

PRACTICING IN AND LEARNING FROM COMMUNITY PLACEMENTS

Martin Andrew & Celine Kearney

Unitec New Zealand

Abstract

In 2004, the authors began a qualitative study into the value of community placements as sites of sociocultural and sociolinguistic learning among English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners studying a Bachelor of Arts degree. Students undertook community placements of ten hours, and wrote reflective journals detailing their observations of and participation in social, cultural and linguistic interactions. This paper reports on the key findings of the project over the past three years. It also applies the notion of “community of practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to community placement within a framework that accommodates constructivist, sociocultural, poststructuralist and new literacy understandings of situated learning. This report discusses participant commentaries in terms of the ten most recurrent themes emerging from open-coded analyses of the data. The findings suggest that community placement has the capacity to provide significant experiences for students, and to impact on participants’ evolving identities as bi- or multiculturals. Community placements also provide opportunities for acquiring procedural, pragmatic and linguistic knowledge. The paper concludes that community placements can serve as communities of practice for the majority of language and cultural learners.

Introduction

Work placements are recognised as a way of bridging the classroom and the world of employment for English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners. New Zealand studies around Victoria University’s Language in the Workplace project and Workplace Communication for Skilled Migrants curriculum (Holmes & Stubbe, 2003; Brown, 2005, and many others) highlight the usefulness of placement for preparing EAL learners for workplaces. The present study, however, seeks to investigate the value of *communities*, particularly but not exclusively those within the volunteer sector, as sites of sociocultural and sociolinguistic learning. The idea of immersive and experiential learning in the community follows the principles of work placements. It also 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” (p. 2). Further, this study uses reflective journals as learner records of community placements, realising Norton’s method of finding “spaces for the enhancement of human possibility” (2000, p. 153). Reflection on the experiences of community placement brings students to a deeper

understanding of the culture of their chosen community, of New Zealand culture in general and of their own participation within such cultures.

Previous articles from this community placement study detail the impacts of community placement on learner identity; the usefulness of this method of learning in preparing migrants, refugees and international students for their various futures, and the acquisition of cultural autonomy (Andrew & Kearney, 2006, 2007a, 2007b). The project, which began in 2004, investigates the value and potential of community placements as sites for students to acquire knowledge of New Zealand culture and society. It also evaluates community placement as a method for encouraging cultural learning through observation, participation and reflection.

The students, enrolled in a second-year EAL degree course, *Culture and New Zealand Society* (CNZS), participate in community placements of ten or more hours in venues of their choice. These “communities of practice” into which learners gain entry are approved by lecturers to ensure they are sufficiently grounded in Kiwi culture and language. The participants diarise their observations and experiences. These journals provide lecturers and fellow learners with evidence of their community interaction and learning. The process of journal writing follows Norton’s work with migrant women’s diaries, where journals accessed “the learners’ opportunities to practice the target language in the wider community, their investments in the target language and their changing identities” (2000, p. 152). The journals also provide researchers with their major data. This paper reports on the analyses of students’ observations and reflections and offers insights into the kinds of learning that emerge from immersive experience in a community placement.

This paper proposes that community placement is an underutilised resource in EAL environments. In the context of provision of international education, the Ministry of Education (2007) writes: “the major host community is a major source of informal behaviour patterns and colloquial language” (p. 27). This paper discusses, in general terms, the ten most significant kinds of learning that participants reported from learning within the major host community. The researchers hope to encourage lecturers to introduce EAL learners to using volunteer communities as places where culture can be understood and language practised.

What is a community placement?

A community placement is a course-related, pre-arranged learning opportunity where participants spend a specified period in an approved community context to achieve defined sociocultural and/or sociolinguistic outcomes. It represents a chance for learners to observe and participate in activities that happen normally as part of the regular operation of a group interacting, communicating and socialising at a particular site, in pursuit of a common goal, using discourse typical of their community. Learners become small-scale ethnographers, recording what they see, hear, think and experience, and reflecting on the community, wider society and its

people and themselves. In short, a community placement is any situated, experiential, participative activity that has the potential to provide a bridge from the classroom to the real world. In this context, the purpose of the placement is to experience New Zealand culture and society and report back on individual learning.

Learners were encouraged to locate a 10-hour community placement for themselves based on their own interests. They could use volunteer agencies, community groups, clubs, lobby groups and workplaces. To help them, course documents included lists of groups and links to websites where students could seek contact information. Lecturers provided letters of introduction to placement providers, and intervened when students' placement choices collapsed, placing students in organisations that had expressed willingness to support students' community learning.

Course participants undertook community placements during mid-semester breaks, although they were permitted to use two or three shorter-term placements (for example, in the evenings) if their schedules could accommodate this arrangement more smoothly. Amongst the selections of community placements were community initiatives organised by the police or refugee support groups; volunteer help groups (Citizen's Advice Bureaux, New Zealand Federation for the Blind); rest-homes, such as Selwyn Village in Auckland; pre-schools, kura kaupapa, primary and high schools and language schools; charity and aid organisations (Red Cross shops, Central Mission); volunteer programmes run by museums or cultural sites (museums, aquaria, environmental groups); church groups and Christian communities; sports clubs (trotting and soccer clubs) and voluntary workplaces (hostels, cafés, translation agencies, warehouses).

Students were asked to keep diaries recording any aspects of culture, communication and language that seemed 'Kiwi' and to comment on the reasons for their perception. Students' perception of 'Kiwi' is informed by classroom sessions as well as by their varying degrees of interactive experience with Kiwi culture. Classroom input included discussions on a range of topics about New Zealand's cultural identity: the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi; the history of migration and immigration; bi- and multiculturalism; language policy and maintenance; national and local government, and their systems (justice, government, education and so on), and Kiwi culture as mirrored by its famous people and their achievements. Lectures focus on culture through the media, sports, arts, architecture and the iconography of Kiwiana. It encourages students to engage with a wide range of discourse written by a wide range of individuals, and to unpack the writers' ideologies and biases and to see beyond stereotypical constructions of people, events and icons. The students, the majority of whom are potential biculturals (or multiculturalists), also see as 'Kiwi' anything that contrasts with their own cultures. Their observations frequently point out aspects of difference, strangeness and otherness.

Much of this data belongs to a discourse of emergent bi- and multiculturalism, where learners invest in linguistic and cultural pluralism. They aim, in constructivist cultural studies terms, for cultural competence (Byram, 1997) and even cultural autonomy

(Dlaska, 2000; Sercu, 2002). They record, in new literacy studies terms, their building cultural literacy, literacy learning being “a process by which individuals participate in specific literate communities for gaining group membership and, in turn, co-construct the social practices of these communities” (Cho, 2006, p. 1). In poststructuralist terms, their diaries are an ethnographic, phenomenological record of their investments in their target culture, and of their negotiation of evolving identities (Norton, 2000, p. 152). The learning they record occurs during community placements, and these entail entry into communities of practice.

Communities of practice

The term “communities of practice” (COPs) came into common use with Lave and Wenger’s social constructivist descriptions of imagined and real communities (1991) and has since evolved to define collaborative knowledge management within organisations (for instance, Holland & Lave, 2001). In their 1991 incarnations, “COPs” had three essential constituents: relations among persons, activity and the world, existence over time and relation to other communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 98). In such communities, new members move from being spectators or “apprentices” with “legitimate peripheral participation” (hereafter LPP) to being potentially in possession of a deeper, engaged, invested interest involving “the whole person acting in the world” (pp. 98, 49). Like the new members of COPs, learners in community placements are participants in the practices of social communities.

Within this conceptualization of “COPs”, LPP involves situated learning. This learning is a social process as well as a psychological and cognitive one. Community placements utilise this conception, with students starting as apprentices/ observers and theoretically developing into interns/ participants as they apply their classroom learning and develop confidence. Community placements provide students not only with opportunities to observe aspects of Kiwi culture and be involved in interactions in the English language; they also potentially offer windows into cultural and self understanding (Andrew & Kearney, 2006, 2007b). Further, placements offer learners a chance to reflect on and renegotiate their changing identities. This brings us back to Wenger. Learning communities should become “places of identity to the extent they make trajectories possible—that is, to the extent they offer a past and a future that can be experienced as a personal trajectory” (1998, p. 215).

Wenger (1998) identified three characteristics of any COP, all of which are components of community placements. These are *mutual engagement* (the regular interactions of community members), *joint enterprise* (the members’ common endeavour, goal, vision or pursuit) and *shared repertoire* (ways of thinking, speaking, expressing, remembering common to the community). The regularity of a COP’s mutual engagement allows community placement learners chances to access (as apprentices) and continue in (as participants) these communities. The joint enterprise ensures that members communicate with inclusive zeal, and welcome apprentices, guiding them to membership. The community’s shared repertoire

contains specific sociolinguistic information that placement participants can overhear and reflect on.

Wenger's 1998 concept of COPs applies to community placements in two more important ways. First, that engagement in situations motivates learners to reflect on "the actual complexity of human thought" (1998, p. 281). Socially situated learners both negotiate linguistic and cultural meanings and reconceptualise their understandings. Hence, the process of learning is sociocognitive and sociocultural. Second, to cite Wenger again, "practice is about meaning as an experience of everyday life" (1998, p. 52). Learners overhear, take part in and reflect on the shared repertoires of the practitioners within the communities.

One way in which this study aims to bring about cultural literacy learning is by positioning itself relative to the notion of literacy as social practice. In particular, it draws on Gee's work on situated learning in dynamic social discourse communities (2000). Placement in real COPs activates the "social mind" and its awareness of "situated meanings" (Gee, 2000, 2004). Gee (1999, online) stresses the importance of participation and identity in "knowing": "Knowing is a matter of being able to participate centrally in practice and learning is a matter of changing patterns of participation (with concomitant changes in identity)." Community placements involve observing and participating in social languages, making meaning cognitively, socially and reflectively, and moving towards "knowing".

Engagement and investment

Community placement offers learners opportunities to gain insights into peculiar, local and national cultures of practice. While there is no guarantee all participants will engage more than superficially, close engagement with these insights may provide observers/ participants with the impetus to develop a sense of belonging to that COP, thereby offering further identity options for the observer/ participant/ member.

Learners' engagement with their COP depends on their investments in cultural and linguistic learning (Norton, 2000; Pittaway, 2004). Those with greater investment will engage more, and, as Kanno and Norton (2002) write, "as learners become more adept at community practices, they increase their responsibility in the community and become more active participants" (p. 242). Community placements entail "language socialisation" which provides crucial interaction for L2 learning (Pavlenko, 2002, p. 286). They can scaffold students into becoming more confident participants in linguistic and cultural interaction.

The negotiation of linguistic and cultural meanings within COPs impacts on the formation of identities since "the role of language is constitutive of and constituted by a learner's social identity" (Norton 1995, p. 17). A learner's desire for affiliation to a chosen community enhances their investment in performing, learning, becoming a member, and developing confidence to engage in future imagined communities.

This study is underpinned by this notion, viewed through studies of EAL learners' negotiation of identities by, amongst others, Ivanic (1998), Norton (1995, 2000, 2002), Pavlenko (2001, 2002), Kanno and Norton (2003), Morita (2004), Kubota (2004) and Tusting (2005).

Methodology

Research design

This project qualitatively analyses emergent themes in learners' reflective logs written during and shortly after a ten or more hour community placement required for the Year 2 course, *Culture and New Zealand Society*, in a BA (EAL).

During their 10 hours of community placement, participants were instructed to write four diary entries of 200 words each and to comment on their observations of any striking aspects of Kiwi culture. (These cues are discussed above in the introduction). Participants were told to write freely and openly, rather than to create an error-free discourse. Most learners made pen-and-paper notes (a few, with permission, made recordings) that they wrote up as e-texts for submission as soon after the placement as possible. Because diaries record learners' investments and chart changing identities, they provide useful qualitative data for discourse analysts and ethnographers (Norton, 2000, p. 152). In diaries, participants freely provide individual descriptions of events and behaviours. Unrestrained by discursive, generic or grammatical expectations, participants produce content-rich descriptions.

Participants

Current data consists of the reflective logs of 70 students from six intakes over three years. All students are second year BA (EAL) learners with academic IELTS bands of 6.0 or above (or equivalent). The subjects included refugees (3) migrants (39), international students (19) and study abroad students (9). The average length of time in New Zealand was three years, although one student had been in New Zealand for 31 years. All of the international students had studied in English language programmes in New Zealand prior to their enrolment in the BA, so they had all been in New Zealand for at least 18 months. The study abroad students were in their first and only semester in New Zealand.

In terms of ethnic origin the participants comprise: Chinese (37), "Taiwanese" (4), "Hong Kongese" (3), Swedish (6), Korean (5), German (4), Japanese (2), and one each of Romanian, Iranian, Ethiopian, Somalian, Thai, Malaysian, Indian, French Polynesian and Samoan. There were 42 females and 28 males. The age range was from 19 to 55, with a mean of 25.

Instruments

Learner diaries were the main research instruments. Additional data was obtained from electronic text summaries learners wrote of their community-based learning (Andrew & Kearney, 2007a) and from transcriptions of group seminars in which

learners discussed learning from their community placements. The data was collected in hard copy from students at the conclusion of the programme and stored in a locked cabinet. To date, researchers have used these data only to confirm and triangulate themes emergent from the learner diaries.

Data coding and analysis

A grounded methodological approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Glaser, 1998) was used during this research. The two researchers used open coding to locate themes that emerged from the data. Then they listed participant quotations under key categories. The researchers used methods from discourse analysis to locate lexical and thematic similarities in the data. The two researchers independently coded items for additional reliability, later coming together to negotiate the semantics of categories. The themes were listed in order of frequency from those mentioned by the majority of participants down to those described by only several. The data reported here emerges from six semesters of research. Data from each semester confirms that collected from previous semesters. Hence, this data comprises a sufficient and reliable sample.

Limitations

The researchers acknowledge two limitations. Firstly, the use of data based purely on reportage and not triangulated by on-site observations leads to over-reliance on self-reportage. An ethnographic approach would contain observational data to strengthen the data. Secondly, the fact that the students wrote solicited narratives within the context of an assessment event needs to be acknowledged, although no writing was treated as data until the course had concluded. This might affect the students' discourse, although it does not mitigate their sincerity.

Findings and commentary

The following section identifies, exemplifies and briefly comments on the ten most recurrent themes from the data set of reflections on value of community placement for sociocultural and sociolinguistic learning. The data demonstrates that even learners who invest minimally in community placement can comment and reflect in a way that shows gain in cultural competence and literacy. This report, then, acknowledges those who participated very peripherally (that is, those with minimum investment) and those who invested deeply in their placement and on their cultural learning. Much of the data testifies to learners' active social minds, negotiating situated meanings both of language and behaviours and practising meaning-making in everyday life.

The findings are presented in descending order of frequency. Student voices that are either typical or insightful are used to illustrate the key themes. The purpose in the present paper is to give a broad illustrative overview of main findings, while other aspects have been analysed in more depth elsewhere (Andrew & Kearney, 2006, 2007a, 2007b).

Theme 1: Opportunities for speaking

The most significant value of community placement lies in its potential to provide opportunities for overhearing and participating in spoken interactions involving New Zealanders. All 70 participants report having increased chances for spoken interaction, with 40 commenting specifically on their chances to engage with ‘Kiwis’, 22 describing types of spoken interaction and 12 fascinated by the everyday subjects of the real world as opposed to education-building classroom topics. Laura, for instance, wrote: “speaking with different people about new topics is helpful to my learning, in contrast to learning in the classroom.” She articulates a tension between the “real” world and the classroom that resonates throughout the data (29 references to “real world”). Learners also report on their application of classroom spoken communication strategies. Rosa, in a migrant centre, learned “to be humble and open-minded. That is the best way to keep a conversation very interesting and last for a long time.”

Learners consistently remark that they heard real Kiwis speaking real *Newzild*, New Zealand English. Tomas, one of 30 students to comment on features of Kiwi speaking, remarks that “Kiwi English is sometimes hard to understand or it is just funny to listen [to]. The words they use are often very informal (like *bugger*, *crap*, *dude*, etc.) and the pronunciation rises at the end of a sentence.” The learners learn about Kiwis’ laidback style and high rising terminal in the classroom, but noticing such features adds value to cultural learning as learners practice meaning-making in everyday life.

Theme 2: Acquisition of procedural knowledge

An incidental by-product of learning in placements is the acquisition of procedural knowledge and problem-solving skills specific to any COP. Collected data contains 52 descriptions of skills acquisition, usually marked by the key words “how to”. Dora, placed in a resthome, learned how to respond to healthcare crises. Beth learned, through real experience, “how to call 111” and Li learned how to articulate words carefully for elderly listeners. Eight of the participants trained as carers for the elderly, also acquiring life-knowledge for themselves:

The educator taught us how we care for home residents in Selwyn Village ... to those with stroke or dementia, besides emergency procedures ... additionally the importance of hand-washing ... some useful physiotherapy to look after my back.

Participants gain procedural knowledge through observation and skills application. Michaela, in a Trade Aid shop, was impressed by her co-volunteer’s customer service skills: “how she made the goods look nice; how she made people stay in the shop longer; how she takes care with the goods, customers and volunteers; and how she dealt with refunds and goods exchanging.”

Procedural knowledge includes strategies of local communicative competence. Sandra, a CAB volunteer, writes that her placement “teaches me techniques of how to communicate with native citizens and to work with them cooperatively.” Danny, a

language school ambassador observing students' orientation "learned how the counsellor slows down the speech and explains about life in both the school and city to the students." Rosa, in a migrant support centre, realised she had the ability to communicate over cultural barriers: "[Placement] helped me to find appropriate communication styles when approaching different people, even though there were some barriers to our communication when I first encountered them."

Theme 3: Increased confidence

When the learners detail their increased sense of self-identity, they describe it in terms of a confidence boost: "My community placement gave me lots of confidence." Anna's comment can represent 35 others, all of whom use imagery of cultural capital and adverbs of quantity, intensity or comparison. Diana, a Red Cross volunteer, phrases it like this: "Being a shop assistant is such a challenging yet rewarding thing for me." This enhanced confidence has impacts on other areas of achievement and on self-esteem, as in Sam's self-report:

community placements have boosted my confidence and taught me to be more attentive with instructions, flexible, organised, cooperative and being more responsible with myself and the tasks provided.

Having a context for self-expression and for making a meaningful contribution impacts on learners' self-worth and on their perceptions of themselves as people who can make a difference. This is clear in rest-home worker Li's reflection: "Every time when they were wearing a smile, I felt that it was just only a tiny work to me, but can make them happy."

Theme 4: Applying classroom learning

Community placements provide a realistic context for learners to apply declarative and procedural knowledge covered in class. Specifically, they give students a mirror in which they can see concepts and objects introduced in the classroom space. Les, a volunteer at a community centre, remembers a core tenet of Kiwi adaptability: "The Kiwi's *can-do attitude* which we discussed in class has been well represented in this community centre." Other students refer to problem-solvers reflecting the "number 8 fencing wire thingie" described in class and "the *she'll be right attitude*." Karina, assisting in a charity shop, hears Kiwi idioms in practice:

I am really happy that I learned some kiwi slang in class because otherwise I would never understand. One man came in and I asked him how everything was, etc, and he started talking with a very hard kiwi accent, about that he just came back from *the wopwops* and that he was now looking for some *gummies* because it was about to rain.

For her, valuable learning occurred on re-cognising localisms observed in class: their value consists in people using them communicatively.

Theme 5: Surprises and re-cognitions

The majority of learners (42) detail specific episodes through which they advance in terms of sociocultural knowledge about New Zealand, its people and their language. These might be moments of “surprise” (Norton 2000, p. 152), moments of re-cognition of classroom input like Karina’s or broader realisations that cultural learning is occurring. The most expressively metaphorical image of moving through a transitional space towards self-knowledge occurs in Moira’s analysis of before and after:

I have tried to take part in their 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.

Even after her placement, however, Kiwis still remain “them” to Moira, and she remains an actor mimicking their actions, participating peripherally in a COP. Other codings include Ivor’s realisation that his knowledge of the Treaty of Waitangi enables him to converse with a Maori co-volunteer; Dora’s reflection on the tear in an old lady’s eye when she sees Anzac biscuits; Karmen’s realisation that Kiwis are trusting people when she is allowed to handle money, and Jill’s recognition, during a Christian trip to Rangitoto that she, now, is a part of this land.

Theme 6: Cultural contrasts

Learners develop understandings of local and national practices by noticing and reflecting on contrasts with their own cultures (Norton, 2000, 152). When experiencing the ‘other’, learners reach an understanding of it based on identifying how it differs from, or is similar to, something comparable in their own culture. Understandings of the treatment of the elderly or the education of pre-schoolchildren, for instance, evolve from a process of re-cognising the cultural model (Byram, 1997). The data includes reflections on differences in the treatment of the elderly in resthomes, the instructive actions of pre-school teachers and the relative value attributed to leisure. Jean observes: “Instead of having formal teaching and learning, the kindergarten provides a variety of activities ... promoting kids’ interests in exploring.” John, in a student hostel, articulates the process, writing that it is:

inevitable that you will compare your own culture with foreign cultures. When I meet a Kiwi I will always try to find similarities and dissimilarities in his behaviour compared to my own ... my experiences of New Zealand culture are not only a result of this country’s culture, but also of my previous culture ... we are all influenced and nothing will be objective.

Students frequently identify differences in values. New Zealand’s lack of corruption, bribery and tax fraud are mentioned. So, too, is New Zealanders’ ease in spending,

their use of hire purchase and the charity they exhibit in food banks and missions. In their placements, participants express surprise that people are open about their poverty and are not too proud to ask for charity. “New Zealanders”, writes CAB volunteer, Sandra, “can get a community card that they use while seeing doctors. However, people who phoned in called it ‘poor people card’ in their native language”. A similar lack of stigma attached to poverty appears in Peggy’s description of Kiwis’ willingness to buy second-hand goods, and Les’s contrastive observation: “In China, if someone saw you go to ask for a food parcel, you will be looked down upon by others.”

Theme 7: Descriptions of sociopragmatic literacy

Students frequently instance sociopragmatic appropriacy, politeness strategies, and awareness of register as they define what is “the normal way” (Hwang’s words) in New Zealand society. According to café worker, Andy, “things change when customers are around ... Politeness is used when addressing customers and slang is used regularly among staff.” Sonja, working in a South Auckland warehouse remarks, typically: “people also can learn to speak to other people who you never meet before, learn what is appropriate to talk to each other: formal or informal.” “In my workplace”, writes Andreas “young people like to say some rude words when they are not happy such as *bugger*, *shit* and so on.” Sam writes that Kiwis’ communications are “happy-go-lucky” compared to those in Malaysia. Noticing these phenomena allows learners to go one step further and enact their knowledge. Michaela wrote that at first she “was a bit nervous about what I should say and what appropriate language to say to [a customer with a complaint].” With her supervisor’s modelling, she managed to use appropriate language in future transactions.

Theme 8: Opportunities to interact in global Englishes

Seeing New Zealand’s multiculturalism reflected in the diverse demographic and linguistic make-up of COPs is another dominant theme. Many learners (28) comment on having the opportunity to communicate with speakers of a variety of Englishes, most specifically Indian, Pacific Island and Maori. Maori appear, paradoxically, both the fearsome other and the ultimate Kiwi in the data. The samples include six effusive descriptions of interactions with local Maori. Encountering a real New Zealander is “golden” and “treasure” and the people “unforgettable” and “generous.” Dana, in a city mission, writes the following:

My second conversation was with a Maori elder and her family had gone. She told this to a complete stranger who served her a cup of coffee-me. I felt Maori people’s kindness through her trusted eyes: they love to talk to people, they love to share their stories, and they love to smile. They trust people, they stick together and care about each other even though they are in extreme life situation.

The data includes references to learners’ need to be exposed to a range of Englishes for New Zealand life; their happiness at being with other “foreigners” in their COP, and,

most of all, to potential communication problems: “As people who call CAB are not very good English speakers, there are many problems during the translation process.” The need for bilingual speakers, such as themselves, strengthens their resolve to contribute to society through their language skills in their future imagined COPs.

Theme 9: Noticing the icons

Although they often risk overgeneralisations, learners often define and quantify their observations and experiences of New Zealanders’ cultures and lifestyles in terms of icons used by texts and media to symbolise the country, its people and values. Not yet critically attuned to seek the realities behind number-eight wire, buzzy bees and kiwifruit, many diaries (28) report superficially on the interactions of those in their COPs with *smokos*, chocolate fish, *marmite*, Anzac biscuits, All Black tests and quaint Kiwi idioms as evidence of having observed real local culture. Les, a volunteer in a food bank, recalled classroom discussion of Kiwi identity as reflected in local brands: “I noticed ... many Kiwi products such as *Watties* canned food, *Weetbix*, *L&P*, *Kornies* and *Jaffas*.”

Theme 10: Desire to fit in

The tenth key theme to introduce here is the desire to succeed as a participant within their chosen community and/or to become a member (25 citations). This involves both doing well, through their own actions, and being accepted by local people. Prior to her work with a Christian community, Margaret hoped she could “do well and fit in”; by her third entry, she was describing incidents where she was a participant and a member (negotiating a recipe, supervising a barbeque). Ivor, after conversing with a Maori volunteer at an aquarium and demonstrating interest in Maori culture, “realized that understanding a culture could help me to integrate into a society easily.”

The process of fitting in is facilitated by the attitudes of workers in the volunteer sector. On day 2, Karmen wrote: “It feels like I am part of the staff now because the people who work there are counting on me and trust me.” Such positive experiences impact on learners’ perceptions of themselves as operating in future imagined communities. This is shown by Spring’s remark about a Waitangi workshop: “I’ve learned everyone is different; everyone is entitled to their own opinion and beliefs... I believe this point will benefit my future work and study.”

Finally, community placements offer learners potential to move from peripheral, observational ‘outsideness’ to a participative ‘insideness’. After volunteering in her son’s soccer club, Miwa writes:

I have just been living in my own culture, not try to integrate the culture that I am living ... the positive outcome for me 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 her, the impacts of community placement extend beyond sociolinguistic and sociocultural knowledge into something the researchers did not expect to find: knowledge of the changing self.

Conclusion: the value of community placement

Community placements offer a valuable if underutilised context for learning cultural literacy among refugees, migrants and international students. Accessing COPs as peripheral participants, and in many cases becoming interns and members, provides learners with both quantifiable and unquantifiable benefits. The ten findings illustrate the most significant ones. The downsides of community placement are that it can be extremely time-consuming for lecturers as it involves letter-writing, networking and organising supervisory support for students. Of all of the participants in the placements to date, only 3 have had insufficient investment, maturity or confidence to participate even peripherally. In contrast, 16 participants have stayed in their voluntary placements (Citizen's Advice Bureaux [CABs], the police, resthomes, migrant centres) or workplaces. They have become part of their investment in their identities as members of New Zealand society.

Diana worked in a Red Cross shop, and her reflection offers a representative summary of the value students gain from community placement:

The original motivation for me was to plan ahead with my future career. As New Zealand work experience is demanded, I thought taking a volunteering job not only gives me an opportunity to participate in society and help other community members, but also affords me a window to observe New Zealand society, gain some experience in working in customer service area, and most importantly practice my English language.

Her comment demonstrates an awareness of community placement's potential to offer COPs where learning is socially-situated, practice-based and "an experience of everyday life" (Wenger, 1998, p. 52). Further, her remark projects her imagined gains forward to her future in imagined communities in accordance with Kanno and Norton's descriptions of imagined communities (2004). The fact that "New Zealand" (that is, both *local* and *in English*) work experience is required by employers also testifies to the importance of cultural knowledge to future participation in imagined communities. Diana believes she will gain this through her "window" to cultural understanding. She envisages herself as a participant gaining "experience" through "practice". She will gain additional reward from the knowledge that her work represents a contribution to others, and to New Zealand, the country which has accepted her as a migrant.

Community placements provide learners with a safe, supportive and 'Kiwi' COP for negotiating situated sociolinguistic and sociocultural meanings via observing, recognising, practising and participating in New Zealand culture, its social practices,

values, mores, customs, conventions, laws and principles. For some, it might open a window for analysing its superficial and real semiotic discourses, viewing the pain behind an Anzac biscuit or understanding the feeling accompanying picking up a food parcel; for others, with less investment and confidence, understanding will remain superficial. Placement's value lies not only in its opportunities for practice and negotiation in English with real people and in real contexts, but also in its potential for building confidence, enhancing self-identity and providing evidence that everyone can make a difference. Most of all it helps students to map out the space between where they have come from (their past experiences and cultures), where they currently are (their permanent or temporary New Zealand home), and where they are going (their future imagined community).

Eraut (2002) asked if the concepts of "learning community" and "community of practice" provided added value to contexts of learning. The associated concepts of LPP, shared repertoire and situated learning provide an apt background to studying EAL students' cultural learning in community placements. Further, it can be concluded that community placement, informed by theoretical and pedagogical insights by social constructivists, poststructuralists, critical social linguists and advocates of new literacy studies can provide at least ten kinds of added value for target learners and by extension for the wider ESL industry. Community placements do have personal and assimilative value for language and culture learners and learning. But are they sufficiently valued and used by institutions, or recognised nationally? Valuing community placements institutionally and nationally as part of potential learning pathways for EAL migrants and refugees is, in fact, one of the recommendations of a forthcoming Ministry of Education report (Strauss et al., 2008).

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 2nd Annual Teaching and Learning Symposium*, 11-24. Auckland: Unitec New Zealand.
- Andrew, M. & Kearney, C. (2007a). E-text and paper-text reflections on cultural learning. In E. Gray & L. Emerson (Eds.), *Old Text/Nu Txt: Writing for a Change. Refereed Proceedings from the 7th Tertiary Writing Colloquium* (pp. 3-16). Palmerston North: Massey University.
- Andrew, M., & Kearney, C. (2007b). Community Placement: Windows into cultural understanding and unfamiliar freedom. In A. Scott (Ed.), *CLESOL 2006: Refereed conference proceedings of the 10th Community Languages and English for Speakers of Other Languages Conference*. Napier: CLESOL 2006.
- Barton, D. & Tusting, K. (2005). *Beyond communities of practice: Language, power and social context*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brown, T. P. (2005). *Authentic spoken workplace texts in the classroom*. Sydney: National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research: Macquarie University.
- Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Cho, H. (2006). Literacy as social practice. Retrieved March 21, 2007, from www.hawaii.edu/csrl/literacyasocialpractice.pdf

- Dlaska, A. (2000). Integrating culture and language learning in institution-wide language programmes. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 13(3), 247-263.
- Eraut, M. (2002). Conceptual analysis and research questions: Do the concepts of 'learning community' and 'community of practice' provide added value? Paper presented at AERA, New Orleans, LA, April, 2002. Obtainable from author.
- Gee, J. P. (1999). The new literacy studies and the "social turn". Retrieved March 21, 2007, from <http://www.schools.ash.org.au/litweb/page300.html>
- Gee, J. P. (2000). The new literacy studies: From 'socially situated' to the work of the social. In D. Barton, M. Hamilton, & R. Ivanic (Eds.), *Situated literacies: Reading and writing in context* (pp. 180-196). New York: Routledge.
- Gee J. P. (2004). Learning language as a matter of learning social languages within discourses. In M. R. Hawkins (Ed.), *Language learning and teacher education: A sociocultural approach* (pp. 13-31). Clevedon, U.K.: Multilingual Matters.
- Glaser, B. G. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Holland D. & Lave, J. (Eds.) (2001). *History in person: Enduring struggles, conscientious practice, intimate identities*. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.
- Holmes J. & Stubbe, M. (2003). *Power and politeness in the workplace: A sociolinguistic analysis of talk at work*. London: Pearson.
- Ivanic, R. (1998). *Writing and identity*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Kubota, R. (2004). The politics of cultural difference in second language education. *Critical Enquiry in Language Studies* 1(1), 21-39.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ministry of Education (2007). *English for speakers of other languages (ESOL): Effective Provision for international students*. Wellington: Ministry of Education.
- Morita, N. (2004). Negotiating participation and identity in second language academic communities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(4), 573-603.
- Norton Peirce, B. (1995). Social identity, investment, and language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 9-31.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity, and educational change*. London: Longman.
- 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(3), 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, UK: Multilingual Matters.
- Peterson, E. & Coltrane, B. (2003). Culture in second language teaching. *Eric Digest* EDO-FL-03-09. Retrieved May 4, 2007, from www.cal.org/resources/digest/subject.html
- Pittaway, D. A. (2004). Investment and second language acquisition. *Critical Enquiry* 1(4), 203-18.
- Sercu, L. (2002). Autonomous learning and the acquisition of intercultural competence: Some implications for course development. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 15(1), 61-74.
- Strauss, A. & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Strauss, P., Roach, K., Roskvist, A., Smedley, F. & Yee, V. (2008). *An investigation of EAL (English as an Additional Language) student pathways in the School of Languages, Auckland University of Technology*. Wellington: Ministry of Education (forthcoming).
- Tusting, K. (2005). Language and power in communities of practice. In D. Barton & K. Tusting (Eds.). *Beyond communities of practice: Language, power and social context* (pp. 36-54). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.