

# *Deepened Mirrors of Cultural Learning: Expressing Identity Through E-writing*

MARTIN ANDREW

*Unitec New Zealand*

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper qualitatively analyzes reflective data gathered from learners' electronic and paper writings about their cultural learning in and about New Zealand. The data comes from three intakes of learners in "Culture and New Zealand Society," a second-year course for migrant and international learners within a Bachelor of Arts in English as an Additional Language (BA [EAL]) at a tertiary institute in New Zealand. As part of an assessment of cultural learning, students write and reflect on their cultural observations and experiences. They submit reflective writings in two forms: a 150-word e-text journal entry using the rhetorical e-spaces of *Blackboard*, and a 1,000-word paper journal account of cultural and linguistic learning during community participation. After the data in the e-writings had been open coded, a range of themes emerged. This paper presents results in two key areas: the development of identities through reflective positioning (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2005), and the useful 'realness' of community placement to highlight and complement class 'content.' Themes emerged from analyzing the e-texts and matched themes in the journals. The analysis suggests that e-writings have the potential to make students "think beyond the square" (Coster & Ledovski, 2005). E-text journal entries are at least as useful as paper texts in mapping learners' cultural and metacognitive awareness. This poses the question that e-moderated writings might reflect more candor and could hence reflect deeper mirrors of learning.

---

## **KEYWORDS**

Asynchronous, Constructivist, Sociocultural, Qualitative

## **INTRODUCTION**

This research project uses brief, public electronic text (e-text) reflections and lengthier private paper journal entries written by students as data for investigating the development of cultural learner identities and emerging understandings of Kiwi (New Zealand) culture. Both types of autobiographical narratives were written in the aftermath of a 10-hour community placement during a second-year course, "Culture and New Zealand Society (CNZS)," as part of a Bachelor of Arts in English as an Additional Language (BA [EAL]) degree at a tertiary institute in Auckland. The course provides its learners—migrants, international/study-abroad students, and refugees—with useful cultural information to enhance their engagement with real and imagined communities of practice in New Zealand. The pedagogy implements Peterson and Coltrane's (2003) recommendation that cultural instruction should "allow students to observe and explore cultural interactions from their own perspectives to enable them to find their own voices in the second language speech community" (n. p.). Further, it realizes Norton's (2000) method of finding "spaces for the enhancement of human possibility" (p. 153). In short, real-world experience is followed by diary writing, first using the interactive discussion board feature of a learning management system (LMS) (e.g., *Blackboard*) and then conventional free-form journals.

Through diarization, learners become aware of how their thoughts and responses are changing, and in this case how they are constructing knowledge of 'Kiwiness' (New Zealandness). This paper uses social constructivist and poststructuralist notions to contend that e-reflections and paper reflections on personal experiences of communities of practice allow learners to consider deeply their learning about culture and society. This process of reaching deeply also allows learners to position themselves as subjects of reflective narratives of experience in which they may trace their development from peripheral participation to greater engagement. This is the first of the key themes extracted from the data (electronic and paper) discussed in this paper.

Students' development from peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to greater engagement is imaged in their e-writing via a range of vivid and candid metaphors: "treasure and capital," "the window and the door," "the wide-opened eyes," "the stepping stone," and "getting in deeper water." The most recurrent metaphor in the e-writings is that of the 'real world' as a receptacle for experiential learning as opposed to the enclosure of the classroom. This metaphor is so recurrent in the data that it becomes the second of the two key themes reported here.

Many of these metaphors recur in the subsequently written paper texts, but fewer originate in the paper texts. This observation leads to investigating whether learners writing e-texts might, in fact, produce more candid, metaphoric free-form writing than when writing in paper forms, where the need to write within generic and discursal conventions might be constraints to candor. To do so, would be to investigate Debski's (2006) assertion about the value of project-based teaching using technology: "It is sometimes suggested that computers, networks and communications software evoke types of interaction and expressivity among students that are difficult to achieve in a traditional classroom" (p. 21). This paper uses its observations to comment on such "expressivity."

This paper, then, not only details two key themes emerging from analysis of learner e- and paper reflections but also posits the idea that e-writings could provide deeper mirrors of learner awareness of their developing thinking about 'Kiwiness' than traditional paper-writings.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Emergent Identities in and through Writing*

If identities are "social, discursive, and narrative options offered by a particular society in a specific time and place to which individuals ... appeal in an attempt to self-name, to self-characterize, and to claim social spaces and social prerogatives" (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2005, p. 19), then reflective diaries, e-texts, and paper texts provide such options for learners to recount their experiences of engagement with communities of practice.

Any such identity constructed by a CNZS learner will be discursive and narrative. It will also operate within a range of social contexts (e.g., the community of practice, the peer group, etc.). Further, individuals use the discursal options (e-texts and paper texts) to characterize themselves as initially peripheral individuals gaining access to communities of practice and moving from a self-definition as spectator to one of participant. These students, although on a small scale, chart how they "claim social spaces and social prerogatives" in a quest to learn about Kiwi culture through experience. Logically enough, learning a second language and culture can be more deeply engaging when the participants build their own social value within communities of practice (Norton & Toohey, 2001—following Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger,

1998). Such participants also invest themselves with a sense of who they could become in a future "imagined community" (Kanno & Norton, 2003).

Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2005) poststructuralist description of "identities" is compatible with Wenger's (1998) social constructivist description and with Benson's (2005) definition of (auto)biography. To Wenger, identity is "a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities" (p. 5). To Benson, autobiography focuses on "the analysis and description of social phenomena as they are experienced within the context of individual lives" (p. 4).

In poststructuralist terms, the students are positioning themselves reflectively through the rhetorical spaces of diary writing. Reflective positioning is "the process of positioning oneself" in discourse (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2005, p. 20). This term can be applied to Norton's (2000) seminal study in which her immigrant women's learning diaries served as ethnographic repositories of information about the complex, shifting, and multifaceted aspects of their identities. "Diaries," writes Norton, "give the language teacher access to information about the learners' opportunities to practice the target language in the wider community, their investments in the target language and their changing identities" (p. 153). These women, as our students, capture their investments in discourse; reframe their relationships with native speakers; relate their surprises about language, culture, and themselves; and identify contrasting cultural practices in their second culture.

Although the use of diaries has skeptics, learner and teacher reflective diaries have served as a useful and valid method of gaining data about learner experience since Nunan's (1992) assertion that "diaries, logs and journals are important introspective tools in language research" (p. 118). At the very least, this process of writing diaries allows writers to position and reposition themselves as subjects within the discourse. In this context, writing becomes, as it was for Ivanic's (1998) adult ESL women returning to tertiary education, "an act of identity in which people align themselves with socio-culturally shaped possibilities for self-hood, playing their part in reproducing or challenging dominant practices and discourses, and the values, beliefs and interests which they embody" (p. 32).

It is of interest that the social constructivist and poststructuralist views on language acquisition as dependent upon learner investment and identities (e.g. Norton, 2000; Pittaway, 2004) accords with the Vygotskian notion of social activity preceding cognitive processing (Markel, 2001; Murphy & Loveless, 2005; Debski, 2006), the humanistic "self-realisation learning" advocated by Barson (1997), and the ecological semiotics of van Lier (2004). The "language socialisation" focus of Pavlenko (2002, p. 286) resonates with Levy's (1998) early assertion that networking technology supports social constructionism. "From a theoretical perspective," write Murphy and Loveless (2005), "online discussions can support opportunities for co-construction of knowledge through shared discourse and interaction with others in a social context" (p. 155). Locke (2005) suggests that e-moderated spaces for self-expression in such digitized media as LMS bulletin boards or threaded intranet discussion sites enhance writing spaces for learners.

The question now becomes: what options for identity construction can be offered by e-diaries that cannot be offered by paper writings?

### ***The Relative Values of E-text and Paper Text***

'Writing' is defined in this paper as an ongoing socioculturally and discursively shaped process of self-construction by which individuals position themselves and their investments reflectively

relative to the changing identity options available to them. This definition of writing holds true for both e-texts and paper texts. Therefore, this section investigates some of the distinctive features of electronic writing, and some of its advantages, as described in recent literature.

If, as Massi (2001) suggests, "writing is an interactive process" evolving "out of the symbolic interplay between writer, text and reader," (n. p.) then, logically, this interactivity is heightened in the e-text environment where students write for an audience of peers as well as tutor-participants and, in addition, are encouraged to comment on others' entries to maximize two-way communication. Although students write in a predefined genre (an autobiographical reflection), asynchronously within word and time limits, there is more scope in this e-environment for students to communicate fluently about their cultural learning. In this environment, the emphasis is less on written mechanics than on "the thoughts, impressions and feelings that our students choose to share with us" (Senior, 2006, p. 1). Students are likely also to feel more motivated to write in this context (Suzuki, 2004). Writing e-texts may, to return to Debski's (2006) context, offer types of interaction and expressivity that are less available in paper texts.

Suzuki has itemized some salient differences between paper and e-text logs (2004, section 2.2). Due to their open and unconstrained nature, e-text diaries and reflections appear to provide students with a context for writing metaphorically and with candor, reflecting experientially and sometimes critically. That multimedia composition in a project-based context enables new levels of language expression is an idea that dates back to Barson's (1997) suggestion. Coster and Ledovski (2005) write that if integrated into the curriculum and teacher-mediated to some extent, "an online discussion allows students to express their opinions with less fear of being challenged by others, reduces social cues and promotes greater self-expression and opportunities to participate" (p. 4). Further, writing in digitally reconfigured e-learning "rhetorical spaces" may involve students in more congenial, less face-threatening expressivity (Locke & Daly, 2006). This may, in turn, promote critical thinking. Coster and Ledovski (2005) write:

EAP students have the responsibility to learn and understand what is happening in their host society in order to be actively involved in their new community. CT helps students reflect on their own biases, reactions and realities, develop their autonomy and self-understanding, and figure out ways to foster their own philosophies. (p. 3)

Students' e-reflections in CNZS may not contain emergent philosophies (they are only in their second year), but new senses of awareness of self and the other emerge. Written only days earlier, the e-reflections contain key themes and metaphors that are developed in the paper reflections. In particular, references to the two themes discussed in this paper emerge from the e-texts. This paper's data, then, consists in themes emergent in student reflections posted as discussion board contributions that are developed more fully in their diary entries.

Within this project, as well as being interactive and useful for free-form writing, e-texts are democratic, public discourses for constructing, portraying, and reflecting on real-life learning. These are some of the manifold uses of e-text identified by e-researchers (Jonasson, 2000; Campbell, 2003; Johnson, 2003; Murphy & Loveless, 2005). They are 'public' because the students in the class access, engage with, and comment on each others' contributions, enabling all participants to view their own thoughts and actions in the light of others' thoughts and actions. They are blog-like in that they are repositories of personal description, evaluation, and reflection.

Further, the 'netiquette' of the class's culture ensures that contributions are safe. Learners are told that it is their ideas and experiences that are in focus rather than their written accuracy. This allows for more candid stream-of-consciousness discourse than that which students produce in their paper diaries. Errors of form are more likely to be seen as typographical than grammatical. In writing the paper texts, writers are aware that they are writing for their tutors and moderate their discourse in line with their understanding of discursal conventions or tutors' expectations. This happens in spite of the fact that the students are assured that tutors want spontaneous, raw description and expression of experience in the diaries, autobiographical discourse characterised by Ivanic (1998) as being "below the level of consciousness" (p. 25). This suggests the interesting possibility that e-text reflections might contain a frankness less likely to occur in discourse-bound paper texts.

## METHODOLOGY

The qualitative data analyzed in this study originated in two sets of texts, each written in a different mode. The use of diarized data borrows from a research methodology suggested by McDonough and McDonough (1997). They write, in the context of online teacher journals, that these kinds of data are useful in research "both for the discovery and publication of concealed knowledge and for the creation of new knowledge" (p. 39). Suzuki (2004) analyzes the methodology more closely: students' "motivation to write is fueled by the interactive commentary, and the research is offered up as a truly dialogic process in the educational community" (section 4.2).

Given the need to preserve such a dialogic nature, this study is informed by grounded research (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). First, researchers analyzed the 150-word e-text reflections posted in an open discussion forum within *Blackboard* in week 13 of the 16-week course, just after the closing date for completing a 10-hour community placement. Second, students developed 1,000-word paper journals written shortly after their placement in week 14. The purpose of the diaries was to create a space for students' reflection on action. Chronologically and pedagogically, the e-texts came first, enabling the learners to begin themes to develop in their paper journals. Students were instructed to write freely, reflectively, and critically about cultural observations they thought noteworthy, interesting, or different from those in their own culture. These included use of Kiwi lexis, accent, and idioms; the communicative content of Kiwi spoken utterances; New Zealanders' communication strategies; Antipodean ways of being, behaving or interacting; and any surprises.

Qualitative data were extrapolated from these reflective texts: first from the e-reflections and then from the paper ones. Framed by the task's foci, themes emerged, were open coded, and categorized. This process follows grounded methodologies identifying categories from data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and is informed by principles of discourse analysis, since researchers seek specific fields of language and note their recurrence.

This discourse-based grounded study is also influenced by metaphor analysis (MA). MA is defined by ERSC National Centre for Research Methods (2006) as "the identification and description of systematicity in the use of metaphors in discourse, and the inferencing from this discourse evidence to thinking, values and attitudes" (p. 1). This methodology may reflect individuals' ways of viewing experience, noting at the same time similarities in learners' usage of metaphors. MA is used, then, to triangulate thematic data emergent from open coding. There is a surface viability in the idea that students from similar backgrounds might use similar culturally bound metaphors to describe their experiences.

## PARTICIPANTS

Community placements were organized with the support of lecturing staff to ensure that the students were safe and that their communities of practice contained sufficient opportunities for cultural interaction. These placements occurred mostly during term breaks, although some students undertook placement tasks at regular intervals, such as 2 hours over five Monday evenings. The placements took place largely in the volunteer sector: Citizens' Advice Bureaux, rest homes, childcare centres, kindergartens/schools, libraries, museums, hostels, opportunity shops, the police, the Heart Foundation, and the Royal Foundation for the Blind.

Five classes of BA EAL learners, comprising 48 students, participated in the community placement. The participants included 24 international or study-abroad students and 24 New Zealand permanent resident migrants (including 2 refugees). There were more women than men: 32 and 16, respectively. The youngest participant was 19 and the oldest 52. The students come from a range of countries, the majority of which were Asian: Mainland China (28), Hong Kong (2), Taiwan (2), Korea (4), Sweden (3), Germany (2), Japan (1), Romania (1), Samoa (1), Malaysia (1), Thailand (1), Iran (1), Ethiopia (1), and Somalia (1).

## PROCEDURES AND DATA COLLECTION

The reflective data for this project were collected from five intakes into CNZS, total of 48 sets of data, and students constructed these autobiographical narratives as part of their participation in the course. They provided the researchers with permission to access their texts, and our ethics approval process required the analysis of the data after learners had moved on from the course.

## RESULTS

E-text postings (and responses to others' postings) gave students an opportunity to begin reflective thinking about their cultural learning based on placement in real communities. A number of the key themes and metaphors appeared in the e-texts and were repeated and developed in paper texts. This suggests that the e-texts give the students a chance to develop frames for thinking and metaphors for self-expression.

In this section, the theme "Community placement leads to changes in self-identity" and the metaphor "Community placement is the 'real' world" are discussed. Table 1 presents the number of occurrences of these and other themes and metaphors in the data.

Table 1  
Number of Occurrences of Key Themes and Metaphors in E-texts and Paper Texts

Theme or metaphor	Responses in e-text	Responses in paper text
Community placement leads to changes to self-identity, that is, increases in understanding of self/others—'progress,' 'confidence,' 'change'	26	30
Community placement is the 'real' world	18	23
Community placement offers 'treasures,' 'riches' or is 'valuable'	18	18
Community placement opens windows/doors/eyes	10	12
Community placement as bridge/stepping stone	6	6
Total	78	89



## DISCUSSION

### *The Theme of "Community Placement Leads to Changes in Self-identity"*

Changes to learner identity is a broad theme under which we subsumed the subtheme "increases in understanding of self or others—progress, confidence, change" as well as instances in which learners describe the impact of their community placement observations and experiences on their identities. Twenty-six participants referred in their e-entries to increase, progress, or change. Some students also used comparative adjectives/adverbs: 'more,' 'closer,' or 'deeper' as a way to quantify an increase in confidence. Win,<sup>1</sup> for example, writes: "I have been in green New Zealand for three years. ... Now I can see how far I have come." Dana creates another metaphor: "community placement was a chance for me to get in deeper with both feet."

Broad statements about progress or increased confidence, if illustrated with narratives of experiences, are included in this theme. In most cases, learning was described summarily, if evocatively, in e-reflections and consequently developed more fully in paper journals. Toby, who volunteered at Auckland's Maritime Museum, increased his learning about Auckland's sea-faring culture. He describes finding his "sealegs" in his e-reflection and writes the following to develop this idea in his journal: "The benefits of the community placement have been huge. I have learned so many things about sailing and sailing language, I met so many people and I learned a lot about Auckland in special and New Zealand in general." The dominant metaphor used in e-texts to describe the experience of community placement relates to investment as conceptualized by Norton (2000) and Pittaway (2004): the metaphor of life's treasure and increased riches (18 students).

This theme also incorporates e-text references to enhanced confidence in applying communication skills and understanding course-related cultural learning via experience in a community of practice. In her e-reflection, Topaz reports that placement "made me become brave, I had to open my mouth and ask people if I could work in their workplace." This "becoming brave" through spoken interaction evidences an evolving, more confident self. Topaz speaks of this at length in her paper text. Bettina, volunteering in a rest home, added to the discussion board: "my community placement gave me lots of confidence." She is one of the 26 students who made such observations about gaining confidence through interactional opportunities. Ivor, a volunteer at an aquarium, writes, with the dialogic surprise characteristic of online forums: "Well, well, I believe my confidence in English helps me to stay in this community." This confidence is described in illustrative detail in the paper texts.

These increases in confidence in a range of aspects of self are given a chance to appear when learners operate and articulate within a community of practice within which they establish a special sense of self. Twelve students speak of being 'welcomed' or 'trusted'. Rowena, in a Maori preschool writes: "This made me relax, feel part of the team ... and when it was time for me to leave, they did not want me to go. Nor did I." Heart Foundation volunteer Sam's comment serves as a further illustration: "Community placements have boosted my confidence and have taught me to be more attentive with instructions, flexible, organised, cooperative and being more responsible with myself and the tasks provided." The key to the enhancement of self in communities of practice is 'becoming brave' via spoken interaction. Max, in a hostel, writes: "Just to sit down with total strangers and have conversations about a bit of everything, not too deep and personal things but small talk, is absolutely amazing and a part of myself I didn't get to know before I came here."

Fifteen students such as Max write about finding or using new parts of themselves or about changing identities in the e-reflections. These ideas are consistently embellished in the journals, so learners appear to be initially negotiating their changes of identity in the safer

space of the e-texts. One success story is Karena, the least assertive student in the class space, who posted the following comment about her work in her community of practice:

My life has been changed after this nice course. I also get a wonderful experience in this course—volunteer. My friend and I went to a rest home to help the staff take care of the old people there. I have a lovely grandmother in my home city. I miss her very much in these years. In the rest home, I take care of those old people. It makes me happy. I think my grandmother also feel happy if she knows I help the old people in New Zealand. When I work there, I also write down some unknown words or idioms. I have learnt more through this nice work, which I cannot learnt inside the class before.

There are other examples of students describing what Norton labeled “surprises” (2000), moments of epiphanic knowledge of New Zealand culture, communication styles, or the self. Dana, who chose to work at Auckland’s City Mission, reflects that community placement allowed her to “get in deeper,” to “put in both feet.” She calls her placement “this unforgettable life experience.”

Such learning events evoking surprise are often described pictorially or metaphorically in the e-texts. Translator Qing, for instance, describes the opening of her mind as if it were a landscape. In a second example, Jordana links her self-negotiation to an increasing sense of ease with New Zealand places: “I have been to Rangitoto island twice and I am feeling that I am more appreciative of where I am and who I am.” The metaphors used by the students are many and various: becoming enriched; evolving from a new born baby; a spectator becoming a participant; moving into the ‘real’, passing through a window or a door to the ‘other’ side; the opening of the mind; and getting in deeper. Such metaphors may be either culturally specific or individual, idiosyncratic ways to express the idea that awareness is maturing and that a new confidence in self-identity is developing.

This analysis suggests that students utilize their e-reflections and discussion board entries as sites of self-reappraisal and self-renegotiation as well as demonstrations of experiential learning. Two further quotations serve to illustrate this notion. In an e-reflection, Moira articulates a “surprise” brought about by community placement in terms of passing through doors and windows, of moving from spectator to participant:

I have tried to take part in [Kiwi] social activities. However, I couldn’t understand them at all. I felt that I am standing out of the door, I can see through windows, I can hear their sounds, I can copy their actions but I don’t know why they do that ... now I do not worry about this. I have learnt their culture, although not completely. I talk with them much more confidently and state my opinion.

The second example, Miwa, describes her “surprise” using a metaphor of the views from the interiors and exteriors and an image of enclosure:

I have just been living in my own culture, not try to integrate the culture that I am living. ... The positive outcome for me doing this paper is that I am trying to recognise real New Zealand culture and society. It is not from an outsider’s view, but it’s a view from a New Zealander, me.

For Miwa, the view into New Zealand society reflects her changing identity: a migrant stepping out of a Korean enclave into a Kiwi soccer club.



### ***The Metaphor of "The Useful 'Realness' of Community Placement"***

The 'realness' of language and culture in the community was a metaphor inherent in 18 e-reflections (and 23 paper reflections) from students with different origin stories. This metaphor is one of several that came into being during the students' interactions with *Blackboard*, sharpening their thought for detailed writing. It makes explicit the dualisms between imagined/real and outside/inside mentioned above. Max summarizes this image in his e-text: "The class is great, but the real experience was to actually interact with people and culture." Korean Hwang "learned a lot of things" via "real conversation with native speakers in New Zealand." Beth met unmoderated discourse in a rest home: "They spoke like real people, sometimes rush, but the teachers always speak clearly and easy to follow."

Six students mention the taboo language they learned. "In general," writes Dana, "Kiwi people use a lot of profanity." Hwang, working alongside a Telecom repairman, overheard it too: "It was a real conversation with native speakers in New Zealand. ... He spoke some swear words quietly, but we could hear what he said."

The reality of the community exists in contradistinction to the classroom and in real people versus lecturers. Karina wrote of her supervisor in the Red Cross Shop: "Lyn is a wonderful person; she is Maori which I think is very interesting to have the chance to talk to a real New Zealander." Swedish Eva—one of four students to make such a comment—observes with an eye to the same contradistinction: "speaking with different people about new topics is helpful to my learning, in contrast to learning in the classroom." In a posting, Li describes her placement at the CAB as a "real event" and goes on to write: "in a community by a real practice is a way of knowing more things about New Zealand, which we may not know in class." Jill even got to use real language, by which she means the jargon of her community of practice: "the language I use is quite specific but I really learnt and improved my confidence every time."

Eight students comment in a posting that they could "really know" or "really see" knowledge covered in class through community placement. Students also encounter language and concepts seldom used in the classroom. Candidly, Chinese Jack writes: "I am very grateful for this community placement because the things you learn there are things you just cannot learn in the classroom."

Related to this is the metaphor of perceived social distance. This appears in the word 'closer,' used by 12 students to describe their increased involvement with New Zealand. They move from Lave and Wenger's (1991) "periphery" towards the core of being and belonging as the imagined community becomes real. The data demonstrates the "second language socialisation" (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 286) of these students within situated contexts. Dana, for instance, writes: "community placement made New Zealand closer become closer and more real to me," and Qing writes: "I have gained more English language skills, cultural knowledge, and more work confidence." The more cultural knowledge gained, the closer students feel to 'Kiwiness.'

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In a context of e-moderated narrative/reflective writing for adult EAL learners, this study suggests, as Debski (2006) does, that "communications software evoke types of interaction and expressivity among students that are difficult to achieve in a traditional classroom" (p. 21). These forms of creativity consist in the use of more rich language—rich metaphorically—and more candid than that produced in conventional written journals. This result needs to consider

two factors: that the written diaries were more likely to be perceived as a genre, with specific discourse conventions, and that the diaries were written in a context of assessment and ultimately for an audience of the lecturers. In contrast, the e-texts were written for peers in a more interactive environment less concerned about pedagogical power and in a mode where free-form blog-like writings are acceptable and normal.

Further qualitative investigation of learners' reflective texts summarizing experiences of community placement reveals that when participants trace the process of an emerging self, they use a variety of metaphors to describe the process. The metaphors used in e-text recollections form and shape those they will use in subsequent lengthier written texts. Using e-texts, then, may be an appropriate way to participate in the process of planning writing. E-texts can be used as an individual's sounding board or a draft of thoughts, insights, metaphors, and expressions. This study suggests in particular that e-texts may help students with their selection of content and modes of expression for capturing their experience.

Learners are unanimous about the value of community placement as a way of learning about New Zealand culture and society. A majority of learners may also find that the experiential context within a community of practice allows them to be a bolder, more confident self than that which is shown in the classroom. This has implications for the acquisition and application of metacognitive learning and "cultural autonomy" (Fedderholdt, 1998; Dlaska, 2000; Andrew & Kearney, 2006).

This duality between the worlds of the classroom and the real world beyond it appears in a recurrent metaphor evident in a significant number of e-texts and corresponding paper texts. The students describe the community placement as situated in a real world that stands in contradistinction to that of the classroom. The reality of their experience both provides increased motivation and leads to a more useful construction of knowledge of New Zealand culture and its social mores. This style of pedagogy enables both tutors and learners to "find spaces for the enhancement of human possibility" (Norton, 2000, p. 153).

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> The names cited in this article are pseudonyms of the students who participated in this project.

## REFERENCES

- Andrew, M., & Kearney, C. (2006). Windows into cultural understanding and the formation of authentic being. In M. Barrow & R. Trewartha (Eds.), *Teaching and learning for an uncertain world. Refereed Proceedings from the Second Annual Teaching and Learning Symposium* (pp. 11-24). Auckland: Unitec New Zealand.
- Barnett, R. (2004). Learning for an unknown future. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 23, 247-260.
- Barson, J. (1997). Dealing with double evolution: Action-based learning approaches and instrumental technology. In R. Debski, J. Gassin, & M. Smith (Eds.), *Language learning through social computing* (Applied Linguistics Association of Australia, Occasional Papers, 16) (pp. 3-7). Melbourne: Applied Linguistics Association of Australia and The Horwood Language Centre.
- Benson, P., & Nunan, D. (Eds.). (2005). *Learners' stories: Difference and diversity in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Benson, P. (2005). (Auto)biography and learner diversity. In P. Benson & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Learners' stories: Difference and diversity in language learning* (pp. 4-21). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Campbell, A. P. (2003). Weblogs for use with ESL classes. *The Internet TESL Journal*, IX (2). Retrieved October 31, 2006, from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Campbell-Weblogs.html>
- Cook, V. (Ed.). (2002). *Portraits of the L2 user*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Coster, J. & Ledovski, V. (2005). Thinking outside the square: Promoting critical thinking through online discussions. In *Proceedings of the 18th Annual English Australia Education Conference*. Retrieved October 31, 2006, from [http://www.englishaustralia.com.au/ea\\_conference05/proceedings/pdf/Coster.pdf](http://www.englishaustralia.com.au/ea_conference05/proceedings/pdf/Coster.pdf)
- Debski, R. (2006). *Project-based language teaching with technology*. Sydney: AMEP Research Centre, Macquarie University.
- Dlaska, A. (2000). Integrating culture and language learning in institution-wide language programmes. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 13, 247-263.
- ERSC National Centre for Research Methods. (2006). *Metnet: Metaphor analysis: Theoretical and methodological challenges in using discourse data*. Leeds: The University of Leeds. Retrieved 31 October, 2006, from <http://www.education.leeds.ac.uk/metaphor/aims.htm>
- Fedderholdt, K. (1998). Using diaries to develop language learning strategies. *The Language Teacher*, 22(4). Retrieved October 31, 2006, from <http://jalt-publications.org/tlt/files/98/apr/fedderholdt.html>
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ivanic, R. (1998). *Writing and identity*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Jonassen, D. H. (2000). *Computers as mindtools for schools: Engaging critical thinking* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Johnson, A. (2003). Creating a writing course utilizing class and student blogs. *The Internet TESL Journal*, IX (2). Retrieved October 31, 2006, from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Johnson-Blogs>
- Kanno, Y., & Norton, B. (2003). Imagined communities and educational possibilities: Introduction. *Journal of Language, Identity and Education*, 2, 241-249.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Levy, M. (1998). Two conceptions of learning and their implications for CALL at the tertiary level. *ReCALL*, 10, 86-94.
- Locke, T. (2005). Writing positions and rhetorical spaces. In B. Doecke & G. Parr (Eds.), *Writing=Learning* (pp. 75-95). Kent Town, S.A.: AATE/Wakefield Press.
- Locke, T., & Daly, N. (2006). Politeness and face in digitally reconfigured e-learning spaces. *Kalbu studios/Studies about languages*, 8, 39-49.
- Markel, S. L. (2001). Technology and education online discussion forums: It's in the response. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 4(2). Retrieved June 9, 2007, from <http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdl/summer42/markel42.html>
- Massi, M. P. (2001). Interactive writing in the EFL class: A repertoire of tasks. *The Internet TESL Journal*, VII (6). Retrieved October 31, 2006, from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Massi-WritingTasks.htm>
- McDonough, J., & McDonough, S. (1997). *Research methods for English language teachers*. London: Arnold.

- Morita, N. (2004). Negotiating participation and identity in second language academic communities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38, 573-603.
- Murphy, E., & Loveless, J. (2005). Students' self-analysis of contributions to online asynchronous discussions. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 21, 155-172.
- Norton Peirce, B. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29, 9-31.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity, and educational change*. London: Longman.
- Norton, B., & Toohey, K. (2001). Changing perspectives in good language learners. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35, 307-322.
- Nunan, D. (1992). *Research methods in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Orem, R. (2001). Journal writing in adult ESL: Improving practice through reflective writing. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 90, 69-78.
- Pavlenko, A. (2001). 'In the world of the tradition, I was unimagined'. Negotiation of identities in cross-cultural autobiographies. *The International Journal of Bilingualism*, 5, 317-344.
- Pavlenko, A. (2002). Poststructuralist approaches to the study of social factors in L2. In V. Cook (Ed.), *Portraits of the L2 user* (pp. 277-302). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (2005). Introduction: New theoretical approaches to the study of negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts* (pp. 1-33). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Peterson, E., & Coltrane, B. (2003). *Culture in second language teaching*. Retrieved May 4, 2007, from <http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/0309peterson.html>
- Pittaway, D. A. (2004). Investment and second language acquisition. *Critical Enquiry*, 1, 203-218.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Senior, R. (2006). Learner journals: Helping to understand our students. *English Teaching Professional*, 39. Retrieved October 31, 2006, from <http://www.etprofessional.com/content/view/197/48/>
- Suzuki, R. (2004). Diaries as introspective research tools: From Ashton-Warner to blogs. *TESL-EJ*, 8 (1). Retrieved October 31, 2006, from <http://www.cc.kyoto-su.ac.jp/information/tesl-ej/ej29/int.html>
- van Lier, L. (2004). *The ecology and semiotics of language learning*. Boston: Kluwer Academic.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This project derives from collaboration with Celine Kearney at Unitec New Zealand.

**AUTHOR'S BIODATA**

Dr. Martin Andrew comes from a background in literary and dramatic analysis and now manages Unitec New Zealand's BA (EAL). Book reviews editor for *TESOLANZ*, he researches cultural identity, writing assessment and using film and media in language acquisition. He is currently Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Swinburne University of Technology, Melbourne, Australia.

**AUTHOR'S ADDRESS**

Dr. M. B. Andrew  
Faculty of Higher Education  
Swinburne University of Technology  
Locked Bag 218, Lilydale, VIC 3140  
Australia  
Phone: +61 03 92157114  
Email: mbandrew@swin.edu.au