "Well, we should have the capitalistic system." Well, we just kind of left it like that. I mean, you're not going to [get into an argument]. (Linda, 1591-1594)

After Ali found out that the Eastern European and Hispanic students in her class were not getting along, she devised a seating plan which would minimize contact (or confrontation) between the two groups. She also mentioned that she did not feel any benefit was gained by discussions of issues upon which students would likely disagree. One reason for this belief was the traumatic confrontation which occurred in one of her classes when two students strongly disagreed over the issue of communism:

> But certainly, in any class, I would be QUITE careful about whether there was any point in discussing politics or stuff like that. It gets very emotional at that level. . . . "You keep your politics to yourself while you're in school!" (Ali, 2312-2374))

Like Ali, Cheryl felt that political topics could be destructively controversial, even dangerous:

> So, I think it's a great advantage [to have a multi-cultural class]. Now, where it's a problem, and I'm sure you've heard this before, is politically. If you ever get into politics! Sometimes, you know, they say you should never discuss religion and politics, right? They are such volatile subjects. (Cheryl, 1265-1274)

> But, politically, for example, some of the Polish people I have had who have come to Canada are just very right wing, hard line, you know. And we have some real debates, and some real dangerous things. . . . I tend to moderate, and if it gets too heavy, I cut it off because I won't have them offending one another. For me, the tone of general acceptance in the class is very important -- that people have a right to their own opinions, but you also must accept that. (Cheryl, 1300-1339)

Because of the potential for confrontation in political subjects, and because it was important to Cheryl that her students not offend each other, Cheryl avoided political subjects:

> As a result, I tend to avoid political subjects. I don't know why. Perhaps I dislike confrontation, but I tend to find that people get polarized when the topic is political. You're either FOR or AGAINST and all it causes is bad feelings and the conversation usually dies immediately. When people sense bad feelings are developing, they stop talking. So, I do tend to avoid them. . . . I tend to think that they've got enough things to deal with without also having to deal with animosity in the class, which is where it usually leads, as far as I can see. (Cheryl, 2797-2826)

Cheryl's concern to avoid confrontation in her class was related to her sense that students faced pain. When asked whether her sensitivity to her students' pain affected the way she taught, she answered:

> It affects it in the sense that I don't set up confrontational kinds of situations and expect [the students] to sink or swim. I don't do that. It isn't so much a sharing as just setting up things that will not be threatening to them. . . . So, I think a brief answer to your question is "Yes, it does affect the way I teach in the sense that it makes me non-confrontational in the things I choose to do." (Cheryl, 4059-4092)

Helen was, perhaps, a bit more confrontational than some of the other teachers -- she allowed (and sometimes even encouraged) discussion on rather controversial subjects.

> Somebody brought an article on homosexuality. Now, I do not censor anything in my class. I really don't believe in that (unless it's going to be offensive) because people are going to be exposed to those things outside the classroom anyway. (Helen, 1825-1831

However, although she discussed controversial subjects in her class, Helen was careful to avoid those topics which she felt would offend students or result in conflicts among the students.

> For example, with oral presentations, I always ask them to tell me first what they're going to talk about. Usually I approve except if it's something very political and I have somebody from like Iran and Iraq, and I know that there's going to be a lot of mixed opinions and I want to avoid a situation of conflict. But, other than that, I would say that as long as it's not going to offend anyone, they can go up there and do it. And if I'm in doubt [pause]. For instance, somebody wanted to talk about. . . abortion, and I had some of these women that wear the veils. Because there I really don't want to push my luck, I asked if that would offend anyone if it was done objectively. I told the woman to give the facts . . . Not to give her opinion, [but to give] laws, statistical information, and that sort of thing. And it was okay. But I asked them if they would be offended. We talked about that, and they said it was okay. So, when in doubt, just ask! (Helen 2037-2081)

Heather was perhaps the most confrontational of the teachers interviewed. When she sensed a problem over a political disagreement between her Eastern European and Hispanic students, she confronted the issue -- and yet, like Helen, she did not allow the students to offend each other. She confronted the issue in a very controlled manner:

> They were at loggerheads without the language to communicate in. So I took them separately and [we talked about] what they're doing, what they feel, to try to get it [straightened out]. . . . Then I brought it into the classroom. They had some English but it was pretty structured, so we dealt with the whole thing in a structured way. And I'd say "What are your points?" Then we would list them. And the other guys are getting defensive, and I'd say "No. No. Be calm. Don't get excited! In a minute!" And then "What are your points? Why?" . . . To give them the chance to get through this, for the sake of the class, otherwise I wouldn't have a class to deal with. (Heather, 666-764)

Heather realized that, by confronting the controversy, she was perhaps quite different from most teachers (such as Linda, Cheryl and Ali, who all mentioned that they would not deal with such subjects). Although in this case she felt that her choice to confront the issue had worked out well, she mentioned that, if the situation had been more volatile, she might have taken a less confrontational approach:

> And in most classes I think you would find that most teachers wouldn't deal with politics, religion, sex, whatever. But it was my intuition that it needed to be dealt with. . . . It was a problem, but there are different ways of dealing with the problem. Some people would say "Look, we don't talk about that in a classroom. Let's talk about what we can both, what we can all

> enjoy and all talk about, without insulting each other." And I chose the other tack and it worked out well. . . . If I saw that it was a too heated situation that I couldn't really diffuse, then I would just try to let it ride and switch topics, go on to something else. So I use my intuition a lot. (Heather, 767-799)

Encouraging Students to Change Divisive Behavior

Related to the idea of avoiding confrontational situations, the teachers mentioned that when they realized that certain student behaviors were causing dissension, they would talk with the offending student, encouraging him or her to change the offensive behavior. For instance, Ali mentioned that although she was very tolerant with the students in her class, and she would not be so tolerant of their behavior if she felt that it was offensive to someone else in the class.

> I don't want to be really strict with them, about how they behave, as long as they don't offend anybody. (Ali, 688-692)

> If they communicate by being silly or being physical or something, then that's nice. But, you know, I would have to hold them back a lot more if there was anybody who could be offended. (Ali, 287-295)

Similarly, Wayne mentioned that he would not deal with behaviors which Canadians would consider rude "unless it bothers somebody in the class" (Wayne, 876-883). Wayne mentioned an incident in which a Polish student was bothered by the behavior of a Vietnamese student -- in that case, Wayne took the Vietnamese student aside and explained the problem to him (Wayne, 1031-1063). Similarly, Helen mentioned that she would bring up issues of body odor or spitting if she felt that other students were being offended:

> Sometimes people get very offended and they look like that [Helen demonstrated an expression of scorn]. And that's why we sort of have to address it. If it isn't a problem, I don't bring it up. (Helen, 1322-1326)

Steve expected students to change what he considered to be inappropriate classroom behavior, especially when he felt it was

distracting either to himself or to other students:

Steve I have a few problems with bodily noises, functions, in the class. You know, when somebody starts burping and picking their nose and so on, I do something about it!

Sara: What do you do?

Steve I just tell them! I said "Don't do that, okay? It's rude! I don't care if you spit on the sidewalk in China, or even in restaurants, just so you don't do it here, okay?" Because it makes a lot of people sick when someone goes [clears throat] in the class and the person beside them is nearly losing their breakfast on account of the noise. I do something.

Sara: And does that happen very much around here?

Steve All the time. It happens in every one of my classes that there's somebody doing some bloody noise. . . . I just say to them, right after the class is done, I say "Listen. That noise --" And they'll go "What???" And then I make it -- because I can do mimicry quite well on that sort of thing. I let them know right there. I say "Please don't do that in class!" And there's one guy we had in the beginners class, and he was making that noise. I said "Please don't do that, okay?" So he said "Okay." So he didn't do it in my class. . . . Same thing in the summer. One of the Japanese guys, every time he comes to class at 8:00, he's got a sniffly nose and it's sniffle, sniffle the whole time. So it was "Go blow your nose." I said, "If you want, you can go to the washroom, get some kleenex or whatever." I'm not putting up with it because it bothers some people. Some people don't notice it, but I do, and maybe it's one of my idiosyncracies. (Steve, 667-749)

Eileen also encouraged students to change behavior which other students found distracting. As mentioned before, when an Italian student's loud, forceful, direct manner of expressing herself made other students feel uncomfortable, Eileen took her aside and, very diplomatically, asked her to change her behavior (Eileen, 590-598). Similarly, when a group of students complained to Eileen that another student talked too much, Eileen took that student aside and explained the problem to her (Eileen, 526-528).

Promoting Tolerance

The participants mentioned that they often found themselves teaching or promoting tolerance in their classrooms. One reason they promoted tolerance was to facilitate relationships among the students, but another reason was to prepare students for involvement in Canadian society.

Encouraging cultural awareness. One way that the teachers promoted tolerance in their classrooms was to encourage students to learn about each other's cultures. In general, teachers found that their students enjoyed learning about the different cultures represented in their classes:

> It has the potential of being lots more interesting for the students if they can learn from each other and find out that it's a big world. (Ali, 3852-3856)

> They learn about each other's cultures. They really enjoy it. It's much more interesting, for them and me. (Wayne, 1333-1338)

> I think that, especially about cultural things, they do have a genuine interest. I've sometimes put them in small groups and they discuss certain aspects of their culture and they really intently listen and they want to learn about different cultures. (Eileen, 415-429)

Eileen found that the students in her classes, rather than being offended by the cultural differences, seemed to enjoy them. For instance, when asked whether the cultural differences of her students affected relationships (negatively) in the class, Eileen responded:

> Noooo. I think it's quite interesting for them, and you can tell that they're very observant of what the other cultural groups do. So, for the most part, they do really watch. And I think they understand that a lot of it is culturally bound (Eileen, 1111-1125)

Eileen mentioned that her students seemed to find some cultural differences quite entertaining:

> She said that for dinner dates, people should come ONE to TWO hours late! And if you come maybe FIVE minutes late, five minutes after the assigned time, then the hostess would be in a panic because she wouldn't have anything ready. It's kind of understood that you come that time. All the other students LAUGHED, because

they couldn't BELIEVE it! Two hours late! (Eileen, 1557-1569)

Teachers encouraged students to share aspects of their own cultures with other students in the class. For instance, Eileen described a few of the topics she used in her class to encourage students to share about their cultures:

> When we do a unit on travelling, we talk about "What is there to see in your country? What are the tourist attractions? What countries have you been to?" When we discuss about the family, then I get them to bring pictures of their own family. And then we can see those pictures. And we talk about cultures: "What is [illegible] your culture?" For the [lowest level] class, I often do a [illegible] marriage and then we talk about "What are weddings like in your culture?" For food, we talk about "What is your type of food in your country?" Also about eating habits, eating customs, what's polite, what's impolite. (Eileen, 736-756)

Steve described a "show and tell" activity in which students were encouraged to share various aspects of their [illegible] with each other:

> I try to get them to get to know each other. We sometimes have things where it's show and tell. That usually happens in chapter two or three of this book that we use. For example, a woman from Japan will bring a kimono and show how to put it on and everything. And everybody else is amazed at how much these things cost and the traditional background behind it. (Steve, 572-584)

Sometimes teachers found themselves interpreting one student's culture to another student:

> Let's say somebody took offense and offense was not intended. Then I'm able to say "Look. That's not what he meant. Let's try this." So that I don't become the intervener, I'll try to bring the others in: "Why don't you talk a little bit more about what you were saying and why you were saying it because it came across like. . . " (Heather, 1204-1216)

Heather felt that Christmas was an especially difficult time of the year for her Christian students, and she encountered resistance from them as she tried to teach them to respect and tolerate the other religions represented in the class:

> And you have to try to show them that, out of respect for people who are Buddhist, Muslim, Confucian, whatever, let's try some other things. What are some other things that happen at Christmas as well? [You have to try] to get away from the religious as well. And some people really take exception to that. They don't really like it. (Heather, 1264-1298)

Wayne took a somewhat different approach to helping his students learn about each other's cultures. Rather than directly and blatantly teaching students about the cultures represented in his class, Wayne would informally (and through his own example) affirm the differences represented in the class. Wayne mentioned that this was one strategy he used to deal with the assumptions which students made about each other:

> And when there are other cultures in the classroom, then you have to be aware that there's a good chance that they WILL assume certain things. You have to make them aware, somehow, of each other's cultures without making it embarrassing. I've thought lots about that, about how I do that in a class. I can't quite describe how it happens in the class because it's not a planned thing. It's not like "Okay, now I'm going to teach the Polish people how Cambodian people eat cake." You can't do that. It has to be quite informal, and it has to be relaxed. (Wayne, 723-753)

As mentioned before, one way Wayne did this was to identify himself with the weaker culture in the class (Wayne, 753-777). Like Heather, Wayne sometimes explicitly taught students about some aspects of other students' cultures:

> Pointing out that the Asian students, many of them, place great importance in their jewelry, what kind of jewelry they have. And with Polish students, it might be cosmetics or whatever. That can come up in a class: "What does this mean? What does that mean?" (Wayne, 784-793)

Wayne also felt that he could be a role model in validating the students' cultures. If students realized that <u>he</u> accepted the differences in culture, then they would be more likely to accept those differences (Wayne, 1012-1018). Wayne felt that validating and affirming the cultural differences in his class forestalled the possibility of prejudice. When asked about whether he had problems with prejudice in his class, Wayne said:

> Sometimes. It's not a big deal because you're always affirming differences. And stressing tolerance and all that "this is okay, that's okay." You're almost going out of your way doing that. (Wayne, 1236-1249)

<u>Teaching tolerance as a Canadian characteristic</u>. The participants' goals in teaching tolerance were broader than just to

help the students get along in the classroom. They felt that tolerance was (to some degree at least) a Canadian characteristic and taught it in order to help their students get along in society at large. This concept was especially important to Cheryl:

> And the thing about teaching tolerance. I only teach that insofar as I find that to be a Canadian characteristic. I do find that as a national group that's one thing that distinguishes us, and for good reason -- we have to be. We started as a multi-cultural nation and I expect we're going to continue that way. God knows, if we aren't tolerant of one another, we'd be in a real mess! (Cheryl, 3599-3615)

Cheryl identified tolerance of "differences of religion, politics, and language" as one aspect of Canadian society to which she felt that her students must adjust (Cheryl, 3810-3819):

> I think one of them is related to this idea of tolerance. They should adjust to each other. They have to. We have to live together, with differences. It's REALLY important. . . . I think many of them come from single culture countries or maybe there are only one or two cultures and one is definitely inferior to another. . . . Like, I have a gut feeling that that's of crucial importance to the country. (Cheryl, 3764-3788)

Cheryl felt that the concept of tolerance (not only tolerance of cultural differences, but also tolerance of different opinions) was a very Canadian concept:

> For me, the tone of general acceptance in the class is very important, that people have a right to their own opinions, but you also must respect that. And I find that that's very Canadian of me -- tolerance. We talked about Salman Rushdie, and free speech. We didn't get very far in it because it's a pretty complex issue. But, I found myself, again, advocating tolerance, advocating tolerance. I thought "Gee, that's very Canadian of me." (Cheryl, 1330-1358)

Clearly, Cheryl realized that when she insisted on tolerance in the classroom, she was promoting one aspect of Canadian culture:

> I think I can set a tone of tolerance in the classroom for the differences amongst people, but I think that that tone itself is part of Canadian culture. That we are, by and large, tolerant of differences. (Cheryl, 1818-1854)

Helen also valued the characteristics of tolerance and non-judgementalness, and she identified them as particularly common among people who had been exposed to other cultures:

People that have been exposed to other cultures. They tend to be very broad-minded and non-judgemental. And I think I can relate best to people who are non-judgemental. (Helen, 579-586; also 616-640)

Like Cheryl, Helen tried to promote those qualities in her students. As Helen told me about an incident which occurred when a student brought an article into her class about homosexuality, it was clear that Helen advocated tolerance of different ideas, not just tolerance of different cultures:

> One of my students, his best friend was in jail for killing a homosexual guy in Red Deer! This was about two years ago and it hit the news then. This guy [who killed the homosexual man] was from Africa. And [my student] kept insisting that his friend was RIGHT for having done that!!! And I said, "Wait a minute! I don't expect you to like or dislike them." I insisted on the fact that this is something that, in general, people have different points of view on. But, if you're working with someone, judge the WORK they do. What they do [outside of work] is their private lives and you don't have to be so judgemental. And that's the only thing that I've been pushing on them, to become a little more tolerant, perhaps. And the guy in Red Deer, he met this other fellow and this other fellow was very friendly to him. So he invited him over for coffee, or whatever, to his apartment. This African guy went along, and he was very friendly in turn. He was misinterpreted, and the guy was gay, and he tried to make a pass. And this guy shot him or stabbed him or something. He's in jail now. But the thing that really alarmed me is that this student here thought it was right! (Helen, 1881-1929)

One reason Helen taught tolerance was to prevent her students from being condemned by Canadian society:

> Yes, [I teach] tolerance and acceptance. Or at least [I teach them to] be broad-minded enough to listen. . . .In general, our society's very respectful and you cannot fire someone because he or she is a homosexual. I mean, that's discriminatory! You can get into trouble doing that. But they don't know that. . . . They're going to find out that society is going to condemn them if they don't know about these things. I'd rather tell them myself then have them not get a job. (Helen, 1933-1973)

Heather felt that multi-cultural classes were especially beneficial because they taught students how to get along with people from other cultures, preparing them for entry into the workplace.

> [The benefits] of a multi-cultural class? Well, multi-culturalism in practice! Like, learning how to get along with people who are substantially different from yourself. . . . So, in the workplace,

> if they were working with someone, the chances are that they will be working with someone from a different background. They'll be able to handle it. (Heather, 3415-3429)

Wayne's class of Polish students themselves realized that they were "missing out' in their mono-cultural class. Wayne, therefore, tried to compensate for that missing element by talking about his wife's culture. Again, Wayne mentioned that this was important because it prepared students for Canadian society.

> Yeah, that's funny, too. I was a bit surprised. I thought that they would like [being in a class with only Polish students] but they realized that they are missing something. Like, they ARE missing the cross-cultural communication and interaction. All they get here is my culture and my wife's culture and their culture. So they get three. My wife is [from another culture], and I always bring that up, too, just to get another culture in there. And that, I think, is more realistic -- that's more how Canada is. (Wayne, 467-485)

Not tolerating bigotry. A number of teachers mentioned that they did not tolerate discriminatory behavior among the students in their classes. Steve was particularly strong in his reaction against bigotry in his classroom. He 'pulled rank' on his students, using his authority as teacher to insist that they not behave with discrimination towards other students. When asked how he reacted to prejudice in his classroom (especially directed towards Oriental students), this is how Steve responded:

> I usually take them aside and I said "Listen, whereever you're from, you do this -- but in my class, I am the dictator and I'm the one who makes the rules. So, if you want to be like this, you don't do it in my class!" We have enough students right now that I can say "Hey, you can just leave if you don't like it! Okay? This is the way these classes are. We have 50% Japanese, 50% or 20% Chinese, and if you don't like these people, that's your problem. Okay? But you're not going to make it mine." And then, if it happens again in class, or if it happens and it's really blatant, I tell everybody. I tell everybody this. I don't just take the student aside. I tell everybody in the class that it's not tolerated in my class. I said "It goes on everywhere. It's like when these Sikhs came over to murder this guy on Vancouver Island and I said "Boy, anytime they bring their problems or violence over here, they're out of here! I don't care if they're Canadian or what! They don't do that. This is my country and we want it clean and safe and nice, basically. You know what I mean? Because we don't want that crap! (Steve, 425-461)

Steve mentioned that this 'mini-lecture' would sometimes lead to more general discussion on prejudice through out the world:

> Oh, everybody's usually quite quiet. But I'm sure there are some that just didn't realize [what was happening]. . . . They said "Boy, I didn't even think. I thought this person was a really nice guy." So I think a lot of students are shocked, but a lot of them, too, just say "Yeah. It's typical. It goes on all over the world." And they bring out their own "typical Pole" and "Typical Japanese" or whatever. And that's what happens. (Steve 464-496)

## Teaching Culture: Dealing with Cultural Topics in the Class

The teachers defined "teaching culture" or "cultural topics" in an extremely broad sense. Therefore, in this section, any type of activity which would foster an awareness or understanding of culture (Canadian or otherwise), impart skills for surviving in a Canadian environment, or involve comparing and/or contrasting cultures will be considered a "cultural" activity.

### Helping Students Belong

A primary motivation for teaching culture or dealing with cultural topics seemed to be to help students belong in Canada.

Fostering a "sense of belonging." Although (as will be seen later) teachers talked about teaching students how to fit into Canadian society, they also talked about their efforts to give students a "feeling" for the society, a sense of their new environment. Included in this category is the idea of giving students a deeper understanding of the culture, the environment, the country, so that they will feel a that they belong. Helen, for instance, described an activity she had developed for a unit on advertising. She felt that one excerpt from a video about "The Best 1986 Commercials" was particularly important because it got her students "into the grain" of Canadian (or, perhaps, American?) culture:

> I was going to show them a video, "The Best 1986 Commercials" and there were a few that I selected. And one of them was talking about Chevrolet and they were singing "Chevrolet is a part of America like apple pie, hot dogs, and baseball." And they repeated it. So, it's a nice tune, catchy. And I thought "Oh, this is really great!" I think that for them to know that is so important because it really gets them into the grain of cultural things. (Helen, 1782-1796)

This cultural activity obviously was not particularly 'practical,' as it did not tell students how to 'behave' in Canadian culture, but Helen felt it did give students an increased understanding of, or feeling for, the culture.

Linda seemed to be particularly concerned that her students develop a sense of belonging to the country of Canada. While observing Linda's class, I noticed that she taught them a Canadian folk-song. When we talked about this later, it was clear that Linda was attempting to help her students feel a part of Canada, the country:

> Even in teaching songs and so on, I worry about teaching them Canadian songs rather than American songs because I feel that, well, they're in Canada, they should be exposed to Canadian songs. . . . But, I do have the feeling that, if you learn the songs of a country, stories from a country, and so on, you have somehow a closer feeling to that country. Just thinking about my childhood and being exposed to a book "Tales of an Albanian Grandmother." And that really, as a child, aroused my interest in Albania. So, whenever I hear about Albania, that book always comes to mind. And I always remember reading these stories, how different they seemed -- so exotic. I remembered even some of the names, and I saw a name recently, something about Albania, and I thought "Ah, it reminds me of that book!" So, I think that influences people, gives them positive influence. And I have the feeling, too, with songs or paintings -- especially with songs, though -- that you're participating in the culture when you sing that song, and so you are really feeling a part of that country, in a way (perhaps) that if you had just looked at a painting, you wouldn't. (Linda, 2442-2512)

Linda's desire that students gain a "feeling" for the country also expressed itself as she 'strongly encouraged' her students to learn about the geography of Canada:

> I thought that everybody should know the capitals and the provinces of Canada. So we spent either the summer or the fall [on it]. Every week we had a test on it. It was an informal test and we just kept doing and doing it until most people got them. And then I was thinking, in the summertime, that I would write to

> tourist bureaus and try to get people to report about the different provinces, get a little bit more [of an idea of] what it's actually like, because parts of Canada are so different. (Linda, 1805-1824)

Another way in which Linda attempted to help her students develop a 'feel' for Canada was to introduce them to paintings and poems about Canadian landscapes:

> I did once do a unit on Canadian painting. That was kind of fun. I'm not sure if they enjoyed it that much, but I brought in the "Group of Seven" and talked about the meanings, and actually found a couple of poems that sort of went with the paintings. . . . I'm not sure how much they [enjoyed it]. But I did think it would be fun to repeat it because I do think it tells a lot about Canada. And most people don't really know that much about the landscape and stuff. (Linda)

Like Linda, Cheryl was also concerned that students develop this sense of belonging; however, Cheryl was more concerned that they feel a part of their new environment than that they feel a part of Canada as a country:

> I said that helping students to feel part of Canada was important to me, but in fact, for me, the important thing is that they feel part of their environment. Finding ways to plug into just what's here: the sky, the sun, the air, the people, the manners. It's not a political thing. . . . For me it's a process of just opening their eyes to what is here. In a way, I suppose, that's putting cultural differences aside in favor of saying "Hey, we're all human beings and we have these things in common. (Cheryl, 3117-3131)

This concern was related to Cheryl's sense that she and her students shared a common humanity:

> I said to you during the course of the first interview that I feel that I have things to communicate as a Canadian. That is also true, but it is WAY more important to me that I have things to communicate as human beings to other human beings, and language needn't be a barrier. (Cheryl, 3170-3178)

Because of this feeling of a common bond of humanity between herself and the students (and among the students), Cheryl chose "natural things like food, things that give us a way around [those barriers], and give us a common human experience to share" (Cheryl, 3191-3215). The activities she used in class were designed to enable her to communicate with the students, in spite of language and culture

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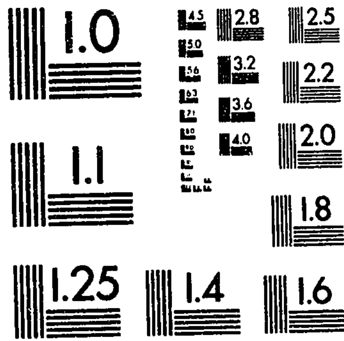

barriers, as fellow human beings. I observed one such activity on the day I observed Cheryl's class. During the class, Cheryl told the students that rhubarb was a particularly "Canadian" food, and gave them each a piece of raw rhubarb to dip in sugar and eat. She then gave each student a small plate upon which were placed dabs of three types of rhubarb sauces for them to taste (Cheryl, 46-61). Later during the interview, Cheryl mentioned that this was only one in a series of activities which she had begun that spring in order to help students become aware of (or "plug into") their new environment:

> Well, you saw what I did with the rhubarb today in class. I've been doing that all along this whole session, only I've started with whatever was in blossom that day. I would take it into class. And of course, that led to flower arranging in Mary's case. Well, we started with pussy-willows. As spring came, we started with the various things that were in blossom. [We did this] because, I think, when you move into a strange place, part of the thing about learning language is what to watch for around you. It's sort of plugging into the environment. Well, I love plants and growing things. I'm sensitive to that, and so I use it. But it's also a cultural thing. If you're born and raised in Edmonton, you watch for the first pussy-willows. You watch for the first robin that comes back. You're very sensitive to the first suggestion of green on the trees. I mean, this is a sign of spring. I told them the story about being in Bulgaria and seeing fruit trees, masses of fruit trees, in blossom for the first time in my life! I was twenty years old. In Edmonton, the signs are so much [pause], in a sense, they're subtle, and they're smaller. You really have to look for them. Otherwise it seems like a long, long, long, terrible, awful winter, and then instant summer, and you don't even notice the spring. So, for me, that's a way into the sensibility of the place in which they're moving themselves. . . . Yes. It's those sort of underlying things that you and I probably take for granted: "Oh, the first robin is back!" Well, (a) they didn't know what a robin was, (b) they didn't realize it had been back or that it had gone. And the crab apples -- Mary knew all about it, of course, because she lived here for ten years, but the others didn't. It's neat! . . . I look for the rhubarb to come up in my garden and I start to make pies and sauces and so on. And that's something that goes with spring for me. And I kind of offer that as an extension to language teaching. (Cheryl, 759-832)

Part of Cheryl's concern that her students "plug into" their environment was related to her perception that they felt disconnected here in Edmonton:

> It's important to me. Yes, it's really important to me. And I think it probably comes from having lived in another culture and feeling so disconnected, not knowing what was important to them, not knowing what the essence of that particular culture was. (Cheryl, 849-856)

She did not see these activities as promoting "Canadian culture" (although, in a previous quote, she did refer to them as "a cultural thing") -- rather, they were related to her sense of a shared humanity:

> Well, this goes back to what I was saying before, I think, that feeling connected to your surroundings. I think that that's important to human beings and it's not necessarily a lesson in Canadian culture, if you see what I mean. It's a human issue, it seems to me. (Cheryl, 3998-4005)

Responding to students' complaints. Another reason the teachers taught students about Canadian culture was to respond to students' complaints about Canada or Canadians. In doing so, they were helping their students develop an understanding and acceptance of Canadians or Canada which would in turn facilitate their adjustment to their new environment. Linda described a discussion about Canadian culture which had occurred in response to students' complaints about the prevalence of divorce in Canada:

> People seemed to be quite upset about it. So we had a wonderful discussion because people were just eager to express themselves. (Linda, 2313-2323)

Steve mentioned that he explained the meanings and uses of the word "Hi" so that his students would not go through life feeling that Canadians who said "Hi" instead of "Good Morning" were rude:

> So I say "Hey, 'Hi' means 'Good morning' in that instance. . . . They were complaining about that the other day, so I went over that with them. (Steve, 1176-1200)

Heather and Helen both felt that student complaints could be used positively to spark discussions of Canadian culture. Heather used a questioning technique to force students to take a more objective look at their objections to Canadian culture:

> I'll say, "Well, what do you mean? Like, what do you base this on?" and try to get at it. [And they say] "Well, my friend said..." [And I say] "Well, yeah. Let's talk about your friend. How long has your friend been here? What's your friend's

> experience?" Or the other [complaint] is "Indians are just a bunch of drunks. They get all these freebies by living on the reservation. I don't understand how Indians are so poor." So, it opens the way, if you look at it in a positive way, for a really good discussion of Canadian culture and how they see it. And, if you're fortunate to have people who've been here a little while who can say "That's what I thought, but later, when I started to meet people. . ." (Heather, 3239-3264)

Like Heather, Eileen and Ali also mentioned that they would question students who complained about Canada, forcing them to consider whether they really had evidence to support those opinions. Helen described how the complaint "Canadians are cold" could be used to spark a discussion of Canadian culture. She used her own experience as an immigrant to help her students understand the process she had gone through, from feeling that "Canadians are cold" to understanding that "Canadians respect your privacy":

> The typical comment immigrants make from some cultures is they say things like "Canadian people, North American people, are very cold." And I tell them that "I had that impression as well when I came here, but on the other hand, it took me a while to realize that it's not that they're cold, that they're indifferent, that they don't care about what you do or who you are. It's just that they're very respectful of your privacy. And your privacy is very important. And it took me a while to realize that they did care, and I had to open up if I wanted them to open up. But they will not ask direct questions because it's a matter of respect." And, in general, that's why many people perceive that as a cold attitude, because it's a misconception. They're getting the wrong impression. In that case, I explain. (Helen, 468-497)

Empowering students to participate in society. A somewhat different (and perhaps slightly more pragmatic) concern was the desire that students become involved in Canadian society. This desire that students be involved in Canadian society was clearly demonstrated as I observed Linda explain to her students about Easter. As mentioned before, it seemed that Linda was avoiding mention of the religious aspects of the Easter holiday (especially as a student had specifically requested information regarding "Good Friday, Easter, Christians and Jesus"). Linda, (at least at first) emphasized the Easter bunny, Easter eggs (painting them, and hunting for them), and the Easter

lily. She mentioned that, although Easter was a Christian holiday celebrating Jesus' resurrection, it was also a spring holiday and therefore one didn't have to be a Christian to celebrate Easter. She particularly emphasized the ideas that Easter meant spring and everybody could celebrate Easter. Her comments on this incident, when we discussed it later during the interview, indicated a deep desire that her students feel invited to participate in Canadian society. She did not want her students to feel that, just because they were not Christians, they could not participate in Canadian festivals:

> Well, this happened once before [when] we talked about Thanksgiving. And I actually take people to my house. We cook a turkey because people don't know how to cook turkeys and so on. We went through this whole thing, and then I asked this fellow, "Well, did you celebrate Thanksgiving?" [He answered] "Oh no. We're not Christians!" . . . Because, you know, we did mention that it was THANKSgiving. So, I thought from then on I should really emphasize to people that it's for everybody. It's not just for [Christians]. (Linda, 628-645)

Another way that some teachers empowered their students to become functioning members of Canadian society was to involve them in the election process. For instance, at the beginning of the class which I observed, Linda brought in both English and Chinese newspapers discussing the upcoming provincial election, and she posted pictures of the candidates on the bulletin board. When Hui (the only Canadian citizen in the class) arrived, Linda gave him a section of the newspaper which covered the elections in his area of the city. She mentioned during the interview that, prior to the federal elections, she and her students not only spent a lot of time discussing the elections, but they also wrote away for "a voting booth and stuff" and then held a "mock election" in their class (Linda, 522-528). Linda's goal, whether she involved her students in a Thanksgiving celebration, introduced them to the election process, or encouraged them to introduce themselves to their neighbors, was to get them involved in Canadian society. Referring to her custom of inviting students to her home for a Thanksgiving meal, Linda said:

> Well, some people have told me that it's the only time they have ever been in a Canadian home. And one student wife said that

after being in my class she could talk to her neighbor because, you know, this thing about introducing your neighbor. So they kind of got a bit of small talk and so on. So this is what I'm hoping -- that they start to talk to people. I mean, that's how it's all supposed to work! So I mean, all the things about culture is not just to indoctrinate them. (Linda, 1735-1750)

Like Linda, Heather was concerned that her students become involved in Canadian society, and this concern was related to what Heather perceived to be her role as an ESL teacher -- that is, a role of empowering students to take charge of their own lives, providing them with practical, useful information so that they can access resources for themselves:

Heather How do I see teaching ESL? It's that I'm empowering people who are perceived or who perceive themselves as being disadvantaged. Yeah. I think they should have that power so that they can really access everything that is here to be accessed. Empower them to be able to access that themselves. That's what I do. So, I wouldn't be interested in working at a university among an elite group. For me, it's almost political, really.

Sara So you don't just consider yourself a language teacher?

Heather No, no. No, no. Empowerer! It's all power. So that they can take charge of their lives and do what they want to do with it. In fairness. (Heather, 1802-1803)

Heather's description of how she would encourage students to get out and meet real Canadians also demonstrated her desire to empower students to access resources in Edmonton:

And [I] try to set up situations where they're meeting real Canadians and talking to them -- not teachers. Now, if that's a fieldtrip, fine. Or maybe some other kind of setting, or telling them about different kinds of meetings that are on that are low cost. Things like, for example, the YMCA has a special program where they reduce the cost substantially for unemployed people, which includes our students. They can go and work out or go into a class. I mean, that's real English. What about a soccer team for the fellows. You know, it's springtime and you've got nothing to do -- make your own [team]. And show them how to book a room so that they can do these things for themselves. Just the practical ways. If I were trying to set myself up in a country, a strange country, what would I want to be able to do? And it's basically how to conduct your day to day life to the fullest strength. Do it yourself rather than have somebody else do it for you. And not being a "yes man" I mean, some people feel [pause] You teach them how to say "Yes" nicely: "Do you understand?" --

"Yes" (but you don't). Or, "Is the meal okay?" You're ready to choke on the food but you say "Yes, it was very nice, very nice." Well, why not be able to criticize it? (Heather, 3510-3554)

One way to encourage students to participate in Canadian society was to provide them with the some information about their new environment. For instance, Heather felt that "a major part of what you do in an ESL program is involved with settlement and resettlement and so on" (Heather, 197-208). Because of this, she dealt with such issues as employment, housing and legal help (Heather, 1922-1942). Although Wayne mentioned that that much of what he did in his class was focused on resettlement, he felt that this emphasis was not necessary if students had already lived in Canada for a long period of time:

> But now, half the purpose of fieldtrips is to show them how to use the LRT, to show them what's available. . . . Now in class we're doing a lot of "In Canada we do this"; "In Canada, we think this way" and you have to do a lot more of those things. [If they had been here for a long time], you could do more of what they do in their country, but you wouldn't need to bring in the Canadian side. (Wayne, 1369-1384)

Wayne described what he considered to be settlement issues:

> Like housing and food and family relationships. There are differences in all of them. Telephone and addresses and sights of Edmonton. Just about everything. Health. The language is there, but it's also culture. (Wayne, 1369-1412)

Another way of empowering students to become involved in the new society was to teach them some of the basic skills needed for survival in the new country. Heather, for instance, clearly felt that teaching students how to complain using the telephone was an empowering activity:

> Then you could give them situations [such as]: "You've just bought something from Zellers and you've only had it home two days and there's something defective about it. What are you going to do? What are the alternatives? Well, you could phone. You could write a letter." . . . So that they're learning how to complain in written form, how to complain using the telephone -- which, for most people is the last thing they want to do. But, if you don't have a car and you've got two kids at home, you're not going to run down to the store and leave the two kids! You'll probably use the phone. And they tend to not use the phone as much as we do. We take care of a lot of stuff over the phone here. (Heather, 2597-2619)

While observing classes, I noticed some of the teachers encouraging their students to make use of the telephone. Ali, for instance, taught her students how to make and respond to telephone calls (while I was in her class they practiced a "Wrong Number" dialogue). Similarly, Helen assigned her class a listening activity which involved telephoning a movie theatre to find out what time certain movies were playing. In a somewhat different situation, Linda mentioned that, when one of her students was having a problem because people made fun of her Chinese accent on her office answering machine, she phoned the telephone company and then the human rights commission to find out whether anything could be done. By doing this, Linda was empowering her student to take charge of her life, to access resources:

> So I told her. At least she knows now that she can do it if she wants to. (Linda, 834-869)

Linda also described helping a student who needed to learn how to talk to the doctor. Again, this seemed to be related to the idea of empowering students, helping them to become involved in Canadian society.

Sometimes empowering students to become involved in Canadian society included helping them overcome potentially disabling attitudes. Cheryl, for instance, talked about empowering her students to adapt to and overcome the winter weather of Edmonton. By doing this, she was encouraging them to get out and become a part of Canadian society, even during the winter months when many students avoided going outside.

> Cheryl But weather, I think it's vitally important for them that they adapt to the weather! They will DIE if they won't, if they don't learn to dress properly.
>
> Sara: So you talk about that kind of stuff in class?
>
> Cheryl Sure. . . . And the things that YOU know because you've lived here. Like putting lots of layers on to keep warm. You don't have to have a down-filled coat, but you have to have lots of layers. And you have to protect your feet. Ah, it's probably the mother in me coming out! . . . If you do not adapt, for example, to the weather in Edmonton, you can end up being so isolated, and so alone. It's not just a question of keeping warm. It's a question of being

able to function during the six months of the year when it's hard to get out.

Sara so they don't just withdraw into their little corner and stay warm?

Cheryl Exactly. (3820-3908)

In a similar way, Helen's action in inviting a policeman to speak to the students in her class could also be seen as an empowering activity -- she was helping her students overcome some deeply ingrained, negative attitudes which needlessly inhibited their life here in Edmonton:

> Things like trying to help break old patterns, old beliefs. Things like, for example, inviting a police officer to come and talk to them. . . . And they actually have police officers trained to [do this]. They come and talk about what they do and what their jobs are. They even tell how much money they make, and WHY they make so much money, and how they should never try to bribe a cop. There are a lot of cultural things and that helps. Okay, they're still going to believe that police officers, some of them, are corrupt and you should keep your distance. We're never going to be able to change their attitude. But at least they will know that, in general, police officers are not terribly corrupt, and they are here to help you, and if somebody IS corrupt, you know where to report him and something will be done about it, and that they're here to protect you, they're not here to persecute you. Because there are people that will not go to see the police about something because they're AFRAID! Because in Poland, when you think about the police, they're there to stab you in the back. So, something like that, I think, as a teacher, you can help. (Helen, 2183-2261)

Teaching Appropriateness.

In order to help students become an accepted part of Canadian society, the teachers felt that it was important to make them aware of which behaviors were considered to be appropriate or inappropriate by Canadians. In general, the teachers viewed this as a potentially empowering action, rather than an ethnocentric means of forcing their culture on the students. Two themes were apparent as teachers discussed this issue: (a) If students did not learn to change their behaviors, they could be rejected by members of Canadian society; and

(b) the teachers often did not feel they had the right to force (or even ask) students to change; rather, their job was to raise the students' awareness.

Why teach appropriateness? First of all, teachers taught "appropriateness" in order to ensure that their students would be accepted by Canadians, empowering them become a part of Canadian society. Helen called this "learning the rules of the game":

> But if we want them to become a part of Canadian culture, and to be accepted by society, then they have to learn the rules of the game. (Helen, 1340-1343)

Similarly, Eileen felt that learning about Canadian culture would both facilitate the students' adjustment to it and make them more acceptable to Canadians.

> And I think it's important for them to learn about the culture so that they can, as quickly as possible, assimilate it or get used to Canadian culture. (Eileen, 1530-1534)

> Just so that they know. Like, if you're invited to dinner, what should you bring? What time should you arrive? [Teaching] these things can make them more accepted in Canadian culture, because other people might not be as tolerant if someone would come [late for dinner] (Eileen, 1547-1566)

When talking about students who had lived in the United States prior to immigrating to Canada, Heather mentioned that she taught them some of the more subtle differences between Americans and Canadians in order to facilitate her students' relationships with Canadians. When doing this, however, she was careful not to pressure her students to change:

> "We do have some differences, and you don't have to like the differences -- that's up to you. You don't even have to observe them. But, I want you to be aware of them. That will make your life here a little easier, your contact with Canadians maybe a little smoother." (Heather, 1079-1091)

Some of the teachers mentioned that they taught appropriateness in response to student queries, indicating that the students themselves identified appropriateness as vital to their survival. For instance, Helen mentioned that the students in her class seemed to be especially

interested in knowing how Canadians would respond to specific situations:

> It seems to me that they, very specifically, ask "How do Canadians feel about that?"...[For instance], when they were saying "When you spill the drink, would it be okay if I just talk to them or try to be friendly and so on. Would that be acceptable?" (Helen, 1738-1749)

Similarly, Linda described providing a student with information on appropriate table manners in response to his question (Linda, 987-1043).

Teaching appropriateness without being ethnocentric. The teachers recognized that teaching Canadian culture could be a somewhat sensitive activity at times -- they felt that they ought to raise their students' awareness about how Canadians responded to certain behaviors, but at the same time they did not want to give them the impression that Canadian culture was in any way superior to their students' cultures.

As mentioned before, some teachers showed their respect for the students' cultures by first encouraging students to share what was true in their own culture before teaching them about Canadian culture.

> I think I should teach them WHAT Canadians think, or what most Canadians believe in this situation. And the same way as I think that students should have the opportunity to say what THEY think to each other. (Wayne)

> I don't think [we are pushing our culture on them], because they share what's true of their culture from their perspective. (Eileen, 1522-1530)

This was illustrated in Eileen's account of how she taught students about nonverbal communication: she first asked students to compare nonverbal communication in their own countries, and then asked them what they had observed about Canadian culture:

> Nonverbal. Yes. Yes. Like, how close should you stand? Can you look someone in the eyes if the person is a stranger? Do you compliment a stranger on what they're wearing? So those kinds of things. And then they get into groups and I have a list of maybe about twenty different items and they have to discuss their cultures. And they also have to discuss what they have observed of Canadian culture. (Eileen, 562-580)

In a similar manner, before Helen explained which behaviors were not considered appropriate here in Canada, she first asked her students to describe those behaviors which were not considered appropriate in their own countries:

> So they start by telling me a few things that they think are not very polite. And then I say, "Well, in the same fashion, there are things that Canadian people will not consider polite and these are some of the things." (Helen, 1225-1240)

Another way some teachers avoided appearing ethnocentric was to rai[illegible]dents' awareness while making sure that the students realized th[illegible]pted them as they were. For instance, although Wayne was careful to ensure that the students realized he accepted and respected them, he also made it clear to them that they might not be accepted by Canadian society if they displayed certain behaviors. In each of the following quotes from Wayne, two themes are apparent: (a) an effort to empower his students and (b) a respect for his students.

> Well, I think, as long as they realize that this is not culturally acceptable. In the class, I'm not judging things. But they know that outside of the class they will be looked down on if they spit. If they spit in the garbage can, they will give the wrong message. (Wayne, 1074-1093)

> There is still the problem, though, of in Canada, burping ISN'T polite. And you CAN'T say "that's okay" because it's not, you see? And eventually you have to get down to saying that in Canada, no, it's not good. And they accept that as long as they know that you are not looking down on them! All of these activities that I've mentioned before, you are participating as the teacher. You're not above them, you are in the circle. When you're in a circle, you're sitting down, you're not standing up and lording. (Wayne, 1031-1045)

> When you get a class that trusts you then you can do all kinds of neat things. Like, you can say what you think Canadians look down on. Like, Canadians may look down on someone who dresses a certain way. And I think that they should be aware of that! That would be to their advantage to be aware of that. What if someone didn't know that by wearing these kinds of shoes, everyone will think that you are [pause]. Or wearing hair a certain way. You certainly wouldn't do that right away. And you wouldn't do it to look down on anyone. They would already have to know that you respect them. . . . If I were there, I would sure like to know that I shouldn't wear shorts in Thailand, I'd like to know that! (Wayne, 1930-1956)

Helen described how she taught such aspects of Canadian culture as body language and appropriate behaviors, in order to help her students secure and maintain jobs. As mentioned previously, one of Helen's students was devastated and humiliated when the manager at her place of work told her that if she continued to burp, she would not be hired at the end of the program -- and this was one reason why Helen felt so strongly that she should deal with such topics in her classes (Helen, 1245-1258). Helen observed other behaviors in her students which she felt would be offensive to Canadians -- and, because she felt that these behaviors would be limiting in terms of employment, she taught her students which behaviors were or were not appropriate in Canada.

> Things like picking their noses and spitting and also playing with their feet (they take their shoes off and touch their feet) and certainly burping, that's a big one. We've had one person here, a few really, but one person really -- stank! And yes, I do talk about that. . . . And we talk about personal hygiene and employment, and how you're supposed to look neat and clean and certain things that you do might be considered offensive, just like, if we go to your country [some things we do might be offensive]. (Helen, 1197-1230)

> And again, they're going to find that society is going to condemn them if they don't know about these things. I'd rather tell them myself then have them not get a job. (Helen, 1968-1973)

Misunderstandings on the job prompted Helen to explain to her students why their body language was being misinterpreted:

> All kinds of misunderstandings on the job. Like the Latin American women getting physically too close to some of their male co-workers, and female co-workers! But the male co-workers . . . misinterpreted her and tried to make a pass. And she was very offended! . . . [Making eye contact] was such a big thing with Oriental people. People from Vietnam. We got complaints from their bosses and supervisors saying "So and so's not listening to me!" "So and so seems to be upset or angry. Could you come over and find out what's going on?" There was nothing wrong! It was just that their way to show respect was not to make eye contact! And we had to explain to them that this was really not acceptable, that this means something completely [different] -- that you're hiding something or that you're angry or that you're not interested. And that's why people don't make eye contact. But it was something totally new. And even gestures. I had a Chinese student that kept saying "number one" [while extending his middle finger]. (Helen, 2300-1291)

The teachers empowered students to access Canadian society by raising their awareness of how Canadians would react to their behavior; they were non-ethnocentric by leaving the decision of whether to alter their behavior in their students' hands:

> As a teacher, I see it as an obligation to raise awareness. I don't think you should impose your own cultural values, your own moral values, on them. That, I absolutely object to that. (Helen, 1805-1812)

Teachers felt that some of their students behaviors could be potentially isolating. Ali, for instance, described a number of issues of which she felt students should be made aware. However, again, she felt it was important that students be given the freedom to decide whether to change their behaviors in order to be accepted by Canadians, or to maintain their culture and risk rejection.

> Somehow there has to be a balance, I guess. I mean, I think it's important to show them what is acceptable or not acceptable in our culture because they have to [pause]. Like the spitting in the fountain or something -- that's somehow cultural, I suppose, and it will turn a lot of people off, so it has a lot of ramifications [for them]. And then it's up to them whether they follow through on it or not. Say you have a Vietnamese man named "Fuk." I think there's some merit to sitting down with the person and saying "There is this problem with your name, you know, and you MIGHT consider changing your name to Jonny or something." Just so that they're AWARE of why people are laughing. And if they choose to maintain their identity or whatever -- well, that's their choice. And maybe it's okay, but then they should be aware [of people's reactions] -- and as long as they are willing to tolerate it, that's fine, I guess. Once a long time ago I was on a fieldtrip with students and I had these two young Vietnamese guys who were walking along, arm in arm. And these two IGNORANT Canadians in a pickup truck came along and said "Hey you faggots!" or something like that. And I felt badly for them. I don't even know if the students even knew what was going on there. But, in a case like that, I suppose there is merit in talking about the different distances that men [keep from each other]. Generally when I've done this with a class and talked about how Canadian men don't like to touch other MEN, pretty well universally the students find that weird! Even the Orientals who don't maybe hug and kiss people of the opposite sex in public feel quite comfortable with the person of the SAME sex. And so it's really hard for them. But at least they know. So I don't think [pause], I mean, you could be terribly frustrated trying to push it down somebody's throat, but I think they deserve to know what the reactions are, WHY people are reacting this way. And, if they can cope with it, what the heck! . . . And maybe it's good if we have a little more

> touching among men, anyways, so let's not get rid of this completely! (Ali, 2484-2569)

Obviously, Ali deeply respected the cultures of her students and did not want them to change everything; however, she also felt that, in fairness to them, she should warn them of potential Canadian reactions. Similarly, Heather felt that her students should be aware that, although certain actions/behaviors may be tolerated by ESL teachers in the classroom, they may not be tolerated by Canadians outside of the classroom; again, however, she did not insist students change. Heather also added the idea that students could learn how to live in both cultures -- switching from one culture to another (and one system of behavior to another) as they changed environments:

> But then again, explain that "When you're working, when you're in a job, you're going to have to get along with people." So it's better to try to do that in OUR framework because WE understand and we can accept a lot of things that maybe people who don't understand can't accept. We can talk about what is appropriate, what's not appropriate, and you can decide whether or not you want to do this or do that. You know, give them the options and have them decide what they're going to do. Because, sometimes, it's like you wear one hat at home. You go to work, you put on another hat, as it were, and change your behavior along with your language. And if they can make those connections, it's a lot simpler. (Heather, 1673-1694)

Helen mentioned an incident in which she and an employment counselor had tried to "raise the awareness" of two Vietnamese women regarding the possible consequences about lying during a job interview in order to secure a job. They had been playing the game "Thumbs-up" and the question which sparked the argument went something like this: "If you have a certain physical disability, would you lie in a job interview just to get the job?" Although both she and the employment counselor had been unable to convince the Vietnamese women NOT to lie during job interviews, Helen felt that she had done her 'duty' by at least sensitizing them to the potential consequences of such an action.

> And these two Vietnamese women insisted that they would lie. Absolutely. They would not say anything. I said "Well, what if you get hurt on the job because you are physically not fit or whatever?" They said "No. No. No. Absolutely. Absolutely not. I would lie. I would lie. I would lie." And we argued about the value [of lying]: "They will find out eventually anyway

> and then your reputation will be spoiled. They won't give you a good reference. They will fire you to start with and then you won't get good references." And there was just absolutely NO way! That was SO cultural -- that the important thing was to get the job, we'll worry about the rest later. And they had a very narrow-minded, short-sighted type of attitude. . . . And [the employment counsellor] said "Well, we just want you to know what you can expect in Canada if you behave like that. You can choose. We obviously are not trying to persuade you and to convince you and to tell you what to do. But at least you have been warned that this is what will happen. We can almost guarantee that this is what will happen if you lie about something like that." And it was fine, but they never changed their minds! (Helen, 1985-2036)

A related issue identified by the participants was the importance of teaching students how to use the English language appropriately. To Heather in particular this was important because she understood that an inappropriate use of the language could alienate her students from Canadians. She felt that this issue was especially important for advanced students because Canadians would be less likely to forgive them their inappropriate language:

> You hear someone speaking English a little differently and you form an opinion. But when they start dealing with English reasonably well, but inappropriately, we form another opinion. And that's going to affect how people respond to them. So I want to deal with it. (Heather, 2691-2699)

For instance, because her students did not necessarily share the same inhibitions as Canadians regarding talking or asking about "personal" subjects, Heather felt that it was important to raise their awareness regarding which topics Canadians felt were "too personal" to be discussed or asked about:

> Heather And I try to show how we use suggestion about things that we consider to be sort of volatile or sensitive when it refers to the person, and opinions are very personal. Body odor, for example, is very personal. One's status, size, weight, age, marital status, whether or not you have children, these kinds of things are considered very personal.
>
> Sara Would they not be considered personal in their countries?
>
> Heather Not necessarily, no. When I was in Korea, people I didn't know (I'd just met them) asked me how old I was, was I

> married, how many children I had. That's got nothing to do [pause] -- you know, I'm there to teach, I'm not necessarily there to talk about [myself]. But that's what they wanted and that was what was considered appropriate in their culture. That's fine! (Heather, 2625-2649)
> Well, right after that incident I taught the Jazz Chant about "I'd rather not say" ["Personal Questions"]. But when I tried to find out what questions they found to be inappropriate, that they would not respond to, they wouldn't tell me! (Heather, 2664-2672)

Although other teachers did not mention this issue, I noticed that, when observing the classes, students often asked me questions which struck me as somewhat impertinent or personal. For instance, in Ali's class, I was put in the "hot seat" -- students were to ask me questions about myself. Although I realized that this was a common practice in low level classes (and although I had often used this same technique with visitors to my own classes!), I was amazed at how uncomfortable I felt -- and this discomfort seemed to be related to the personal nature of the questions the students asked me (Are you married? Is your husband nice? How old are you?). Because I was familiar with such questions from ESL students, I was not offended; however, I could not help wondering how a "mainstream Canadian" would respond.

Heather identified another problem which was related to the appropriate use of the English Language -- the bluntness of her Eastern European students. As mentioned before, Heather identified this bluntness as a cause of misunderstandings between ESL teachers and their students, and she felt that the teachers should be more aware of this difference. However, because Heather also felt that this bluntness could cause problems between students and the Canadians they met outside of class, she dealt with the issue in her class:

> Poles might come across seeming really boorish and ill-mannered when they give their opinions. . . . But they haven't learned HOW. [They haven't learned] appropriate ways of giving their opinions. They haven't learned that the big thing that distinguishes us from American culture is that understatement is really important to this culture. So that if they feel something strongly, they need to be able to learn to say it with less feeling than they really feel. And it hasn't been taught to them so I think people jump to conclusions. (Heather, 1154-1183)

> And so, what they're doing is they're translating the exact words, which is one problem. When you try to teach the function of stating an opinion or complaining, they're more likely to sound like they're insulting us. And in Polish, it's not it at all! (Heather, 2554-2560)

Because of this problem, Heather felt it was important to make her students aware of the impression they were giving mainstream Canadians; however, if the students were comfortable with giving that impression, she did not insist they change. She saw her role as one of 'demystifying' rather than 'changing':

> Heather So I will try to tell them how they come across to mainstream Canadians. And I'll say, "Well, if you're comfortable with making that impression, then don't change it. But if that kind of impression bothers you, maybe you would like to try doing it this way.
>
> Sara So you're not forcing them to change, but you are just
>
> Heather No! I mean, that's their choice, isn't it? But, if they are perplexed by reactions to them, it might demystify some things. (Heather, 1217-1232)

In order to raise her students' awareness of this issue, Heather would have students listen to audio or visual tapes of people stating their opinions or complaining and then have them analyze how people state their opinions or complain. She also gave them situations to role play (Heather, 2554-2610).

Another use of language which Heather felt was important for her students to know was related to the patterns of logic followed in this culture, especially with regards to writing. She felt that, especially when teaching writing skills, it was important to teach her students the patterns of logic followed by North Americans:

> We talked about logic the other day . . . because patterns of logic are going to vary from culture to culture. They hadn't thought of that before. So what is logical for, let's say, a North American? With a very verbal culture, we need, on most topics, to go quite directly to the point, step-by-step, so that you SEE the direction it's going. Well, in other cultures that's considered rude. But you go from the outside, kind of like a circle, and slowly to the centre of it. And that's considered respectful. And in another culture you might steadily go to the point but put in lots of (what WE would consider in North America)

peripheral information, but for this other culture it's considered rather relevant. (Heather, 851-893)

Other teachers mentioned that inappropriate uses of certain lexical items could cause misunderstandings. For example, in Linda's class, the students were confused over the meaning of the word "passionate." A few weeks prior to the class I observed, Linda had described the word to mean "strong feelings." One of her students subsequently had used the word in a paper to describe her daughter's feelings about her teacher. Linda, therefore, explained the sexual connotations of the word, and cautioned her students to be careful about how they used it (Linda, 96-108). Like Linda, Cheryl identified language appropriateness as an issue in her teaching:

> There's a kind of uncertainty about whether what you've said is appropriate to the situation. Now you are understood. The grammar is correct. The pronunciation is wonderful. Everything, language oriented, is fine. But there's a slippery area where appropriateness is in question. (Cheryl, 932-943)

In the class I observed, I noticed that Cheryl was careful to explain exactly when it was appropriate to use the term "shut-up." When talking about this later, Cheryl described another related incident:

> For example, Isaac had been in the bank and he came to class one day. I was passing things out and I said "There you go, there you go," meaning "here it is." And he sat up and he looked at me and he said "Are you telling us to leave?" I mean, he heard "There. You go." And he had heard the expression in his bank. He had finished his transaction with the teller and she had said "There you go." And he had said "Yes. I'm leaving." He had heard it twice in different contexts and then he asked me. And it was a good way to make a connection with the difference between what the grammatical content of the sentence is and what it actually meant. (Cheryl, 932-973)

<u>Not being the expert</u>. Some of the teachers indicated that they did not feel they could dogmatically assert truths about Canadian culture. Ali, for instance, cited the diversity in Canadian culture as one reason she did not feel she could dictatorially tell the students what was true in Canadian culture:

> There are, I think, a fair number of differences in culture,

anyway. You can't say "Well, you know, all men behave like this" (Ali, 2553-2567)

Linda also mentioned the diversity of opinions held by Canadians as one reason why she could not be "too partisan" when teaching culture:

> But, of course, I think in Canada [pause], sure we do have [pause]. Well, we say we believe in human rights, but there are plenty of Canadians who don't believe -- you only have to listen to the talk shows! So I think you just have to try to present kind of the way it is, trying not to be too partisan or pushing a political party or saying it's the only way. (Linda, 1616-1627)

In the following quote how Wayne qualifies his statement about teaching students what Canadians believe and think:

> I think I should teach them what Canadians think. Or what MOST Canadians believe in this situation. (Wayne, 1864-1871)

Because of the changing nature of his own opinions and because of the diversity in culture (and opinion) among Canadians, Steve mentioned that he would not make dogmatic statements about what Canadians believe. Instead, he would qualify his statements with "in my opinion":

Steve  I'm sure you would teach different things [than I would]. . . . For example, three years ago, I would have come in and said "Lots of people don't have credit cards and they don't use them because they get into too much debt and they get into trouble." So, I've changed on that cultural point and I'm sure it happens on different points. Like, I can't stand Korean food. But last year I'd go in and I'd say "I really like Korean food. You should try the Bulgogi House." . . . I still think I have prejudices there, or I have a difference of opinion from other people. So, but if I think of myself as the standard Canadian! I always qualify my statements by saying "Most people I know in Canada do this," something like that.

Sara  Not saying "Canadians do this!"

Steve  Yes. "This is what you do! [thump on table] I'm God! [thump on table] Etc." Yeah. You avoid that. But you can see how my opinions change about things. So my cultural bias comes in, too, as a Canadian, even within the Canadian culture. And my ideas change. So I make sure they know that. I try to make things, well, not standardized, but "In my opinion." I would tack on that. (Steve, 1209-1263)

## Culture as the Content for Language Learning

From the previous sections of this analysis, it may appear that, to the teachers I interviewed, language learning was of secondary importance when compared to bonding activities, settlement issues, and culture learning. However as will be seen in this section, this simply was not the case. The participants were extremely concerned about the language acquisition of their students, and they found that capitalizing on cultural topics was one means of stimulating interesting classroom discussion and talk (language practice). Cultural topics were, therefore, considered to be the ideal content for ESL classes, and multi-cultural classes were generally considered to be the ideal setting for language teaching.

Multi-cultural classes encourage students to speak English. First of all, in spite of all the potential problems, most teachers indicated that they preferred teaching multi-cultural ESL classes over mono-cultural classes because multi-cultural classes encouraged more use of the English language: not only were students forced to speak in English, but what they had to say was interesting and different.

Some of the teachers mentioned that multi-cultural classes provided students with a natural rather than an artificial English language environment. Wayne, who at the time of the interview was teaching a mono-cultural class of Polish students, mentioned that his students had to pretend that their only means of communication was English:

> In some ways, [being in a mono-cultural class] is NOT good for them because they have to pretend that the other students in the class don't speak Polish. And they have to speak English to them, even though they know that it's WAY easier to communicate in Polish. So, it's a bit artificial in that way. They know, and they agree with me, that to learn English quickly, it's better to be put into an English setting, and be forced to speak English, or be forced to acquire English with English. And not acquiring English through Polish. And, in a multi-cultural class, that's what you have to do. [In order] to deal with and talk to the other students, they have to say "Please repeat that" and "How do you say this" and "What's that?" and all the rest of it. In this

class, they have to PRETEND that they don't (or can't) understand each other any other way than English. So, in that way, it can be artificial. And it's hard for them. (Wayne, 390-421)

Like Wayne, Cheryl felt that a multi-cultural class made the language learning environment more "real." She also mentioned that it made her job as a teacher much easier in that she did not have to continually pester students about speaking their native language:

> It's much better because, what happens if they're all the same language (whether it's Polish or Vietnamese or whatever) is they natter away at each other in their own language and I'm forever having to say "Don't do that! It's an English class! Stop that! Tell it in English!" I'm forever having to do that. Whereas, if they haven't a common language other than English, then they have to do it in English. It makes the situation so much more real. So, I think that's a great advantage. (Cheryl, 1242-1265)

Steve's comment was similar -- he found it easier to teach when he was assured that the students would only be speaking English in his class.

> I've only taught a couple of classes in my life where they've all been speaking the same language or all from the same culture. And I find it completely different because I know, I KNOW when they're whispering something, that they're talking in their own language so I have to stop that. But in this case, I don't [have to stop them speaking their own language], especially when I'm busy with helping somebody else. And I tell them that, too: "I'll split you up [if you are talking in your own language]! You can talk all you want [in English] if I'm doing this. That's fine. Just go for it." And it makes them talk more, too. (Steve, 548-562)

Ali reiterated this idea, but she also added that the students (and teacher) found a multi-cultural class to be more interesting:

> And, as far as discussing Canadian customs and what it's like in your country and so on, it's kind of more interesting for the teacher. It has the potential of being lots more interesting for the students if they can learn from each other and find out that it's a big world. (Ali, 3844-3856)

Wayne also mentioned the interest generated by the mix of cultures in the multi-cultural class. When I asked him which type of class he would prefer to teach, he responded:

> Multi-cultural. Yeah. Much better for the students, and more interesting. . . . It's more interesting for ME but for the students it's much more beneficial because they get forced to have to speak English. They learn about each other's culture. They really enjoy it. It's much more interesting for them and me. (Wayne, 1324-1338)

found in teaching a mono-cultural group of students. For instance, Helen mentioned that in a mono-cultural class, teachers could be freed to concentrate on the language needs specific to the group they were teaching:

> It makes it a little easier with the mono-cultural class to talk about specific errors, to work specifically with their problems that are typical [to their group] -- pronunciation problems, grammar problems, or whatever. You can focus, and do more reinforcement. You can't really do it on an individual basis. . . . Perhaps it's a little easier to have one [culture]. If you have a group of Chinese people, you know what their expectations are. (Helen, 1350-1367)

Like Helen, Steve recognized the benefits of a mono-cultural class. However, he concluded that a multi-cultural class was more suited to the style of teaching and the content matter of the conversation classes he taught:

> If I were lecturing or giving a grammar course, it would be no problem. Then I could get all my lessons made according to their needs, their specific needs as a group. When we do pronunciation, for example, we'd work on the R's and L's if it was a certain group, or the P's and B's if they are Arabs or something like that. But, I think for the type of work that we do in class, like small groups and so on, I'd lose it. . . . So, I'd rather have a multi-cultural class. (Steve, 761-788)

Like Steve, Heather recognized the benefits of a mono-cultural class, but concluded that students in a mono-cultural setting would have a difficult time NOT speaking in their native language. Heather felt that one option would be to have a bilingual (i.e., English and Polish) class where the teacher spoke the same language as the students (Heather, 3342-3363).

An observation I made while observing Wayne's mono-cultural class of Polish students illustrates one benefit of having a mono-cultural class. It became apparent during a language activity that his students all had similar problems with the alphabet -- they consistently confused the pronunciation of the letters "A," "E," and "I." After the language activity, Wayne discussed the alphabet with the students, trying to help them figure out mnemonic devices to help them remember the pronunciation of those letters (e.g., "I am" for "I" and "ABC" for

thoroughly than he would have been if all of the students had not shared the same problem.

<u>Cultural topics give students something to say</u>. Teachers incorporated "cultural topics" into their classes in a number of different ways: (a) they encouraged students to share about their own cultures because it gave them something to talk about (something that they were "experts" in); (b) they encouraged students to compare their cultures (with other students' cultures and with Canadian culture) because they felt that interesting discussions naturally developed; and (c) they taught students about Canadian culture because they felt that such topics would naturally be of interest to the students. In each case, the goal of the activities was to get students talking, thereby fostering their acquisition of the English language.

Throughout the interviews, Linda demonstrated a desire to get her students to talk. For example, Linda's concern about not dominating the students was related to her desire that <u>they</u> do the talking:

> I always try to have activities where they can do more of the talking. This is always so difficult. It's easy for me to talk for the whole two and a half hours! But you want to get things where they can have a chance to speak. (Linda, 1890-1898)

She felt that having an opportunity to talk was vital for her students if they were to progress in their language learning:

> Well, I think this is the best way to teach the language, to involve them. I'm Krashen's disciple I guess. Sure, I think grammar and all the other things are important, especially the higher up you get, and people need it. But most people just need a chance, need a chance, I think, to practice the language. I think that's the most important thing this class can do. (Linda, 1718-1731)

Linda described the success of an activity in which students talked about wedding customs in their own cultures. This activity was particularly successful in her mind because it really involved the students. Students were so excited about sharing about their own cultures that the language barrier was forgotten:

> Speaking of culture, we had one really successful thing where everybody brought their wedding pictures and we talked about

just a WONDERFUL example of how, when people are really interested in things, they just have [pause]. I mean, you forget all about language, just trying to express yourself! (Linda, 1661-1666; 1699-1704)

As mentioned before, I noticed this same eagerness to share about their cultures while observing Ali's class. When Ali asked a Vietnamese woman about the food she was eating, her students seemed eager, almost excited, to be given the opportunity to share something about their own culture. They worked together most enthusiastically as they attempted to bridge the language barrier and describe this little piece of their culture to Ali (Ali, 15-19). In a similar way, Cheryl felt that a cooking activity was particularly successful in her class because it encouraged students to share about their own lives and cultures:

> I ran into that with some of my Central American students because they said "Oh, WE don't make [tortillas]. The Indians do that!" They have COOKS in their house! So I thought "Oh, Hmm!" That is another really interesting thing that would never really have come up unless we had had this kind of experience. They wouldn't have had occasion to tell me that they don't ever make tortillas at home. (Cheryl, 3740-3758)

I noticed while observing Linda's class that, after explaining some aspect of Canadian culture, Linda would ask students about their own cultures. For instance, when she taught the students a song, she asked them if it sounded happy or sad. When her Chinese students thought it sounded happy (although, to both Linda and I, it definitely sounded sad), Linda explained that songs in minor keys sounded sad to Canadians. She then asked the students what made songs sound happy or sad in China. In doing this, Linda gave students the opportunity to talk. Not only did she find that the students wanted to talk about their own countries, but she also found that they had something to say -- in a sense, they were experts on that topic:

> But I feel, of course, also, that one of my goals is to get them to talk. And of course, people like to talk about their own country and their own culture, and they've got something to say. (Linda, 555-588)

Eileen also mentioned that students were eager to share about their own

> I think so. Because that's a common ground. We all come from different cultures and so that gives each group of people something to say. And they're really eager to share about their own culture. They want people to know what's true in Japan or what's true in Columbia. (Eileen, 1494-1504)

Sharing about and comparing cultures was particularly interesting in multi-cultural classes because of the varied backgrounds of the students. Teachers felt that their students found each other's cultures fascinating, and the differences and "richness of experiences" provoked interesting discussions.

> Cheryl I think there's a richness of comparing experiences. For example, family life -- What's family life in your country?
>
> Sara So it gives people more to talk about?
>
> Cheryl Yes. That's right. I mean, if we all have this sort of nuclear family that they encounter in Canada, then there would be no basis for conversation except to crab about how your children behave. But, when a student is from Malaysia, and she's expected to move into the house of her father-in-law with her husband, and how that causes friction amongst her sisters-in-law, and how she was happy to come to Canada to get away from that, and all those repercussions -- I find that very interesting. And so do the other students because they've not lived in those kinds of situations. And so the possibilities for stimulating reaction and questioning and so on is wonderful, I think, in an English classroom. . . . English class is about talking, so it gives a lot more springboards to jump off from, whether you're moving into grammar or pronunciation or reading or you're comparing experiences, say about family life, and then you want to deal with some kind of reading about family life. . . . It's all related. So you use the variety of experiences in the class to. . . get into other [language] activities. It's not that I'm just being an opportunist, I'm saying that what is there is rich and varied and so they can bring that to lots of other language related experiences. (Cheryl, 3471-3536)

Again, from the above quote, it is clear that language acquisition was a primary goal with Cheryl. She used the cultural topics as a

be easier to teach a multi-cultural class:

> Well, actually, I think it's easier to teach a multi-cultural group because you can say "Well, what do you do in your country?" (Linda, 1233-1237)

In spite of the fact that her students shared a common language and culture (at least to some degree) Linda capitalized on their differences to stimulate discussion:

> Even having people from different countries, even though they are all Chinese speaking (however, some of them speak Cantonese and some speak Mandarin, so they can't actually speak to each other, so in a way they are different languages). But it's nice to be able to compare countries, compare backgrounds. (Linda, 1271-1280)

The teachers also felt that students were naturally interested in topics about Canadian culture -- after all, the students were living here in Canada and did have to learn to fit in. Therefore, the teachers capitalized on topics about Canadian culture in order to gain their students' interest and get them talking. For example, when talking about an activity in which Cheryl gave students a 'taste of Canadian culture' (literally, a taste of rhubarb in its different forms), Cheryl said:

> And I kind of offer that as an extension to language teaching. Or at least a way into it. And, quite pragmatically speaking, it's something to talk about. It's a good warm-up. (Cheryl, 830-835)

Cheryl gave another example of how she used a discussion of Canadian culture to encourage her students to practice their reading and speaking skills:

> Usually I use cultural differences as a jumping off point for a class. For example, one that was particularly successful, I think, was table manners and etiquette. I took in a place setting -- a formal and an informal one. and we talked about it -- "What do you expect when you see this?" and so on. And then there was an etiquette quiz in one of the magazines, and I took that in and went over it and had them choose what the appropriate behavior was. And it was a good reading exercise and it was a good speaking exercise, but I also think it was quite a cultural difference. (Cheryl, 697-716)

their husbands when they lose their jobs (

case, students were perhaps more eager to express their opinions about Canadian culture than to learn about it; however, the end result was the same -- the students were motivated and eager to express themselves in English. Heather also mentioned that student complaints could result in valuable language practice:

> So, it opens the way, if you look at it in a positive way, for a really good discussion of Canadian culture and how they see it. (Heather, 3239-3264)

Linda described Canadian culture as an ideal content to stimulate discussion and talk among the students:

> So, I mean, all the things about culture is not just to indoctrinate them. It's also to give them a chance to --- I mean, you have to have them talk about something! . . . I mean, I would say in a way that it's almost more important for the content because there are hundreds of things you could choose. (Linda, 1751-1765)

Eileen's concern that the students do the talking was evident as she explained how she taught about Canadian culture. As much as was possible, Eileen encouraged the STUDENTS to volunteer the information about Canadian culture:

> I ask them, "What do you think is true of Canada?" I get THEM to give ME as much of the information as possible. And then, of course, I fill in the blanks. (1507-1511)

Wayne felt that his job was made easier by the fact that the students were from different cultures and were adjusting to Canada. Because of this fact, he had a broad spectrum of potentially interesting topics to choose from:

> Well, the students are all really eager, because of those things [because they were from different cultures and adjusting to Canada]. And they're really open, most of them. They feel really like they have lots to learn and are motivated. Like, all these ...ngs make the job really easy, right? And you can use all of ...e background experiences as a vehicle for teaching English. ... job is made easy in a lot of ways. (Wayne, 2097-2127)

Way... used both comparing cultures and teaching about Canadian culture

as vehicles for language teaching. He mentioned that it was sometimes difficult to find topics which were of interest to students who had been living in Canada for a while, as they were no longer particularly interested in learning about Canadian culture:

Wayne We're trying to teach English, but through some of these themes. And that gives you a lot of themes that you can do. And there's a lot more interest in these themes because they're different for different cultures. And housing, it's very different in different countries. And even in Canada, it's different. And it gives you a really good vehicle to teach English through. So, we're still teaching English as the main thing, but

Sara but you're using different vehicles than you probably would if they'd been here for a long period of time?

Wayne Yes. And it's harder to use themes in those kinds of classes where students have been here for a long time. It's harder to use these kinds of themes -- they're not as interested in them. (Wayne, 1814-1838)

Wayne made it clear that his students' acquisition of the English language was his primary goal in teaching his classes -- he only used cultural topics as a vehicle for the language:

> Our main goal here is to teach English -- spoken English and English literacy. And that's the main goal. But [we do this] through making them aware of things that people in Canada do, through making them aware of what other people in the class think and do. [Those would be vehicles to teach the language], but language is first. That's why we're here! And culture is a very big part, but [language] is our goal, our stated goal. (Wayne, 2133-2153)

Helen also capitalized on topics about Canadian culture in order to promote discussion in her conversation class, but the topics she chose tended to be somewhat controversial. For instance, in order to stimulate discussion in her conversation class, Helen gave her students an article about single's bars in Edmonton and Calgary. Although some students were shocked by the article, Helen thought it was a valuable exercise because, not only were they learning about Canadian culture, they were able to express their opinions and share about what was true of their own country:

> Some of them were shocked. . . . The Orientals were shocked. People from more conservative cultures were shocked. The Latin

> Americans were a little bit shocked as well. But others, certainly people from Germany, they have the same thing. But at least they had a chance to say "Well, this is the way we do it in our country and so on." (Helen, 986-995)

As was mentioned before, Helen also allowed (or encouraged) discussion about topics such as homosexuality, abortion, and religion in her classes. After a student's presentation on a religious subject during the class I observed, some of the students seemed to be a slightly irritated with the presenter. Helen then told the class that the presenter had been worried about talking about religion in her class but she had told him to go ahead, as long as he made sure that it was done in a polite manner. She then told the class that, when she was in teacher's training, she had been told not to talk about "sex, politics, or religion" in the class. "But," she told her students, "If you don't talk about those subjects, everything else tends to be boring!" The tension was broken and students laughed. From this incident it was clear that Helen capitalized on any topics which she felt would stimulate discussion without unduly offending her students. (Helen, 118-132)

## Themes

Further analysis of the data gave rise to two broad and pervasive themes which seemed to cut across the boundaries imposed by the categories. The first and perhaps most important theme which undergirded every one of the interviews can be described as "tolerance" or non-ethnocentrism. The second broad theme includes the teachers' efforts to give their students a "voice" both in their classrooms and in Canadian society.

### A Non-Ethnocentric Attitude of Tolerance and Acceptance

Included in this concept of tolerance or non-ethnocentrism was a deep respect for other (and different) people, ideas, and cultures; and a fascination with and an openness to learn from their differences.

Within this broad concept, two sub-themes became apparent: on the one hand, the participants felt that they, themselves, must be tolerant of and open to learn from their students; and on the other hand, they felt that they must promote or instill in their students this same attitude of tolerance, openness, and respect for differences.

Demonstrated by teachers. The teachers' attitude of tolerance and acceptance towards their students was demonstrated as they (a) respected the adultness of their students; (b) affirmed their students' cultural identities; (c) sympathized with their students' difficulties; and (d) demonstrated a fascination with, and an openness to learn from, their students.

The participants' acceptance of their students was first demonstrated by the deep respect, worth, and value they accorded their students. The teachers were careful to treat their students as adults, as equals, in spite of the students' resistance to such treatment. Because they recognized that their students were worthy, responsible adults, they encouraged their students to take responsibility for their own learning. The teachers found, however, that their students often resisted such treatment, preferring rather to take the somewhat less demanding roles of passive students in authoritarian, totalitarian classes.

The teachers' acceptance of their students was also demonstrated as they constantly affirmed their students' pride in their diverse ethnic heritages. As is clear from the categories previously delineated, the teachers encouraged students to share aspects of their cultures and countries with other students in the class. They expected and allowed the students to make their own decisions regarding which parts of Canadian culture they would or would not adapt to. Teaching Canadian culture involved first presenting students with options, and then encouraging students to make their own decisions regarding whether to change their behavior to fit the sensibilities of Canadians, or to maintain their own culture. The decision the students eventually came to was not so important to the teachers interviewed; what was important was that the students be fully cognizant of how Canadians might view

them. By encouraging students to make their own decisions, the teachers were not only validating the students' ethnic heritages, but they were also recognizing their students as adults who had the right to determine their own lives.

Besides recognizing the importance of being sympathetic and sensitive to the needs of their students, the teachers interviewed also emphasized the necessity of being able to suspend their assumptions about their students and tolerate different ways of behaving and believing. As they described their efforts to alleviate the stress their students faced and make them as comfortable as possible in the classroom, the participants demonstrated a genuine concern for the comfort of their students and a sympathetic awareness of the complex, stressful realities of life that their students faced. Possibly because of this awareness and sympathy, the participants tolerated a wide variety of behaviors which mainstream Canadians might find unacceptable or strange.

Not surprisingly, the teachers seemed to feel that those experiences which they had in common with their students were especially valuable in helping them empathize with and tolerate their students. For instance, both the experience of learning another language and the experience of living in and adjusting to another culture were cited as valuable in helping the teachers understand their students' feelings and needs as they learned English in Edmonton. Other experiences, such as working in refugee camps in Southeast Asia, standing in food lineups in Poland, or feeling out of place in a Chinese restaurant because they could not use chopsticks, were also cited by the participants as factors which had helped them understand and empathize with the experiences of their ESL students. Often, as teachers described the problems and needs of their students, they compared their own past experiences with their students' experiences, as if to say, "I've been there too, so I understand."

The participants also demonstrated their acceptance of their students as they described the pleasure they derived from their jobs. They treasured the personal fulfillment they experienced by helping people who truly seemed to need their help, and they appreciated the

eagerness to learn which was demonstrated by their students. Most importantly, however, they expressed a fascination for, and an enjoyment of, the different cultures of their students. Because the teachers found the cultural differences of the students to be inherently interesting (not only for the other students, but also for themselves) they almost unanimously indicated that they would rather teach multi-cultural than mono-cultural classes. They consistently described their students' cultural differences as not only strange and different, but also as immensely fascinating. Statements such as the following were common throughout the interviews and demonstrate the participants' enjoyment of their students and classes: "It was really interesting"; "That was another really interesting difference"; "It was an absolute hoot!"; "They're really quite a nice class"; "I like this class"; "They're quite funny! I'll never forget them, I'm sure!"; "I would never have learned that otherwise!"; "It makes it really challenging and really magnetic"; "And I really enjoy this, delving into other cultures, comparing cultures, comparing notes." Heather's comment at the end of our interview summarizes these sentiments:

> Sara: Is there anything else that you'd like to mention?
>
> Heather Anything else, huh? Enjoy! Enjoy, enjoy, enjoy, enjoy. Enjoy the differences! Yeah, and really [pause] enjoy the differences! . . . Enjoy the differences! (Heather, 1792-1801)

Not only did the teachers describe their enjoyment of and fascination with the diversity of their students, but they also often described the 'education' they had received from their students. Linda, especially, valued the opportunity she found in her classes to learn about unfamiliar cultures and foreign countries:

> And it's something that I am interested in learning because I might as well learn something, too. (Linda, 583-585)
>
> Well, the one thing that I can think of, that I might not have mentioned, is it's so interesting for the teacher, which I don't think is mentioned that often. I think if you were just teaching Edmontonians, it wouldn't be as [pause]. It would be as interesting, probably in a different way -- but there is something really interesting about discussing with people [who are]

completely [different], if you are interested in foreign affairs and travel and all that sort of thing. It does just make it really challenging and really magnetic. And I really enjoy this, kind of delving into other cultures or comparing cultures, or comparing notes, or seeing similarities even. . . . Well, I mean, I think as far as teaching goes, the teacher learns more because you try things out, and you have the feeling you're learning a lot more than the students are. (Linda, 2910-2945)

As Linda described an activity in which she and her students had talked about weddings, much of her enthusiasm was obviously related to the fact that, through the activity, she had gained some fascinating new insights into her students' cultures:

> And I didn't realize that people gambled at wedding parties in Hong Kong! They played mahjong for money! I couldn't believe it! I was just absolutely [pause]. And then the bride puts on a fashion show. She has all these different outfits for her trousseau, and then she's supposed to put them on and then parade around in the reception, wearing all these different costumes! (Linda, 1681-1693)

Cheryl demonstrated a similar fascination and enthusiasm as she related some recently learned information about her students' cultures:

> So I thought "Oh, hmm!" That is another really interesting thing that would never really have come up unless we had had this kind of experience. They wouldn't have had the opportunity to tell me that they don't ever make tortillas at home because they have Indians and Indians know how to do that and they're really good at it and they build the fires and they're wood fires and they do it this way and that way and so on. I never would have learned that otherwise! (Cheryl, 3740-3758)

Cheryl also mentioned that her own assumptions and ideas were often challenged by her students -- and she found this to be a valuable experience. In the following quote, Cheryl describes how her stereotypical assumptions about Syrians were challenged and changed:

> I had an image of Syrians: Swarthy skin, dark eyes, black hair. And when [Isaac, a Syrian] came into class -- blond, blue eyed, light skinned -- I said, "Isaac, you can't be blue eyed! You're supposed to be dark!" And he didn't find it very funny I guess -- I mean, he sort of smiled and laughed -- but he said that only the people who live in the desert are dark. He said it's to protect them from the sun. I said "Of course! How reasonable!" But, you know, I really did smash a stereotype that I had held. Syrian to me meant dark, swarthy, dark eyed. (Cheryl, 1007-1031)

In another instance, a student's criticism prompted her to rethink her assumptions about Canada's electoral process, and allowed her new insight into the experiences of one of her students:

> Isaac who comes from Syria (which has a history of government manipulation of elections) was most offended, most upset! He felt that this was corruption in the electoral process, manipulation of the electoral process. For me, that's a cultural idea that he's bringing that I don't have -- and actually, I was really surprised. And the result is that it makes me think differently about our electoral process. (Cheryl, 530-540)

Other assumptions of Canadian culture (e.g., the value of individualism) were challenged by Cheryl's students, and Cheryl identified these challenges as one of the rewards of being a teacher:

> There are some challenges to my sense of Canadian culture that come to me from the Asiatic groups. For example, social services. Strongly, from the Vietnamese and the Chinese (the traditional Chinese, I should say), is the idea that the family has a responsibility for everybody. If you're out of work or you need some place to live, you go to your family. You don't go to the government! And that challenges my Canadian sense of the way things are done. . . . You tend to use the social services if you haven't got a job or if you need some help or some counseling or whatever. Those things are available. But, oh goodness, you wouldn't go to your brother or your sister or your mother or anybody like that. We all have independent lives to live, after all! So that was a real challenge to the values that I had accepted as being right and good. . . . That used to be the way in our culture, and now we have strayed from that. Maybe we'll come back, but still [pause]. Challenges to me. I think that's probably what makes it rewarding as a teacher. (Cheryl, 1996-2047)

Like Cheryl, Heather felt that maintaining an openness to learn from her students was very important to her as a teacher:

> And I learn from them. I think the day I stop learning from them is the day that it's [time to] stay out of the classroom. . . . I think students need to be convinced of that, too. They find it very hard to believe -- "Teachers don't learn. They teach!" If I become that kind of teacher, I'm quitting! (Heather, 1833-1846)

<u>Fostered in students</u>. Not only did the participants demonstrate an accepting, nonethnocentric attitude towards their students, but they also clearly felt that it was their responsibility to foster a similar attitude in their students. In some ways, the teachers I interviewed

seemed to think that the students in their classes were somewhat narrow-minded -- intolerant of new ideas, different opinions, and unfamiliar teaching styles. They were also quite concerned about the ingrained racial prejudice and bigotry of their students which seemed to reinforce their intolerance of different viewpoints and cultural behaviors. The teachers attempted to broaden their students' horizons by helping them to perceive reality from different cultural viewpoints, thereby helping their students to overcome ethnocentrism and prejudice.

As is clear from the category, "Helping students get along with each other," the most obvious reason for teaching tolerance and cultural awareness was to ensure that students would get along with one another in the classroom. However, another reason for this emphasis was that, since they perceived tolerance to be a Canadian characteristic (at least to some degree), the teachers felt that their students would be condemned by Canadian society if they did not learn to be more tolerant of different races, cultures, and opinions. Persuading students to become more tolerant, then, seemed to be a rather empowering activity.

As described in the category "Helping students get along with each other," the participants reported that the ingrained racial prejudice and bigotry of some students, along with the stress of acculturation and intolerance towards different viewpoints and cultures, often resulted in conflicts among the students. As a result, the participants took a number of precautions to ensure that the their students would get along with each other. First of all, because the teachers recognized that shared or similar experiences fostered bonds among students, they emphasized the similarities among their students, the common humanity that each of them shared. They also encouraged students to share their problems with other students in the class, promoting sympathy and empathy among the students. In the hope that students would "learn from each other and find out that it's a big world," the teachers also attempted to open their students' eyes to the variety of cultures represented in the class. Teachers did this by arranging classes so that students would be forced to interact with people from other cultures, by encouraging students to share about and

compare their cultures, by emphasizing that every culture was "okay," and by neither ignoring nor tolerating bigotry in their classes.

However, teachers did not teach tolerance of other cultures and peoples just as a means of empowering their students. Their teaching of tolerance was also very much related to a desire to preserve and protect the culture and well-being of their own country, Canada.

> I tell everybody that [prejudice/discrimination] is not tolerated in my class. . . . I said, "It's like when these Sikhs came over to murder this guy on Vancouver Island, and I said, "Boy, any time they bring their problems or violence over here, they're out of here. I don't care if they're Canadian or what! They don't do that. This is my country and we want it clean, and safe, and nice, basically. Do you know what I mean? Because we don't want that crap. (Steve, 447-461)

> I think that one of [the things students should adjust to] is related to this idea of tolerance. They should adjust to each other. They have to. We have to live together, with differences. It's REALLY important! . . . I have a gut feeling that that's of crucial importance to the country. (Cheryl, 3769-3789)

> We started as a multi-cultural nation, and I expect we're going to continue that way. God knows, if we aren't tolerant of one another, we'd be in a real mess! (Cheryl, 3599-3615)

Not only did the teachers encourage students to tolerate and accept other cultures, but they also encouraged them to become more tolerant and accepting of different ideas or opinions, or, as one teachers stated, "to at least be broad minded enough to listen!" (Helen, 1934-1937). It is interesting to note that, although the teachers recognized that tolerance of different opinions was a very "Canadian" characteristic, they had no compunction in insisting that their students accept this Canadian norm:

> And that's the only thing I've been pushing on them, to become a little more tolerant, perhaps. (Helen, 1905-1908)

> I found myself, again, advocating tolerance, advocating tolerance." (Cheryl, 1330-1340)

In Cheryl's mind, teaching tolerance was obviously connected to her desire to protect those things which she felt were unique to Canadian culture:

On the other hand -- and if it hadn't been for this RCMP thing with the Sikhs, I wouldn't have known that I held this idea so firmly. But I do think that things which have come to be known as traditionally Canadian shouldn't be tampered with. And it's another gut feeling. It's not rational, it's not very intelligent, really. It's just a gut feeling that I have that there are certain things here that I want preserved as having developed here in the first part of our development as a country. What happens from here on in, I suppose, is going to be something different. But I just had that [feeling]. (Cheryl, 3769-3809)

On the surface, it may seem that Cheryl's concern to teach her students tolerance was in conflict with her outrage at the idea of allowing Sikh's to wear turbans in the RCMP -- however, both of these ideas seem to be rooted in her desire to protect (and possibly promote), Canadian culture.

I really feel quite strongly about that, that I have a culture too, to communicate. That Canada has a culture to communicate. . . . I think I can set a tone of tolerance in the classroom for the differences amongst people, but I think that that tone itself is part of Canadian culture. That we are, by and large, tolerant of differences. On the other hand, we also have an identity and a culture. . . . I feel quite strongly that they should adjust to it. I'm quite opposed, for example -- and this may sound like a racist comment, and I'm sorry if it does -- but the recent decision (this is just in the news) to allow Sikhs to wear turbans and swords in the RCMP??!! Yes, instead of the RCMP uniform! And I thought, "My goodness! That's very strange!" The RCMP is Canadian. This is a uniform in itself! If you are in the RCMP, you'll wear an RCMP uniform. You don't wear a Sikh uniform in the RCMP! So, my outrage at that story indicates to me that I really have a sense of what is Canadian culture now. And I'm very opposed to diluting that in the name of "tolerance" -- multiculturalism. (Cheryl, 1807-1852)

Cheryl, especially, felt that there were some things that she wanted to preserve about Canadian culture, and she seemed to feel these things were being threatened in some way. Perhaps because of this, she desired to share her culture with the students:

I believe that we could accept and tolerate other cultures, but I do believe that there is a Canadian culture that has to be also communicated, and that this is the way we do it. And I feel confident in that myself, actually. I do feel that I have a basically Canadian approach to things, and I want to share that. I want to approach it, I want to offer to them things that come from that culture. (Cheryl, 1488-1500)

Related to Cheryl's efforts to protect and share aspects of Canadian culture were Linda's efforts to promote one of our Canadian ideals, the value of a democratic government which respected human rights:

> I'm interested in politics, myself, and I feel also, with the people from China, I think it's trying to give them some of the ideas about the way our Canadian government functions; hoping, I guess, that they'll loosen up their government when they go home. I hope that they don't get into any trouble or anything, but I mean, I sort of want to show them, as much as I can, the values of a democratic system. I guess that's the main reason. (Linda, 541-554)

> We did talk about human rights -- that was a big thing before the election...we talked about the Canadian Bill of Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and then we got into government. Ah, and this is something I feel very strongly about, so I was of course pushing this kind of thing. Knowing that China has a very bad record, although they can't do too much about it, I was trying to give some values. (Linda, 1556-1571)

This desire to protect and preserve Canada was also demonstrated as teachers described students who criticized Canada and Canadians. Some of the teachers seemed quite defensive when they recounted student criticisms of Canada. Heather, for instance, was obviously irritated by students who constantly complained about Canada:

> Like "Canadians are cold" . . . Well, how do you know they are cold?" You know, I get a little upset with the Canada-bashing, I must say. (Heather, 1233-1236)

Likewise, Steve made it clear that he did not tolerate students who criticized his country overly much:

> And there's only so much you can listen to in the class, when even the other students are going to be thinking, "Well, go home then, buddy." And that's my attitude towards it. (Steve, 953-958)

> [They complain] about the way the education system is set up here. For example, if you've got somebody from Poland who's complaining about the education system here. All I can do is laugh! . . . So, don't give me that stuff, buddy. (Steve, 961-981)

> "This is the way it is here, gang . . . you don't like it? Go home." And for some of them, they can go home now. "You want to go back to Poland?" Imagine how much they'd complain if they went there! This is the attitude I'm picking up with these people because it's just -- boy, what a pain! (Steve, 1455-1479)

Ali also seemed somewhat exasperated as she described a student who complained constantly about Canada and Canadians.

> Partly it was her forcefulness, it's true. But it was WHAT she was forceful about that became particularly annoying. We'd talk about how, in Canada, some people have a problem with daycare or something like that, and then she'd sort of say "Yeah. Canada. Canadians are no good parents. Children are no-good in Canada." or something like that! Well! I mean! Inadvertently, myself as a parent, she's a little bit offensive to me! And then, you know, I said to her "Oh, come on! Do you really think, are you telling me that there are no good parents in Canada?" (Ali, 3682-3716)

When faced with student criticisms of Canada, some teachers attempted to defend Canada/Canadians from student criticisms, encouraging students, so it seemed, to be more tolerant and openminded towards Canada. Eileen, for instance, explained how she reacted to the criticism that "Canadians weren't very friendly." First of all (like Ali in the previous quote), she asked students for examples to validate their complaints. She then "tried to explain that some Canadians might be friendly" (Eileen, 1446-1452). Similarly, Linda described her attempt to defend Canada when responding to students who complained that "Canadian women divorce their husbands when their husbands lose their jobs":

> And I felt, of course, that I had to defend Canadians. I wasn't really aware that this was a big problem or anything! (Linda, 1084-1087)

> I tried to explain. I said, "Well, I wasn't really aware that it was happening. Did they maybe know more about it than I did? There was lots of divorce in Canada, no doubt about that. And I said, "Well, maybe people, when they lose their job, become very difficult to live with, and so maybe this causes friction in the family. I -- I -- somebody had to defend Canada! . . . I guess I just want to present another perspective. Actually, I'm notorious in my family for always standing up, explaining why people do the things they do. Joe Psychology, they used to call me. (Linda, 1160-1179)

In another instance, when her students complained about the weather forecasting in Canada, Linda again mentioned that she had felt compelled to defend Canada:

> You know, you always feel you have to defend Canadian institutions! -- I said, "Well, I guess it's because we're so close to the mountains." (Linda, 2406-2438)

Giving Students a Voice

The second theme which emerged from the data was the teachers' concern to give their students a voice, both inside and outside of the classroom -- empowering students both to express their identities, cultures, and opinions, and to become functioning members of Canadian society, able to access all of the rights and privileges therein.

Within the classroom. In the classroom, the teachers gave students a 'voice' in two ways. First of all, as they taught their students a new language, the teachers were involved in giving students a new 'voice' with which to communicate. Therefore, as language teachers, the activities they developed were designed to encourage students to speak up in class (this idea was especially emphasized in the sub-category, "Culture as the content for language learning"). Secondly, throughout the categories, it was apparent that the teachers encouraged their students to use their new voices to express their cultures, opinions, and experiences in the classroom. The teachers found that, because students were experts in their own cultures, and because they were new to Canada, cultural topics were inherently interesting and gave students something to say (see the sub-category "Cultural topics give students something to say").

In Canadian society. Not only were the teachers concerned that students have a voice in the classroom, but they were also concerned that students be empowered to express this voice outside of the classroom, in the new society which surrounded them. The teachers evidenced this concern in a variety of ways. When the problems students faced became overwhelming, the teachers made themselves available to either help the students themselves or refer them to professionals who could help them. As the teachers taught students to tolerate and get along with students from other cultures, they felt they were empowering the students to get along in a multi-cultural society. Similarly, as they taught their students about aspects of Canada and Canadian culture, they were empowering the students to

become a part of that society, to access all of the resources and privileges accorded to citizens and residents of Canada.

As is seen from the categories previously described, much of what the teachers did was designed to help students "belong" in Canada. Through various activities (such as singing Canadian folk songs, reading poems, looking at paintings of Canada's landscape, eating Canadian foods, learning about Canadian holidays, watching and analyzing television commercials, etc.) the teachers tried to develop in their students a "feeling" of being a part of the new environment and country. In response to student complaints about Canada and Canadians, the teachers taught students about those aspects of Canadian culture that students found difficult to accept (e.g., "it's not that Canadians are cold; rather, they respect your privacy"). The teachers also developed classroom activities which encouraged and prepared students to get out and become involved in the new society, to make and maintain contact with local Canadians (e.g., they taught students how to vote, use a bank, take advantage of the convenience of the telephone, introduce themselves to their neighbors, engage in small talk, use appropriate nonverbal behaviors, etc.).

Finally, in order to help students become an accepted part of Canadian society, the teachers felt that it was important to make the students aware of those behaviors which Canadians consider to be inappropriate. They realized that, if students did not change or adapt in some ways, they would likely be rejected by members of Canadian society. At the same time, however, the teachers did not want to pressure students to change their behaviors in order to conform to Canadian cultural norms. Although they taught their students about Canadian norms, they did not insist that students conform indiscriminately to those norms. Instead, as mentioned previously, the teachers were very careful to encourage students to both describe their own cultural norms and make their own decisions regarding whether to adapt to Canadian culture or to maintain their own culture. Because they displayed a vibrant interest in the students' cultures, and because they allowed students to express their own cultures and

viewpoints in the class, the teachers did not feel that they were being ethnocentric by teaching Canadian culture to their students.

Summary

In summary, in this chapter the data from the interviews were presented in terms of five categories and two broad themes. In the first category, I discussed the participants' comments about the impact of their past experiences (whether cross-cultural, language learning, or teaching) on (a) their ability to understand and identify with their students, (b) their decision of what content to include in the class, and (c) their ability to serve as a role model for their students. In the second category, the teachers' perceptions of their students as being under tremendous pressures was evidenced by their descriptions of the realities of their students' lives and the symptoms of stress they saw their students displaying. In the third category, the teachers' efforts to help their students feel comfortable in the classroom were discussed. Those efforts involved setting a relaxed, tolerant tone in the classroom, dealing with different classroom expectations, treating students with respect, being approachable, developing a relationship with the students, and avoiding misunderstandings. A fourth category, (which was closely related to the idea of helping students feel comfortable in the classroom) included the teachers' perceptions of student relationships in the classroom and their efforts to encourage students to get along with each other. In order to facilitate positive student interaction, the teachers emphasized similarities among the students, encouraged bonds to develop between students, avoided topics which could cause confrontation, encouraged students to change offending behaviors, and promoted the characteristic of tolerance. The fifth category included the teachers' discussion of the dual purpose of dealing with "cultural topics" in their classes: (a) cultural topics were seen to be the ideal the content of the ESL class (it was one way to "get students to talk") and (b) teaching culture was one way to help students "belong" here in Canada. Also included in this category was a

discussion of how the teachers taught Canadian culture while avoiding ethnocentricity.

The two broad themes which were described in this chapter included (a) the primacy of tolerance, both as a characteristic or value of the teachers interviewed, and as a characteristic which they attempted to foster in their students; and (b) the teachers' efforts to give their students a "voice" both in their classrooms and in Canadian society.

In the next chapter, the study will be summarized and reflected upon, and implications for practice and research will be discussed.

# CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, REFLECTIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, the purpose, methodology, and findings of the study will be summarized, reflections (both personal reflections and reflections on the literature) will be addressed, and implications for practice and research will be discussed.

## Summary of the Study

### Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into ESL teachers' perceptions of the impact of cultural differences and acculturation on the adult ESL class. The following questions served as guides to the development of the study and, in part, to the analysis of the data.

1. What impact do cultural differences among the students have on interaction, communication, and relationships in the ESL class? How does this affect the teachers' actions and attitudes?

2. What impact does the process of adjusting to a new culture and country have on interaction, communication, and relationships in the ESL class? How does this affect the teacher's actions and attitudes?

3. What past experiences do ESL teachers perceive as valuable as they interact with ESL students and assist them to adjust to Canadian society?

### Methodology

Unstructured, reflexive interviews with eight ESL teachers were the primary method of data collection, although some data from classroom observations were also used to corroborate and illustrate the

data from the interviews. The teachers I interviewed were from a variety of ESL teaching situations and taught a variety of levels: some of the teachers interviewed taught very basic level classes with a high percentage of elderly and/or illiterate students, while others taught relatively advanced university preparation classes.

A few hours of classroom observation with each teacher served as a springboard for discussion during the interviews. Although the interviews were by no means standardized (especially since much of what was said related to what had occurred during the classroom observation), they did share some common elements: I asked participants to describe how their students got along with each other (giving examples from their present and past classes) and how this affected what they did in the class; I asked them to describe their students' experiences of adjusting to life in Edmonton and what they felt to be their role in facilitating that adjustment; I asked them to tell me about the cultural aspects of what they do, and give me examples from their current classes; and I also asked the participants about their background in teaching ESL, and their knowledge and experience with places other than Canada and languages other than English (see also Defoe, 1986). In keeping with the reflexive principles of ethnographic interviews, I often voiced my interpretations and inferences for the participants' reactions. Each interview was taped, transcribed, and then returned to the participant. Participants were then given the opportunity to clarify, delete, or add to what they had said. Follow-up interviews were scheduled for five teachers who felt that they had additional comments to make, while one interview sufficed for the three teachers who felt that they had "said everything they needed to say" in their first interview.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was continuous, beginning with the first observation and interview. The data were analyzed in terms of the categories and

themes which emerged from the interviews. It is important to note here that the categories which emerged from the interviews did not necessarily correspond neatly with the three guiding questions described previously, although each of the questions were eventually answered. Instead, the information from the interviews evolved into five major categories.

The first category corresponds with the third research question mentioned above, and it includes the participants' reflections on the impact of their past experiences (whether cross-cultural, language learning, or teaching) on (a) their ability to understand and identify with their students, (b) their decision regarding what cultural content to cover, and (c) their ability to serve as role models for their students.

The remaining five categories provide answers (although somewhat circuitously) to the first two guiding questions mentioned above, as the participants described what they saw to be the impact of acculturation and cultural differences on roles, relationships and communication in the ESL class. The distinction I drew between the two factors (acculturation, cultural differences) in the literature review and in the guiding questions was not reflected in the responses of the participants. Instead, the teachers I interviewed seemed to view the issue of culture more holistically. They clearly felt that the different cultures and experiences of their students affected their classes; however, as the teachers described the interaction, communication, relationships, roles and actions apparent in their classes, they did not distinguish between the effects of acculturation and the effects of cultural differences. Therefore, in light of the accepted principles of qualitative research, I chose to present the experiences of the teachers in terms of the categories which emerged from the data, rather than imposing on the data my rather artificial conceptual framework.

The second category which emerged from the interview data included the teachers' sense that their students were under tremendous pressure as evidenced by their descriptions of the realities of their students' lives and the symptoms of stress they saw their students displaying.

The teachers' identified the following issues as realities faced by their students which they, as teachers, needed to take into consideration: pressure to support the family; pressure to learn the language; pressure of role reversals in families; pressure of isolation and loneliness; impact of scars from past traumatic experiences; impact of changes in status, weather, technology, and culture; impact of limited classroom experience; and impact of limited exposure to other cultures. In some cases, these realities were seen to be quite overwhelming as teachers described some students as being unable to learn the language, over-sensitive, depressed/apathetic, exhausted, moody and even ill. They also described some of their students as being extremely critical, especially of Canada and Canadians. On a more positive note, however, some teachers felt that these pressures provided students with the needed motivation to learn the language.

What teachers did in their classroom seemed to be closely tied to their perceptions of their students. For instance, the teachers' concerns for the comfort of their students, the third category, is clearly related to the teachers' perceptions of their students as being under extreme pressure. Six subcategories are all clustered under the major category of the teachers' concern to help their students feel comfortable in their classrooms. In the first subcategory are the teachers' descriptions of their efforts to set an informal, relaxed and tolerant tone in the classroom. A second subcategory includes the sense that the teachers attempted to treat their students with respect by keeping in mind their status as adults, by trying not to impose their own cultures/opinions on the students, and by validating their students' cultures. The teachers considered themselves available and approachable as they (a) scheduled individual interviews; (b) listened to, helped and referred students who came to them with problems; (c) reached out to students in trouble; and (d) provided opportunity for students to share their problems with other students in class. A fourth subcategory includes the teachers' descriptions of their efforts to develop a relationship with their students. They attempted to minimize the barrier between themselves and their students (building a

rapport) while still maintaining some sort of teacher image (being friendly, but not being a friend). Also included in this major category are the teachers' accounts of the different classroom expectations they encountered in their students (what students felt were appropriate in terms of teacher/student roles, gender roles, and language learning activities), and their efforts to deal with these disparate expectations. The last subcategory includes the teachers' perceptions of the potential for misunderstanding in their classes and the steps they took to avoid it.

A fourth category, which is closely related to the teachers' concern to help students feel comfortable in the classroom, includes the teachers' perceptions of student relationships in the classroom and their efforts to help their students interact positively with each other. Although they recognized that students often did get along with each other, the teachers mentioned that racial prejudice, intolerance of cultural differences, and misunderstandings (as a result of cultural/language barriers) often negatively affected the atmosphere of their classrooms. In order to neutralize potential problems, the teachers emphasized the similarities (or the common humanity) of their students, designed their activities and organized their classrooms in ways that would encourage bonds to develop between students, avoided topics/activities which could cause confrontation, and encouraged students to change offensive behaviors. By encouraging students to learn about each others' cultures, and by not tolerating bigotry in their classrooms, the teachers encouraged students to be more tolerant of different cultures and opinions. The teachers clearly felt that tolerance was the one aspect of Canadian society to which their students must adapt.

The fifth category includes the teachers' discussion of their dual purpose in teaching culture in their classes. First of all, teachers used what they described as "cultural" topics to help their students belong: they tried to foster in the students a 'sense of belonging' to the environment and the country; they dealt with students' criticisms of Canada/Canadians; they taught the students survival skills and encouraged them to become participating members of Canadian society.

The teachers also taught students how to behave appropriately in Canadian society; however, in doing so they were conscious of trying to avoid giving the impression that Canadian culture was in any way superior to the students' cultures. The second purpose of using cultural topics was to provide the students with an interesting, relevant content for their language learning activities. Because students are experts in their own culture, because they find each other's cultures to be inherently interesting, and because they are motivated to learn about Canadian culture, the teachers felt that cultural topics provided an ideal way to "get the students talking."

As the analysis progressed, I identified two major themes which seemed to run throughout the data. Each of these broad themes consisted of two minor themes. The first theme I identified included the value the participants placed on the non-ethnocentric attitude of tolerance. The teachers themselves demonstrated this attitude of tolerance and acceptance towards their students as they (a) respected the adultness of their students; (b) affirmed their students' cultural identities; (c) sympathized with their students' difficulties; and (d) demonstrated a fascination with and an openness to learn from their students. Not only did the participants demonstrate an accepting, nonethnocentric attitude towards their students, but they also clearly felt that it was their responsibility to foster a similar attitude in their students, who they described as being somewhat intolerant of new ideas, unfamiliar teaching styles, and people from other cultures. Teachers fostered tolerance in their students in order to (a) ensure that students would get along with each other and (b) help students fit in to Canadian society; however, their teaching of tolerance was also very much related to a desire to preserve and protect the culture and well-being of their own country, Canada. The second theme I identified included the participants' concern to give their students a "voice" both inside and outside of the classroom, thereby empowering and encouraging students (a) to express their identities, cultures, and opinions in the classroom and (b) to become functioning members of Canadian society, able to access all of the rights and privileges therein.

## Reflections On the ESL Literature

In this section, the concepts included in the underlying themes will be related to the current ESL literature, and implications of these concepts for ESL teachers and teacher trainers will be discussed.

### Tolerance and Acceptance Demonstrated by the Teachers

In general, the teachers I interviewed demonstrated a very positive attitude toward both their students and their students' cultures. Their tolerance and acceptance of the students and their cultures was expressed in number of different ways, each of which is mentioned in the ESL literature and has implications for practice: (a) teachers were careful to treat students as adults in spite of the students' resistance to such treatment; (b) teachers recognized the realities of life that students faced and were therefore very concerned about their students' comfort; (c) teachers identified with and were open to learning from their students.

Treating students as responsible adults (and the problems inherent in such an approach). Because it is usually children who lack proficiency in a given language, the temptation exists to treat language learners like children; indeed, from the literature on language shock (Schumann, 1978; Smalley, 1963; Stengal, 1939; Stern, 1983), it is clear that language learners often do feel that their lack of language has placed them back on the level of children. Not only does this lack of language rob a learner of her/his adult status, but an additional change in status results as he/she moves from being "an active involved adult to being an adult second language learner" (Elson, 1982, p.8). The teachers I interviewed recognized this issue: one teacher described a student who, while very outgoing and verbal in his own language and culture, was very shy and withdrawn in English; another teacher described a student who was a successful, respected scientist in his own country, and now was "Joe student, in with the farmers and the housewives and the laborers."

The concerns of the teachers I interviewed, which are reflected in the ESL literature, would imply that it is part of the ESL teachers' responsibility to ensure that the adulthood of their students is recognized and reaffirmed. Elson (1982), for instance, states that "the most effective learning environment will be one in which the 'adultness' of the learner is taken into account" (p.10). Similarly, Finocchiaro (1974) suggests that the teachers must communicate to the students "that they are important members of the group, that they can assume responsibilities, and that they can achieve success" (p.25). It has also been suggested that, in order to foster "self-confidence and responsibility" in their students, ESL teachers should be willing to release some of their control and authority to the students, making their classes more learner-centered (Elson, 1982, p.10). The teachers I interviewed were clearly quite concerned to foster in their classes a learning environment that would recognize the "adultness" of their students. Because they recognized that their students were worthy, responsible adults, they encouraged their students to take control and responsibility for their own learning. However, although the teachers I interviewed seemed willing enough to release to their students some of their control and authority, they found that their students often resisted such treatment, preferring rather to take the (less demanding) role of passive students in authoritarian, totalitarian, classes.

From both the literature and the results of this study, it is clear that ESL teachers and their students come to the class with different concepts of what is socially acceptable classroom behavior (McGroarty & Galvan, 1985). Generally, these different expectations have to do with who is to take the more active role in the classroom. The Canadian teachers I interviewed wanted, and expected, their adult students to take active, participatory, responsible roles in their education; however, the students they taught expected a totalitarian, structured class where the teacher was the authority and the students sat back passively and absorbed the language. One implication of this is that ESL teachers need to consider the cultural and educational backgrounds of their students, being aware at the same time of their own "culturally determined assumptions regarding the roles of teachers

and students and types of techniques and activities suitable for language teaching" (McGroarty & Galvan, 1985, p.83; see also Tibbets & Westby-Gibson, 1983; Radford, 1980; Chen, 1984). Bassano (1986) describes the resistance of ESL students to the instructional practices of teachers who "use an informal, democratic, active approach to language learning, [an approach] that requires maximum student self-investment and discipline" (p.18). Bassano (1986), in discussing the example of an instructor who attempted to structure "real, meaningful language practice in a relaxed, student-conducted environment," mentions that such a teacher can never be certain how the students will react to those activities (p.14). From the interviews I conducted with the participants of my study, it was obvious that they, too, had experienced these problems. Some of the negative student reactions described by both the teachers I interviewed and Bassano include aggression, discord, withdrawal, apathy, evasion, egocentrism, confusion, condescension, and complaints.

The teachers I interviewed described their own personal solutions to the problem of different classroom expectations. One solution which many of the teachers mentioned involved verbalizing or discussing the different expectations, bringing them out into the open. This concept is also mentioned by Bassano (1986):

> Unless the student can communicate 'Who I am and what I am used to,' and the teacher can communicate 'Who I am and why I do what I do,' it stands to reason that the students may perceive their new instructor as incompetent in language training, and our students may seem to us a roomful of uncooperative malcontents!" (p.16)

Bassano (1986) also emphasized the idea that teachers should not assume that their students understand the purposes of unfamiliar classroom activities.

> Adults, especially, may have difficulty at first with what they see as idle chatting, game playing or fooling around; they have little time to 'waste.' It is surprising how much co-operation and enthusiasm can be gained through a short, simple explanation of what the task does to help one learn a language. (p.17)

Similarly, it was the experience of some of the teachers I interviewed that their students felt that some of the language learning activities were rather trivial. However, like Bassano, many of the teachers had

found that a brief explanation of <u>why</u> they expected the students to participate in such activities did much to offset student complaints. Seemingly, the potential for misunderstandings and communication difficulties was highest when differences in cultural norms remained unstated (McGroarty & Galvan, 1985, p.84).

Bassano (1986) also emphasized the idea that the teachers needed to find out about their students' previous classroom experiences and their present assumptions about language learning. In contrast, the teachers I interviewed seemed to feel that they were already quite familiar with their students' expectations; however, they did mention that it was important to allow the students to verbalize their feelings and their expectations. From this basis, the teachers could then go on to explain their own expectations about the roles of students and teachers and their philosophies of language teaching.

Another difference between Bassano (1986) and the participants I interviewed is that Bassano (1986) advocates a relatively more accommodating position with regard to different expectations than the participants. Bassano (1986) suggests that teachers should "begin where the students are and move slowly," starting with more structured classes and slowly introducing new methods and materials (p.17). She also suggests that teachers should allow the students to choose between alternate activities when they do not feel comfortable with new activities. However, most of the teachers I interviewed were quite adamant in that they expected the students to adapt and accommodate to their expectations. They justified this expectation by explaining that, whether the students were going to take their place in the Canadian marketplace, or whether they were going to go on to further education, the students would eventually be expected to take the active, responsible, problem-solving roles in society which they were now being expected to take in the classroom. Interestingly, when discussing different teacher/student expectations regarding group work, the writers of <u>More of a Welcome than a Test: An Instructor's Resource Kit for Immigrant Citizenship Preparation</u> state that "how students learn to act in the classroom, from each other and from the instructor,

will mirror their expectations for participating in Canadian society" (p.16).

Recognizing realities and providing a comfortable classroom atmosphere. It was very evident as I interviewed the teachers that they were quite cognizant of the very complex, and stressful, realities of their students' lives. During the interviews, some of the teachers went into great detail as they described the different realities of their students' lives -- it seemed as if they felt this was important for me to know if I was to develop an adequate understanding of both student and teacher behavior in the classroom. The ESL literature, as well as literature on acculturation and culture shock, also recognizes the stresses and realities which face ESL students. For instance, Elson's (1982) list of the sociocultural factors which teachers must consider is strikingly reminiscent of the participants' perceptions of the realities of their students' lives: "students may be rejected by the larger community, suffering from a dramatic drop in status and self-image, experiencing self doubts, as well as having the usual concerns of bills, job security, and relationships with family members" (p.13). Like the teachers I interviewed, Elson also describes the pressure caused by threatening major role reversals in the students' families (child/parent, husband/wife). He asserts that "the starting point for the teachers' response to these factors is to accept that adults must be seen as complex individuals with a strong pull to their lives" (p.14). Fantino (1982), in her thesis entitled Psychosocial processes of immigrants' adaptation: Chileans and Argentinians in Canada, described the helplessness and frustration felt by well-educated Chileans and Argentinians in Edmonton who found themselves working in construction and janitorial positions. She also described the "crisis of identity" which resulted from a deterioration of communication within the family unit. The teachers I interviewed and the literature describing the emotional response of culture shock (Brown, 1987; Adler, 1987; Molnaire, 1983; Damen, 1982; Smalley, 1963) clearly portrays ESL students as responding to the stress they face on an emotional level, and in ways that affect classroom interaction and

the responsibilities of the ESL teacher. However, other than recognizing the difficult realities the students faced and noting their reactions to these stressors, the teachers I interviewed did not seem to use the model of "culture shock" as a means of making sense of their students' experiences. For this reason, "culture shock" was not used as an organizing principle in the analysis of the data.

One implication of a recognition of these realities, and the students' emotional response to them, is the primary importance of providing the students with a comfortable classroom environment if any learning is to occur in the class (Allameh, 1986; Elson, 1982; Ely, 1980; Foss & Reitzel, 1988). Because they saw their students to be experiencing so many difficulties, the students' comfort was a primary concern to the ESL teachers I interviewed. This concern is reflected in Allameh's (1986) suggestion that teachers attempt to "create a cheery, pleasant working place that draws the students, attracting them so that they contribute, satisfy themselves, and feel uncertainty in a relaxing atmosphere" (p.14). The participants' emphasis on affective, environmental factors seems to place them in Finocchiaro's (1974) category of "superior teachers" (p.25). As suggested by Finocchiaro (1974), the teachers were very concerned that their students "feel loved, respected, and secure" (p.25). Similarly, ESL literature also points out that ESL students themselves have recognized the importance of affective and environmental factors. For instance, the results of Katz's (1988) survey of college level ESL students indicate that students themselves consider aspects such as classroom atmosphere and relationships with the teacher to be at least as important, if not more important, than a teacher's knowledge of the content. Similarly, the teachers I interviewed described their attempts to build a good rapport with their students. As one teacher stated, "If they don't like you, they're not going to work very hard."

A concern that students retain their pride in their language, culture and country of origin also seems to be related to the concern for the comfort of the student. One of the expectations of classroom teachers suggested by Finocchiaro (1974) was that they must provide their students with a classroom atmosphere which is conducive

"especially to the retention of pride and hope" (p.6). This concern that students retain their pride and hope has been mentioned elsewhere in the ESL literature (Wallerstein, 1983; Cummins & Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988) and was a clear theme as the teachers I interviewed described how they affirmed their students' pride in their ethnic heritages.

Cultural relativity: Identifying with and learning from students. The ability to empathize with students (the feeling of "I understand what they're going through"), along with the ability to tolerate and accept differences, were cited by the participants as characteristic of effective ESL teachers. Those experiences which the teachers had in common with their students (e.g., learning another language, adjusting to another culture, learning to use foreign eating utensils, etc.) seemed to be especially valuable in helping teachers understand and empathize with their students. For instance, during our interviews I noticed that teachers often used examples of their own experiences to illustrate the needs and problems of their students -- seemingly, their own experiences enabled them to understand and correctly interpret their students' behaviors and experiences.

One implication of these findings is that the benefits to be gained from the experience of living in a foreign culture should not be underestimated by ESL teachers, teacher trainers, or hiring agents. This implication has not gone unrecognized in the ESL literature. For instance, McGroarty and Galvan (1985) cite "first hand knowledge" of students' cultures as important if teachers are to accurately identify appropriate cultural topics for students of a particular group (p.86). McGroarty and Galvan (1985) go on to suggest that those teachers who are not familiar with their students' cultural backgrounds should access the libraries for such information. However, although many participants mentioned that they did not know much about their students' countries or cultures, they did not seem to feel that such specific knowledge was particularly important. In fact, some participants described this lack of knowledge as positive in that it gave their students the opportunity to take on the role of teachers as

they informed others about aspects of their culture. In one instance, a teacher even found that her exposure to specific information about the use of gestures in a variety of cultures was confusing and inhibiting rather than useful -- she now avoids using gestures at all for fear of unintentionally offending students! More important than knowledge about specific cultures was the teachers' openness to learn from the students, their willingness to suspend their assumptions about their students, their tolerance of different ways of behaving and believing, and their empathy and sensitivity towards the needs of the students.

One notion which was common throughout the interviews was the personal enjoyment and pleasure that the teachers derived from their jobs. They seemed to especially appreciate the cultural diversity of the students in their classes. Despite the problems that the cultural differences among the students sometimes resulted in, the participants clearly valued the learning opportunities afforded by these differences, both for themselves and for their students. Similarly, in her 1986 study on the cultural role perceptions of ESL teachers, Defoe found that the teachers in her study "expressed respect for the integrity of the students' cultures of origin and first language by remaining genuinely interested in them and learning about them" (p.100). The "cultural mix of people" was what the teachers both she and I interviewed enjoyed most about their jobs as ESL teachers (Defoe, 1986, p.100). Wallerstein (1983) echoes these sentiments as she describes the benefits of a classroom in which teachers participate in a two-way dialogue of learning with their students:

> As students talk about their lives, the classroom becomes a place of learning and excitement for teachers. . . . Many teachers are not fluent in the students' language, and lack in-depth knowledge about their culture. Using dialogue and a multicultural curriculum established in partnership can stimulate learning and mutual understanding. (Wallerstein, 1983, p.16)

All of the teachers I interviewed had had some cross-cultural experience; however, the participants felt that the impact of their experiences was broader than what seems to be suggested by McGroarty and Galvan (1985). McGroarty and Galvan emphasize the value of the

specific knowledge about a particular culture which can be gained through first hand experience in that culture. The participants, however, did not mention as valuable the specific information gained from living in a particular culture; instead, it was both the increased tolerance of different ways of living/believing and the increased empathy for students adjusting to a culture and learning a new language which they seemed to feel were the valuable outcomes of living in another culture and learning another language. Other ESL literature also emphasizes the importance of intercultural awareness, intercultural skills, and non-ethnocentricity, as characteristics of effective ESL teachers (Allameh, 1986; Delamere, 1986; McLeod, 1980). McGroarty and Galvan (1985) recognize that, in addition to knowledge of specific aspects of their own and the students' cultures, prospective ESL teachers should

> understand and accept the notion of cultural relativity, i.e., that cultural "norms" are societal conventions, that these conventions develop arbitrarily over time, and that they are subject to the same evolutionary influences as language. Thus, cultural awareness is an important training objective for a TESL program to encourage. (p.81)

It may be impractical, however, to insist that potential ESL teachers spend time living in a foreign country. A number of the teachers in the study also described how their experiences learning a second language (both in Canada and abroad) helped them to understand the needs and experiences of their students. Golebiowska (1985) discusses the relevance of presenting ESL student teachers with lessons in a foreign language in order to foster increased understanding of their students. While Golebiowska argues that such <u>contrived</u> language learning situations for student teachers are ineffectual and irrelevant, he does mention that "maybe it would be worthwhile recommending (but only gently!) taking a course in a foreign language for at least one term" in order to recreate the feelings of foreign language learning (p.276). He states that, by taking note of their experiences as second language learners, potential ESL teachers "can gain insights into what goes on in their learner's minds during English lessons" (Golebiowska, 1985, p.277).

Broadening Students' Horizons -- Fostering Tolerance

Another theme which was an important issue with the participants, and which was mentioned (albeit only slightly) in the ESL literature, was the idea that an important part of the ESL teachers' job involves broadening their students' horizons -- helping them to perceive reality from different cultural viewpoints and to avoid ethnocentrism, prejudice, and prejudgment (Jaramillo, 1973; McLeod, 1980; Trifonovitch, 1980). In some ways, the teachers I interviewed seemed to think that the students in their classes were, perhaps, somewhat narrow-minded, dogmatic, and intolerant. Their students' ingrained racial prejudice and bigotry, along with their intolerance of different viewpoints and cultural behaviors, were concerns for the participants I interviewed. Like the teachers in my study, Defoe's participants viewed their students' bigotry as "an artifact of the students' culture of origin which was often a more homogeneous society than the one they find in Canada" (p.87). Teachers in both studies seemed to find the bigotry and intolerance especially problematic among Eastern European students (Defoe, 1986).

Like the teachers in Defoe's study who "questioned the influence that some 'right-winged Europeans' may have on Canadian society in general" (p.88), the teachers I interviewed expressed concern over the impact of the students' bigotry, or lack of tolerance, on Canadian society:

> I tell everybody that [prejudice/discrimination] is not tolerated in my class. . . . This is my country and we want it clean and safe and nice, basically. (Steve, 447-461)

> I have a gut feeling that [tolerance] is of crucial importance to the country. (Cheryl, 3785-3789)

> We started as a multi-cultural nation, and I expect we're going to continue that way. God knows, if we aren't tolerant of one another, we'd be in a real mess! (Cheryl, 3599-3615)

For the good of Canada, they tried to teach their students to tolerate other cultures. They also felt that, if their students were to live and work in Canada's multicultural society, they would have to learn to

be more tolerant of different races, cultures, and opinions (Defoe, 1986).

As described in the category "Helping students get along with each other," the participants reported that the ingrained racial prejudice and bigotry, along with intolerance towards different viewpoints and cultures, often resulted in conflicts among the students. Like Harmatz-Levin (1984) and McLeod (1980), the teachers I interviewed recognized the potential for tension and disruptive competition in the ESL classroom. Defoe (1986) interviewed teachers from three different ESL programs -- academic, general, and vocational ESL -- about their role in helping students adjust to living in Canada. Interestingly, she found that only the teachers in the <u>vocational</u> ESL program felt that "improving intergroup relations by broadening the students' perceptions of others, promoting tolerance, and overcoming prejudice were valid and important parts of their work" (p.98). The teachers in General and Academic ESL programs either did not perceive prejudice to be a problem in their classes, or, if they did perceive the problem, they did not feel it was their responsibility to deal with it. In contrast to Defoe's study, however, the teachers I interviewed (who would probably be classified as in either General or Academic ESL settings) all recognized prejudice as a problem and described their efforts to improve intergroup relations and broaden the students' perceptions of others. Following are three possible reasons for this discrepancy: (a) classroom prejudice was more disruptive or obvious in the classes of the teachers I interviewed than it was in General and Academic ESL programs in Vancouver (perhaps due to a different ethnic mixture of students); (b) the particular teachers I chose to interview were more sensitized to this issue than were the teachers interviewed by Defoe (1986); or (c) since no "vocational" programs were offered by the institutions in Edmonton, it is likely that there were many "vocational students" in the general and academic classes here (and that the teachers, therefore, were training students to get along in a multicultural workplace).

Finocchiaro (1974) corroborates the beliefs and practices of the teachers I interviewed in her suggestion that ESL teachers should

"change the direction of our teaching whenever and wherever necessary to extinguish or rechannel aggression, to help our students accept another's opinions and feelings, or to eradicate bigotry and racial prejudice" (p.31). Similarly, McLeod (1980) suggests that, to offset the "disruptive competition" that sometimes occurs between national groups in a class, the teacher should teach "cultural relativity," making it clear to the students that "cultures and languages differ from each other, but no one culture or language can be said to be superior to another" (p.542). The following quote from Finocchiaro's 1974 speech to the National Institute of Education, is strikingly reminiscent of the participants' concerns to 'multiculturalize' their students:

> [The superior teacher] makes sure that students retain their sense of individual dignity and ethnic pride while learning to appreciate English and other cultures. Both with relation to their own culture and to that of others, he guides students not only to sense the basic similarities of the human experience, but also to realize that 'different from' does not necessarily mean 'better than' or 'worse than.' One of his major objectives in the teaching of culture is to make students sensitive to their own values and to the values and customs of any cultural group with whom they will come into contact. It is not the idea of biculturalism alone which we must foster, but that of cultural pluralism." (p.28)

Not only did the teachers I interviewed encourage students to tolerate and accept other cultures, but they also encouraged them to become more tolerant and accepting of different ideas or opinions, or, as one teachers stated, "to at least be broad minded enough to listen!" (Helen, 1934-1937). It is interesting to note that, although the teachers recognized that tolerance of different opinions was a very "Canadian" characteristic, they felt no compunction about insisting that their students accept this Canadian norm:

> And that's the only thing I've been pushing on them, to become a little more tolerant, perhaps. (Helen, 1905-1908)

> I found myself again advocating tolerance, advocating tolerance" (Cheryl, 1330-1340).

Although speaking about teaching children, Finocchiaro (1974) validates this concern as she encourages teachers to help their students "to

listen to each other with attention and with interest, to appreciate differing points of view, to respect diversity, and to question their own values" (p.31).

Giving Students a Voice

Mukherjee (1986), as he examines the role of ESL in England, is particularly harsh as he describes ESL as "aimless, meaningless, and lifeless, symbolic symptoms of decay and debasement in an anomic society" (p.49). He feels that, rather than empowering the people it purports to serve, ESL in the United Kingdom is designed only to maintain the power of the white community, training illiterate non-whites so that they can better serve the white community:

> Over the last 30 years, ESL has become a National Industrial Complex with the specific function to produce subservient literates to take instructions on the factory floor (Mukherjee, 1986, p.45).

While the position and status of ESL in Canada is somewhat different than that of ESL in England, it is not so different that Mukherjee's concerns can be automatically discounted. Much of ESL teaching in Canada is connected with the training of immigrants to take their place in the Canadian workplace, whatever that place may be. ESL practitioners, therefore, must consider their political role in teaching ESL -- by what they do, are they taking away their students' voices and identities, or are they providing their students with a new voice with which to express their unique identities?

Nina Wallerstein (1983), writing from an American perspective, also raises this issue as she asks "how, then, can we best teach English and avoid diminishing students' culture and self-esteem?" (p.9). In Language and Culture in Conflict, she advocates a Freire problem-posing approach to language teaching which "allows students and teachers to explore life situations, create hope about change, and use their imaginations to build the link between classroom English and the community" (p.10). She critiques the unrealistic, patronizing, and stereotypical dialogues that are common in the "Situational Method" of

teaching ESL (i.e., the method which advocates teaching the survival language which people need in their daily lives -- making a doctor's appointment, phoning an ambulance, going to the bank, etc.). Instead, the language dialogues and activities which she offers in her text are designed to help students critically evaluate the forces that control and limit their lives (such as layoffs, racism on the job, cultural discrimination, inflation, education, and family) (p.16). They are also designed to teach a language of action -- "a language that goes beyond identifying or accepting a situation, language that leads to empowerment" (p.17).

As I read through Wallerstein's book, she seemed to be echoing the concerns that had been raised by some of the teachers in this study. As mentioned in the previous section, the teachers I interviewed had a very positive regard for their students: they constantly identified themselves with their students; they spoke of a common humanity which they shared with the students; they admired their students' perseverance in spite of overwhelming odds; and they treated the students as responsible adults. Rather than producing "subservient literates to take instructions on the factory floor" (and taking away the students' voices), the teachers I interviewed were very concerned to give their students a voice: within the class, by empowering students to express their identities, cultures, and opinions; and outside of the class, by empowering them to become functioning members of Canadian society, able to access all of the rights and privileges therein. This 'voice' which they attempted to foster in their students was certainly not meant to be a subservient 'voice':

> And it's basically how to conduct your day to day life to the fullest strength. Do it yourself rather than have somebody else do it for you. And not being a "yes man." [Instead of teaching] them how to say "yes' nicely -- "Do you understand?" They answer "yes," but they don't; "Is the meal okay?" and they're ready to choke on the food but they say "Yes, it was very nice, very nice!" Well! Why not be able to criticize it?! (Heather, 3510-3554)

<u>Empowering students to express that voice in the classroom</u>. In the classroom, the teachers gave students a 'voice' in three ways:

they taught their students a new language; they encouraged their students to use that language to communicate their opinions, feelings, beliefs, concerns, and cultures with other members of the class; and they encouraged students to take active, participatory, responsible roles in the classroom.

As teachers of English, the participants were involved in giving students a new 'voice' (and therefore a wider audience) with which to communicate. As language teachers, the activities they developed were designed to encourage students to speak up in class, to practice the language they were learning, confirming Finocchiaro's (1974) suggestion that a well-designed curriculum "suggests experiences and procedures which require the learners and not the teacher to do most of the talking" (p.8).

Not only did the teachers encourage students to speak English (for the sake of their language acquisition), but they also encouraged students to use their new voices to express themselves, their cultures and their experiences (see Finocchiaro, 1974, p.9). The teachers interviewed by Defoe (1986) described how they used culture as a "vehicle for teaching the language," a concept that was echoed by the teachers I interviewed. Both the teachers I interviewed and the teachers Defoe interviewed reported that cultural topics provided the students with "a natural high-interest topic for discussion" as the students were experts in their own cultures (Defoe, 1986, p.80). Even when teaching students about Canadian culture, some of the teachers I interviewed were careful to ask students what was true in their culture before providing them with insights into the cultures of English speakers. In doing so, they were following the principle suggested by Finocchiaro (1974): to use students' experiences as the "point of departure for the teaching of any aspect of the communication skills and of the culture of the English-speaking peoples" (p.6; see also p.10).

As the teachers focused on the comfort of their students in the classroom, they were enabling students to practice and acquire English despite the overwhelming problems they faced. Lucas (1984) describes the problem of "communication apprehension" in the ESL class (a problem

that was mentioned by some of the teachers I interviewed) and then suggests some classroom techniques which can be used to help students overcome their fear of oral communication. Three of the techniques which she describes for helping students become more verbal in the classroom were also mentioned by the teachers I interviewed: providing a warm accepting classroom environment, using [illegible] exercises (such as music), and designing activities to help students get to know each other. Lucas also suggests that students who are afraid of verbal communication are "more likely to participate orally in class if they have something to say they believe, or if they have to give their opinion" (Lucas, 1984). Therefore, she advocated using activities that forced students to voice their opinions, to talk about their beliefs, a strategy that the teachers I interviewed reported using.

The advice offered by More of a Welcome than a Test: An Instructor's Resource Kit for Immigrant Citizenship Preparation, while geared primarily for an audience of Canadian citizenship instructors, seems to be quite pertinent: "While you may not see your role as instructor as helping people to take charge of their lives, in fact, in helping your students to prepare for their Canadian citizenship, you represent Canadian society's way of saying to immigrants: 'We are inviting you to help take charge of Canada'" (p.20). This resource kit, therefore, advocates the use of classroom activities which encourage student participation both in the classroom, and in Canada.

Empowering students to express that voice in society. Not only were the teachers concerned that students have a voice in the classroom, but they were also concerned that students be empowered to express this voice in the Canadian society. They did this in a number of ways: by making themselves available to either help the students themselves or refer them to professionals who could help them, the teachers were helping their students overcome some rather overwhelming problems; by teaching students to tolerate students from other cultures, they were empowering the students to get along in a multi-cultural society; and by teaching students about Canadian culture, they were empowering them to become a part of that society,

able to access all of the resources and privileges accorded to citizens and residents of Canada.

This concern to empower students to access society, to express themselves in society, is also expressed in the ESL literature. Lucas (1984), for instance, describes a variety of techniques which can be used to help students overcome their fear of speaking in certain social situations outside of the classroom. Similarly, Baxter (1983) suggests that ESL teachers should consider "interpersonal skills" as an important part of their language teaching:

> Enabling learners to speak English is of little consequence unless they can 'make contact [with local people].' In intercultural communication, being chosen as a communicative partner is critical. There is no value in speaking but not being spoken to. (Baxter, 110).

Baxter (1983), whose background is in intercultural communication (rather than in ESL) writes as if this is not a concern of ESL teachers based on what he has read of ESL literature. However, as I interviewed the various ESL teachers, it was apparent that they were very concerned that their students be enabled to access all parts of Canadian society. As can be seen from the description of the findings, much of what the teachers did was designed to help students belong in Canada. Through various activities (such as singing Canadian folk songs, reading poems, etc.) the teachers tried to develop in their students a "feeling" of being a part of the new environment and country. This same sentiment is echoed in <u>More of a Welcome than a Test: An Instructor's Resource Kit for Immigrant Citizenship Preparation</u>: "The process of bringing immigrants into the "Canadian family" is seen in the context of developing national identity and a sense of fully belonging to Canada" (p.5). In response to student complaints about Canada and Canadians, the teachers taught students about specific aspects of Canadian culture that students found difficult to accept. In order to help students become an accepted part of Canadian society, the teachers made students aware of those behaviors which Canadians consider to be inappropriate. They felt that, if students did not change or adapt in some ways, they would likely be rejected by members of Canadian society. The teachers also developed classroom activities

which encouraged and prepared students to get out and become involved in the new society, to make and maintain contact with local Canadians.

Some of the teachers' concerns to teach Canadian content are reflected in an article by Cameron, Derwing, and Munro (in press), Canadian Issues in the Multicultural Classroom. Cameron, Derwing and Munro promote the use of Canadian issues in the ESL classroom, giving "newcomers access to the ideas, conflicts, symbols and services within Canadian society in order that they may become active participants" (p.8). In their words, the goal of teaching ESL is "to help our students to adjust to their new lives in Canada" (p.8). Cameron, Derwing, and Munro discuss the problem (also raised by the teachers I interviewed) of finding topics which are suitable and relevant to students in ESL classes. They note that much of the available material, although entertaining and communicative, is not particularly relevant to the students (i.e., solving a murder mystery, or deciding who should be thrown out of a boat in a life or death situation). Another drawback which they mention is that these materials usually offer "a string of unrelated topics which are connected only in terms of the skills which they aim to develop" (p.3); therefore, the treatment of the content tends to remain superficial. Cameron, Derwing, and Munro propose focusing on Canadian issues in order to provide for continuity and relevance of materials in the ESL classroom. Instead of having students decide who to throw out of the boat, Cameron, Derwing, and Munro suggest that students could determine what to do if a neighbor is battering his wife; and instead of planning a trip to the moon, students could plan a trip to another part of Canada. Similarly, using Canadian content in their classes seemed to be a particularly important theme for Linda, Heather and Cheryl.

Dilemmas involved in teaching culture. Although teaching culture was seen to be an empowering kind of activity, the participants found it to be problematic in two ways. First of all, the teachers I interviewed were cautious about giving the impression that they were representative of all Canadians, a concern that Defoe (1986) also noted

among her participants. For instance, one of the teachers in my study said that, when teaching about Canadian culture, he avoided giving the impression that "This is what you do! I'm God!" Because of the diversity of Canadian culture, and because of the changing nature of their own opinions, the teachers I interviewed did not feel that they could dogmatically say "this is what Canadians think." Instead, when teaching an aspect of Canadian culture, they would include statements such as, "in my opinion" or "most Canadians I know think this." This issue is mentioned by Damen (1988). When describing the cultural roles of the ESL teacher, Damen rejects the roles of "The Heavenly Messenger or The All Knowing Source of Knowledge" and "The Judge" for ESL teachers who teach culture. She then cautions teachers not to "let your role as native culture bearer fool you into assuming that you have been anointed as a cultural guru" (p.7).

Secondly (again like the participants in Defoe's 1986 study) the teachers I interviewed were very wary of appearing to pressure students to change their behaviors in order to conform to Canadian cultural norms. In her short essay "Culture learning: The teacher's role," Damen (1986) describes some of the complexities, pedagogical challenges, and role conflicts which are encountered by ESL teachers when culture is added to the traditional (reading, writing, listening, speaking) curriculum. This same role conflict regarding the teaching of culture was evident in the teachers I interviewed. One participant, for example, was not sure how much of her personal opinions (regarding a political or religious viewpoint) she should share with her students. Another faced a dilemma as she debated whether or not to ask students <u>not</u> to spit on the floor or in the water fountain. In one sense this teacher felt that by asking students to change, she might somehow be contradicting their cultural/religious norms; in another sense, however, she realized that such behavior could potentially isolate her students from Canadians.

Damen lists seven roles which teachers have assumed in order to bring meaningful culture learning into the classroom, six of which she rejects. The one role which she does accept (and which the teachers I interviewed seemed to accept) is that of "Fellow learner (Traveller),"

in which the teacher is "an equal among equals in the culture learning game, as ready to change as anyone else" (p.7). That the teachers I interviewed remained open to change was evident as they described instances in which they felt they had learned from their students, instances in which they felt their values and assumptions had been challenged and changed by their students. One way that the teachers in my study resolved the previously mentioned role conflicts was to maintain a vibrant interest in the students' cultures, ensuring that students were encouraged and given opportunity to share their own cultures with the class. Because they allowed students to express their own cultures and viewpoints, the teachers did not feel that they were being ethnocentric by describing Canadian culture to their students.

Baxter (1983), in an article which calls for an approach to teaching ESL which involves training students in intercultural communication, criticizes ESL teaching because of the native speaker model which he feels it assumes. Baxter first applauds the recent developments in ESL which have encouraged teachers to realize that "teaching English to speakers of other languages is also teaching English to speakers of other cultures" (Baxter, p.295). He then reviews the development of the communicative approach to language teaching (which most of the teachers I interviewed followed, at least to some degree), and then rejects the model because it ignores the students' cultural backgrounds and requires conformity to native speaker (Canadian) norms. It is this "native speaker model" which Baxter (1983) critiques as not being intercultural in scope:

> Teaching materials depict the communicative behavior of native speakers, this behavior being presented to learners as the ideal to be achieved. Native-speaker behavior is the basis for adjudging proficiency in the areas of grammatical well-formedness, pronunciation, appropriateness of use, stylistic repertoire, style of argumentation in the written medium -- in short, in the full range of language-linked behavior. . . . [However], it is all the participants -- whether native or nonnative speakers -- in a communicative event who together form the basis of the sociocultural context of that event. Because of the predominance of the native-speaker model, the learner or nonnative speaker has not been seen as contributing to that context. Appropriateness, an essential aspect of communicative competence, has been defined

only in terms of native-speaker standards. Nonnative speaker perception as to what may or may not be appropriate has been excluded." (p.102)

As mentioned previously, however, the teachers I interviewed were very careful to recognize, validate and encourage expression of their students' cultures. Although they taught their students about Canadian norms, they did not insist that students conform indiscriminately to those norms. Instead, the teachers were very careful to encourage students to both describe their own cultural norms and make their own decisions regarding whether to adapt to Canadian culture or maintain their own culture. Baxter (1983) states that, although ESL teachers assume that people can change their behaviors, yet they have not "articulated the more important question of whether and to what extent nonnative learners and users of English are able and willing to adopt the cultural standards underlying the verbal and nonverbal behaviors of native speakers" (103). Clearly, however true this statement may be of the ESL literature Baxter read, it not true of the teachers interviewed in this study. The teachers I interviewed were very concerned about whether, and to what degree, their students were able and willing to change their behaviors. They consistently expressed the idea that their job was to raise their students' awareness of Canadian culture, Canadian norms, while allowing the students to make their decision regarding what changes they wished to make in their behaviors. Like Baxter (1983), the teachers were quite cognizant that "many constraints make it unlikely that a speaker will adopt all communicative standards of another cultural group" (Baxter, 1983, p.106)

## Personal Reflections

Prior to writing this section of the thesis, I again reread the literature review and the description of the findings, grappling with the question of how this study has affected me both personally and professionally as an ESL teacher and curriculum developer. Following are my personal reflections on what I have gained by conducting this study.

Preparation for ESL Teaching

First of all, my conviction that exposure to other cultures is a definite asset for ESL teachers has been reaffirmed through this study. What particularly interested me during the interviews is how often the teachers referred to their own cross-cultural experiences in their efforts to convey to me what their students experienced as they adjusted to living in Edmonton. In some cases, this seemed to be almost an unconscious strategy -- I asked about their students and teachers responded with information about themselves. Clearly, those cross-cultural experiences helped the teachers I interviewed make sense of, and identify with, their students' experiences.

A few of the teachers had mentioned that a general cultural awareness (gained through exposure to any foreign culture) was more important than specific understanding of the cultures of the students in their classes. However, I noticed that those teachers who did have specific knowledge of and experience with the cultures of the students in their classes displayed what seemed to be a more critical analysis of student behavior and their role in helping students adjust to this new country. For instance, while many teachers were upset and frustrated with the behavior of some of the Eastern European students in their classes, the one teacher who had lived in an Eastern European country (and was, in fact, a part of an Eastern European culture) was able to pinpoint the particular cultural difference which was causing the widespread misunderstanding. She had also developed a plan of how to make the students aware of this cultural difference and how it might affect their relationships with Canadians.

Although I had been convinced of the value of cross-cultural experiences, I had never really considered classroom language learning experience to be particularly valuable in sensitizing ESL teachers to their students' needs (probably because, although I had had extensive cross-cultural experience, my language learning experience was limited). In my mind, the combination of my childhood acquisition of a second language, my experiences in high school Swahilli and French classes, and my college experiences of learning Greek, had provided me

with sufficient exposure to the process of language learning. However, through comments made by participants about the value of learning a second language in helping them identify with their students, I realized that my second language learning experience was not very relevant to my students' experiences of learning English. I had never actually learned to communicate in a second language as an adult in a second language class. This realization has prompted me to enroll in a Chinese language class. Through this experience of learning a completely new language I hope to become more sensitized to the problems my own students face as they learn English.

ESL Pedagogy

I have learned much about ESL pedagogy from observing and talking to the participants of this study. For instance, as a beginning ESL teacher, I was extremely conscious of how students' classroom expectations differed from my own, and I had always felt rather insecure when dealing with this issue (especially when it came to disagreement over the issue of teaching grammar). During the last year, however, I have become much more conscious about clearly explaining both my philosophy of language teaching and the language objectives of every activity to my students. I have found that, with this precaution, and with a willingness to compromise just a little, divergent student expectations no longer are a problem.

Another example of the effect of this study on my teaching practices has been a renewed emphasis on including bonding activities during the first few weeks of each course. Prior to this study, my efforts to encourage students to get along with each other were rather sporadic and not very deliberate. If, by some chance, bonds happened to develop between students, then I was thrilled. If it didn't happen -- well, c'est la vie! I did not really feel that my actions could influence whether or not students got along with each other. However, after talking to the various ESL teachers about this issue, and after analyzing their responses to my questions, I've found that fostering relationships among students has become the predominant (and usually

reachable) objective of the first few days of my classes. I have even incorporated into my teaching some of the specific bonding activities which were mentioned by teachers in the interviews. For example (with one exception mentioned below) every class I've taught within the last year and a half has begun with some sort of a "name game" in which students were 'strongly encouraged' to learn the names of their classmates (and teacher). Another very successful and adaptable activity was the "musical conversations" activity mentioned by Heather. I've found that students will often come to me at the end of a course and describe how amazed they are that they were able to learn everyone's name and make so many friends in the class. Also, from comments made during class time, it is clear that students from different cultural backgrounds often get together outside class (to go shopping, go to the zoo, go to Fort Edmonton, etc.), and this interaction often continues long after the class has ended. This type of student interaction gives me great satisfaction.

A class I recently taught reinforced in my mind the necessity of including bonding activities at the beginning of a course. I was teaching a class of advanced students, about half of whom knew each other from previous class. When I began my (now traditional) "get to know your classmates" routine, one woman in the class spoke up and said "Sara, I think we can get to know each other on our own -- we don't need to get to know each other during class time." Rather intimidated by her comment, I took the path of least resistance and made little overt effort to encourage students to get to know each other. Later during the course, multiple and serious interpersonal problems among the students became a major obstacle to learning. I wonder what would have happened had I insisted on going through with my bonding activities (while clearly explaining why I was doing so). Perhaps at least some of the subsequent problems would have been alleviated.

<u>Content for Language Activities</u>

As I look back at the language learning units and activities I have developed during the last year, it is clear that (somewhat

unconsciously) the findings of this study have directly influenced my choice of topics for the content of the class.

Promoting tolerance. For the sake of survival, the issue of tolerance or cultural relativity among students has been important to me since I began teaching ESL. The first ESL class I taught, which was made up of six Eastern European students and seven Hispanic students, had been a hard lesson on the results of intolerance and ethnocentricity among students on class atmosphere. The problems I faced in trying to get students from one group to communicate with students of the other group, and the subtle (and sometimes not so subtle) instances of prejudice and intolerance, prompted me to consider my role in "multi-culturalizing" students. From the interviews I conducted, it was clear that this was an issue that most ESL teachers face. As I look back at what I have taught this last year, it is clear that the findings of this study have influenced my choice of content for the ESL classes I teach. Many of my language activities have, as a 'hidden (or perhaps not so hidden) agenda,' the goal of promoting tolerance of other cultures and ideas. For instance, one unit which I recently taught included the following progression of activities: (a) a short reading activity on the rights and privileges we have as Canadians (freedom of religion, etc.) from some "Newcomers guides"; (b) a few reading activities and discussions about multiculturalism adapted from the Edmonton Journal; (c) a trip to Heritage Days Festival; (d) a reading and short debate about the melting pot and patchwork quilt methods of dealing with a multicultural society; (e) a listening activity in which students were presented with a speech on the place of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Canadian society; (f) a very short presentation on the Sikh religion; (g) an analysis of letters to the editor on the topic of "Turbans in the RCMP" (students analyzed the logic of the arguments on both sides of the issue and presented their findings to the class); and (h) a dramatized debate on the issue of Sikhs wearing turbans in RCMP. In this unit, students were forced to grapple with a multi-cultural issue that has much broader implications for their lives in Canada. Also, by immersing

themselves in a particular theme (over the course of a wide range of reading/writing/listening/speaking activities), the students learned many new vocabulary items and language functions in a meaningful non-artificial manner.

Another activity I often use after a unit on nonverbal communication involves giving two groups of students very different "rules of speaking" which they must practice and follow. After practicing those rules within their own group, they are told to interact with members of the opposite group, trying to figure out what their "rules of speaking" are. After interacting together, the students discuss how they feel about the other group, what their attitudes towards the other group are. A primary "message" in this activity is that the other group is not really "inhibited, unfriendly and weird" or conversely, "rude, obnoxious and insulting" -- rather, each group just follow different "rules of speaking." This activity generally leads to a discussion of reasons for stereotypes such as, "Cold Canadians," "Rude Americans," "Mysterious Japanese," "Late South Americans" (etc.). One goal in this activity is obviously to promote cultural relativity in the class.

Now, as I am in the position of assisting in the development of a curriculum for an ESL program in Edmonton, I find myself advocating the inclusion of cultural relativity, and cultural awareness into the curriculum. It is no longer enough for me to include aspects of Canadian culture in the curriculum (this is very important and is an accepted practice) -- I also want to include topics that will foster cultural relativity among the students.

<u>Providing information about the experience of culture shock</u>. One surprise for me during this study was that the teachers I interviewed did not seem to be very conscious of the issue of culture shock, and none of the teachers mentioned that they discussed culture shock in their classes. However, after doing some research on the issue of culture shock and its effects on students, I began to include some activities about culture shock in my classes. I now deal with the topic of culture shock in almost all of my classes, from the very

lowest level (where they read, discuss and react to a simplified article about culture shock) to an intermediate level (where they read newspaper articles on the adjustment of immigrants to Edmonton, present that information to the class through interviews, read a more complex article about culture shock, and perform skits of people who are in the various stages of culture shock) to the most advanced level (where they listen to a lecture, read journal articles, and then write an essay or research paper on culture shock). In each class, students have mentioned in their dialogue-journal (a modified diary) that learning about culture shock, and learning that it is a legitimate stage that most people experience, was extremely beneficial for them. Although some students in a few of the advanced classes have seemed a bit bored with the topic (perhaps it has been overdone?), the advantages of dealing with the issue seem to outweigh the disadvantages.

Related to this emphasis in my ESL classes on letting students know what is happening to them regarding culture shock, is a presentation I've developed and presented numerous times to participants of an "Introduction to TESL" class offered by the Faculty of Extension. In my presentation, my "hidden agenda" is to instill in these budding ESL teachers and tutors an understanding both of the process students go through as they adjust to new cultures, and of their roles in helping students through this process.

As I conclude this section, it is clear to me that the experience of observing other ESL teachers in practice, and the opportunity to learn from the wisdom of their accumulated experiences, has been invaluable to me, both personally and professionally.

## Implications for Practice and Research

The concerns and perceptions of the teachers interviewed in this study not only provided useful information and implications for ESL teachers, teacher trainers, and hiring agencies, but also resulted in additional questions which require further research. Following are four areas arising from this study which I feel are particularly important with regard to their implications for practice and research.

Role of Past Experiences

Since the ESL teachers interviewed emphasized the impact of those past experiences which they held in common with their students (e.g., learning another language and living in another culture) on their ability to empathize with and understand their students, and since they cited this empathy as one characteristic that was very important for ESL teachers to have, I suggest that potential ESL teachers should be encouraged to expose themselves to crosscultural and language learning experiences, either in Canada or abroad. Further research, using different methodologies, could be conducted to determine the effects, benefits (and prevalence among ESL teachers) of cross-cultural and/or language learning experiences.

It would also be interesting to compare the impact of 'generic' cultural awareness (i.e., the experience of living in a different culture which is not necessarily similar to the culture of the students) with specific awareness and knowledge of the students' cultures. Those teachers who only had the 'generic' awareness seemed to feel that it was enough, although they often seemed to be uncertain about what their students were thinking or what their role was in helping students 'make a go of it' here in Canada. Conversely, those teachers who demonstrated a deep understanding of their students' cultures seemed much more confident in their analyses of and responses to student experiences in Canada.

Dealing with Bigotry in the Classroom

Since the potential for conflict, bigotry, and misunderstandings among students in multicultural ESL classrooms was an important issue for the teachers interviewed, and since very little is written about this subject in ESL literature, it is important that this be recognized as an area requiring further exploration. Potential ESL teachers need to be made aware of the potential for (and methods of avoiding) conflict, bigotry and misunderstandings in the ESL class. The insights I personally gained from the teachers I interviewed has both made me

aware of unhealthy undercurrents in my own classrooms as well as providing me with ideas and methods for dealing with such problems. Many of the bonding activities which the teachers mentioned have subsequently been proven useful in my own classes as I encourage students to get to know, tolerate, and enjoy the differences of their fellow students. For these reasons, I feel that experienced ESL teachers should be encouraged to share (and publish) those 'tried and true' methods which they have used to deal with or avoid conflict, bigotry and misunderstanding in the ESL class.

Further research should be conducted to determine the scope and effects of prejudice, bigotry and ethnocentrism in Canadian adult ESL classes. Such research could take the form of a survey of ESL teachers using variables that have been raised in this study. For example, teachers could be asked what types of conflicts they have experienced in their classes (misunderstandings due to an inability to communicate clearly, ingrained racism and prejudice against a particular group, or prejudice which is the result of observed cultural differences), and how common these conflicts are. Research could also be conducted to identify the specific variables that facilitate or detract from student interaction and relationships in the classroom (i.e., particular cultural mixtures of students, bonding activities, cultural awareness/comparison activities). The attitudes of students and/or teachers towards other cultures could also be explored through interviews or through an attitude questionnaire. The changes in students' attitudes over the course of an ESL class could also be examined (i.e., the attitudes towards other cultures of students going into a course could be compared with their attitudes as they exit the course).

## Multiculturalizing Students

Related to the previous issue of helping students get along in the classroom is the question of the role of the ESL teacher in "multiculturalizing" the adult students in their classes. Clearly, the role of the ESL teacher in promoting the rather "Canadian" value of

cultural relevance and tolerance needs further consideration. On the one hand, it is obvious that students from monocultural societies do need to learn to tolerate new and different customs, races, ideas, etc., both for their own sakes and for the sake of Canada. However, caution in this effort is important as cultural relevance is a foreign (and very Canadian) concept to some students who have come from rather homogenous societies. As teachers, we need to be aware of the potential ethnocentricity of forcing our values (however good and necessary we may deem them) on students. However, from the input of the teachers I interviewed, it seems that promoting tolerance and broadening students' horizons is an accepted (although not necessarily verbalized) part of the ESL teacher's job description. Since this issue is vital both to the well-being of our country and to the well-being of the students we teach, I suggest (a) that potential ESL teachers be prepared to fill this role, (b) that ESL curriculum be developed to better reflect this issue, and (c) that further research be conducted to determine whether ESL teachers indeed feel that it is their responsibility to "multiculturalize" their students.

## The Dilemma of Teaching Canadian Culture

The teachers I interviewed described facing a dilemma as they taught students Canadian norms -- although they wanted to facilitate their students' adjustment to Canada, they did not want to appear to be ethnocentric. Although they had good intentions in their desire to help students be successful in their new lives in Canada, some teachers seemed what uncertain about what role to take in this process. Therefore, potential ESL teachers need to be encouraged to critically analyze the way they position themselves relative to the immigrants in their classes; in order to do this they must grapple with the implications of attempting to "Canadianize" students. They must recognize the ethnocentricity of forcing their own cultural viewpoints on the students, but they must also recognize that students do need some information regarding Canadian culture if they are to become

functioning parts of Canadian society. Respect and understanding of the students' cultures need to be emphasized and fostered.

Much has been written on how to teach aspects of Canadian culture to ESL students, but little is mentioned about the importance of doing this in a non-ethnocentric manner. As Baxter (1983) commented, the ESL literature gives the impression that the native speaker norm is of ultimate importance in ESL teaching. Consequently, this is an area that needs further consideration and research. For instance, further research could be conducted on the levels of ethnocentricity of ESL teachers and on methods for lowering that ethnocentricity. Research could also be conducted on ESL students' responses to the teaching of Canadian culture in the classroom -- do the students themselves view this as an ethnocentric activity? or do they feel that this information is vital to their survival?

## Conclusion

This study examined how eight ESL teachers viewed the impact of cultural differences and acculturation on communication, roles, relationships and behaviors of the actors in the ESL class. Although the eight teachers approached this issue from different perspectives, some common themes and issues surfaced as the research progressed. The teachers' rejection of ethnocentricity and bigotry, both in themselves as they taught students about Canadian culture and in their students as they learned to live in a multicultural society, seems to be the most important issue which has come out of this study.

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# APPENDIX 1

## LETTERS TO ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS

## CONTACTING LETTER TO ADMINISTRATORS

May 11, 1989

(Institution)
(Address)

Dear (Name of administrator),

As a masters student in Adult and Higher Education at the University of Alberta. I am doing research in the area of teaching English as a second language. The purpose of my research is to understand how ESL teachers relate to adult students of different cultures going through the acculturation process. Specifically, interviews with ESL teachers will be used to explore the impact of the students' cultural differences and the students' experiences of acculturation on the teacher's decisions, attitudes toward the students, classroom actions, and interpretations of students' actions.

The teachers who volunteer to participate in this study will be involved in three taped interviews of approximately one hour each (although the first interview may be somewhat longer). An hour or two of classroom observation will serve as a "spring board" for discussion during the interview, giving me the opportunity to observe the impact of cultural differences on the interaction and communication in the classroom. Transcripts of each interview will be returned to the teacher prior to the next interview, and the teacher will at that time be given the opportunity to clarify, delete, or add to what he or she has already said.

In order to protect the anonymity of the respondents, real names of participants will not be used in either the transcripts, analysis of the interviews, or the final report; similarly, all names of individuals and institutions will be altered. Also to ensure anonymity, descriptions of situations and participants will not be so detailed as to make it possible to clearly identify the persons in the study. Based on these ethical safeguards, this study has already been passed by the ethics review committee assigned by my department.

I am writing to request your permission to forward a letter to three of your instructors, requesting their participation in this study. I would also like your advice as to who you think I should approach about becoming involved in the study (I would like to interview experienced teachers, possibly one teaching at a basic level, one at an intermediate level, and one at an advanced level). Enclosed is a copy of the letter which would be sent to your instructors as well as a copy of my research proposal and ethics review form. I can be reached at (phone number), or at either of the following addresses:

(Home Address) (School Address)

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely

Sara Gnida
Encl.

CONTACTING LETTER TO INDIVIDUAL INSTRUCTORS
May 25, 1989

(Address)
(Phone number)

Dear (Name of teacher),

As a student in Adult and Higher Education at the University of Alberta, I am doing research in the area of ESL as part of the thesis requirement of my program. The purpose of my study is to understand how ESL teachers relate to adult students of different cultures adjusting to Canadian culture. Specifically, interviews with ESL teachers will be used to explore the impact of the students' cultural differences and experiences of acculturation on the teacher's decisions, classroom actions, interpretations of students' actions, and attitudes toward the students.

I requested permission from (Name of administrator) to contact a few of the teachers at (institution) as participants in my study, and your name was suggested as a potential participant. Therefore, I am writing to find out if you would be interested in participating in this study. I would like to interview you on your perception of the impact of the students' cultural differences and experiences of adjusting to Canadian culture on your decisions, actions and relationships with the students in your classes. The first interview will take no more than an hour and a half and will follow one hour of classroom observation. The purpose of the observation is not to in any way evaluate your teaching; rather, I will be observing the impact that cultural differences have on communication and interaction in your class and use this information as a "spring board" for our discussion during the interview. The interview itself will be taped and transcribed. I will then provide you with a copy of the transcript of the interview (as well as some of my "interpretations") in order to (a) give you to the opportunity to clarify, delete or add to what you have said, and (b) make sure that I am truthfully representing what you said. At that point, I would like to arrange one or two follow-up interviews to discuss any subsequent questions arising from the transcripts (these interviews would be shorter than the first interview -- approximately 30-45 minutes).

In order to protect your anonymity, I will not use your name or your institution's name in either the transcripts, analysis of the interviews, or the final report. Also, I will be the only one to listen to the tapes.

Please consider whether you would be interested in becoming involved in this study. If you have any additional questions, I can be contacted at (phone number). I will be phoning you in a couple of days to ask you whether you would be willing to participate in this study.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sara Gnida

## LETTER TO INSTRUCTORS ACCOMPANYING THE ANALYSIS CHAPTER OF THE THESIS

Sara Gnida
(Return Address)
(Phone number)

November 11, 1990

(Address)
(Phone number)

Dear (Name of teacher),

Hello again! This letter and package signify that I am almost at the end of the journey towards completing my thesis (finally!!!). Thanks again for your contribution in allowing me to observe and interview you. The information that I gained from you were central to the success of my project.

Enclosed you will find a copy of the analysis chapter of my thesis. In this chapter, I have attempted, to the best of my ability, to rightly interpret and portray what you stated in our interviews -- hence the large number of direct quotes! Actually, the bulk of this chapter is made up of your own words and the words of the other teachers I interviewed. If you find yourself skimming through this manuscript (it is much easier to read than the interviews were!), I would love to hear your feedback or reactions.

Thank you again for your participation in this study! Not only did your contributions make it possible for me to actually complete a thesis (which will hopefully be read and used by others) but the experiences of interviewing and observing ESL teachers have made me much more thoughtful in my own teaching practices.

May you have a blessed Christmas and a happy new year!

Sincerely,

Sara Gnida

# APPENDIX 2

## SAMPLE DATA FROM A CLASSROOM OBSERVATION ALONG WITH MY REACTIONS AND QUESTIONS FOR FUTURE DISCUSSION

**+Helen - Observation notes (my questions and responses are in brackets)**

The observation took place on October 18, 1989, from 8-10 PM

Before class began, I noticed that there was one group of oriental men who seemed to be clustered together -- they seemed a little "out of it" as far as the class was concerned and didn't really get too involved in the discussions. They sort of clung together. A Polish (or German?) guy with an earring was involved in a lively discussion with a man from _______ (maybe India, Pakistan or Iraq?). They joked and laughed. Also, as one student put up a diagram on the board for his class presentation, the guy with the earring teased him and asked if he was nervous. A lot of the class got involved, but not the two Chinese.

Helen came in and gave students a listening assignment for the weekend -- they were to phone a movie theatre and find out what time certain movies were playing... She got into a discussion about the library and told them that those who need to practice their listening skills should go to the library and get out a "read along" tape and book. She then went into a long explanation of why this would be beneficial for them. **(Do you always explain everything you do? Why? Do you find that students have different expectations than you do?).**

While she was talking a student had his finger in his nose -- digging away -- for quite a while. **(This would be quite offensive in Canadian company -- I found it distracting).**

Helen mentioned talking about single's bars with them **(Why? What was their reaction? Do you think they'd ever go to one?)**

One student gave a presentation on hockey -- **(Had he been here a long time? This seemed to be useful information...Did Helen assign topics or give guidelines?** After his presentation, two students (not from Germany) asked him whether hockey was a popular sport in Germany. **(Students evidence interest in each other's countries -- is this the norm?)** Another student (from Germany, I think) asked him when he became so interested in hockey -- he told them that his colleagues at work had forced him to become interested in it. **(How long has he been here? Do you see much difference between students who have been here a long time and students who are new to Canada -- as to their progress in class?).**

Helen again gives an explanation about language learning: "It's to the best interest of your English development to listen carefully..."

A second presentation. A man from (Korea?) talked about the earth, and who had designed it... and then went into an argument for the creation of the world by God. Some of the students obviously disagreed (took offence?) at this. The guy with the earring raised his hand as soon as the presenter had stopped: "I have a question for you -- you say that everything we see and touch and feel must have a designer, right? Who then, do you think designed or created God?" The Korean responded that there are somethings that man can't understand -- in effect, "It's none of our business!" Another student (the friend of the guy with the earring) asked "Who designed the Bible?" The Korean then gave a well-thought out, logical answer. **(I detected a little bit of irritation with the Korean for his**

"forcing" his beliefs on others. Actually, even though I share his beliefs, I was a little uncomfortable during his presentation. Many Canadians would object to a discussion of religion in class -- Do you find students are more open to talk about it?)

Helen then commented on the hockey presentation. She said that it was interesting...useful. She also said that it had been called the "Canadian religion" because it is the one thing that unifies Canada in spite of its diversity. (bits of information about Canada and Canadians -- do you do this a lot? You mentioned that these students in particular seemed to be particularly concerned with appropriacy -- in what areas? Do you teach this anyway, even when they don't ask? Why are these students especially interested?)

Then Helen, maybe noticing the tension, told the class that Peter had been worried about talking about religion in the class, but she had told him to go ahead, just to make sure that it was done in a polite manner. She then told the class that when she was in school to be a teacher, she was told not to talk about "sex, politics, or religion" in the class -- but she said that if you don't talk about those subjects, everything tends to be boring! Students laughed -- tension was broken. (Did you notice a little bit of irritation at P? Do you do this to teach tolerance? It sounds from this like you talk about sensitive subjects -- do you ever have problems with disagreements?).

Then Helen gave the class an article to read on Apples -- this was in preparation for a group discussion the next class. The article seemed to be very provocative in some ways (people who liked bananas suffered from a low sex-drive!) -- perhaps yielding insights into Canadian culture (what kinds of things do you usually talk about during your conversation class? Do you work in groups? Do you decide who is in what group?)

Helen then introduced the game "Thumbs Up" which the students had played once before. She asked if they remembered what the language learning objective of the game was -- and students volunteered various objectives. Helen expanded on what they said, again, being very clear about WHY they were playing the game.

Helen got on a "rabbit trail" about British and American English (based on P's question). P seemed to really want to know which was appropriate and "right." I noticed the guy with the earring giving Peter irritated looks -- possibly because Peter kept pressing for answers to his question.

The first scenario was "What would you do if you spilled pop on a dozen hockey fans at a hockey game?" The girl who read it (oriental) said that she would apologize and explain that it was because she was excited at the goal that was scored. She would tell them to remember that the team had scored a goal (I was asked to play the game with the class, so I didn't take detailed notes at this point). Most students tended to agree with her. P, though, disagreed, and said he would apologize and then try to make the person feel better by turning his attention to the hockey game. Helen told them what she thought a Canadian would do -- told them not to try to engage the people in conversation as it might make them more irritated. On the other hand, if they expressed a real interest in talking, you should be as friendly as possible.

A second scenario asked what you would do if your son told you that a number of his friends had been treated unfairly at school and were going to go on strike. The Chinese guy who read the question said that he wouldn't allow his son to strike. The other students laughed a bit -- but Helen explained that because he was from China, this was a very logical decision. When asked WHY, the Chinese student said he would be afraid his son would be punished by the school... Most other students had their thumbs 1/2 up. They said they would first phone the school and find out the true situation, as well as alternate solutions, before they made the decision whether to allow their son to take part in the strike. None of them mentioned talking it over with the son, and then letting him make the decision. When I said that's what I would do, one Polish guy said "Then you're not really doing anything!" Helen then agreed with me and said that most Canadian parents would probably do that. She then asked the students what they felt about children moving out at 18 and living on their own. The whole class said that they didn't like that. Helen told them that she used to think it was horrible, too -- that she had been raised in a close family where children. A Spanish woman said that her family would look after her whether she was married or not for the rest of her life. One student asked Helen if that was true, and Helen said "Yes. I know, because I was raised in that kind of home myself." She also said, as an aside, that it results in children who are very dependent. Students were upset at the fact that Canadians don't support their children financially once they move out. The Spanish woman told of a friend she knew who, when she moved out, had to PAY for her parents' old furniture! She said that could NEVER happen in her country. All the other students agreed. Helen asked if they thought, then, that Canadians didn't love their children. She then explained that they love their children, but they just want to teach them independence -- she told about a friend of hers who keeps trying to get her 18 year old to move out -- there comes a time when the little bird has to try its wings!

They went back to the topic of the strike. She emphasized that you don't have to worried about safety -- students have the right to strike. She then talked about the need for them to teach their children independence so that they can fit into Canadian society. She ended with "It's just an opinion -- you are entitled to your opinion."

The next question was about whether to use "Ms. Miss Mrs. or Betty Ford" in a letter to a potential employer who was female. The Chinese guy who read it sure didn't want to give an answer -- he just couldn't seem to make a decision. (Is something the matter here?) This resulted in quite a bit of discussion. The students really wanted to know what was appropriate in this situation. Some said they would try not to even mention her name (e.g., Dear General Electric). This generated a discussion on the Women's Liberation movement.

Generally, some of the students were very quiet -- some didn't even say one word (Chinese guy in corner) -- and others were quite vocal.

# APPENDIX 3

## SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

# INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Introduction

* Purpose of interview: to find out how you, as an ESL teacher, feel that the cultural differences of students in your class, and their experiences adjusting to a new culture, affect your class (relationships and actions in the class). I am especially interested in "stories" or anecdotes of incidents that have happened in your classes.

* Promise confidentiality - I will not use your name in either the transcript or in any final document (do you have any preference for a name I should call you?). I will send you a copy of the transcript for you to "OK" before I use it. You may opt out at any time.

## Observation Questions

(While observing classes, I noted potential questions in this space. Prior to the interview, I reevaluated the questions and decided where they would best fit in in the general interview guide.)

## General Questions

1. Tell me a bit about your background and your teaching situation.

   Probes:

   - How long have you taught ESL? How did you get into teaching ESL?

   - What about your own cross-cultural experiences? Have you ever had to adjust to another culture? What do you remember most about that experience? How does that experience affect your teaching now?

   - Describe your own cultural background -- What culture or cultures do you most closely identify with?

Questions Dealing With Cultural Differences

2. How would you say the cultural differences of the students affect your class -- what first comes to mind?

3. What are the more important cultural differences between yourself and the students in your class? (or among the students in the class)

4. How do these differences affect what you say and do in the classroom? (do you take these differences into consideration as you teach?)

Probes:

- do they place any restrictions on wha  ou say and do in the classroom?
- affect how you teach?....the types of activities you choose? (or the types of activities the students like?)
- affect the role you take in the classroom?
- Would you say that these differences enhance or inhibit your relationship with the students at all?
- do these differences affect communication in the classroom?
- do these differences affect what you teach?

5. Now, what about among the students in your classes -- do they have different expectations...? How does this affect your class?

- how students interact with, or get along with, or react to, each other?
- How do students react when they are placed in a multi-cultural class? would you rather teach a mono-cultural class?
- Do bonds form across cultures? How do you encourage this?
- Is ethnocentrism/prejudice a problem?

6. Do these differences result in any unique benefits? or problems, concerns?

- what do you do to make the most of these benefits?
- how do you deal with the problems?

Questions Dealing with Acculturation

7. Could you describe what you see your students going through (or experiencing) as they adjust to living in Canada (Canadian culture)?
   Probes:
   - What are the biggest adjustments they have to make?
   - How do they react to living in a new culture?
   - Do you see any of the "typical" symptoms of "culture shock"? If so, how does this affect what/how you teach?
   - What do you see as their greatest needs?
     - Any common themes among your students?
     - How do you deal with these needs?

8. How do their experiences of adjusting to Canadian culture affect what you do in your class?
   Probes:
   - the way you teach? (activities)
   - what you choose to teach? (content)
     * Do you teach culture in your class? How? What kinds of things do you teach?
     * Should ESL teachers teach culture? -- is it his/her responsibility? is it morally right?
   - your role as you relate to the students?
   - What do you feel are your responsibilities in light of their experiences and needs?
   - does it place any restraints (constraints) on what you do?...how on you teach?

9. Does this experience of adjusting to a new culture tend to draw students together? (Do they identify with each other?)

Questions Dealing With Personal Experiences

10. Which past experiences have done the most to help you to relate to and/or understand the students in your classes?
    Probes:
    - Helped you understand their cultures?
    - Helped you understand their experiences of adjusting to life in a new country?

11. Is there anything else you would like to mention that I haven't asked about?

# APPENDIX 4

## EXCERPTS OF CODED TRANSCRIBED INTERVIEWS

---

```
HELEN-1   Helen        +Helen - First Interview
SC: TEACH-TOL  $-TEACH-TOL  $-PREJUDICE
    :  it.  And in fact, one of my students,        1881    -$
    :  his best friend is in jail for               1882     $
    :  killing a homosexual guy in XXX              1883     $
    :  XXXX!  He...  This is about two years        1884     $
    :  ago.  And it hit the news then.  I           1885     $
    :  think it was...  What was it...this          1886     $
    :  guy was...they were from...  This guy        1887     $
    :  was from Africa, some place in               1888     $
    :  Africa.                                      1889     $
    : Sara:  The one who killed?                    1890     $
    : Helen:  The one who killed the                1891     $
    :  homosexual guy.  And he kept                 1892     $
    :  insisting that his friend was RIGHT          1893     $
    :  for having done that!!!  And I said,         1894     $
    :  "Wait a minute!  I don't expect you          1895     $
    :  to like or dislike them..."  I               1896     $
    :  insisted on the fact that this is            1897     $
    :  something that, in GENERAL,                  1898     $
    :  people...  People have different             1899     $
    :  points of view, but you have to try          1900     $
    :  to judge people for...  If you're            1901     $
    :  WORKING with someone, judge the WORK         1902     $
    :  they do.  What they do...that's part         1903     $
    :  of their private lives and you don't         1904     $
    :  have to be so judgemental.  And              1905     $
    :  that's the only thing that I've been         1906     $
    :  pushing on them, to become a little          1907     $
    :  bit more...tolerant, perhaps,                1908     $
    :  because...  And this guy, apparently,        1909     $
    :  had been very...  The guy in Red             1910     $
    :  Deer, he met this other fellow, and          1911     $
    :  this other fellow was very friendly          1912     $
    :  to him.  So he invited him over for          1913     $
    :  coffee, or whatever, to his                  1914     $
    :  apartment.  And this African guy, I          1915     $
    :  don't know from country, went along.         1916     $
    :  And then he was very friendly in             1917     $
    :  turn.  He was misinterpreted, and the        1918     $
    :  guy was gay and he tried to make a           1919     $
    :  pass.  And this guy shot him, or...I         1920     $
    :  don't know...stabbed him or something        1921     $
    :  like that.  I don't know if he had a         1922     $
    :  gun, and I can't remember why, but           1923     $
    :  he's in jail now.  But, the thing            1924     $
    :  that really alarmed me is that this          1925     $
    :  student here thought it was right!           1926     $
    :  And that's why...  And I would have          1927     $
    :  never found out if this other guy had        1928     $
    :  not brought along this article.              1929 -#  $ -%
    : Sara:  So, do you find yourself               1930     $
```

```
    :   teaching a lot of...like emphasizing    1931      $
    :   tolerance, teaching tolerance in        1932      $
#-RESPECT
    : Helen:  Yeah.  Tolerance and              1933 -#   $
    :   acceptance.  Or at least be             1934  |   $
    :   broad-minded enough to listen.  I       1935  |   $
    :   don't expect them to like it or not     1936  |   $
    :   like it.  I don't tell them if it is    1937  |   $
    :   right or wrong.  But, in general, our   1938  |   $
    :   society's very respective and you       1939  |   $
    :   cannot...you can't fire someone         1940  |   $
    :   because he or she is a homosexual.  I   1941  |   $
    :   mean, that's discriminatory!  You can   1942 -#   $
------------------------------------------------------------------------
CHERYL-1   Cheryl       +Cheryl - First Interview
SC: TEACH-TOL  *-TEACH-TOL  *-CONVINCE   @-ATMOSPHERE
    : Cheryl:  It was a debate.  I tend to      1330  |       |   -* -@
    :   moderate, you know, and if it gets      1331  |       |    *  |
    :   too heavy, I cut it off because I       1332  |       |    *  |
    :   won't have them offending one           1333  |       |    *  |
    :   another.  For me, for me the um, the    1334 -#      -%    *  |
    :   tone of general acceptance in the       1335               *  |
    :   class is very important, that people    1336               *  |
    :   have a right to their own opinions,     1338               *  |
    :   but you also must respect that.  And,   1339               *  |
    :   um, that's very Canadian of me, I       1340               *  |
    :   find.  Tolerance is all...We talked     1341               * -@
    :   about Salman Rushdie, and, you know,    1342               *
    :   free speech versus that... We didn't    1343               *
    :   get very far in it because it's a       1344               *
    :   pretty complex issue.  But, but I       1345               *
    :   found myself again, advocating          1346               *
    :   tolerance, advocating tolerance.  I     1347               *
    :   thought, "Gee, that's very Canadian     1348               *
    :   of me."  You know, that that's the      1349               *
    :   culture they're in.  And I got some     1350               *
    :   very harsh words on the other sides     1351               *
    :   of the argument, as there were in the   1352               *
    :   society at large: "No, he should not    1353               *
    :   be allowed to say that about            1354               *
    :   someone's faith"; "Yes, he should be    1355               *
    :   allowed to say that, regardless of      1356               *
    :   who he offends."  You know, those       1357               *
    :   free speech versus offence.             1358              -*
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CHERYL-1   Cheryl       +Cheryl - First Interview
SC: TEACH-TOL  #-TEACH-CUL  #-DEFENSIVE  #-TEACH-TOL  #-S-CHANGE
    :   respect.  Um.  It was funny when you    1807 -#
    :   asked me whether cultural things        1808  #
    :   would prevent me from doing certain     1810  #
    :   things.  I really feel quite strongly   1811  #
    :   about that, that I have a culture       1812  #
    :   too, to communicate.  That Canada has   1813  #
```

: a culture to communicate. 1814 #
: Sara: So you see that as part of 1815 #
: your job, teaching culture as well as 1816 #
: teaching language. 1817 #
: Cheryl: Oh, absolutely! Absolutely! 1818 #
: Um. I think I can set a tone of 1819 #
: tolerance in the classroom for the 1820 #
: differences amongst people, but I 1821 #
: think that that tone itself is part 1822 #
: of Canadian culture. You know, that 1823 #
: we are, by and large, tolerant of 1824 #
: differences. On the other hand, we 1825 #
: also have an identity, and a culture. 1826 #
: Sara: Do you feel that they should be 1827 #
: adjusting to the culture, or are you 1828 #
: more just...give it to them to 1829 #
: Cheryl: I feel they should adjust to 1830 #
: it. I'm quite opposed, for example, 1831 #
: and this may sound like a racist 1832 #
: comment, and I'm sorry if it does, 1833 #
: but, um, the recent decision...this 1834 #
: is just in the news...to allow Sikhs 1835 #
: to wear turbans and swords in the 1836 #
: RCMP?! 1837 #
: Sara: Turbans and swords? 1838 #
: Cheryl: Yeah! Instead of the RCMP 1839 #
: uniform! And I thought "My 1840 #
: goodness! That's very strange!" 1841 #
: [laughter]. The RCMP is Canadian. 1842 #
: This is a uniform in itself! If you 1843 #
: are in the RCMP, you'll wear an RCMP 1844 #
: uniform. You don't wear a Sikh 1845 #
: uniform in the RCMP! So, that...my 1846 #
: outrage at that story indicates to me 1847 #
: that I really have a sense of what is 1848 #
: Canadian culture now. And I'm very 1849 #
: opposed to diluting that in the name 1850 #
: of, you know, quote, tolerance 1851 #

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CHERYL-2 Sara +Cheryl - Second Interview
E: #-TEACH-CUL SC: TEACH-TOL $-TEACH-TOL $-CONVINCE %-S-CHANGE
: Sara: Um, page 25, let's see. You 3764 | -$ -%
: mention a number of times that you 3765 | $ |
: feel your students SHOULD adjust to 3766 | $ |
: Canadian culture, um, are there any 3767 | $ |
: specific things that you can think of 3768 | $ |
: that you feel they should adjust to? 3769 | $ |
: Cheryl: OK. I think one of them is 3770 | $ |
: related to this idea of tolerance. 3771 | $ |
: They should adjust to each other. 3772 | $ |
: They have to. We have to live 3773 | $ |
: together, with differences, like, 3774 | $ |
: it's REALLY important! 3775 | $ |