

**Paper for the *Educators and Planners: Symphony or Discord* Conference
AAIR Conference 1 – 3 December 1999**

**INSTITUTION AND SOCIETY:
ESL LEARNERS IN EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY**

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ABSTRACT

This discussion looks at the relationship of the education institution to society, in the context of globalisation, focusing on the ESOL student and migrant. It analyses aspects of immigration policy in New Zealand, and the place of migrants in secondary and tertiary level in the Auckland area, considering the extent to which learners fit into society, relate to native-speakers of English, and benefit from the resources of education institutions. It relates findings from Canadian research on the place of the ESOL migrant in university in Toronto, including how the institution constructs the migrant, how the learners see themselves, and the extent to which migrants feel they belong to the institution and society. In the light of this analysis, it proposes various responses to the present situation, in both immigration and education policies.

INSTITUTION AND SOCIETY: ESL LEARNERS IN EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY

Because I am working in China and doctor in China, I study six years in the university, but now I come to NZ, and this government not agreed our qualification, so if I register as a doctor again, I must pass the English test, and then, who is the government asked me to study again, to study the medical course, so then I want to study the medical course maybe the master degree, a higher qualification degree, and then so that I must have to study tests and to passed the IELTS test.

Institutions in society can have powerful and pervasive effects on other institutions and on people's lives. A case in point is the institutional demands placed on students of ESL background, trying to enter the cultures of tertiary education, English mother-tongue groupings, and society at large. Entering such cultures of course is only the start: the migrants concerned also want and need to succeed, and therein lie great difficulties, as becomes evident from separate studies in Canada and New Zealand, reported below.

A further case in point is NZ immigration policy in the 1990s, by which the institution of government has adopted successive policies that have dramatically influenced the institution of immigration, and in the process, foisted a dubious mixture of opportunity and pressure on education institutions.

This of course is only a fragment of the fuller picture, and misses out the wider context. To give credit where it's due, therefore, one has to acknowledge the enormous impact of corporations worldwide, as they promote their agenda of globalisation and structural adjustment, with the enthusiastic support of various governments, media and publicity of many kinds. (The business pages of the NZ press during the 1999 APEC summit in Auckland offered relentless evidence of the happy collaboration among these different parties.)

NEW ZEALAND EXPERIENCE

The 'fundamentals' of the structural reforms in NZ, writes Kelsey (1999, p29), "comprise an ideologically coherent package . . . premised on unfettered market forces and a limited state": "a deregulated labour market, a minimalist government, a strict monetarist policy, the liberalisation of trade, investment and markets, and fiscal restraint." In other words, the local manifestation of an international goal, described by Clarke (1997, p 261) as "a declaration of global corporate rule," and summed up succinctly in the title of Korten's (1995) book, *When corporations rule the world*.

NZ's changes in immigration policy during the 1990s came in the wake of the radical social restructuring that Kelsey describes. "Immigration was one of the important features of this economic restructuring," says Zodgekar (1997, p11), a process that heralded a review of policy in 1986, followed in 1991 by the introduction of the point system, known at times as an "autopass," and succeeded in turn by a "quota management system" in 1995. "The system introduced in [1991]," claims McKinnon (1996, p54), "in effect substituted 'price' for 'quantity' as an allocation mechanism, relating immigration more to general objectives of increasing New Zealand's human capital than meeting specific shortages in the labour market." Or as an ESOL teacher puts it, "the whole business of migration schemes is . . . selling residency in the country." Business migration, he adds, is "a cheap way to . . . buck up the economy, a short term measure."

(This teacher was one of about 40 Auckland ESOL teachers, administrators and learners interviewed in July and August of 1998, as part of a study of the delivery of ESOL in the context of NZ's structural reforms of the previous decade (Cooke, 1998). The study consisted of 28 interviews with 42 subjects from two polytechnics, two public schools and one private school: 30 learners (14 at secondary school, 16 at polytechnic), 3 teacher-administrators, 1 director of a school, 7 teachers of ESL and an immigration

consultant. All interviews were conducted by D. Cooke. Numbers of these interviewees are quoted at various points throughout this discussion.)

In institutional terms, immigration in New Zealand represents the “regulative” emphasis of Scott’s (1995, p 35) “three pillars of institutions” – those that “constrain and regularize behavior.” Scholars favouring this analysis of institutions, Scott argues, stress “rule-setting, monitoring, and sanctioning activities,” all of which have echoes in the role that the process of immigration has played in the lives of migrants in the 90s, not surprisingly in light of Kelsey’s (1995, p 338) claim, “Immigration was integral to the new international economy.”

Commenting on the rapid increase in Asian immigration, McKinnon (p55) remarks that “the total numbers coming in could still be manipulated by raising or lowering the number of points that had to be earned to gain admission, that is, by raising or lowering the price.” Hence, in 1995-96, when net migration rose to about 40,000, “the government announced the introduction of an English language test and a tightening of the criteria for entry under the general category.” (McKinnon, p55)

Meanwhile, immigration policy had moved to usher in a new “Business Investment Category,” or an opening for economic migrants, “the attempt to market New Zealand as an attractive destination for Asian entrepreneurs and their investment capital,” as the New Zealand Planning Council, Population Monitoring Group (1991, p 52) put it in their discussion of “The Great Debate.” These various shifts in immigration policy are an indication of NZ re-orienting itself to Asia and the Pacific as areas for NZ’s own economic development, “essentially a market-oriented strategy to enable the continuing development of the New Zealand-Asia-Pacific trade relationship,” comment Dale & Robertson (1997, p 215). It was “a conscious strategy,” says Kelsey, (1995, p338), “to reorient New Zealand’s dominant culture and identity away from the anachronistic colonial past towards its new economic destiny within the Asian region.”

In this sense, then, NZ’s volatile immigration policies in the 1990s exhibit not so much institutions as a “stable, valued, recurring pattern of behavior,” (Huntington, 1968, cited in Goodin, 1996, p 21) but rather Morgan’s (1994, p 135) notion of “organization as flux and transformation.”

The 1990s were a period of notable fluctuation in policy and demand, exacerbated by volatile public and political response. Given the lack of preparedness in NZ society for relatively larger immigration levels, it is predictable yet disturbing to recognise that “[p]opular reaction to Asian immigration reflected a deep-seated racism” (Kelsey, 1995, p339). “Prejudice,” says McKinnon, (1996, p57), “seems first to have arisen with the immigration of wealthy Asians under the business migration scheme which operated at the time [of introducing the points system]. With . . . the continuing arrival of much larger numbers of Asians under the general category, the prejudice has been directed against the communities of Asians as a whole,” a trend that Kelsey (1999, p12) analyses in the context of Winston Peters and NZ First campaigning on ‘economic sovereignty’ and “appealing to nationalist - and sometimes racist - sentiment,” from 1992 onwards. The fears of New Zealanders, “deeply insecure about their colonial-based identity in a world that was rapidly changing,” she notes, “were manifest in an outbreak of populist racism directed at Asian immigrants and investors from 1993 to 1996.”

There is a kind of circular development in society, summed up in Fig 1. NZ’s decision-making class, bent on promoting structural reforms and joining the corporate push for globalisation, introduces sweeping changes in immigration and education that result in an influx of visible minorities. The new faces in society provoke a negative social reaction (prejudice and objection) that in turn justifies a new government response to restrict immigration levels.

Even without prejudice to face, one of the serious setbacks for migrants has been the difficulty in getting employment. As a teacher-administrator explains, “the first big bulk of Asian migrants was told that

New Zealand needed their skills, that there was a shortage of engineers, doctors, whatever they were, from which they took (maybe naively) to mean that when they got here there would be a job waiting.” Then they would find that NZ employers wouldn’t recognise the overseas qualifications, and would take the easy way out by saying, “Your English isn’t good enough to work in this company.”

Not surprisingly, then, migrants have flocked to tertiary institutions for English language instruction, which they have to pay for, since the state doesn’t systematically provide language courses for new migrants, in contrast to the long-lasting language provision for migrants in Australia. But education has been restructured, too, one of the outcomes being removal of subsidies. “We’ve had enormous changes in the fee structure,” reports one ESOL teacher. “When I first started here, a full-time student could study for \$35 a twelve-week term. We’ve now moved to semesters . . . eighteen weeks, at a cost to a student of \$1360.”

So the learner is faced with large up-front costs for language learning, since one semester can only accomplish a limited amount. At the same time, the institutions are often forced to cope with tardy funding for contracted programmes. One tertiary level administrator describes what happens with Employment Service English. ESE agrees to give early notice of suitable funding, but regularly doesn’t deliver in time. The teaching institution is therefore faced with either confirming tentative contract teaching to waiting teachers (without any guarantee that they’ll have the funding available), or acknowledging to the prospective teachers that the contract isn’t secure. The teachers then take other employment elsewhere, including beyond NZ, the funding agency delivers late, often only a few short weeks before classes are scheduled to start, the institution ends up losing its preferred instructors, the teachers lose out on security, and it becomes hard to ensure adequate preparation for suddenly available courses.

Meantime, there is an unreasonable and unhealthy expectation on the part of ESE and ETSA (Educational Training Support Agency). “They have very specific employment outcomes,” reports the administrator, “they really expect us to . . . enable [students] to get jobs at the end of it, and that’s quite a tall order. It’s the reason for funding for those particular persons, so we enter contracts that 30% of our students will get into employment at the end of this course. In reality, what [the funding agencies] are interested in is shifting people off the unemployment benefit and getting them into jobs.”

The stakes for language instruction are therefore high, since the funding provider makes an explicit connection between language courses and employment. It wouldn’t be surprising if the learner does the same – linking language training to getting jobs – though perhaps in a muted way. As another administrator comments, “[The learners] tend to blame everything on language.” The problem is of course that language learning is an extensive, drawn-out process for most learners, so a few courses won’t necessarily create a dramatic advance in use of English. Meanwhile, teachers recognise the learners’ spoken and unspoken demands to make progress, along with the need to get employment, so there’s pressure on the institution to deliver.

There’s a related issue in many adults’ limited access to the wider English language environment outside courses. Both teachers and learners acknowledge that ironically many adults simply get very little chance to use English away from class beyond fairly perfunctory exchanges in almost formulaic settings like supermarkets and churches. Such isolation can take place despite the best efforts of instructors to structure external use of English into their courses: “We often set them tasks to do, . . . make telephone inquiries, . . . visit a certain place and purchase certain things.” But adult learners’ lives are extremely busy and often quite complicated, balancing home and study, so they don’t get much chance to stroll into the local community centre for a relaxed conversation over coffee. On top of which, “they are living in a community that’s ethnically similar,” points out one teacher, “and are using the same language, so that they are not using their English outside of the institute as much as they could be.” “They will tell you that they get very little opportunity to actually practise conversation in English,” says an administrator.

“That’s why they will pay in the language support centre to have English conversation classes with a Kiwi speaker, because they tend to be inside their own cultural environment and they don’t get that much chance to interact.” She elaborates. “They are not able to make contact. They all would like to meet more Kiwis, but . . . they’re not in a work situation where we meet most of the people we talk to. In the education system, they’re all second language learners, and that’s why they want to go on to other courses of study so that they are going to meet more people. They try to join sports. . . . They can’t just say ‘I want a Kiwi friend.’ Often they live in new migrant suburbs. There are very few opportunities to interact.”

CANADIAN EXPERIENCE

For ESL students enrolled in professional programs at a Toronto polytechnic university, social interaction and language proficiency appear linked in several ways. Interview data from a study of first year students and a smaller subgroup in their upper years suggested that many students use little more than perfunctory English even though they study full-time, often work, and conduct at least some of their daily lives in English. These students may be admitted to university programs largely on the basis of their applied skills or their strengths in maths, sciences, and computers. They have little difficulty with technical work, but, like many native English speakers in such fields of study, are more challenged in English writing. ESL students may process written text more slowly and write with less fluency, which compounds the demands on their study time. In addition, the nonnative English speakers also struggle with cultural differences and group interaction. These findings result from a set of interviews conducted with 42 ESL students enrolled in full-time professional degree programmes at Ryerson Polytechnic University, Toronto, in 1997-98. All had been required to take ESL. Ranged in age from high school to the “mature student” category, the students consisted of Hong Kong Chinese, other Asian ethnicities, Middle-Eastern and European. The study first interviewed 35 students in the first year of the research, then in the second year, did a follow-up study of 7 who could be traced from the original cohort.

One interviewee from Hong Kong spoke in first year of attempting to join a casual group of Anglo-Canadian students in the hallway, smiling and maintaining eye contact to show his involvement despite not fully understanding the conversation. He told of his chagrin when the others moved off and he later realized that the conversation was about complaints, not a topic for smiles. At the second interview in his graduating year the student related another "awful experience" in an assigned group project when the others initially excluded him. He reflected on their behaviour and his attempts to participate despite his English: "Slowly, [I] tried to speak slowly to make it clear. Maybe they feel that, ‘Oh that guy speaks too slow!’" He continued: "I had that feeling, like I have to go, like I can't stay here anymore. But I thought to myself that maybe I should take more time . . . At the end it's good" He reported that in the group assignment he offered to complete the drawing task, for which the group received a high mark, and as a result their attitude towards him changed. Nevertheless, he characterized his overall attempts to engage in English Canadian social interaction as ineffective. Consequently, the strategies he used in labs and other group work was to join other nonnative English speakers, for they understood each other's communication needs. This student was, in fact, highly successful academically; he was on scholarship and soon after the interview was accepted in graduate school. Clearly his success was related to his high intelligence, his resourcefulness, and his perseverance. The financial support from his scholarship and emotional support of his wife also must have played an important part in his success. But not all students have such a combination of characteristics and circumstances. Even moderately bright students may have to work part-time to continue school; they may not have strong family support, and when they have the added stress of social isolation, they may not succeed.

Several students in the study and in ESL courses spoke about the importance of friends. For students whose language skills slow them down, friends from the native language group offer not only social support but academic help. For example, they translate for each other or work through course concepts together in their native language. What's more there is sometimes peer pressure to stay with the native

language peer group, not to reject their own culture. Those who do disassociate from their own culture can be seen as snobs and rejected by the group. The consequences here are lack of progress in English, but this choice, staying with the first language group, is very tempting in the face of academic pressure.

POLICY

The experiences of these two migrant groups in Canada and New Zealand highlight the need for differing institutions in society to contribute to the well-being of migrants (and thereby to the strength of society as a whole). In both countries, the education institutions have a burden to recognise and help overcome the alienation of migrants in study and life in general. The Canadian case underlines the difficulties of meeting learners' needs in institutions characterised by evident diversity – visible minorities, differing cultures, speakers of various languages. In structural terms, the “outsider” comes into an educational framework that is usually long-established, operating by sets of over-arching values and conventions evolved over time by a dominant culture. Typically, the migrant is simply expected to fit in to the norms of that institutional culture. Typically, many student peers and staff have a rather tenuous understanding of the situation of the migrant, including the obstacles posed by language, education demands, cultures and social patterns. The local residents are mostly under many pressures themselves from study, employment, research, teaching and so on, all of which make it difficult for them to even take time to consider the plight of foreigners in their midst. Institutionally, in other words, education bodies like universities, colleges and institutes face an implicit call to provide programmes and support systems that can sustain migrant students, recognise their problems and accommodate them in various ways – language programmes, descriptions of Western academic demands and standards, counselling centres, tutoring services, for instance. Many of these provisions already exist, of course, but often in rather unequal ways, with varying and perhaps uneven levels of commitment.

In trying to accept and welcome diversity, however, it is important for education institutions to stop defining the ESL migrant as “a problem,” in the interests of acknowledging the richness and contribution that such residents can offer. (In this spirit, there is something of a move to refer to such people as “bilinguals” and to talk of their situation as “English as an additional language” (EAL).) Migrants bring experience, knowledge and insight into different cultures. Oftentimes, that dimension is quite ignored in Western education institutions, let alone considered as a basis for changing the curriculum. However, some institutions have wondered just how “ethnocentric” their curriculum is, i.e. how Western-oriented it is, and some have consciously moved to broaden their studies from courses on Western Civilisation to something like “World Cultures.”

Meanwhile, the education institution is also part of society and contributes to enabling its students and graduates to take part in that society. In this arena, there are numerous possibilities. Education programmes can explicitly orient the migrant to interpretations of the local society, one hopes in reflective ways. It can also try to empower students to do more than just survive in society, by equipping them to look after their own best interests, contend with the way language and cultural practice may range from advantaging to disadvantaging them, deal with power structures throughout the communities they live in. And it can enter into an exploration of the different cultures that make up evolving societies such as Canada and New Zealand, in which the face and nature of the country is clearly moving away from monolithic European models.

In the NZ case, there is also an urgent need for adequate settlement policies, in which area, there are clearly factors of both omission and commission. “What do we do as a country to welcome new arrivals?” asked Noel Watts (1999) in an ALANZ symposium. His answer: not much, and he quotes an anonymous local government official in support:

The attitude is, “get them in, take their money and drop them in there.”

Such indeed is the perception of many teachers and administrators. “We lack a national response to immigrant issues,” says one administrator flatly and an ESOL teacher comments, “The pitch was, we need new skills, new blood, new migrants, we’ll get people over here, experienced in business, in running factories, they can come here and start it up here and create jobs for us, and *virtually nothing was put into it. There was no infrastructure.*” [emphasis added]

New Zealand would benefit from a government funded programme to provide basic cultural adjustment to NZ society, adequate language training, some assistance in translating and interpreting, conceivably help with housing and employment, possibly some intervention in legal matters. As Kelsey (1995, p339) sums up, “Both Labour and National enthusiastically promoted Asian immigration, but failed to establish effective settlement programmes.” NZ’s hands-off stance contrasts sharply with the long-standing structure of Australian support, once providing up to 800 hours of funded language support, amongst other items. Policies like the above would go a long way to providing institutional support for migrants through New Zealand’s immigration system.

It’s not just the accommodation to New Zealand life. Part of the problem for migrants is the set of expectations they arrive with, specifically that their qualifications and experience should fit them for jobs in their new country. The reality is that the backgrounds that net them the right number of points for entry don’t necessarily guarantee them offers of employment, a situation that many have not been warned of.

Sadly, NZ has adopted several punitive and discriminatory moves that have starkly disadvantaged migrants. One was to insist in the mid-nineties on a \$20,000 language “bond” for non-principal applicants.

Under this . . . policy, all applicants aged 16 and over applying for entry under both the General Skills and Business Investor Categories are required to either provide evidence of having an English language background or pass level 5 of the IELTS test (level 4 for Business Investor migrants). Non-principal applicants who cannot attain this level of English can instead pay a \$20,000 bond, refundable in full if the required level can be achieved in 3 months and 70% refundable if the required level can be achieved in 12 months. (Forsyte Research, 1998, Executive Summary, p1)

Forsyte (p2) report that “the language bond was intended to act as a strong incentive for applicants to learn English offshore or within a short time-frame after their arrival in New Zealand.” That may have been the official reason, but some observers simply see it as a way of exploiting migrants. Yet for pretty paltry returns, as it turns out, and at significant cost to the individuals concerned and to NZ’s reputation. From the 236 bonds collected to October 1997, NZ grossed \$4.72m, reduced by the 45 bonds refunded or partially refunded (Forsyte, 1998, p2). To put it another way, 80% of those bonded stayed so – they lost their deposit, and there is no evidence that the revenues collected were then directed to language instruction.

Another disturbing move was to eliminate the student allowance of about \$100 a week for migrants who had been in the country for less than two years (while retaining it for other residents). By this measure, migrants are excluded from support at the very time they most need it. Removing the allowance contradicts provisions of entry, which entitle immigrants to the full rights of residency available to New Zealanders (except for voting). Despite some public objections, one administrator sees the response in these terms:

New Zealanders don’t respond, they say things like, “They’ve just come into line with Australia, current line with all the other benefits, and we had to cut something.” The average NZer doesn’t have a lot of new migrant friends that would be affected. They were easy pickings, they were an

isolated group, they don't have a lot of people battling for them. No there hasn't been a huge outcry.

An ESOL teacher reinforces this view in rather rueful tones: "I actually see this as a form of discrimination, the standard Kiwi response: you get very angry about things, and if you don't take the bull by the horns, right at the time, time goes by and nothing's been done. I haven't seen or heard of any response to this from other institutes, which surprises me immensely."

So what's the state of NZ's immigration policy? It depends who's speaking. To critics of the policy, NZ has dumped immigrants in unknown seas, without a life raft. By contrast, to the average Kiwi, NZ has probably done all it needs to do -- given entry: the rest is up to the immigrant. To government, it's probably not a question. From the start, the whole enterprise was a way of building up human and financial capital.

But if Kelsey (1995, p339) is right, NZ has played its cards poorly. In the early part of the 1990s, she claims, "New Zealand was importing the skilled labor and capital that it was unable to provide from within," like other richer countries around the world. Yet many of the migrants just weren't getting jobs, they weren't using their skills to advantage, they found it difficult to crack barriers of language, cultural adjustment, entry to professions. As Trish Daley (in press) put it in an interview on her research into the lives of migrants, "Overall on migration, NZ has left migrants to sink or swim, which is negative for society generally. . . . The migrants' expectations are often dashed and they then have to decide whether there are good reasons for staying or for going back."

Without an adequate settlement policy, a generation of immigrants is condemned to shortfall: they'll find it difficult to realise their potential and reach fulfilment. By the same token, NZ doesn't reap the benefit either. Many of the new migrants won't contribute to the enhancement of NZ society in the way they might if they had the opportunity from the start to move into a productive working life. Unfortunately, many migrants feel cheated and precarious, while sectors of Kiwi society resent their presence.

In terms of civil rights, NZ has created a second-class citizenry, a group that doesn't have much compelling ground for committing itself to the country, since NZ has made little commitment to them. What's worse, it has made new residents a target for hostility, in an environment that has not been adequately prepared for continuing cohorts of immigrants. At the least, many NZ citizens are indifferent to the situation of migrants. At worst, some are racist. NZ urgently needs a pro-active policy to promote tolerant, informed cultural pluralism, in order to acknowledge, respect and foster diversity, part of which process would be a reformed languages policy (Shackleford, 1997).

The internal situation is therefore unappetising. But it also spills over to external relations, potentially sully NZ's good name. Numbers of short-term residents give up through lack of work, lack of acceptance, difficulty in advancement. Some return home and spread the word. Other prospective migrants pass up NZ immigration and look elsewhere.

But New Zealand could yet become a leader in race relations, ethnic diversity, and social equity. It could establish a healthy re-settlement policy, encompassing in the words of Love Chile (1999), a Nigerian scholar working in Auckland, accurate information for the migrant, access and equity to provision of services, and an "unambiguous ethnic relations policy."

Overall, the two institutions of immigration and education face real challenges regarding the migrant. Both institutions play a significant part in shaping the nature of civil society. Two factors are influential here. The situation of adult migrants in tertiary education is fraught in various ways, as the Canadian study would suggest. And the powerful forces of globalisation and structural adjustment impose a frame that opens the door to opportunity for both migrant and host society, without necessarily ensuring that either party gains the potential benefit. Whether or not social reform remains the order of the day,

however, it is still possible to create humane and enlightened policies in education and migration, with positive outcomes for both host country and newcomer.

Acknowledgments

The New Zealand research reported on here was conducted as a faculty member of York University in Toronto, Canada and funded by three grants from York (York University Incentive Grants, York Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Small Grants, and Faculty of Education Research and Development Grants). Others whose support is gratefully acknowledged in making the research possible include Prof. Rod Ellis, and the Institute of Language Teaching and Learning, University of Auckland, Margaret James, Alan McDonald, Nick Shackleford, and Allan Vester.

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