

## **Chapter 3**

### **Theory and Methodology**

#### **3.1 Part A: Review of Theory and Methodology: Theoretical Frameworks, Review of Case Studies and Investigative Approach Situated**

**Whenever a theory appears to you as the only possible one, take this as a sign that you have neither understood the theory nor the problem, which it was intended to solve.**

—Karl Raimund Popper (1902-1994)  
Austrian born-British Philosopher

##### ***3.1.1 Introduction***

Chapter 1 provides a background for how the research questions and aims of the investigation were crafted. This qualitative inquiry came about through reflecting on the role of out-of-class interactions in second language learning; it addresses questions regarding what, if any, was the influence of L2 teachers' conceptions in that process. In Chapter 2, literature reviews on OCI, ICI, and L2 teachers' conceptions were provided to situate the aims of the thesis presented. In this section (Part A) of Chapter 3, the theoretical and methodological underpinning of the thesis is presented. After deliberation, the researcher chose not to situate the investigation within one theoretical paradigm, but to use what has been discovered from multiple perspectives to inform the current investigation. Similarly, the researcher chose to use more than one qualitative method to explore the original questions posed as well as those that emerged during the investigative process. Reasons for these decisions are presented as follows. First, a

review of theory and findings from different theoretical perspectives that inform the investigation are discussed. Then the theoretical framework for the investigation and the stance of the researcher are described. Next, a review of qualitative research methods is presented and the researcher's decision to use mixed methodologies is explained (for a review of mixed methodologies see R. B. Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Finally, a description of studies that informed the chosen investigative approach is given, and a framework situating the investigation is illustrated.

### ***3.1.2 Review of Theory***

Research has shown us that teachers' perceptions originate from their own experiences as both a teacher and a learner (Archer, 2000). A review of literature reveals that there has been little work done in the area of language learning that can provide us with information about these teachers' perceptions. Consequently, there is not presently a theoretical framework that accounts for the influence L2 teachers' perceptions of out-of-class interactions may have on the second language learning process. By focusing on L2 teachers' perceptions, this investigation is in many ways covering new ground. Nevertheless, previous research does provide an in-depth understanding of learners' perceptions and the influence these perceptions have on the language learning process. In addition, while the role of out-of-class interactions in the process may not be fully explained, years of research have shown us that these interactions are highly significant to the success of language development (Sullivan, 1996; Swain, 1991; Swan & Smith, 1987). Finally, research into teacher's cognition originating in other educational fields enjoys a long history; thus these previous investigations, using a variety of theoretical perspectives and investigative approaches, are a rich source of information and support for the investigation presented here.

The aims of this investigation are qualitative and are situated strongly within the proviso of what Holloway (1997) terms “Webarian sociology”—that is, to develop an understanding of a group of human beings and their relationship to phenomena (p. 2). This type of investigation is inherently different from research focused on providing an explanation, as in the natural sciences where research aims for numerically measured, hard quantifiable probability. Fundamentally, this thesis incorporates findings that have accumulated from previous research as the initial theoretical framework on which to base this investigation. No one theory is applied directly as a foundation for the research reported however a number of theoretical perspectives inform and support the research questions and approach used in the thesis.

### **3.1.2.1 Social Interactionists**

In the field of second language learning, the view of social interactionists is that from the time we are born we make sense of our world through the interactions we have with others (M. Williams & Burden, 1997). The interactionists’ perspective seems to lend its weight to a number of other theories rather than operating as the predictive weight of an individual theory. Vivian Cook’s article (1978) shows how this perspective can be applied to three major theories: Krashen’s Monitor Theory, Schumann’s Acculturation Theory, and Hatch’s Conversational Theory (see Cook for details on these theories). Pica (1998) claims that over the years, this perspective seems to have found its strongest identity in a line of research termed “language learning through interaction.” Emphasis is placed “on the social aspects of interaction, with the interaction viewed as the context and the process through which language is learned” (p. 9). Criticism against this theory has centred on claims that it is too general and lacks empirical support (Freeman & Richards, 1993). Yet, this generality is precisely what is

needed for the thesis presented, as this learning through interactions applies not only to the learning of the learner but also that of the teacher.

### **3.1.2.2 Constructivists**

Theoretical descriptions of how learners learn through participating in social situations, referred to as the sociogenesis of learning, can be traced back to Vygotsky's general genetic law of cultural development, or the process of internalisation through which individuals transform social experiences into individual mental functions (Wertsch, Tulviste, & Hagstrom, 1993). According to this view, an individual gains understanding by constructing new knowledge or transforming old knowledge into new, and this process is facilitated through interactions with others. Learning is thought to occur when differing individual perceptions arise and are reconciled. This view is particularly pertinent when we are discussing the influence that teachers' perceptions have on learners' approaches to learning. The focus of the thesis on out-of-class interactions also aligns with this viewpoint, as these specific interactions can be utilised to construct new knowledge based on the individual interactional difficulties the learner may have. Von Glasersfeld clarifies the process, (1995) stating:

In general, language is learned in the course of interaction with other speakers, because speaking is a form of interacting, and we modify our use of words and utterances when they do not yield the expected results (p. 30).

Both the constructivists' and interactionists' views of learning and thinking fit well with the overall aims of this thesis. However, they tend to gloss over the large amount of work that has been done on individual learning processes. The role of the individual in the learning process is particularly evident in the adult language-learning situation, as Pica (1987) points out:

The amazing success of many adults who have picked up a second or third language through everyday experiences in the neighbourhood or workplace provides impressive testimony to the human capacity of language acquisition (p. 3).

This second language learning occurs with little or no formal training. While the focus of this thesis is rooted in a belief that language learning occurs through interactions with others, and that L2 teachers' perceptions of these interactions may have an influence on progress, an informed explanation of the relationship between out-of-class interactions and L2 teaching and learning, cannot discount the importance the individual learner plays in the process.

### **3.1.2.3 Cognitivists**

It has in fact been from the cognitive perspective that much of our knowledge regarding the impact of individual's previous experiences on new situations, or "transfer," has originated (H. Gardner, 1991; A.L. Brown, 1994; A.L. Brown, 1997; De Corte, 1995; Glaser, 1994; Mayer & Sims, 1994). While it is true that most of this research has been presented from a learners' perspective, it is still valid for the present thesis, as the teachers were once learners as well though not all, of course learners of foreign languages. It is also from this view that most of the research we have today regarding the development of individual's self-regulatory skills has originated; therefore a thesis that focuses on developing a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of out-of-class interactions and language development must consider that language learning occurs individually as well as socially (Lightbown & Spada, 1993).

According to this perspective, "cognitive skills" are those that enable one to know about the world; whereas Kuhn (1999) claims, "Metacognitive skills are second-

order meta-skills that entail knowing about one's own (and others') knowing" (p. 16). The cognitive perspective has often been criticised in that it ignores the relationship between learning in school and work activities and other social participation outside of school (Derry, 1992). Yet, previously we discussed the huge influence this perspective has had in the area of language research (see Literature Review Part A). Therefore, outlining a theoretical orientation without considering this perspective would be incomplete.

#### **3.1.2.4 Using Opposing Perspectives as Support**

The interactionists' and constructivists' perspectives in many ways complement one another; however, they are often presented in opposition to cognitivist findings. The cause of this dissension stems from their different views on learning. Cognitive perspectives attribute learning processes to individuals, whereas the interactionists and constructivists attribute these learning processes to social systems that include individuals (Greeno, 1998). However, it is my belief that in the present state of our theoretical understanding in language development, both perspectives are needed. That is, while proponents of both approaches propose alternative explanations for phenomena, this competitiveness allows researchers the opportunity to compare, contest, and sometimes merge these alternatives towards a more coherent account of learning. Instead of disclaiming findings from other areas, researchers should view these competitive processes as work towards a united goal. Greeno supports this view, defining this goal as:

a more inclusive, unified view of human activity in which dichotomies such as individual versus social, thinking versus acting, and cognitive versus situative will cease to be terms of contention, and, instead, figure in coherent explanatory

accounts of behaviour and in useful design principles for resources and activities of productive learning (p. 13).

### **3.1.2.5 Constitutionists**

The perspective came about in the early 1970s when researchers at Göteborg University in Sweden began to shift focus away from the quantity of learning to a focus on the quality of learning (for a historical overview see Chapter 2 of Marton & Booth, 1997). Previously the common measurement of learning was often a quantifiable increase in correct answers or overall performance, usually assessed by a third party (for a review of cognitive theory and research on learning at this time, see Castellan & Restle, 1978). In looking at the question, “Why is it that some learners learn better than others?” constitutionists began looking at learning experiences through the learners’ perspective (Marton & Booth, 1997, pp. 14-15). Formerly, quantitative and qualitative research had explored external or outer-world influences and innate or inner-world influences on learning; both approaches provided explanations as to how learning outcomes might be increased (usually by making changes in how materials were presented or attempting to enhance the external learning environment). Suggestions as to why increased learning outcomes might not have been achieved (e.g., some people are smarter, more motivated, or work harder than others. In an educational sense, these types of explanations and suggestions provided educators with advice on factors that appeared to encourage or inhibit learning. Educators were also left to sort through a multitude of teaching models, originating from a diverse array of educational contexts, which reported successful increases in outcomes in some contexts but not in others. Much of this information was either limited to very specific teaching situations or was too general for practical application. This continued focus on promoting predetermined

increases in learning outcomes didn't reveal much about how the actual learning of academic concepts or subjects took place, and continued to propagate the idea that the organisation or learning environment and the learner's abilities were most responsible for the success or non-success of learning and teaching situations (Entwistle, 1984, p. 12).

Constitutionist researchers began looking at questions of learning in a different way: How did a group of learners experience learning a specific phenomenon? How did these learners' experiences vary? What was the relation between these experiences and how a particular phenomenon (academic or non-academic) was viewed and understood? In exploring these "lived" experiences from the learners', and later, teachers' perspectives (as described in the person's words or acts) constitutionist researchers made a "key discovery" later summarised by Hasselgren and Beach (1996) as:

Understandings of whatever phenomenon or situation that we take will, in a sufficiently large population or a sample of people, vary in a limited number of qualitatively different ways which are crucial for the quality of subsequent learning and also its outcomes (p. 2).

This finding became the basis of a large body of constitutionist-based research that began in the mid-1970s and continued through to today, carried out primarily in Sweden, the UK and Australia. Researchers from various backgrounds have (1) looked at the different ways that people both in educational and non-educational sectors experience a phenomenon of the world, (2) explored the variations in the ways a particular phenomenon is experienced, and (3) attempted to describe the phenomenon as others see it (Hasselgren & Beach, 1996).



In this way, constitutionist perspectives transcend the divide of outer and inner worlds and diverging perspectives on learning (individual vs. social) as well as investigative conflicts over how the learning processes should be explored. As Marton argues, in one school of thought the individual's outer acts and behaviours need explanation and the inner processes (mental acts) are explanatory, whereas in another school the reverse is true (Marton & Booth, 1997). From a constitutionist perspective there are not multiple worlds constructed individually. There is only one world, and we experience the world differently because we experience different aspects of it. From this one world perspective the forementioned theories actually could be described as 'different aspects' of the same world and therefore it could be argued that these differences actually are complimentary in that they together help to inform our understanding of the whole. This is a very important concept for this investigation because the questions it poses seek to explore how a group of teachers understand and experience interactions in one world, rather than describing multiple individuals' perceptions of multiple worlds.

#### **3.1.2.6 Theoretical perspective of the researcher**

Although informed through findings from cognitivist and constructivist perspectives; the theoretical orientation chosen as a starting point for the research is best described as a constitutionist stance, which could be viewed as operating within an interactionist perspective. The perspective is non-dualistic and is particularly suited for explorations into how a group of teachers experience particular phenomena situated in an educational context. On the other hand, the educational context of this investigation is the learning and teaching of a second language; accordingly, the interactionist perspective is appropriate for an exploration into the relations between the teaching and

learning and the interactions that occur both inside and outside the classroom. In other words, learners and teachers make sense of the world, but they do so within a social context and through social interactions. This theoretical orientation, 1) supports the importance of out-of-class interaction in language learning, 2) allows for the influence of teachers' perspectives through the social interactions that occur between teacher and learner, and 3) acknowledges that teachers' perceptions form through their experiences interacting as both learners and as teachers.

Every researcher comes into the process with a certain bias; in this case, I consider that when spoken second language is the subject, it is best learned within a social context and through social interactions. I also believe that what we understand about the world comes from how we interact with it through our own experiences. Denzin and Lincoln (1998) argue that researchers are people who come from specific communities and incorporate their own historical research into a distinct point of view. I live in a community of second language researchers, teachers and learners; my interest in the phenomena studied and the questions posed are ideologically driven, and derived both from personal experience and from reviewing historical research traditions in the field of second language teaching and learning.

It is my understanding that the overall aim of all second language research is to develop an understanding of language development and those who participate in the process. With this aim in mind, I deliberately decided to use aspects from multiple perspectives as supportive tools to inform the enquiry; I chose not to situate the investigation firmly within one theoretical paradigm that would dictate the sorts of questions asked, or how those questions that emerged during the investigation should be approached or described.

**Experience without theory is blind, but theory without experience is mere intellectual play.**

—Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

German Philosopher

### **3.1.3 Methodology**

When deciding on research methods, structure and flexibility are required to answer the specific research questions posed within the broad aims of the thesis. After a review of educational research methods in general (see Table 3.1) and investigations of conceptions of phenomenon in educational settings in particular (see Table 3.2), phenomenographic and ethnographic methods were chosen as most suited for data collection<sup>15</sup>. Ethnography emerged in the 1920s and 30s as a tool to study cultures, societies and groups, and has strong roots in both anthropology and sociology. Conventional or “descriptive ethnography” focuses on describing patterns, typologies and categories of a particular group (Holloway, 1997, pp. 61-62). Phenomenography is theoretically grounded in the constitutionist theory. It is a research specialisation that came out of observations dating back to the mid-1970s which suggested that people encountered or experienced a phenomenon in a limited number of qualitatively different ways that are interconnected (Marton & Booth, 1997).

---

<sup>15</sup> A presentation I co-presented on the use of mixed qualitative approaches assisted in grounding the decision to use this type of approach in the Teachers’ Belief Study when that approach emerged as most suited for seeking answers to the questions posed (Bunts-Anderson & Yew, 2002).

<b>Table 3.1. Research Methods in Educational Research</b>		
Conducting and analyzing interviews	W ragg	1978
Research methods in education	Cohen	1980
Surveys in social research	de Vaus	1985
Action-research and the nature of social inquiry: Professional innovation and educational work	W inter	1987
Interviewing in educational research	Powney	1987
Second Language Research methods	Seliger	1989
In-depth interviewing	Minichiello	1990
Teachers as researchers: qualitative inquiry as a path to empowerment	Kincheloe	1991
Participatory action research	W hyte	1991
Research methods in language learning	Nunan	1992
Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research Interviewing	Kvale	1996
Qualitative research practice in adult education	W illis	1996
Research in education: A conceptual Introduction	McMillan	1997
Qualitative research: Theory, method and practice	Silverman	1997
Basic concepts for qualitative research	Holloway	1997
SLA research and language teaching	Ellis	1997
Participatory action research and social change	Selener	1997
Strategies of qualitative inquiry	Denzin	1998
The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects	Denscombe	1998
Action research for language teachers	Wallace	1998
Fundamental statistics for the behavioral sciences	Howell	1999
Phenomenography	Bowden	2000

<b>Table 3.2. Investigations in to conceptions and phenomenon: Educational settings</b>		
Beyond the culture wars: How teaching can revitalize American education	Graff	1992
Promoting helping behaviour in middle school mathematics	Webb	1994
Interpersonal strategies: investigating interlanguage corpora	Flowerdew	1997
University faculty members' context beliefs about Technology utilization in teaching	Abdelraheem	2004
Beyond "lesson study": Comparing two ways of facilitating the grasp of some economic concepts	Pang	2002
A longitudinal study of learning for a group of indigenous Australian university students: Dissonant conceptions and strategies	Boulton-Lewis	2004
A Functional-design approach to motivation and self-regulation	Kuhl	2000
Learning and awareness	Marton	1997
Evaluating the quality of learning: The SOLO Taxonomy (Structure of the observed learning outcome)	Biggs	1982
Understanding learning and teaching: The experience in higher education	Prosser	1999
Educationally critical aspects of the experience of learning about the concept of an information system	Cope	2000
Teachers' mathematical beliefs and practices in teaching and learning thematically	Handal	2001
Changes approaches to teaching: a relational perspective	Trigwell	1996
Relations between teachers' approaches to teaching and students' approaches to learning	Trigwell	1999
Congruence between intention and strategy in university science teachers' approaches to teaching	Trigwell	1996

Phenomenographic researchers Marton and Booth (1997) suggest that if we want to learn about the world we have to learn how the world appears to all these different people and how they've come to experience it. To uncover second language teachers' conceptions of out-of-class interactions, it is necessary to look closely at the internal relationship between the teacher and in-class and out-of-class interactions, and learn how these interactions are experienced by a group of teachers in a situated experience, specifically looking at variations in the way these interactions are experienced. It is expected that in-class interactions spoken in the second language would naturally be a part of classroom discourse and discussions of classroom discourse. However, out-of-class interactions are not specifically considered to be the subject taught in L2 classrooms—or in teacher training, for that matter—so at the start of the investigation it was unknown whether these out-of-class interactions would come up naturally in discussions of classroom teaching or not.

From a phenomenographic perspective teacher's experiences are taken very seriously, particularly when attempting to develop an understanding of the teaching and learning processes that occur in a situated context (Marton & Booth, 1997). At the start of the investigation, it was unknown whether out-of-class interactions were conceived by the teachers to be part of the classroom context or not. Therefore it was decided that ethnographic methods and appropriate qualitative tools would be used to explore unexpected factors that might emerge that would inform general understanding of the phenomenon outlined in the thesis aims, but were not part of the phenomenographic categories of description. Ethnography is well suited for describing detailed pictures or descriptions of "events" that emerge naturally in an investigation (Denscombe, 1998). As it turned out, during the process of investigation, applying ethnographic techniques and qualitative tools was particularly helpful in uncovering the role that teachers and

learners had in utilising these interactions during specific situations, and in exploring experiences or factors described by the teachers regarding how individuals as well as the group came to their current understanding.

### **3.1.3.1 Ethnography**

All the theoretical perspectives discussed in the theoretical section above form a basis of support for the thesis proposed. This thesis answers descriptive questions about the beliefs and practices of a particular group (Australian second language teachers of students with intermediate to upper-level English ability) and falls within the qualitative paradigm of ethnographic research (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). One of the major characteristics of ethnography is that it provides a “thick description”—that is, a detailed description—of social relationships, and puts them in context (Holloway, 1997). Traditionally this framework often incorporates some form of participant observation and textual analysis, along with interviews (Silverman, 1997). However, previous observation-based studies of language learning have not been able to provide us with an in-depth understanding of teachers’ beliefs, precisely because they have relied on categorising the behaviour or comments of teachers under existing conceptions of teaching practice or theory (De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Oxford & Green, 1996).

This propensity of language researchers and teachers to discuss and explain beliefs through the use of predominant practice or theory is evidenced in all of the studies on teachers’ perceptions previously discussed (Archer, 2000; De Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Pennington et al., 1997). Archer specifically states that theory has little to do with actual teaching practice, yet she falls into the categorization trap later in the same paper, claiming that the actions of the teachers in her study lent support to

Krashen's "Input Hypothesis" (i+1). Perhaps this categorisation occurs because researchers, even during explorations into complex phenomena such as human concepts, are taught to look for lucidity and logic instead of ambiguous representations. Perhaps in our attempts to classify we overlook that learning is a continual process; or as Clendinnen (1991) claims:

We are also trained to assume an unnatural clarity and tight coherence in what and how people "believe," and so tend to excise contradictions and conceptual blurriness as indicative of inadequacies in informants or "the record," instead of being how people (including ourselves) think (p. 11).

Despite the success of participant observation in other ethnographic research (McLaughlin, 1984; Stoneberg, 1995), a review of studies in language development clearly indicates the use of in-depth interviews as the most appropriate means, at present, of categorising teachers' perceptions<sup>16</sup>.

### 3.1.3.2 Phenomenography

One of the criticisms against ethnographic and qualitative research in general is that it frequently does not provide generalisability to other contexts (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Holloway, 1997; Silverman, 1997). Ethnographic approaches are particularly appropriate for describing the perceptions of individuals in a particular context. However, in the first aim I was interested in developing perceptual categories of a specific phenomenon that is generalisable to a wider group (ESL teachers teaching

---

<sup>16</sup> Very early on in the investigation I had the privilege of attending a symposium attended by Ference Marton and some leading phenomenographers in Australia. The discussions were centred on current approaches for applying phenomenographic findings for practical educational purposes. The experience was a huge learning curve for me and I hope have future opportunities to meet with phenomenographic researchers and discuss the finding from the Teachers' Beliefs Study in more depth (Bunts-Anderson, 2002).

immediate to advanced-level English speakers). Therefore, I chose to collect and analyse the data from another qualitative approach as well. The phenomenographic approach has been designed specifically to categorise perceptions in a manner that can be generalisable to similar contexts. This approach has been particularly successful in categorising a group of teachers' perceptions and uncovering the patterns or interconnections between the different ways in which participants experience aspects of the same phenomena, as described earlier in the studies by Prosser and Trigwell (1999) and other researchers (Crawford et al., 1998a; Martin, 1997).

Criticism against a phenomenographic approach stems from the view that the underlying theoretical suppositions of these approaches are in contradiction to the cognitive perspective (see Ausubel, 1978, as cited in Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). From a phenomenographic standpoint, teachers' perceptions are believed to relate to a particular context and are therefore not significantly impacted by previous experiences. Phenomenographic techniques are suited to uncovering factors related to the phenomenon that are described by participants to be at the forefront of their understanding during a specific situation. Another criticism of phenomenographic research is that the focus on situation and connectedness across a particular group and context provides descriptions that are dry and lack the richness of more descriptive qualitative techniques. I do not view these characteristics as weaknesses for the thesis presented, since the richness of particular situations can be illustrated with excerpts of transcripts or through employing ethnographic methodologies.

To meet the aims of the thesis the investigation incorporated features of the ethnographic and the phenomenographic perspectives, as well as techniques generally used in qualitative research, as the need arose. The need to remain open to unexpected



factors or influences is a hallmark of qualitative research, and is one of the distinguishing factors that separates qualitative from quantitative approaches, where the phenomenon is deduced and the data collection approaches frequently follow strict procedures.

The research presented employs ethnographic components such as sampling, interviewing, and comparative techniques, but cannot be termed purely as “ethnographic.” This adoption of certain ethnographic features to fit within a specific research situation has a long history in various fields of research (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994).

Similarly, the research presented employs phenomenographic components, particularly in the investigative approach used to collect data and to analyse the data needed, in order to explore the primary questions of the thesis presented. As the research is a qualitative investigation using phenomenographic tools, it cannot be termed a “pure” phenomenography; the project does not investigate phenomena that subjects encounter in everyday life, nor does it intend to identify change or bring about change in how these in-class and out-of-class interactions are experienced, conceived or understood by teachers or learners. The use of phenomenographic methods in combination with other methods is not new and has appeared in the foreground of a number of studies that have used phenomenographic approaches for a variety of investigative purposes (for an illustration of the variety of phenomenographic uses, see the investigative topics outlined in Table 3.2).

In a review of studies that have successfully applied phenomenographic principles in combination with other methods, Dall'Allba points out that a practical educational benefit of these investigations is that the resulting knowledge can provide a starting point for future development (Dall'Allba, 2000). In this investigation, the

context is situated in an educational setting, but the focus is to understand how these interactions are conceived; to explore any patterns as to how these conceptions might relate to practice, and to report on any factors that might have influenced how these conceptions came to be. The use of a mixed-method approach utilising phenomenographic, ethnographic and other qualitative tools provides a focused way of addressing the specific questions posed but also provides the flexibility needed to meet the investigative purposes of the thesis presented (for a critique of the methodological implications of research using phenomenographic approaches, see Bowden, 2000). The goal of mixed-method research is not arbitrarily to select tools on a “needs to” basis without concern for the underlying differences in paradigms, but rather to draw from the complimentary strengths that different approaches can provide. It may be safer to situate oneself in a well-respected theoretical paradigm that provides a substantial argument for preselecting one approach over another, but it is the inquiry that should determine the choice of approach, not the other way around; as R. B. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) state, “What is fundamental is the research question—research methods should follow research questions in a way that offers the best chance to obtain useful answers” (p. 14) For a graphic description of how interactions are portrayed within the contest of prior interactions studies (see Appendix A.1. and A.2.).

## **3.2 Part B: The Investigation: Context, Participants, Data Collection and Analysis**

**If we knew what it was we were doing, it would not be called research,  
would it?**

**—Albert Einstein (1879-1955)**

### ***3.2.1 Introduction***

In Einstein's humorous quote above he describes an obstacle facing most qualitative researchers—that is, when exploring the unknown, it is logical to use informed approaches and methods of inquiry that have a history of application; but often what has been done previously does not fit current circumstances nor the unexpected findings that may emerge during any enquiry. Section B of Chapter 3 explains the investigative processes used for collecting data, the decisions to do so in certain ways, and the modification and adoption of new approaches as data emerged and was analysed. The section also outlines the investigative procedures used to collect and analyse the data needed to explore the primary research questions and aims of the thesis. In addition, it presents the general steps undertaken to illustrate patterns in the data presented through the remaining chapters of the thesis.

### ***3.2.2 Investigative Approach***

#### ***3.2.2.1 Sampling***

The sampling procedure chosen to select participants deliberately fits within the frameworks of both methodological approaches. A well-known ethnographic sampling method termed "Intensity sampling" (for an overview, see Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) was initially considered to seek appropriate participants for the investigation. This

sampling procedure selects participants that are authorities on a particular experience. Based on the a review of literature three segments of the population emerged as important to include if the group studied was to be representative of the Australian New South Wales (NSW) L2 teaching population: 1) general ESL teachers 2) English Academic Preparation teachers and 3) overseas-trained teachers.

#### 1) General ESL teachers

This particular segment represents a large portion of the ESL teaching population in NSW. If we consider the large number of adult overseas students that come to Australia for English training and have enrolled in ELICOS courses (see Figure 3.3) a unique factor of this segment is the self-study or self-access time provided at the ELICOS institutions where general ESL teachers work. This factor is significant in understanding teachers' perceptions of role. If, for example, some of the teachers believe that it is the learners' responsibility to focus on their out-of-class interactions, than this belief could be reflected in the use of self-access (Miller & Rogerson-Revell, 1993).

#### 2) English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Teachers

This particular segment of teachers teaches the largest and fastest-growing proportion of the Australian ESL student population. According to the 2004 statistics, 151,798 overseas students with student visas enrolled in institutes of higher education and 57,348 enrolled in vocational training (see Figure 3.3). NSW EAP teachers' perceptions are particularly important to include in the investigation, as the perceptions they have regarding out-of-class interactions in relation to teaching for academic purposes (considering the skills students need to attend courses taught in the target

language at a university level) may differ from those perceptions held by the general NSW ESL teachers.

**Figure 3.3 . NSW Overseas students** Australian Education International  
http://aei.dest.gov.au/AEI/MIP/Statistics/StudentEnrolmentAndVisaStatistics/Recent\_Table  
G\_pdf.pdf Accessed April 22,2005



Australian Government  
AEI - International Education Network

**Year 2004 Market Indicator Data**

**Table G: Overseas Student Enrolments in Australia by State/Territory and Major Sector, 2003 to 2004**

State/Territory	Higher Education			Vocational Education		
	2003	2004	Change	2003	2004	Change
New South Wales	47,472	53,829	13.8%	27,775	28,798	3.7%
Victoria	43,295	47,904	10.6%	12,564	13,346	3.7%
Queensland	20,524	22,388	9.0%	8,080	8,528	7.7%
Western Australia	13,114	13,968	6.5%	6,334	6,201	-2.1%
South Australia	8,437	7,894	-22.8%	1,818	1,811	-0.4%
Australian Capital Territory	3,696	3,967	7.3%	642	557	-13.2%
Tasmania	1,377	1,614	17.2%	255	288	4.3%
Northern Territory	210	158	-25.7%	31	45	45.2%
Total	136,125	151,798	11.5%	55,579	57,348	3.2%

NSW ➡

ELICOS			Other			Total		
2003	2004	Change	2003	2004	Change	2003	2004	Change
25,064	24,530	-2.1%	8,180	8,115	-0.8%	118,291	125,138	5.8%
13,715	13,667	-0.3%	5,825	5,649	-3.0%	83,990	88,782	5.7%
12,830	13,708	6.8%	5,873	6,194	5.5%	49,478	53,239	7.6%
6,237	6,131	-1.7%	1,795	1,682	-6.3%	30,003	30,464	1.5%
2,311	2,288	-0.9%	1,457	1,634	12.1%	13,571	15,345	13.1%
709	553	-22.0%	368	418	13.6%	6,051	6,114	1.0%
694	735	17.8%	226	249	10.2%	2,898	3,381	11.8%
35	23	-34.3%	34	37	8.8%	481	413	-14.1%
61,525	61,649	0.2%	23,738	23,978	1.0%	304,801	322,776	5.9%

These numbers only include students with student visas and not students that may be attending institutions on other visas, according to Australian Education International, a department of the Australian government. These numbers may only illustrate approximately half of those students actually attending schools in NSW. “As a general ‘rule of thumb,’ for each ELICOS student on a student visa there is another on a non-student visa” (see AEI, 2005c).

**3) Overseas Trained Teachers (OTT)**

The statistics for this segment are not currently available; however, when you take into account 1) the current shortage of teachers in Australia, 2) the number of teachers with overseas qualifications that can be observed on staff at many NSW

educational institutions, and 3) the fact that at least some of the large numbers of students attending higher education institutions may decide to apply to immigrate to Australia after completing their qualifications, these teachers also appear to be an important segment to include in the sample (Inglis & Philps, 1995; New South Wales Department of Education and Training [NSWDET], 1998b).

This segment of ESL teachers is unique in that these teachers have learned English as a second language themselves, either overseas or in Australia; therefore their perceptions regarding the importance of out-of-class interactions, as well as their experiences as a learner and teacher, could offer a unique perspective. In addition, many of these teachers have taught languages other than English; the ability to communicate in the native language with ESL students has been shown to positively impact language progress (C. E. Snow, 1990; Supik, 1999).

### **3.2.2.2 Purposeful sampling**

The initial identification of these three segments from which to select a sample was based on trying to develop an understanding of individual teachers' perceptions, as well as a range of perceptions of the teachers as a group that is representative of the context under investigation. Nevertheless, once I began reviewing the contexts available in NSW in which to situate the investigation, it appeared that there would be some methodological problems with identifying and seeking samples of these segments from different contexts. For example, the most efficient way of targeting these segments would be to seek participants from three contexts: private English colleges, NSW universities offering EAP courses, and university and community programs specialising in the training and certification of OTT.

Although strategically sampling in this manner could possibly provide the rich source for comparative data sought in ethnographic studies, there were two problems with this approach. The first was that all participation in the investigation would be voluntary, and the average teaching population of the private colleges, university EAP programs and community OTT contacted was rather small, with less than 10 teachers on staff. Therefore, it was likely that a number of institutions for each segment would need to be approached to ensure that a viable number of participants volunteered for the study, resulting in a greater variation in the contexts in which the participants worked.

This variation in teaching contexts, even if it were possible to find sufficient numbers of teachers to represent each segment, could also endanger the validity of the phenomenographic categorisation used to answer the primary research questions on which the thesis was based. Phenomenography is a non-dualistic investigative approach that is built on the internal relationship that exists between the individual and the world. As Prosser and Trigwell claim, this approach is “informed by the belief that the context forms an integral part of the investigation of any phenomenon or relationship” (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999, p. 14). At this juncture, it was decided that situating the context of the study was more important than attempting a “holistic” sampling procedure. A “purposeful sampling”<sup>17</sup> approach where the teaching contexts were as similar as possible would provide more reliable phenomenographic data.

In addition, the probability that all three teaching segments identified previously would be represented in the group of participants studied would increase with the number of teachers that agreed to participate. Therefore the sample was narrowed to the teaching segment currently teaching the largest number of overseas students in NSW—

---

<sup>17</sup> In qualitative research, generalisability is less important than developing an understanding of the ideas of the people that make up the sample. In purposeful sampling it is important to investigate a phenomenon through those people who are most likely to have knowledge or experience of that phenomenon (Holloway, 1997).

EAP teachers preparing students to attend higher education institutions—and to those institutions with large numbers of teaching staff.

Thus, through reviewing the literature, I had identified and developed an understanding of what segments of the NSW ESL teaching population were most likely to randomly volunteer in relation to their proportion of the population (Denscombe, 1998). However as *context* was paramount to the investigation, boundaries regarding sample size, teaching subject, and students' level of language proficiency were set in accordance with the type of information sought.

### **3.2.3 Context**

#### **3.2.3.1 Sample size**

One NSW institution that had a comparatively large number of ESL-qualified teachers on staff was the National Centre of English Language Teaching and Research (NCELTR). This institution was also well suited for the investigation since it offered a large number of EAP courses. When I started the process of seeking permission to situate the study there and gain ethics approval, I was informed that there were approximately 70 teachers on staff. When I began soliciting volunteers to participate in the study, this number had increased to over 100 teachers employed, either on a permanent, part-time, or casual basis. In many qualitative studies, the study population is quite small; for example, 19 of the 38 previously outlined studies on L2 teacher's conceptions (see Section 2.2.2 in Literature Review Part B) had 9 or fewer participants, with the focus being on a thick and accurate description. Phenomenographic investigations, however, are typically larger, with between 15 and 20 usable cases (Denscombe, 1998). Ordinarily, qualitative research using larger population samples tends to use tools such as surveys and questionnaires rather than in-depth interviewing.



In this regard phenomenographic research can be very time-consuming, as data is typically collected through interviews. However, as the purpose of such investigations is to develop an understanding of the qualitatively different ways a group rather than an individual conceives and experiences a particular phenomenon, a sample large enough to represent the group is desired. From the teaching population at NCELTR I was lucky enough to receive 28 volunteers and 28<sup>18</sup> usable cases for the investigation presented. This number aligns well with previous phenomenographic research conducted in Australia (see Table 3.3).

Table 3.3.Australian studies reviewed Bowden’s Phenomenography (2000)		
J. Bowden	Physics project	30 students
K. Trigwell	Phenomenographic procedure	15-20 people
G. Dall’Albas	Learning of science in lower secondary schools	10 students
G. Dall’Albas	Longitudinal study on learning	29 students
K. Patrick	Comparative study on what is taught and what is learned	18 physics teachers 15 Australian history teachers

Situating the investigation at NCELTR also provided the benefit of convenience. As a Macquarie University student, I was afforded easy access to the Centre, which is located on and near the main Macquarie University campus. This

<sup>18</sup> One interview was unexpectedly interrupted a couple of times and finally cut short. The participant had completed describing the lesson and there were a number of spontaneous experiences reporting the teachers’ perception of the teaching and learning that took place. The original data supplied was sufficient to be used in answering the primary research questions posed in the thesis. The participant, however, had spontaneously mentioned some experiences as a teacher and as a second language learner, which needed more clarification. The participant during the initial interview agreed to meet again if necessary. After transcribing the interview, it became apparent that some of these personal teaching and learning experiences briefly mentioned in the interview were important, particularly in developing an understanding of participants’ descriptions of how conceptions had come to be. Therefore, this teacher was interviewed again only about those “personal experiences” that spontaneously emerged in the initial interview but had not been clarified. Thus this respondent’s transcripts consisted of two parts: part one contained a full description of an actual teaching situation, and part two contained further descriptions

location was very beneficial, as I was able to schedule interview times that were convenient for the participants over a 3-month period, and because of the close proximity, I was able to flexibly reschedule interviews at the participant's request. NCELTR provided not only an opportunity for a larger number of participants, but as the Centre and the investigation were both affiliated with the same university, the atmosphere of the context was quite supportive. The number of volunteers I received who generously gave up time in their busy schedules to participate in the initial interviews and clarify or confirm information during the investigation was probably higher than if the investigation had been situated elsewhere within a stricter time-frame.

#### **3.2.3.2 Students' L2 proficiency**

Only teachers who were currently employed or had very recent experience teaching students at an intermediate to advanced level of English were asked to volunteer. The level of the students is pertinent to the phenomenographic approach, as previous studies indicate that teachers' practices altered with the perceived variation in the ability of the students at a course level (Prosser & Trigwell, 1999). Thus, it is important to sample teachers of students with similar levels of ability. One of the benefits of situating the study at one institution was that it eliminated the variance in how language proficiency was rated (ESL institutions often recognise similar ratings on international or national exams but have a unique rating system for proficiency within their own system). At NCELTR the same tools and measurements—written exams, oral interviews and International English Language Testing System (IELTS) scores—were used to evaluate the proficiency of all students accepted to attend at the centre.

---

and clarifications of the participant's teaching and learning experiences that the participant believed to be important events in his conceptual understanding.

These students were chosen primarily because a number of studies have shown that learners at lower levels of proficiency may have enough to do just to maintain communication and lack the ability to focus on their own language forms and structures in their out-of-class interactions (VanPatten, 1996). Language researchers suggest that for learners to perceive, identify, and develop strategies to affect change in their interactions, they must be at a higher level of proficiency (Boulouffee, 1986; N. Ellis, 1993; Schmidt, 1990). The focus of the investigation on out-of-class interactions is particularly relevant as learners are more apt to be aware of their interactional problems through the course of communicating meaning (Long & Robinson, 1998; Pica et al., 1996). In a well-known study of learners at different levels of proficiency, J. Williams (1999) found that only the students at intermediate to advanced levels of ability were able to self-initiate learning repairs in their interactions, and thus were more likely to discuss their communication difficulties with their teachers.

#### **3.2.3.3 L2 teaching experience (expertise).**

Another factor considered was teaching experience, and whether the study should be limited to participants with *expertise* in the area. One of the tenets of qualitative research seeking an understanding of an individual's perceptions of a phenomenon is that the individual must have either opportunities to experience the phenomenon or expertise in the area (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). In the studies reviewed on L2 teachers' conceptions (see Table 2.5, Chapter 2) many of the studies used either teachers in training or teachers labelled as "experienced." When considering the expertise of teachers, researchers usually set as a criterion the specific number of years the teachers have taught the subject. In a reviewing criterion for selecting "expert teachers" Tsui (2003) claimed that the number of years of experience required in most

studies was usually set at more than five years (p. 4). One problem with using the number of years of teaching experience as the only criterion for measuring expertise is, as Tusi so aptly argues, “experience and expertise are not synonymous” (p. 5).

Another problem with setting expertise as a criterion for the thesis presented is that the focus of research is on out-of-class interaction, which is not considered a distinct subject in the field of second language teaching. Without previous research, supporting the contention that conceptual development regarding these interactions is influenced by specific teaching contexts—arguing that a larger number of years in one teaching context somehow relates to expertise in the area—is not sustainable. Thus when seeking out volunteers, years of teaching experience was not listed as a boundary for participation.

The decision not to include expertise as a requirement of participation was made initially because I wanted to leave the sampling procedures open enough to encourage participation of teachers from the three different distinct segments of the NSW ESL teaching population previously outlined. That is, if the criterion were set as “all teachers with 5 or more years of EAP experience teaching,” it was possible that this requirement would eliminate those teachers who had considerable teaching experience in other segments of ESL teaching but were new to EAP teaching.

This decision was quickly reinforced when some of the teachers interested in volunteering for the study specifically asked if such things as being new to EAP teaching, having learned English as a second language themselves, or being new to ESL teaching in general would eliminate them from the research. I assured the participants that this would not be the case. Individually, prior to or at the start of specific interviews, some of the participants also asked if having a number of years experience teaching overseas but only recent teacher training for certification in

Australia, or a limited knowledge of specific L2 theory or methodologies, would be problematic. Again, I assured these teachers that I was primarily interested in their own beliefs and experiences and wanted to talk to them about a recent teaching experience they had had, and that they were considered the expert when describing their own experiences.

In qualitative research, sampling is usually purposeful when the researcher develops a criterion that assists in collecting information from the people chosen from the sample (Holloway, 1997). In setting the sampling criteria outlined, I wished to achieve as complete or "holistic" a picture as possible of the phenomenon investigated; this openness and flexibility is required of an ethnographic approach (Silverman, 1997). From a phenomenographic perspective, investigating participants in similar contexts is very important. By setting firm boundaries as to the type of course taught (EAP), the proficiency of students taught (intermediate to advanced level of proficiency) and time frame (current or very recent experiences teaching a lesson in one of these courses), I attempted to limit the sample to those teachers who taught in as similar a context as possible.

#### **3.2.3.4 Resulting sample**

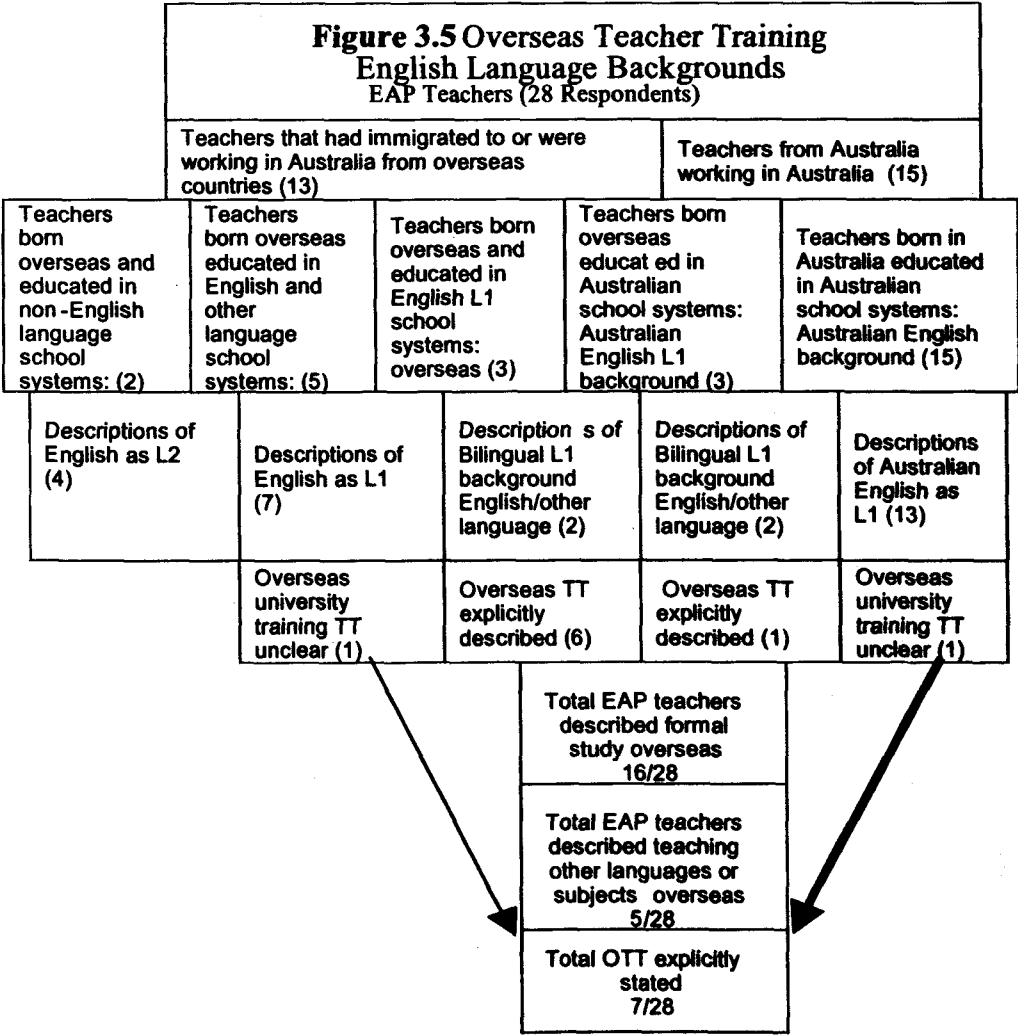
The context of the investigation was determined to be the primary consideration; however, by situating the investigation in a predominantly EAP institution, the inclusion of the quickest growing segment of the NSW population (English for Academic Purposes) in the sample was predetermined. As the NCELTR also had a comparatively large number of teachers it was expected that at least some of the participants who would volunteer for the study would come from the other two prominent segments of the NSW teaching population previously discussed, general

ESL teachers and overseas-trained teachers. None of the teachers were specifically asked about their previous teaching experience at the start of the study; therefore, exact figures for number of years of teaching experience or types of teaching are not included. Later an attempt was made to ascertain general information regarding teaching experiences across the group in order to discover if “expertise” might have an influence on the results of the study (see section entitled, “Factors Analysed for Influence on Findings,” Chapter 7).

The transcripts were again read through individually, and all mention of teaching experiences for each individual was noted. In addition, a questionnaire regarding teaching experiences was sent out to all participants (see Appendix A.2). There was a lapse of time of approximately 1-1½ years between the original participation in interviews and receiving the questionnaire; therefore, it was expected that not all the participants would be contactable or that all would have the time, with very hectic teaching schedules, to respond to an additional voluntary request for information. Luckily, 8 out of 28 respondents did reply to the questionnaire; therefore, although there is not enough quantifiable information on all the participants to provide exact numbers, the questionnaire responses and data from transcripts illustrates (see Figure 3.4) that this segment of the population was represented in the sample.

All participants interviewed had current or very recent experience teaching EAP at NCELTR; 9 of these teachers mentioned teaching EAP in other contexts. Across the group, all but two of the teachers mentioned previous ESL experiences apart from their current situation, and 14 teachers described situations where they had taught overseas. While this data does not provide qualitative information on specific types and length of ESL teaching experiences, it does indicate that many of the teachers had some general ESL background in addition to their current employment as EAP teachers.

In contrast, although the EAP teachers who participated in the study were not explicitly asked, either in documentation or during the interviews, about their OTT experiences prior to the interviews, this information emerged naturally in a number of ways for all the participants, either through introducing themselves or through the spontaneous telling of these experiences during the interview. Figure 3.5 illustrates that of the group of 28 teachers that volunteered for the study, 13 described having overseas language backgrounds; and of these, 7 teachers explicitly stated that they had overseas teacher training, which indicates that at least one quarter of the teachers in this group fit within this segment of the NSW teaching population.



The information provided by the teachers also shows that the OTT situation is complex and is not just a matter of teachers who were trained overseas coming to Australia to work for short periods because of teaching shortages. Out of the group of 28 teachers, 16 mentioned having some sort of formal study overseas. While some of these experiences include general education studies the teachers had as children, they also include formal studies in second languages and at tertiary institutions that may or may not have been credited to either Australian or overseas teaching qualifications.

In looking at this segment of the population, it is important to note the possibility that these teachers themselves have had experiences learning English as a second language. As indicated in the second row of Figure 3.5, two teachers explicitly stated that they learned English as a second language themselves and that had been schooled in a non-English-background country. Three other teachers described immigrating from non-English speaking countries and entering the Australian school system as children. Although it is not illustrated in Figure 3.5, two of the five teachers that described themselves as educated in English and other language school systems (row 2, column 2) also reported childhood experiences of immigrating from non-English speaking countries to English-speaking countries other than Australia. This suggests that at some point at least seven teachers out of the group of 28 had, had experiences learning English as a second language, although as adults only four of 28 continue to perceive English as a second language.

### ***3.2.4 Interviews***

All the participants (28 in total) were interviewed for approximately 45 minutes to 1-½ hours. The purpose of the interviews was to find out specific information regarding EAP teachers' conceptions of in-class and out-of-class interactions. The



interviews were semi-structured and could be categorised, according to Baker (1997), as an asymmetrical organization of talk—where the interviewer asks specific questions either pertaining to the topic or for clarification but the respondent does most of the talking. The data collected was in large part based on descriptions that were provided by the interviewee. Both the phenomenographic and ethnographic approaches were considered in this process, as both investigative approaches view interviews to be semi-structured when they are broadly based on the topics in question.

The type of interview conducted could also be termed an “in-depth interview”; that is, the information provided by the participants was not pre-determined. I did not have expectations regarding these teachers’ beliefs or personal knowledge of the experiences, conceptions or understandings of in-class or out-of-class interaction. Nor did I have knowledge of the lesson they would describe prior to the interview. On the other hand, the interviews were designed toward developing an understanding of a particular phenomenon, the teachers’ perceptions of in and out-of-class interactions—particularly regarding the value and role, they ascribe to these interactions and to themselves in the second language learning situation. Prior to the interviews, it was expected that the interviewees would describe their situation in their own way and in their own words; yet all interviews were audio taped so they contained an element of formality (Holloway, 1997). Previous studies have shown that the placement of topics within an interview is crucial to the accuracy of data obtained (Mishler, 1986). Thus when questioning the role that teachers perceive for themselves in the learning process, it is logical to introduce this topic after eliciting descriptions of the teaching and learning that occurred in a specific situation (Archer, 2000).

#### **3.2.4.1 Interview format**

The interviews followed a format of specific questions regarding the context of the class, consisting of general open-ended questions regarding the actual lesson experienced, followed by questions seeking clarification of or more detail regarding the specific teaching and learning experiences. This interview format was developed in an attempt to counter a general criticism of qualitative research into teachers' beliefs, which claims that what teachers say they do is not always evident in actual classroom practice. In this thesis, the process was reversed. The teachers described their experience of a specific lesson and were encouraged not only to report but also to reflect on how they perceived learning and teaching in that situation.

#### **3.2.4.2 Interview questions**

Prior to starting the interview, teachers were asked to confirm that the level of proficiency of students in the courses they were currently teaching or had recently taught was in the range of intermediate to advanced (see Appendix A.3). The first few minutes of the interviews all began with a casual discussion of the types of courses the teacher was currently teaching or had just finished teaching. If the teacher was teaching more than one course, the interviewer asked the participant to describe the lesson they had most recently taught. The interviewer then asked specific demographic questions regarding class size, gender, and language background and ability of the students (see Table 3.4). During the interview, the teachers were explicitly asked to describe the proficiency level of the students who attended the lesson they described. In Table 3.4, under the column titled "Ability Level," the actual words the teachers used to describe proficiency are listed. The interviewer specially requested the specific demographics of students that attended the lesson described. Overall, there were many demographic

similarities in these students; for example, the student populations in a majority of classes were described to have equal or close to equal gender distribution; the terms used to describe this most frequently were “mixed” and “50/50.” The average class size across the group was 12.89. The majority of students at the time the teachers were interviewed were described as coming from a Chinese L1 background; the most common length of a course reported was 10 weeks; and the length of time the teachers were presently in or had just finished teaching was included in the column titled “Length (weeks).” Some of the courses had student movement usually at the midterm point so some students were new to a particular course.

Table3.4 StudentDemographics & Ability			Student numbe	Class Size	Length (weeks)
Gender	L1 Background	Ability Level			
Half & half	Chinese	Intermediate	9	4	3
Mixed	Thai, Japanese, Chinese, Korean	High Intermediate	28	11	6
Mixed	Thai, Spanish, Korean, Indonesian, Chinese	Intermediate	5	8	10
Almost half & half	Chinese (Mainland & Taiwanese), Indonesian, Thai	Intermediate	22	13	10
Mixed	Mandarin, Japanese, Korean	Intermediate	10	14	5-10
Half	Chinese	Upper Intermediate	8	14	4-10
All Boys	Chinese, Korean, Indonesian	Low Intermediate	23	10	11
Mixed	Chinese	Master Level	1	12	10
Mixed	Korean, Thai	Upper Intermediate	3	13	10
Mixed	Taiwanese, Spanish (Columbia & Spain)	Intermediate	2	9	7
Mixed	Chinese (Hong Kong), Spanish, Korean	Upper Intermediate	15	14	10
4 Boys/6 Girls	Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian	Low Intermediate	4	10	15
11 Girls/4 Guys	Chinese, Korean	Intermediate	14	15	10.5
50/50	Chinese, Japanese, Thai	Intermediate	17	15	10
80% Female	Chinese, Korean, Japanese	Intermediate	20		5
Mixed	Chinese, Korean	Intermediate	18	19	10
50/50	Chinese, Indonesian, Malay	Intermediate	16	18	13
Mixed	Thai, Bangladeshi	Intermediate	7	17	11
Mixed	Japanese, Chinese	Upper Intermediate	19	18	10
Mixed	Thai	Intermediate	21	10	5
Majority Male	Chinese, Korean, Russian, Japanese	Intermediate	11	16	10
Mixed	Chinese	Intermediate	12	15	6
Mixed	Chinese, Bangladeshi, Indonesian	Intermediate	13	12	10
50/50	Chinese, Thai	Intermediate	6	10	10
Majority Female	Chinese, Korean	Upper Intermediate	24	17	9
Majority Female	Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian	Intermediate	25	11	3
50/50	Chinese (Mandarin & Cantonese)	Intermediate	26	13	5-10
50/50	Taiwanese, Thai, Korean	Intermediate	27	12	11

Early on in the interviews, teachers were asked to describe the general aims of the course, and the motivation or goals of the students who attended. Except for two “study tour classes,” all the courses were described as “academic preparation.” The study courses were specialised courses held for groups of overseas teachers, and the courses were organized around the specific group’s needs and scheduling requirements. Both participants that described a study tour lesson also described an academic preparation lesson and contrasted the differences between the overall focuses of the two. As these contrasts helped to elucidate the teachers’ conceptions of learning and teaching in those situations, these were included in the data analysed for the group. Other participants, in clarifying particular points, also provided contrasts between various EAP courses or particular lessons within a specified course. When discussing interactions, particularly interactions outside of the classroom, some of the teachers contrasted experiences they had had elsewhere with the lesson described. Out of the 28 interviews analysed, 13 different types of courses were described (see Table 3.5).

<b>Table 3.5 Type or EAP courses described during interviews</b>	
<b>CLASSES</b>	<b>MIXED PROGRAM</b>
ACADEMIC 1	PREAPP
ACADEMIC 2	S E P (SSEPP)
ACADEMIC 3	SIBT (CEBIT)
APP	STUDY TOUR
BPP	
GENERAL 4	
IAP	<b>Total Number of</b>
IELTS	<b>EAP courses= 13</b>

Overall, motivation for students attending the NCELTR was described as an intention to increase or learn academic skill that would be needed as students enrolled

in an Australian University. Students came from a variety of educational backgrounds ranging from first-time university students to graduate degree students. The students were at various stages in the process; some were attending courses prior to applying for entrance into a university, or taking an exam to qualify for university, while others had already been accepted into university and were attempting to brush up on their skills prior to taking up their offers. Some students were finishing courses that would allow automatic enrolment into Macquarie University, while others had been tentatively accepted by a university with the prerequisite that specific courses would be taken and passed before acceptance was confirmed. There were also students that were already attending university or attending a specialised course such as CEBIT, which included courses for credit at university but also required students to take specific L2 courses that focused on skills the students were weak in. The majority of students attending NCELTR were reported to be planning on a degree in business; thus, there were a number of courses designed to fit this need, such as BPP, APP and PREAPP (business preparation, academic, and pre-academic courses).

After describing the course and students, the teachers were then asked to talk about a lesson they had recently experienced. From this point, there was very little direct questioning from the interviewer except to ask for clarification of a situation or description reported, or to encourage the teacher to reflect on how they saw learning, teaching, or the role of spoken interaction in the specific situation they had just described. During descriptions of the course in general, and of the specific lesson described, teachers often supported a particular action or observation with an experience they had had as a teacher or learner. They were encouraged to describe these experiences. Then the topic of the specific lesson was again brought up, leading

to a complete description of the lesson, including the focus of the class, the participation of the students and teacher, the materials used, and so on.

After describing the lesson, teachers were asked to further clarify beliefs or perceptions that had emerged during the interview and to further recount their own L2 learning and teaching experiences.

During the interviews, a quantifiable difference between instances of in and out-of-class interactions was apparent. Multiple instances of interaction inside the classroom naturally emerged in the teachers' descriptions of lessons; and in some cases, experiences of out-of-class interactions did as well. However, in many cases out-of-class interactions were not evident in the lessons described, which necessitated that the topic be brought up initially by the interviewer (the question types used to elicit information for ICI are provided in Chapter 4, and for OCI, in Chapter 5). There were also differences in the ways that these interactions were reported. In-class interactions were usually described in experiential terms as part of the process and experience of the lesson. Often teaching and learning terminology was used to explicate the purpose or role of interactions in a certain instance. In contrast, instances of out-of-class interactions—those that either emerged naturally or were elicited separately later by the interviewer—were often recounted in a narrative fashion (detail provided in Chapter 7) and contrasted or supported by teachers' previous experiences (detail provided in Chapter 6).

### **3.2.5 Analysis**

Thus far, the phenomenographic and ethnographic approaches used to collect the initial data do not appear that different. However, in the analysis stage they differ in the extreme. The ethnographic approach aims for a rich description of an individual's

beliefs. The phenomenographic approach views the data as a whole, without individual variation; it aims for generalisability across broadly similar contexts. To explicate these differences I will discuss both perspectives individually and describe how these investigative approaches were used in the research presented.

**3.2.5.1 Phenomenographic categories of description**

*Research Questions One and Three*

**What are the L2 teachers’ conceptions of out-of-class interactions?**

**What are the L2 teachers’ conceptions of in-class interactions?**

The data for the first and third questions was collected using a phenomenographic approach; therefore analysis occurred only after the interviews were completed. Prosser’s earlier study was used as a model (see Figure 4, Section 2.2.5); therefore the same research approach will be taken—namely, a second-order, phenomenographic perspective approach (Prosser et al., 1994). From this perspective, conceptions are considered as relations between individuals and a particular task and context. These conceptions are viewed as dynamic and dependent on the particular context and task in which they are being studied. At the same time, though, proponents of this view consider the number of conceptions and approaches about particular phenomena to exist in relatively small numbers, which can be identified and described (Marton, 1986; Prosser et al., 1994; Prosser & Trigwell, 1999).

**3.2.5.2 Stages of Analysis**

1. The first stage of the analysis was to develop an initial set of categories from the conceptualisation of teaching and learning that is understood in a sample set

of the data. In developing the categories, the transcripts were treated as a whole, without regard to individual variation, and the participants' descriptions were de-contextualised without reference to the context.

The purpose of this type of analysis is not to describe the beliefs of an individual or small group of teachers, but to better understand the conceptions of all the teachers in relation to this particular context. As Prosser et al. (1994) claim, "They are not meant to describe the variations between individuals, but the range of categories represented within a set of transcripts as a whole" (p. 220). After discussion and debate with supervisors, the categories were then analysed in terms of their referential and structural components.

2. The second stage of the analysis involved the construction of a set of categories to accurately represent the transcripts as a whole. At this point in accordance with phenomenographic methods all the transcripts (approximately 28) were read and reread and the conceptual categories presented individually within each transcript were listed. This list of descriptions was compared with the list of categories representing the whole (only those descriptions that were evident in 4 or more were retained, and the categories describing the whole were revised). Revisions to these categories, along with their ordering characteristics, were then discussed with the supervisor. In his earlier study, Prosser et al. (1994) reports that there was heavy debate among the researchers as to how the set of categories would be constructed either in a hierarchical or logically related format.



In developing the ICI set, there appeared to be hierarchical patterns between the five categories that emerged, in relation to the role that ICI was perceived to play in the actual learning and teaching described, and also in relation to how these interactions were approached within different situations within the actual lesson. Later the researcher discovered that these patterns closely aligned with Marton's work on science learners' conceptions (Marton, Beaty, & Dall'Allba, 1993), as well as with Prosser's work on teachers' conceptions in science and higher education (Prosser et al., 1994) (see Table 4.5.1, Chapter 4). Thus, these previous frameworks published in other areas acted as support for the hierarchical format chosen independently in the area of L2 research.

The construction of a related format for the OCI set was a bit more problematic, as the relation between categories was less apparent. Out of the four categories that emerged, OCI were treated as completely separate from classroom teaching in two of the categories; they were actively elicited in one and were the basis for discussion in another. However, some patterns emerged in how particular aspects of OCI were approached in classroom teaching. These patterns were apparent in all four categories, particularly in relation to teachers' perceptions of rapport and the use of learners in the classroom. The most telling factor that emerged across the group was the use and non-use of students' outside experiences in classroom discussions. Therefore the transcripts were again explored individually for instances where these factors were apparent, in order to confirm that these OCI factors were representative of the group as a whole.

3. Once the construction of the set of categories was decided, the transcripts were re-read and the categories revised and reordered. Categories were then checked

to see if they were represented in the transcripts. The process continued until a stable set of categories was developed.

In the third stage of the analysis, the focus returned to the transcripts in order to classify the perceptions as they were represented in individual transcripts. The transcripts were read over in relation to the given questions:

- Who initiated the interaction?
- What was the teacher's perception of the role of interaction in that instance?
- How did the interaction occur (teacher, teacher + student, student + student, as a group)?
- How was the teaching and learning perceived as a whole?
- What was the role of the teacher and learner(s) in instances where in-class and out-of-class interactions were described?

Previous research indicates that students' learning approaches vary in relation to their perceptions of the task's learning goal (J. Williams, 1999); so it is reasonable to suggest that adoption of more than one concept within a course (the teaching of EAP or the availability of self-access) might also apply to the teachers' perceptions of the roles of teaching and learning in a single context. This approach is supported by Prosser et al.'s earlier study (1994), which found that in some cases a number of perceptions were represented within each transcript. In this study it was the case that a number of perceptions were described within each of some of the transcripts, and in those situations perceptions were classified in terms of the highest category for which there was substantial evidence within the transcript.

From this process a list of ESL teachers' conceptions was developed, as had been done in earlier studies of student perceptions of learning mathematics (Crawford et al., 1998b) and nursing (Duke et al., 1998), and of teachers' perceptions in

mathematics and sciences (Prosser et al., 1994). After the individual transcripts were allocated to the highest possible level, they were coded with individual numbers and explored to see if relationships between perceptions of teaching and approaches to teaching, or perceptions of learning and approaches to learning, emerged across the group. This process was done separately for each set of categories, first for ICI and then for OCI.

**3.2.6 Combination of Phenomenographic and Ethnographic Investigative Tools**

*Research Questions Two and Four*

**What, if any, is the relationship between L2 teachers’ conceptions of out-of-class interactions and their descriptions of actual teaching practices?**

**What, if any, is the relationship between L2 teachers’ conceptions of in-class interactions and their descriptions of actual teaching practices?**

The data needed to explore research questions two and four came out initially from the multiple phenomenographic sorts of descriptions of instances of in-class and out-of-class interactions within individual transcripts and across the transcripts as a whole. Once the ICI and OCI descriptions had been categorised across the group, the researcher went back and looked at particular instances within each transcript where specific interactions took place during the lesson. Then the teacher’s description of the role that interactions played in that instance was contrasted with the teacher’s responses to phenomenographic questions about how the teacher perceived learning and teaching in the situation described. See a sample of excerpts of interactional instances within a lesson reported in a single transcript (Table 3.6).

<p>Table 3.6 <i>Some Excerpts of a Lesson in One Transcript</i></p> <p>ICI and OCI Instances                      Teaching and Learning</p>	
<p>1. ICI – “Initial discussion of ideas in groups builds confidence.”</p> <p>2. ICI – “I saw their talking (in groups) only as practice.”</p> <p>3. ICI – “When we discuss principals in English they slip into Chinese (L1) despite the importance of sticking to English. I constantly say, “Please speak in English.”</p> <p>4. IC/OCI – “If it’s relevant I try to get them to talk about their own experiences.”</p> <p>5. L1 Use – “I think it (L1 use in class) is their disadvantage definitely because soon they are going to be studying their masters and they might not have a lot of Chinese people around them and they are going to need the language skills to be able to discuss things in English.”</p> <p>6. ICI – “A couple of the students were speaking in Chinese. I knew that they were speaking about the topic but they know they should be speaking in English. “They know they shouldn’t use their L1; they can do it (speak in English) but sometimes I think it’s easier for them. “</p> <p>7. OCI – “I’m quite often surprised because they do quite well on their tests but when I have a conversation with them I find that ... they do okay in the classroom but if I have a private conversation with them outside the class I’m surprised at what they don’t understand or can’t say.”</p> <p>8. OCI – “Especially on Mondays I try to find out about their weekend. I don’t find them very cooperative. I really try to get them to talk to me “Did you speak English over the weekend? Who with?’ I try to do that but they don’t seem interested.”</p>	<p>1. Teaching – “Ideally, I say we’re going to cover these topics, I group them (put students in groups) and then I go around and answer any questions.”</p> <p>2. Lesson Focus – “I helped them with their summary writing for a test they were having.”</p> <p>3. Activity – “We listened to a taped lecture and then took notes; I did it with them. Then I grouped them in pairs.”</p> <p>4. Activity – “They had to (task) look at what I had done and what they had done and try to identify the differences themselves.”</p> <p>5. Teaching – “Some academic classes prefer conversation like general English classes but I prefer academic-you design your own lesson, own focus.”</p> <p>6. Learning – “I could see that they were much more confident, they were more enthusiastic, more energy. Their mood is one thing I look for.”</p> <p>7. Teaching/ learning – “I must have done something right because I got a note that they did well on the exam.”</p> <p>8. Teacher as Learner – “I learnt communicative teaching approach through teacher training, and I’m very conscious of applying it to the classroom.”</p> <p>9. Teaching – “I want to point them in the right direction but not hold their hand and take them places.”</p>

Descriptions of specific teaching and learning situations and interactions in the lessons described didn’t always happen in chronological order. As in most real life conversations, the teachers’ descriptions of a lesson (or a series of tasks in one lesson) did not follow a linear process. In Table 3.6, I have attempted to group similar interactional instances together along with the descriptions of teaching and learning that that were provided and appeared to relate to these instances. The numbered excerpts in

the table are not a sequential illustration of the conversation that actually occurred in the interview.

#### **3.2.6.1 Example of initial data for research questions 2 and 4**

In this case, the teacher began by talking about the primary event in the lesson, which was the task the students were given—to mark their summary of a lecture they had listened to in class. At this time, the students were grouped together in small groups that the teacher had arranged (with weaker and stronger students included in each group). The teacher described the benefits of grouping in relation to teacher training (excerpt 8, right column in Table 3.6). Then the role of interaction amongst groups was described as a sort of practice the students get in language skills (excerpt 2, left column); at the same time the teacher emphasised that the main purpose of the task was for students to independently mark their own summaries using the teachers' summary as a guide (excerpts 3 and 4, right column). The teacher's role experienced during the grouping interaction was expressed as providing direction to the students (excerpt 9, right column).

During the task described (excerpts 3 and 5, left column) the teacher depicted an instance of L1 use that occurred during the activity (excerpt 6, left column). The teacher believed that the students were discussing the assigned topic and maintained that this should be done in English (excerpt 5, left column). The teacher reported a perception that students' outside experiences should be a part of classroom discussion if it relates to the topic at hand (excerpt 4, left column); however, this situation did not occur in the lesson described in the interview. After describing the task, the teacher backtracked chronologically to report on the context of the task (an upcoming exam) and then described an event regarding OCI that occurred in the same lesson prior to the

task (excerpt 8, left column). This event was portrayed by the teacher as separate from the primary teaching and learning situation and was reported by the teacher to be viewed as separate by the students as well.

The teaching and learning experienced by the teacher in specific instances emerged throughout the interview. In Table 3.6, the researcher has aligned those perceptions of teaching and learning as closely as possible to correspond with the interactional instances reported. Examined apart from the ICI and OCI, these teaching-learning descriptions provide a snapshot of an ideal lesson (excerpt 1, right column), of how the lesson was organized (excerpts 3, 4 and 5, right column), and of how the in-class and out-of-class interactions were managed (excerpts 3, 4, 5 and 8, left column). The teacher's assessment of learning in this situation was provided just after the task and again later when the outcome of the test was known (excerpts 6 and 7, left column).

#### **3.2.6.2 Expanding and condensing data**

Using the excerpts of data where instances of interaction were spontaneously brought up through descriptions of activities in lessons was a good initial starting point and provided a sort of synopsis of the areas of interest to the thesis. Even so, to get a holistic picture of whether the teachers' conceptions of ICI and OCI related to the actual teaching practices reported, it was necessary to expand the data set and include all the factors that appeared to be connected to the learning and teaching described in the lesson. These additional factors included things like information on how the lesson topic was initiated, what the focus of learning or teaching was for various activities, the teachers' plans prior to the lesson, who participated in the interaction, how the interactions were managed, who participated, and so on. The use of materials in

lessons, types of activities, use of language by the teachers when describing specific types of interactions, and most particularly, the learning and teaching that occurred in various situations reported, were closely scrutinised.

Once the researcher and supervisors were satisfied that all the factors pertaining to OCI and the actual teaching and learning experienced by the teachers were located, the data was coded and taken out of the context of the individual transcripts and explored as whole across the group of teachers. The same procedure was repeated with ICI. Both sets of data were treated as completely new and separate data sets. In instances where multiple activities or situations were present within a single transcript, each situation was represented separately as part of the whole group. In situations where ICI and OCI were discussed simultaneously, or shared related factors that could assist in categorising an actual teaching or learning situation, these factors were duplicated across sets.

In phenomenographic research, all factors related to the phenomenon, whether or not they appear to be connected, are important to consider when describing the phenomenon from the teachers' perspective. Therefore, at this juncture more of an ethnographic research approach was used to condense the data and focus on the materials directly pertaining to the aims of the thesis and the questions posed. In both data sets repetitions were eliminated and superfluous material was removed (e.g., descriptions of past teaching experiences, general comments regarding ICI and OCI that were not part of the actual teaching and learning experienced, and incidental comments teachers made. In addition, any responses to interview questions that did not emerge naturally from the teachers' own descriptions of their experiences were removed in an attempt to exclude the researcher's interpretation of the event. As much

as possible, the non-essential was separated from the essential material that described the actual experiences of the teachers.

### **3.2.6.3 Illustrations of teaching and learning approaches**

Once both data sets had been reduced in this way, the teaching and learning events were grouped in similar sets (that is, where the ICI and OCI and learning and teaching were described in very much the same way or followed a similar pattern). Across the group as a whole, the minimum number of teaching and learning situations reported was 3 and the maximum was 18, within a single transcript; so the sets were quite large initially. There were 8 sets for ICI and 3 sets for OCI. Individual teaching and learning situations were then analysed to assure that each set was representative of the group as a whole. Those teaching or learning situations that were not representative of at least four of the teachers were removed. The resulting sets were then discussed in detail with supervisors. After much deliberation, those that illustrated very similar teaching approaches and learning approaches—and more importantly, those that shared very similar perspectives on how interactions were conceived—were grouped together, while those that differed significantly were grouped separately.

In this way, the number of ICI sets was reduced to 6 and the set of OCI was increased from 3 to 4. The researcher then went back and confirmed that a minimum of two teaching and learning situations were present for each participant. in the group as a whole. Once this was done the sets of lesson descriptions were compared with the ICI and OCI categorical descriptions previously developed phenomenographically. Those lessons that best depicted a particular categorical description were regrouped in corresponding sets. There was some discussion about whether one category should be represented by a two-lesson description, but it was agreed that essentially, although the



focus of the lessons differed slightly, the overall patterns of that set were well represented within the second and third ICI categorical descriptions. One benefit of this comparison was that although only 3 participants had been allocated to the highest OCI category, the number of instances of teaching and learning representing this category was 13, which acted as additional support for the stability of that category.

Finally, once all the sets had been situated in a category, the overall teaching and learning situation highlighting the role of spoken interaction within each set was depicted in an illustrative form. Although these illustrations lack the complexity and richness of the lessons described, they accurately and simply illustrated the patterns of teaching and learning that were reported in the lessons across the groups. For the illustrations describing the teaching and learning situations corresponding to the ICI categorical descriptions, see Chapter 4; and for the illustrations depicting the teaching and learning situations corresponding to the OCI categorical descriptions, see Chapter 5.

#### **3.2.6.4 Quantitative analysis of ICI and OCI descriptions**

When the illustrations of the actual teaching and learning situations had been developed, an unexpected result emerged: interconnected patterns between both phenomena. Similar patterns across the range of both sets of phenomenographic categories of EAP teachers' ICI and OCI conceptions had been initially indicated, when comparisons of both categorical sets showed that in situations where a deeper-level conception of one phenomenon occurred, teachers would frequently mention the other phenomenon as well. The illustrations of the role of both types of interaction in the teaching situations reported seemed to reinforce this finding.

The investigation had been set up to explore OCI, and a comparison of the ICI data appeared to be a natural methodological step in the process, since data for both phenomena would be collected simultaneously. Originally, it was hoped that information on teachers' conceptions of ICI would assist in informing an understanding of teachers' conceptions of OCI. The phenomena were treated as two distinct investigations; however, in both the categories of description and in the illustrations the phenomena appeared to be at some level interconnected. To develop a better understanding of this result the researcher again reviewed all the original data pertaining to both phenomena that had emerged in the teachers' own words during the process of describing these interactions in the teaching and learning that occurred during a lesson.

Qualitative differences in the way the teachers answered the same question (for example, "Do you think your students have the ability to interact inside the classroom/outside the classroom?") were explored, and these could be illustrated in numerical ways (i.e., the number of words in both answers were counted); see Chapter 7. Further qualitative differences between the levels of certainty expressed in response to the same question were also evident, so a quantitative comparison was made between responses to both that and a subsequent question ("Do your students interact in the classroom/outside the classroom?"). Overall, when comparing both phenomena, patterns of differences and similarities emerged between the types of words teachers used to describe the actual teaching and learning that was reported.

To better understand these factors and whether in-class and out-of-class interactions were conceived as separate or related phenomenon by the group as a whole, particular instances of types of words used to describe both were first identified and then checked to see if they were evident across the group; if this was the case they

were sorted and counted. These numerical comparisons and contrasts of the words used by the teachers to describe both phenomena are illustrated in Chapter 7.

### **3.2.6.5 Ethnographic analysis (experiences)**

In the previous stages of analysis most of the data was analysed as a whole, with individual transcripts checked afterwards to confirm if the patterns that emerged were consistent across the group. Still, within each interview there were very specific experiences spontaneously reported by the teachers, most often relating to personal situations of teaching and learning previously experienced by that teacher. From the participants' perspective these experiences were either influential in developing their current understanding or were illustrative of the perspective the teacher was describing. Therefore, those experiences not specifically situated in the context of the lesson described, but which had emerged in the teachers' own words, were considered by the teachers to be important and from a research perspective were taken seriously.

To explore these experiences, an ethnographic approach outlined by Kvale (1996) was adopted as a general framework for the procedure. Typically, in ethnographic research data from various sources (i.e., written texts, multiple interviews, observation, teaching journals, and so on) is collected across the course of an investigation. In this investigation, the primary data was collected in a single interview. In some cases during the transcribing process when specific situations described by a teacher were unclear (such as terms used), these terms were discussed with the interviewee for clarification; however, additional information was not sought, as the investigative purpose of the thesis was to explore whether conceptions of ICI and OCI were evident across a group of teachers within a situated experience, rather than the general beliefs that one teacher might describe concerning a specific experience.

The teachers interviewed provided information in three steps:

- Step 1. In the first step, the teachers described their relation to the phenomenon by spontaneously speaking about their beliefs and experiences in relation to the topic; these interviews were later transcribed and studied.
- Step 2. In the second step the EAP teachers revealed new connections between their experiences and beliefs as expressed their spontaneous explanations, without interpretation from interviewer.
- Step 3. In this step, from an ethnographic perspective the interviewer condenses and interprets what was said and sent it back to the interviewee to allow the interviewee to confirm or disconfirm the interpretations. This step is contrary to the phenomenographic perspective, which endeavours to describe the experience from the participant's perspective and not the researcher's interpretation. So, in this investigation, excerpts of the exact words were used as much as possible to illustrate the individual's perspective; in this way the teachers' perspective and the researcher's interpretation were kept as separate as possible. Condensed versions of the researcher's interpretations of personal experiences described from a teachers' perspective were not developed and sent back to the participants. For the data utilised in Teachers' beliefs investigation participants were contacted only to clarify something that was said in the original interview and not as a means of collecting additional data. After the interviews, the teachers that participated in the investigation were informed of progress in the research, and the ICI and OCI categories of conceptions that emerged across the group were shared. Participants were also provided with information and electronic links to ensuing publications. On two occasions,

various participants attended conference presentations where the categories of description were presented.

At this juncture, the next step in an ethnographic research approach would be to confirm that the researchers' interpretation was correct. This is often done when possible through participant observations. This step, however, falls outside the investigative purpose of the thesis—which is primarily to identify and describe the conceptions of phenomenon evident across a group of teachers, and to explore the relations between their conceptions and their experience from their own perspective.

Step 4. At this stage, there was again a rather large amount of data and a noticeable difference between the descriptions used by the teachers to talk about types of experiences related to the phenomenon. That is, when describing personal experiences related to a particular action or event that occurred during the EAP lesson, these descriptions were often short and frequently used terminology specific to the field of second language teaching. The headings for this data set are listed in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7 *Teaching Lesson (Actions and Events)*

	Experiences Teaching Lesson (Actions and Events)
	(Numerical Data)
Heading	Communicative Language Teacher/Learner
Subheadings	Explicitly      Implicitly
Subheadings	Work Individually • Work w/Class • Work w/Partner • Work w/Teacher • Work w/Group      Planned Discussion • Unplanned Discussion
Heading	Inside Classroom Interaction— Methodology
Subheadings	Teaching • learning • subject • new knowledge • pre-existing knowledge • materials
Heading	Learning Skills and Structures
Subheadings	Academic • writing • reading • listening • speaking • social language • subject specific • culture
	(Excerpt Data)
Heading	Teacher Training
Heading	Inside Classroom Interaction
Subheadings	Explicitly      Implicitly
Heading	Task Based Teaching
Subheadings	Pre-Planned      Assessment
Heading	Professional Teaching Terms (excerpt list)
Heading	Teachers Role (Outside Classroom Interaction) Excerpts
Heading	Learning (Outside Classroom Interaction) Excerpts
Heading	Teaching (Outside Classroom Interaction) Excerpts
Heading	Teachers Role (Inside Classroom Interaction)
Heading	Inside Classroom Interaction
Subheadings	Student Learning • Object of Learning

In contrast, when discussing ICI and OCI in relation to actual teaching and learning situations experienced by the teachers, participants often described these experiences in lengthy narrative fashion. Table 3.8 demonstrates how these narratives were grouped and counted under general topics (headings and subheadings) that emerged across the group of transcripts.

<b>Table 3.8 EAP Teachers' Experiences Teaching (Headings)</b> Data Set A			
Respondent Assigned Number	EAP teaching	Does respondent relate L2 learning experience to present teaching methods?	Situated experience text
If learning led to teaching, do they do what they learned, or the opposite of what they learned?	Learning/ Teaching Text	L/T Types counts	General Teaching Notes
Lived or Worked Overseas	Experience influence Text	Teachers' that lived or worked overseas (count)	OCI Text Other Preferences Expressed for How they like to Teach. Text
All instances of teacher training	TT positive or negative text	TT relations to practice Text	Any instances of 'labelled' teaching approaches
Text comments	*Other* experiences as a student (math, science, anything.... Teacher as student)	Experience Teaching EAP Courses	Experience Teaching English Through Content
Experience teaching ESL	ESL Teaching – Adults ESL Teaching - Kids experience teaching other things	Total ESL (umbrella)	ESL Text

Data for both types of experiences described (experiences that occurred in the lesson described and outside experiences spontaneously reported by the participants) were analysed through both numerical counts of types of experiences told across the group (when sufficient numerical data emerged across the group as a whole) and through qualitative categorisation of excerpts. All data were organized using Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, with the “narrative” data sets spread out over multiple spreadsheets covering over 140 pages (see Tables 3.8, 3.9 and 3.10). In contrast, the data for “action or event” experiences typically fit on one to three pages, which could be easily transferred into tables that could illustrate the data in its entirety.

Table 3.9. Teacher as L2 Language Learner (Formal Training) ICI and OCI (Data Set B)			
Respondent Assigned Number	Language	L2 Total	Reason for learning
Formal – Classroom Training	Classroom Training Percentage Count	CT Total	Subcategories 1. Immersion 2. L2 through Content
Self-Directed Study (SDS) (Types)	SDS Percentage Count Classroom in TLC / N/A / unknown	SDS Total	Subcategories 3. Assigned 4. Self-initiated
Formal context (types)	Negative (-) or Positive (+) toward Teaching Methodology	TM/Class Totals	Negative (-) or (+) Positive Toward Class
Text comments	Negative or positive.	Time frame amount(s)	Time frames (Text)
ICI Yes	ICI limited	Percentage count	Presence of ICI negative
Lack of or limited ICI positive (+) / negative (-)	Response to ICI (or lack) Unclear or N/A	Proficiency Reached for this instance of Formal Training	Response to ICI Text
OCI Yes	OCI Limited Opportunity	OCI Limited by own Student	OCI No or Not much N/A / Unclear
OCI Proficiency Reached for this instance of Formal Training.	OCI in / not in / unclear / N/A Target Language Country	OCI percentage count	OCI Text

The difference in the quantity of data sets is illustrated by the number of headings used to organise and sort the data: 12 headings and 29 subheadings in the Actions and Events data table (Table 3.7) and 82 headings plus multiple subheadings and unlisted subcategories in Tables 3.8, 3.9 and 3.10. Essentially the data for both the ICI and the OCI studies emerged through the EAP teachers' descriptions of the same situated lesson; however, the types of data that become apparent were quite different. The teachers themselves during the process of describing the lesson frequently illustrated ICI perceptions.



<b>Table 3.10</b> Informal Language L2 Learning: OCI and ICI Data Set C			
Respondent Assigned Number	Language	L2 Total	Reason for learning
Informal	OCI Yes OCI No or Not much	OCI percentage count	OCI Limited Opportunity OCI Limited by own Student
OCI N/A/Unclear	OCI in/not in Target Language Country	Unclear as to Location of OCI	OCI Text
OCI positive/negative	OCI positive or negative text	OCI length of instance.	Lack of or limitations on OCI Negative (-) or (+) Pos
Text comments	OCI initiated by/context	Time frame amount(s)	Time frames (Text)
OCI/ Types Subcategory purpose	OCI Experience Relate to current teaching/ learning (Text comments)	Proficiency Reached for this instance of Informal Learning	Text: Proficiency Reached for this instance of Informal Learning

In contrast, OCI perceptions were illustrated by the teachers through spontaneous experiences that were often told in a narrative form. In both situations, the researcher attempted to look for the conceptual patterns that existed across the group, rather than focusing on the individual. In situations where there were multiple instances of a certain type of experience described, these experiences were closely examined. In circumstances where a particular belief or methodology or even a term was used multiple times across the group, these instances were counted and presented in tables to illustrate and quantify the similarities and differences that emerged across the group in relation to both types of interaction. Finally, through the process of investigation, factors and questions that the researcher or researcher’s supervisors thought might have influenced the results or might better inform an understanding of the phenomena were further explored. Decisions for additional analyses were made as dictated by the data during the process of the investigation and are outlined in the following chapters.

## Chapter 4

### Teachers' Conceptions of In-Class Interactions

#### 4.1 Introduction

Previously language teachers' beliefs regarding the learning and teaching that occurs in actual classroom practice has been frequently described as unique and context-specific; this study looks at the phenomenon from a different perspective, presenting: (1) background information on research into in-class interactions (2) a categorical framework for understanding second language teachers' conceptions of in-class interactions (ICI) and (3) the relations between these and the learning and teaching that occurs in actual classroom practice<sup>19</sup>.

Spurring this current interest in L2 teachers' beliefs is a growing trend in L2 studies which views language learning as a social group experience rather than as an individual process. Central to this perspective is the importance placed on interactions with others in the language learning process. Because so much learning occurs in the classroom, through activities created by classroom discourse—the spoken interaction between the teacher and the students and between the students themselves—the role of ICI is considered to be particularly important to the formation of learning environments and ultimate shaping of the individual learners' development (Boulima, 1999; Marshall & Torpay, 1996).

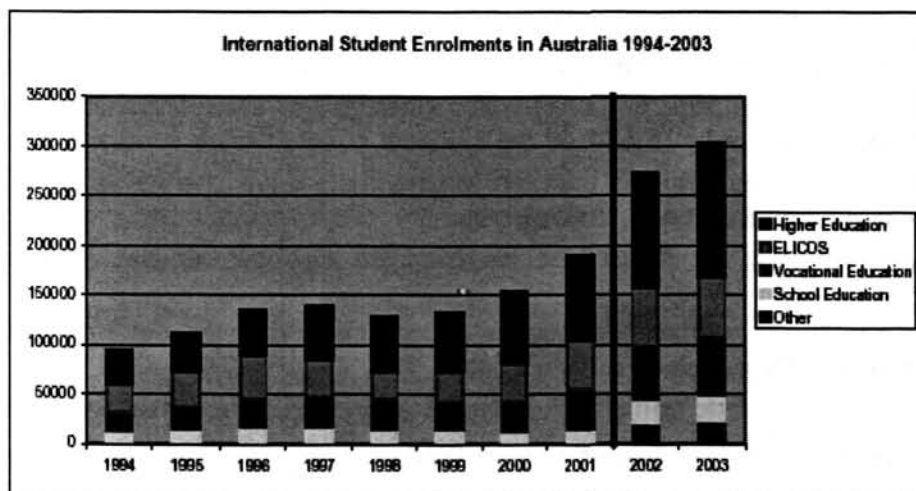
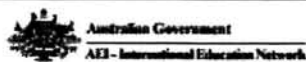
Clearly L2 teachers as well as students are active participants in classroom discussions. Yet in the past 20 years of L2 research, little effort has gone into understanding these teachers' conceptions of ICI, how these conceptions may influence

---

<sup>19</sup> A manuscript discussing the development of categories during the process of the investigations was accepted for publication (see Bunts-Anderson, 2004).

their teaching practices, or the impact these conceptions may have on the language learners themselves (Larsen-Freeman, 2001). The urgency for this type of information is apparent when we consider the ever-increasing numbers of overseas students worldwide that are choosing to study in countries where their language is spoken. In Australia the percentage of overseas students has increased at a rate of over 10% per year to 303,324 overseas students enrolled in Australian educational institutions in 2003 (see Tables 4.1.1 and 4.1.2).

Table 4.1.1 Annual Statistics Australian Education International  
*Source: AEI (2005)*



**Table 4.1.2** Times Series: International Student Enrolment 1994-2003  
*Source: Market Indicator Data AEI (2005)*

Time Series - International student enrolment in Australia 1994 - 2003

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	Total
Other									20,342	22,017	42,359
School Education	12780	14351	16663	16,997	14,803	13,651	13,129	15,112	23,273	26,799	167,558
Vocational Education	19479	23035	28483	31,177	29,937	29,593	30,759	39,845	54,970	57,326	344,604
ELICOS	26173	34209	43307	37,348	27,356	29,226	36,767	49,380	58,336	60,930	403,032
Higher Education	35290	39685	46773	52,897	56,810	60,914	72,717	86,269	116,934	136,252	704,541
Total	93722	111280	135226	138,419	128,906	133,384	153,372	190,606	273,855	303,324	1,662,094

The statistics in the tables above include only overseas students enrolled full-time; 60,930 of these students were enrolled in ELICOS institutions and 136,252 in tertiary degree programs (AEI, 2005d). For many of these students English was not their first language; in fact only 15,584 of the students counted were reported to be from English-speaking countries (AEI, 2005e).

## 4.2 Background on ICI Research

Discussions about the process of second language learning in the classroom have always been coloured by nature vs. nurture debates—how much is the L2 learners' learning predetermined by some innate form of genetic predisposition and how much is derived from the learners' social and cultural experiences (Mitchell & Myles, 1998)? Consequently interaction in the second language classroom has been researched in almost an autonomous fashion from a variety of perspectives and theoretical paradigms. For the purposes of this chapter it is enough to note that today most second language researchers generally accept that humans are endowed with an innate ability for language learning, but that this predisposition does not account for all

aspects of language development, and that other factors, including active involvement in language use, are equally important to success in second language learning.

.. A review of current research on classroom discourse provides an impression of great diversity, with different groups of researchers pursuing different theoretical agendas that focus on very different parts of the in-class interaction. For example, learners' interactions have been researched to develop an understanding of the learners' ability to learn through debate and controversy (D. W. Johnson & Johnson, 1985), acquire and produce grammatical forms (Doughty & Williams, 1998), negotiate meaning (Damon & Phelps, 1989), perform specific tasks, construct new knowledge (Davy & McBride, 1986), self-manage their own individual learning processes (Ohta, 2000), acquire new cultural understandings (Sullivan, 1996), and so on. Most often the spoken interactions of teachers in the classroom have been investigated to better understand the ways that teachers can support the learning processes of the individual language learner. Such studies have reported findings on the types of questions the teachers ask, the feedback they provide, how topics are introduced, how grammatical forms are presented, how interaction between the learners and their peers are managed, and how teachers' talk impacts learners' motivation and identity (Salili, 1995; M. L. Simpson et al., 1977; Spratt & Leung, 2000; Vauras et al., 1999).

The sheer wealth of studies on in-class interactions even within the past decade would be impossible to discuss in detail within the confines of a single thesis. However there are some developments and findings that should be mentioned, coming out of a variety of research approaches and theoretical paradigms that have strongly informed our current understanding of the relationship between in-class interactions and second language learning.

#### ***4.2.1 Nature vs. Nurture***

If we go back to the nature vs. nurture debates, those that have concentrated on understanding and mapping the innate abilities of the language learner have researched interactions; and the use of tools such as Chomsky's "Universal Grammar" (Chomsky, 1981; Chomsky, 1986a; Chomsky, 1986b) have enabled researchers to descriptively map in great detail the route the learner takes to acquire the second language. From a cognitivist perspective and through the application of processing models such as Anderson's ACT (Adaptive Control of Thought) model (Anderson, 1983; 1985), we now know more about how language is processed, and how L2 learners develop learning strategies and fluency in the second language. Research from functionalist perspectives have underlined the need to consider function as well as form, and through looking at interactions in naturalistic contexts such as the European Science Foundation Project (1982-1988), have shown us that the pragmatic need to communicate more complex meaning drives the language learners' development (Klein & Perdue, 1992).

More recently the "nurture" aspect of L2 learning has received much attention, particularly in regard to the contexts in which L2 learning takes place and the types of interactions and learning opportunities in which learners become engaged. Descriptive accounts coming from sociocultural, sociolinguistic, and interactionist perspectives have all addressed these issues in different ways, but together they have shown how learners' engagement in L2 interaction is influenced by cultural factors such as gender, power relations, and sense of community. One of the most important findings from interactionist and sociocultural research is that both approaches have demonstrated that the character of L2 interaction both in and outside of the classroom affects the learning opportunities made available to the learner (Mitchell & Myles, 1998).

One of the most exciting developments in SLA research today is that there appears to be more linking and cross-referencing between the different strands of L2 research on classroom discourse (Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Roberts, 2001). One reason for this may be that a grand overarching theory comprehensively explaining all the complex features of second language learning has not yet been generally accepted. In the near future at least, it is unlikely that there will be a mass meshing of different research methodologies or theoretical traditions. In the past decade, however, a number of publications (see next section) have included studies that report findings on specific factors but also include the importance of factors usually reported in other areas (Cobb & Bowers, 1999; Thanasoulas, 2002). This cross-referencing between research paradigms has started to provide second language researchers and educators with a more holistic view of the L2 teaching and learning processes that occur through in-class interactions, and the need to know about more about the L2 teachers is expressed with increasing frequency (Breen, 1991; Dufeu, 2001; Faerch, 1985).

#### ***4.2.2 Recent ICI Studies***

A good example of this cross-referencing between theoretical perspectives comes from a group of 12 studies published in a book that focuses on understanding language learning through the study of second and foreign classroom interaction (J. K. Hall & Verplaetse, 2000). The studies reported in the volume generally draw from findings across disciplinary borders and theoretical boundaries with a focus on 1) reporting teaching behaviours that support in-class interaction, and 2) the relationship between learner interaction and the development of a single aspect of language development. The aspects of in-class interaction investigated (ranging from teachers' questions to developing learning strategies), the contexts in which the language was

studied (ranging from elementary classrooms to adult intensive language courses) and the languages studied (English, Japanese, Dutch, Hebrew, French and German) differed dramatically. However, taken as a whole, the findings reported some compelling evidence on particular classroom practices and significantly emphasised the important role that teachers play in these interactions, as well as a need to better understand the teachers' impact on the process. Four key findings reported in all the studies were described in detail (J. K. Hall & Verplaetse, 2000).

Several of the studies demonstrated that repetition, rephrasing, echoes, and paraphrasing part or all of their own and others' utterances, by both teacher and student, provided not only positive cognitive benefits but positive social consequences as well. In fact, three of the studies reported that it was the teacher who was primarily responsible for helping the learners make connections between utterances in the in-class discourse and new ideas or words. Also it was the teacher who most frequently affirmed learners' contributions and made them available for consideration to the whole class.

The social context—or more specifically, the interpersonal relationships formed through in-class interactions—appeared to be fundamental to constructing shared social knowledge, and it influenced the process of additional language learning. In six of the studies it was explicitly reported that the interpersonal relationships formed through in-class interactions nurtured student engagement and provided multiple opportunities for the students to use and extend their own knowledge of the language. It was through the active participation in meaningful discussions that the students saw themselves as valid participants in the classroom community and a need to interact with others was fostered. The interpersonal relationships that evolved from the in-class interaction were



also credited with promoting positive emotional energy and an active interest in learning.

The third finding across this group of studies had to do with the significance of the teachers' role in fostering additional language learning opportunities. Across the learning contexts it was reported that the teachers at all levels who helped to foster a dynamic learning environment were those who "acted inquisitively; asked intellectually weighty and socially relevant questions; provided multiple opportunities for students to be full participants in the conversation; and in other ways displayed a genuine interest in learning, in the topic, in the student's expressed thoughts, and in the students themselves" (J. K. Hall & Verplaetse, 2000).

The fourth finding focused on the active use of private speech by individual learners in the classroom context. In several of the studies, points made in the previous findings were also directly implicated in peer-to-peer interaction. Peer solidarity was formed; one student, to help another, used learning strategies appropriated from the teacher, and through actively engaging with peers, students sustained a motivating learning environment. Interaction with the teacher also seemed to impact indirectly; for example, in one study it was reported that the learners not directly addressed by the teacher were, through observing and reflecting on teacher-talk, as actively involved in making use of the teacher's assistance as those learners who were the direct focus of the teacher's attention (Ohta, 2000); in another study the resourcefulness of young learners in appropriating and making use of the teacher's strategies to monitor their own learning was reported (Takahashi, Austin, & Morimoto, 2000). The authors of this study argued that in addition to learning the target language, the learners were learning how to learn.

In my view the second finding reported above is not new but began to be reported frequently in the 1960s and continues to be commonly reported in L2 studies today (Allwright, 1979; Hymes, 1970; M. L. Simpson et al., 1977). In relation to the questions posed and the study reported in this chapter, an unintentional but consistently apparent finding across this group of studies (and explicitly stated in the first, third and fourth key findings) was the important role that teachers played in the learning that occurred through classroom interactions. Interestingly, one of the suggestions that came out of this group of studies was a suggestion to improve teacher training: “Teacher candidates also need to learn about the role of classroom discourse in learning, and in particular, of specific practices such as those we have learned about here that lead to additional language learning” (J. K. Hall & Verplaetse, 2000).

I agree that there is a need to better inform teacher candidates about the relationships between in-class interactions and second language learning. However, I would argue that the way to do this is not through simply modelling teaching practices that are perceived to support in-class interaction, but through understanding the thinking that lies behind the teaching practices believed to successfully promote learning through in-class interactions. Many of the practices reported in these studies viewed to promote additional language learning are already covered in detail in most teacher training programs.

Practices such as the type of teacher questions reported to promote motivation, and the communication of meaning, are elements of communicative methodologies coming from CLT (the communicative language teaching approach) that has dominated the area of L2 teaching and learning since the 1980s. Similarly, the in-class interactions reported in the studies to support learners’ critical thinking and development of learning strategies have also been well documented, mainly from a cognitive

perspective, since the 1970s, 1980s, and more actively in the 1990s, and have already been incorporated into most teacher training programs—particularly with the strong trend in L2 teaching to promote “autonomous language learning.” To understand the thinking that lies behind these practices we need to ask the teachers themselves.

### **4.3 The ICI Study**

#### ***4.3.1 The Study Investigates Two Questions:***

**What are the L2 teachers’ conceptions of ICI?**

**What, if any, is the relationship between L2 teachers’ conceptions of ICI and their descriptions of actual teaching practices?**

#### ***4.3.2 Context***

The Teacher Beliefs Study investigated these questions through exploring the ICI conceptions experienced in actual lessons and described by a group of 28 Australian English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers. The EAP classroom is well suited for this type of investigation, as the overseas students attending these courses share the same motivation: that is, to increase their language proficiency and learn the academic skills required for admittance into an Australian tertiary institution. In the EAP classroom, the learners’ second language is not only the subject of study but is also the means by which the teacher and students communicate both socially and culturally with one another.

The categorical framework presented was developed from interviews with 28 second language teachers teaching in similar situations in terms of subject content and student ability. All the participants had current or very recent experience in teaching students at an upper intermediate to advanced level of English proficiency. Previous

language research into different levels of proficiency indicates that it is only students with intermediate or advanced levels of language proficiency that are able to perceive and self-initiate repairs in their L2. Thus, teachers of students at these levels were chosen, as it is more likely that these L2 learners will discuss their communication difficulties with their teachers (Williams, 1999; R. Ellis, 1997).

### ***4.3.3 Interviews***

#### **4.3.3.1 Format**

The interviews followed a format of specific questions regarding the context of the class, general open-ended questions regarding the actual lesson experienced, followed by questions seeking clarification of or more detail regarding the specific instances where the participants described the teaching and learning experiences in the situation. This interview format was developed in an attempt to counter a general criticism of qualitative research into teachers' beliefs that claims what teachers say they do is not always evident in actual classroom practice. In this study the process was reversed. The teachers described their experience of a specific lesson and were encouraged not only to report but also to reflect on how they perceived learning and teaching in that situation.

#### **4.3.3.2 ICI Interview Questions**

The first few minutes of the interviews all began with a casual discussion of the types of classes the teacher was currently teaching or had just finished teaching. If the teacher was teaching more than one course, the interviewer asked the participant to describe the students they had most recently taught. The interviewer then asked specific demographic questions regarding class size, gender, and language background and

ability of the students. When teachers' initially described situations where ICI and OCI emerged the teachers were asked to describe their own perceptions of students' ability to communicate effectively in classroom and outside classroom discourse (see Appendix B.1 for examples of excerpts).

The teachers were then asked to describe the goals or aims of the course and motivation or goals of the students who attended. Once a general context of the lesson had been elucidated, the teachers were next asked to talk about the lesson they had recently experienced. From this point, there was very little direct questioning from the interviewer except to ask for clarification or to encourage the teacher to reflect on how they saw learning or teaching in a specific situation, they had just described. As the teachers were describing their own experiences, there were differences in how these experiences were expressed. Some teachers spontaneously included their reflections regarding the teaching and learning they perceived in conjunction with the tasks, exercises and in-class interaction they described (see Appendix B.2), while others listed the tasks and exercises of a specific lesson in point form and then followed these points with their own reflections regarding the learning and teaching experienced in that situation (see Appendix B.3).

#### ***4.3.4 Methodology: Data***

Data were collected and analysed using a research approach, "phenomenography," that is particularly useful in describing the range of conceptions that exist in a specific situation, across a group of people. Phenomenography (widely used in Europe and Australia) is specifically concerned with describing phenomena as others see them and describing the variation in ways of experiencing something within an educational context.

Interviews were transcribed and analysed as a whole, with the intention of identifying the conceptions that existed across the group and the variances in the ways the situation was experienced. Once a set of stable categories was identified, the transcripts were analysed individually and the prominence of each conception within a transcript described. The stability of the categories of description was tested using a rigorous analytical procedure to establish categories and the relationship between categories. A range of five distinct categories of description was delineated, and a pattern of conceptual development that appears to exist in a hierarchical form across the categories emerged.

Once the conceptual categories were formed, the transcripts were then analysed as a whole to identify the types of practices that were described in conjunction with the ICI conception reported. The transcripts were then analysed individually to identify specific situations where teaching, learning, the teachers' role, and objectives of the lesson were described.

#### **4.4 Results: Conceptual Categories**

##### ***4.4.1 Caveats***

In reviewing or using the ICI categories some important caveats must be attended:

- These categories are like broad labels and do not describe the complex ways that individual teachers teach.
- These categories are used to describe the prominence of each conception within a transcript and do not describe individual complexities of the process or propose to put one teacher in a category.

- These categories can only be used to describe the relative status of each approach to teaching in any transcript. It is wrong to put any one teacher in any single category (similar caveats reported by Entwistle, 2000).

Five distinct categories of conceptions emerged that described differences in the ways these in-class interactions were perceived and experienced in actual lessons. When surface level conceptions were reported, ICI were described as a “method” by which new information was transferred. In the more developed conceptions, these interactions were described as a “forum” where students could change and build their own conceptions of the subject matter and of individual second language learning. A brief list of the ICI categorical descriptions, starting from less developed to more complex, follows:

- *ICI Teachers’ Method*: In-class interactions are conceived as a method used by the teacher to teach second language learners.
- *ICI Teachers’ and Students’ Method*: In-class interactions are conceived as a method used by the teacher to teach second language and to provide opportunities for the learner to receive feedback from teacher and peers.
- *ICI Teaching Method Provides Opportunities for Group Problem Solving*: In-class interactions are conceived as a means by which students learn experientially by interacting with others.
- *ICI are the Context for Individual Development*: In-class interactions are conceived as a means by which links between what is taught and the students’ outside world are forged.
- *ICI are a Forum*: In-class interactions are conceived as a situation in which learners’ individual conceptions are built upon and changed.

When you examine the developmental sequence of the categories of description above, a pattern of relations between this group of EAP teachers’ conceptions of ICI and teaching practices emerges. In the less developed conception, ICI are viewed only

as a method; however, the importance of this teaching method increases from being a method used solely by the teacher, to one that is used by both students and teachers, and finally to a method that provides opportunities for the learners themselves to solve problems. In the more highly developed conceptions, ICI cease to be conceived as a method but are described as the context in which individual learning takes place, and finally as a forum where individual conceptions are developed and change. The easiest way of demonstrating the impact that teachers' conceptions of ICI have on actual teaching practice is to compare how teachers approach ICI in two lessons.

#### ***4.4.2 Surface-Level Conception of ICI***

Participant: We also did some skimming and scanning work, focusing mainly on scanning. So that was, you know, quite a good activity, they had: questions, to look for answers and scan to find them.

Interviewer: Were they working alone, together?

P: What we did is, I divided them into groups of four. They were scanning for certain information; they were looking for certain words, certain phrases and [would] give certain answers. (Pause) So I put them in groups of four and I said to them, you start scanning and as soon as you've found the first answer, the group runs up to the board and writes down the answer on the board.

I: So each group was doing the same task?

P: They were all doing the same text and they were reading on their own, but it was a race to see who the winning group would be.

The in-class interactions reported in this excerpt are clearly described as a method. In this case students are grouped together for the purpose of motivating the students to competitively race other groups of their peers to see which group finds the answers to predetermined questions the fastest. No explanation of the actual interactions that took place was provided; and in fact later, when the teacher was asked, he/she described the task as an individual learning task. The worksheets used to scan



for information were given to each student, so it was actually the fastest student within each group that raced to the board rather than a group endeavour. The only discourse evident in this specific task was that of the teacher presenting the task to the students. Although it is possible that some sort of solidarity or interpersonal relations between group members were fostered during this task, these factors were not reported.

#### ***4.4.3 Deeper-Level Conception of ICI***

Participant: Dictograph—it just means having a passage, reading it once at normal speed, they write out key words and then work in groups to reconstruct the meaning—the text, not identical but the same meaning. It's good because you use a lot of skills so you've got listening not to dictation (which is a fairly false situation) but to a person speaking at a normal speed (pause). A bit of note taking, and then they are working in groups. That's good because they are constructing working together plus they are thinking about sentence structure for one thing, "There's that word, how do you put it in a sentence—oh that's not a good word in that sentence," and all that.

In this excerpt the initial task is an individual listening exercise; however, in-class interactions are viewed not only as a method in which opportunities for group problem solving are provided ("they are working in groups"). Also the relationship between the interactions within the group and the learning processes that took place is described ("they are constructing ... thinking about sentence structure"). At the end an example of the actual type of in-class interaction that took place within the situation is also reported.

#### **4.5 Relations Between Teacher's Beliefs And Practices**

In developing these categories, terms describing *Surface* or *Deep* approaches to teaching and learning were adopted from two well-known categorical frameworks

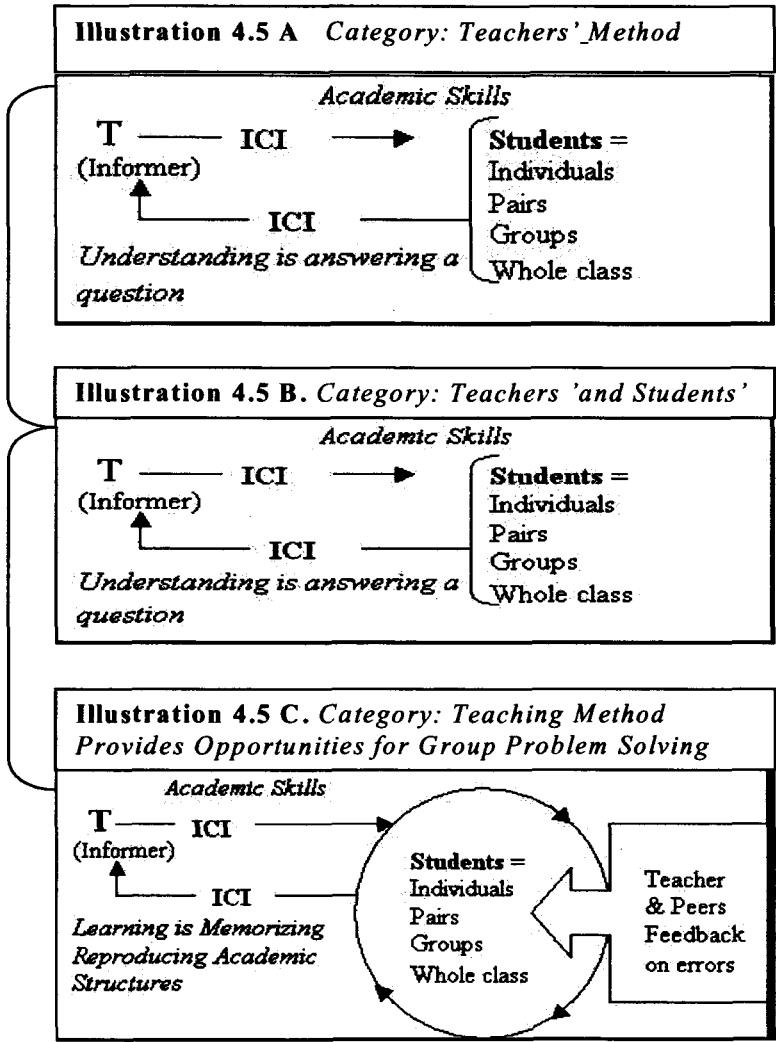
“Learners of Social Science” (Marton et al., 1993) and “Academics' Conceptions of Science Learning and Teaching” (Prosser et al., 1994; see Table 4.5.1 for a summary of both). The results from the ICI study show patterns similar to the conceptual ranges reported in Marton’s and Prosser’s phenomenographic studies in the maths and sciences. The conceptions identified on the ICI study range from limited to more complete conceptual understandings of the relations between ICI and L2 teaching and learning.

<b>Table 4.5.1 Surface and Deep Approaches to Learning and Teaching:</b> <i>Two Phenomenographic Studies</i>	
<i>Learners of social science, Open University</i> <b>Learners’ Conceptions of Learning</b>	<i>Academics’ Conceptions of Science Learning</i> <b>Teachers’ Conceptions of Teaching</b>
1. Learning as increasing one’s knowledge	1. Teacher-focused, teaching activity with the intention of transferring information to student
2. Learning as memorizing, reproducing	2. Teacher-focused, student activity with the intention of transferring information to student
3. Learning as applying	3. Teacher-focused, student activity with the intention of students acquiring concepts of discipline
4. Learning as understanding	4. Student-focused, student activity with the intention of developing their own conceptions
5. Learning as seeing something in a different way	5. Student-focused, student activity with the intention of changing their conceptions
Sources: <i>Marton, Dall’Alba &amp; Beaty (1993) and Prosser, Trigwell &amp; Taylor (1994)</i>	

Similar to the findings of learning and teaching described in the preceding tables and in previous phenomenographic studies in other areas, the types of teaching practices reported by the L2 teachers correspond with conceptual development of ICI described. Descriptions of more highly developed conceptions of ICI also report teaching practices generally believed to support learners’ deeper approaches to

learning. The following graphic illustrations (4.5 A–E) portray how these EAP teachers’ conceptions of ICI were described across the group in specific classroom situations. The illustrations depict experiences reported by teachers; these are categorically grouped by the ICI conception most prominent within individual transcripts, with the movement of the in-class interactions demonstrated.

- Illustration 4.5 A. Teachers' method.*
- Illustration 4.5 B. Teachers and students.*
- Illustration 4.5 C. Teaching method provides opportunities for group problem solving.*



In the first three conceptual categories the primary focus of the lesson is to teach “Academic skills.” In all three categories ICI are conceived as a teaching method; nevertheless, there are slight differences in how these teaching methods are applied. In the *Teachers’ Method* category the method is used by the teacher, in the *Teachers’ and Students’ Method* category the method is used by the teacher and students, and in the

*Problem Solving* category the method is used by the teacher and students to provide opportunities for problem solving. In all three illustrations ICI are initiated and managed by the teacher; however, in the first two the movement of the interactions are one-directional, with the majority of interactions initiated in question form by the teacher and the learning assessed by the form of responses received from the students. In contrast, in 4.5 C more opportunities for interactions amongst the students are available and the separate circular interactions among students and between students and teacher are described as “necessary for the students to learn experientially.” There are also explicit descriptions of a separate type of interaction, with the teacher and students providing feedback on individual language errors apart from the academic skill presented during this circular interactional process.

In 4.5 A, 4.5 B & 4.5 C the primary purpose of ICI is to provide new information on academic skills. In all three categorical descriptions ICI are reported as providing a secondary benefit of practice in the target language, as “talk” is viewed as one of four skill areas of language learning. In 4.5 C the ICI are viewed as closely related to the learning of academic skills, as students are reported to learn experientially together through interacting with each other. Learning is reported as occurring when students interact and solve problems together, and the quality of learning is assessed when students either in pairs, as a group, or individually are able to reproduce the academic skills presented in a specific structure (that is, the written structure of an argumentative essay or literature review, an oral presentation, and so on).

*Illustration 4.5 D. Context for individual contextual development.*

Illustration 4.5 E. Forum where individual conceptions are built upon and changed.

**Illustration 4.5 D. Category: Context for Individual Conceptual Development**

*Concepts of Language Skill Development and Academic Structures*

**T & S** initiate discussion topics  
(Helps clarify links)

*Learning is when Individuals  
put pieces together and develop  
own conceptions*

**ICI**  
Discussion  
as a class  
Teacher &  
students

Students'  
outside  
experiences  
encouraged

**Illustration 4.5 E. Forum Where Individual Conceptions are built upon and changed**

*Improving and Communicating Meaning: Academic & Non Academic Structures*

**T & S** initiate discussion topics  
(Helps communicate meaning)

*Learning is when Individuals  
learn to apply their concepts in  
their own world*

Students'  
outside  
experiences  
base for  
discussion

**ICI**  
Discussion as  
a class  
Teacher &  
Students

Majority of Learning occurs outside the classroom

Illustrations 4.5 D (Context category) and 4.5 E (Forum category) differ from the previous illustrations in that ICI are not conceived as a teaching method; rather, the primary focus of the lesson is on teaching “concepts” of academic structures, not academic skills; and interaction is initiated more frequently by students. Notably the “forum” category differs from the other four categories as the majority of learning is reported by the teachers to occur through students’ interactions outside the classroom.

In Illustration 4.5 D, ICI are described as the context of learning (with learning described as, “individuals develop their own concepts”). Through discussions as a class or group (with teachers and peers) the students clarify links between what is learned and the students’ outside world. In Illustration 4.5 E, ICI are described as a “forum” for classroom discourse, where individual students and teachers build and change their own conceptions, and learning is described as the ability of individuals to communicate meaning and apply their concepts in their own world. One noteworthy difference between the final two categories is that although learning in both is described in terms of conceptions, in 4.5 D the secondary benefit of ICI is described as “conceptions of language skills.” Viewing talk, as a skill is similar to the “talk as practice” reported in previous categories, whereas in 4.5 E, development of academic and non-academic language structures is reported to occur simultaneously.

There are differences in how ICI flows within a lesson; in both ICI conceptual categories described in Illustration 4.5 D and 4.5 E, classroom discourse is initiated by teachers and students, and the majority of interaction takes place in group discussions; therefore the interactions flow in a circular fashion. In Illustration 4.5 C, however, assessment of learning is not based on a direct response to an inquiry posed by the teacher, as it was in the first three categories. There is also a difference in the type of interactions on which classroom discourse is based. For example, in the first three categories ICI is based on academic skills presented by the teacher; but in the “Context” category, information on academic structures is supplemented by individual students’ outside experiences; and in the “Forum” category, discussion is centred as much as possible on students’ outside experiences, with the focus of discussion being on how to apply these new structures in the students’ own situation.

Across the group of five ICI conceptual categories depicted in the illustrations there are clear differences in how teachers described conceptions of ICI, conceptions of learning and teaching, the role of teacher and students in classroom practices, and how ICI are reported to be managed in the classroom context. J. K. Hall and Verpletse (2000) support these descriptions of classroom experiences: “They [the teachers] mediate both the quantity and quality of opportunities that the students will have to participate in and learn from these activities. In doing so they make visible their own attitudes towards the activities and the students’ involvement in them. This in turn, shapes the degree of individual learning that will occur” (p. 10).

#### **4.6 Relational Links, Conceptions, and Roles in ICI**

Relational links between conceptual development and differences in the ways EAP teachers perceive ICI apply to the following:

- Their experience of learning in a specific situation.
- Their experience of teaching in a specific situation.
- How they experience their role as teacher in a specific situation.
- What the teacher was trying to teach (the “object of study”) in a specific situation.

Through analysing the group as a whole, the differences in the basic elements of a typical lesson (what was learned, taught, what was the teacher’s role and what was the subject of the lesson) appeared very much to correlate with the conception of ICI reported within that specific situation. The data collected in this study was in a naturalistic form, so the elements mentioned above were sometimes discussed in a single excerpt, or more frequently within distant parts of the whole description

provided. To look at these elements specifically it is necessary to study them in the situations experienced.

#### ***4.6.1 Surface-Level Conception of ICI: Teaching/Learning Role***

[What] I did recently was to help them with their summary writing test they were having last week. We [listened to] a tape of a lecture on corporate culture; I was taking notes and then while they wrote their summary, I wrote a summary. And instead of actually marking their summary I actually gave them a copy of my summary as a guideline for them to look at theirs, and for them to get an idea of what we do and don't put in a summary.

In this excerpt the teacher has planned a lesson with the objective of assisting the students to prepare for a writing task. The lesson begins with a listening exercise and the students are asked to summarise a taped lecture. Learning in this situation is viewed by the teacher as increasing the learners' knowledge of "what we do and don't put in a summary," and the goal of the exercise is to assist the students to reproduce this knowledge in their own written summaries on a future exam. These conceptions of learning are described as surface approaches to learning both in the field of L2 learning and in other areas (Table 4.5.1). After describing the lesson the teacher was encouraged to reflect on the actual learning that occurred during the lesson.

Okay. I thought that was a really good class; I was really happy with that. (Pause) Why? Because I felt like I was actually showing the students and they were learning. I mean I've been told that getting them involved and active learning (pause) and in groups is the way it's done. So that's what I try and encourage in my class.

Here teaching is described as "showing the students" what the students were perceived to be learning through: completing the tasks initiated by the teacher. The type of task described here is what Prosser describes "as a teacher focused student activity" and is generally considered to be a teaching approach that supports surface-level learning (Prosser et al., 1994). The role of the teacher is implicitly that of an informer.



This lesson doesn't include much oral discourse other than instructions given to the students from the teacher. In this situation the students were initially seated individually and then grouped together to compare their individual work with the model provided by the teacher. The reasons behind the grouping are not given, and descriptions of the interactions that took place within the groups were not reported as factors in the learning process. However, the teacher refers to a personal experience of being told that active learning in groups is beneficial to learning, which suggests that the interactions that occur in these groups are considered to be part of a frequently employed method believed to be beneficial to learning. Overall the elements of the lesson described mirror those depicted in Illustration 4.5 C.

**4.6.2 Deep-Level Conception of ICI: Teaching/Learning Roles**

I tend to do a lot of work even on pronunciation at this level. Just talking about contractions and things that happen in language so they are aware of what's actually being said. ... So occasionally, I might put up a phrase and just say you've got to work harder at this one. But often they are really trying desperately saying, "Remember when (name of student) said this or when we were talking about that and we used this phrase?" We talked about Thailand so they were recalling the whole situation. They might be talking about the coup so they'll be trying to build the situation up. That's kind of wonderful if you can actually hear that, that's actually happening because (pause) I mean it's so much more meaningful for them if they are trying to recall the situation where they used that word.

In contrast to the previous excerpts, this lesson appears to be based on language that emerges during in-class discourse. The teacher describes specific language elements, and skills that were highlighted during the lesson—pronunciation, contractions, phrases, vocabulary—but the focus on language elements appears to be a secondary aim. The primary teaching focus described was one of developing the learners' understandings "so they are aware of what is actually being said." The type of

learning described here is what Marton terms “Learning as understanding” (Marton et al., 1993) and is considered a deeper approach to learning (see Table 4.5.1). Interestingly, the teacher also describes in-class interactions as being more beneficial to learners when they are able to recall past experiences and build on their individual conceptions of language.

The goal I guess always for me is to try to see that my students are able to go away and know something and be able to say and talk about something. That I hope is relevant to them and their being in the world. Therefore, I was focusing a little bit on their countries and about them being able to say, you can apply what we’ve talked about. [The teacher described a specific interaction where a student discussed politics in his country with the class and links the usefulness of what was said to the other students). You can talk about your country in those terms in similar words. You can talk about the economic situation in your country, what it is like or whatever. I want to be able to give them some ability to talk about their world, their place, and to be able to say something that makes some kind of sense or has relevance.

In this excerpt the teacher talks about initiating the topic of countries with the goal that that they will be able to apply the concepts learned in class to their own outside world. The role of the teacher is clearly implied as the links between ICI and the students’ outside world are clarified and explicitly stated (“You can talk about your country in those terms in similar words. You can talk about the economic situation in your country.”). After describing the lesson the teacher was encouraged to reflect on the actual learning that occurred during the lesson.

Just say that I can show them elements of text and writing or ways of saying things. So you’ve got options, choices like, “This works as a relative clause here,” or, rather than, “the Prime Minister who was supported by an army,” just say, “the Prime Minister supported by the army.” So we’re getting the story out but also probably helping them with the text analysis as well. I find that a lot of teaching happens that way. That when it comes up ... actually trying to put it up and then guiding, helping them, to decide maybe what is the best way of saying something.

In this last excerpt the teacher describes teaching as a process of noticing and clarifying concepts that occur naturally in classroom discourse, but it also means supporting students to reflect and analyse texts themselves when developing their own conceptions of the topics and language. The activities of teaching and learning described in this situation closely align with those depicted in Illustration 4.5 D.

#### ***4.6.3 The Relations Between ICI and the Subject Focus of Lessons (Object of Study), Across the Range of Categorical Descriptions***

One of the clearest examples illustrating teachers' conceptions of ICI concerned the teachers' awareness of how classroom discourse related to what it was they wanted to teach in that specific lesson, the subject. Here I've used the phenomenographic term object of study, as the idea that something is learned through how it is perceived in a specific instance fits in well with the supposition that teachers' beliefs affect not only how they approach teaching but also impact the opportunities for learning made available to the student, at least within a classroom setting. In this segment the objects of study described in lessons across the group of 28 teachers as a whole are summarised and then illustrated with excerpts.

1. In both categories *ICI Teachers' Method* and *ICI Teachers' and Students' Method*, in-class interactions, in those specific lessons, were perceived as peripherally related to the object of study in that they were considered as the means by which the information was transferred. ICI themselves were considered to be separate from the subject taught/learned in the lesson.

**Excerpt 1:** I broke them up in groups each to summarise a different part of the text. The reason I did it this way this time is I wanted them to look at the

differences between what they had done and what I had done and try and find the differences themselves.

2. As in the less developed first and second categories above, in the third category *ICI Teaching Method Provides Opportunities for Group Problem Solving*, in-class interactions in those specific lessons were perceived as separate from the object of study (academic structures). However, these interactions were viewed as a teaching method that supported learning processes in general. In practice the teacher presented information and provided materials for the students to work through together as tasks done in pairs or groups. Grouping and pairing were seen to be particularly beneficial, as through this process a group-centred concept would be clarified and then individually applied.

**Excerpt 2:** Well, I think it's because the students are given sort of a framework for them to be talking. In this case they were given a list of pointers and I got them to go into groups together and choose the best arguments. ... So that they are sort of forced to interact with other class members and that's good generally.

3. In the category *ICI are the Context for Individual Development*, ICI, in those specific lessons, were conceived as directly related to the object of study (students develop their own concepts of language skill development and academic structure). ICI could be described as the context in which in-class learning is perceived to occur.

**Excerpt 3:** (Reflection on learning through ICI in a group activity) It's a problem solving exercise. We've been discussing a certain text. ... I'll give another text of the same type ... ask people to evaluate it in terms of the criteria, which we've just been discussing on the previous text. ... They are working in groups ... and what they are doing is they are practicing the kind of seminar discussion skills that they'll have to be using. I think learning by ... doing something yourself, interacting personally with a text and discussing with other people, sort of with students that might have a very different point of view to you ... I think that's really when accelerated learning takes place. I think it's

faster and more direct than the kind of standard teaching droning away at the front of the classroom.

4. In the category *ICI are a Forum*, in-class interactions, in those specific lessons, were conceived to be the object of study. In-class discussion was perceived as a forum where individual conceptions are built upon and changed. Students' outside experiences were used as a basis for in-class discussion, and the lesson focus was on improving and communicating meaning within academic and non-academic structures.

**Excerpt 4:** I don't think it's always enough that communication is taking place. But I think it's wonderful when communication is taking place when people are also searching and hunting for words, which they then use with each other. ... I see teaching a lot as happening in that way, sort of guiding or helping them to see ... express meaning here and out there with others.

[Re. ICI and learning] It's the excitement of actually learning and finding out things. English is the means ... but it's not just for English, it's for yourself as well. You've got to know who you are where you come from and what you are doing.

#### 4.7 Hierarchical Patterning

The L2 classroom is frequently described as highly individual and unique because the external and internal factors that influence the learning environment are often in a state of flux. Thus, it would be accurate to assume that the teachers' conceptions of the learning and teaching that occurs in their individual classrooms would be numerous and somewhat context-specific. This investigation, however, has sought to develop an understanding of the variances in ways that a particular factor in L2 language teaching and learning is perceived and practiced. The ways of experiencing these ICI in this situation are limited in number and are not ontogenetic or disconnected from the rest of the group but in fact related in a hierarchical form. A

patterned relationship across the range as a whole was evident in a number of ways three such patterns are iterated in this section—in terms of L1 use, rapport and learners' outside experiences.

#### **4.7.1 L1 Use**

One pattern elucidated in the transcripts deals with students' use of their first language (L1) in these ICI; *all* teachers reported a belief that L1 use in class should be limited. In the less developed conceptions L1 use was viewed as negative and generally discouraged in class, whereas those teachers who reported more highly developed conceptions described L1 use as supportive of the learning process when used to explain ideas, concepts or clarify meaning to peers, and were more inclined to allow and encourage L1 use in those instances.

#### **4.7.2 Building Rapport**

A similar hierarchical pattern was revealed when *all* the teachers described the social nature of ICI as “building rapport.” In the less developed conceptions this was limited to the rapport between the teachers and students in the classroom, whereas in the more highly developed conceptions rapport was associated with the teaching-learning environment and extended to include social relationships. A comparison of the learning that is seen to occur through interaction in actual lessons evidences that although rapport is a focus of both situations, the ICI are viewed very differently.

##### **4.7.2.1 Surface-level conception of ICI in a lesson: rapport.**

We had done some discussion on Monday about umm multinational companies and globalisation, so on Tuesday ... we started a further thing of

discussion, just a mini-discussion for the students to get to know each other a bit more, especially with the newer students.

#### **4.7.2.2 Deeper-level conception of ICI in a lesson: rapport.**

I don't think it's always enough that communication is taking place. But I think it's wonderful when communication is taking place when people are also searching and hunting for words, which then they use with each other. Like when I'm saying, well sometimes we're on the edge of something and a student comes up and says, "On the brink?" I think wow where did you get that from and he says, "I don't know it just happened." Then I say well here's another one—you could say it's "on the verge of something" and someone says, "Yah, on the side of the road"—they knew the word verge as well; so when I feel as if my students are talking with me, I feel their learning is actually taking place.

The idea of rapport building is evidenced in both excerpts above, but in the less developed conceptions rapport is seen as a quick exercise to boost rapport. In the more developed level conception learning is viewed as directly related to the actual interaction that takes place; however, the interaction between the teacher and the student and the involvement of another student in the discourse clearly indicates that a level of rapport has been established.

#### **4.7.3 Learners' Outside Experiences**

Another pattern that emerged was in a general conception held by the group that when learners were able to associate past experiences with a topic discussed in class, or to relate something learned in the classroom to a real need, this increased motivation and was generally considered beneficial to the overall language learning process. With the more surface-level conceptions of in-class interactions, this was not planned and

generally considered a bonus, whereas in the more developed conceptions these types of links were often expected and encouraged.

#### **4.7.3.1 Surface-level conception of ICI: learners' outside experiences.**

Participant: The text [the teacher describes choice of topic selected in a lesson] ... I think it's important that it's just something that is good for the students to know about. I mean if they don't have any personal experience of the topic than that's good.

Here the teacher describes the importance of providing new information to the students as a focus of the lesson. However, in this situation a student unexpectedly associated a personal outside experience. The teacher, at first surprised, later found the inclusion of the learner's outside experience beneficial to the classroom learning.

P: There was one girl who had personal experience of a multinational and so then that was different you know because ...

Interviewer: She had strong feelings?

P: Yah and some people have strong feelings about it but others don't so I think that creates a bit of a forum for them to talk.

#### **4.7.3.2 More developed conception of ICI: learners' outside experiences.**

Participant: I asked them what they thought "takeovers" and "mergers" were and we discussed the disadvantages of both.

Interviewer: Was this sort of a presentation of what vocabulary to expect?

P: Exactly! But then you have to prepare them for an argumentative essay and it's rather topical and they have to write about it. So they have to discuss if the culture of the company is affected by the acquisition and all so they need the vocabulary.

I: So they pretty much got the concept and this is the first time you've introduced it? P: Yes, but these students have for a time, have worked in jobs related to or had a relationship to or were related to finance. So they know.

I: So the business concepts are not new to them?

P: No, exactly! They can associate their own experiences.



In the situation described in the preceding excerpt the teacher is focusing on building learners' conceptions of specific academic structures, but the background of the students is considered during the lesson planning process, and it is expected that the students will have some shared experience with the topic that will benefit the learning process. This differs from the deep-level conception described in the following excerpt, as in this situation the teacher not only expects the students to share outside experiences, but designs tasks that encourage the students to share these experiences with the rest of the class.

#### **4.7.3.3 Deep-level conception of ICI: learners' outside experiences.**

P. This morning I was doing an education thing and gave them a grid. They come from 5 different countries, which is nice and [I] just gave them clues across two words on the side. First they had to write down questions, so we had to have some accurate questions, then they had to interview the other students and ask the follow-up questions in each one. So there was a focus, a theme; we're using vocabulary we've practiced the last few days. So I suppose that's what I set up structured to free ... but hopefully if we suddenly talk about what countries they are from and [are] looking at the map, talking about history, revolutions, economy—you grab anything they come up with, listening to their input.

I. Why do you think that is better ... unstructured?

P. Because it gives them what they need for their life, it's what they need for out of class and it gives them a safe situation, environment to practice it, and there is a chance for students' to help each other. They correct each other and the teacher can go around whatever. I think particularly with this group most of them have studied a lot so it gives them a chance to use the language they've got.

In the situation outlined in this final excerpt the teacher describes the link between the topic of countries and the practical situations where the students can apply knowledge assessed in class (academic skill-interviewing) to their outside world. The

teacher also talks about the benefit of students building their own conceptions of language in the safe environment of the classroom. The teacher describes these outside experiences as necessary.

#### **4.7 Summary**

At the beginning of the study reported in this chapter, two specific questions were posed: 1) What are L2 teachers' conceptions of ICI, and 2) what, if any, is the relationship between their conceptions of ICI and their descriptions of actual teaching practices? The results of the study show that across the group of 28 EAP teachers investigated, five very distinct conceptions of ICI were evidenced. Classroom experiences reported by participants, across the range of ICI identified, strongly indicate patterns, which suggest that relations between teaching practices and teachers' conceptions of ICI exist. In addition, the hierarchical format of these patterns suggests that teaching practices described may actually be altered or impacted by the level of ICI conceptual development reported within a specific situation. Following is a summary of the categorical descriptions and practices, which emerged across the group as a whole and were illustrated through individual excerpts within the chapter.

*ICI Teachers' Method.* In-class interactions are perceived as a teaching method utilised by the teacher. ICI are used to transfer information. Learning is viewed as increasing one's knowledge. The teachers' role is that of an informer. Understanding is answering specific questions (either individually, in pairs, groups or as a class as a whole) provided by the teacher based on text material or course goals.

*ICI Teachers' and Students' Method.* In-class interactions are perceived as a teaching method utilised by the teacher and the students themselves. ICI are used to transfer information. The teachers' role is that of an informer. Learning is memorising and

reproducing structures provided by teacher. ICI in groups or pairs provide opportunities for feedback from teacher and peers on individual errors and support the learning process.

*ICI Teaching Method Provides Opportunities for Group Problem Solving.* In-class interactions are perceived as a teaching method that provides opportunities for group problem solving. The teachers' role is viewed as that of a provider of information and an expert in a joint learning process. Students through working together will develop and clarify a group concept. Teachers provide materials and students are believed to learn experientially through interacting with others. Learning is acquiring the academic concept presented.

*ICI are the Context for Individual Development.* In-class interactions with others are perceived as the context in which students develop their own concepts of language skill development and academic structures. The teachers' role is to clarify the links between what is learned and the students' real life situation. Learning is viewed as "understanding" and is believed to occur through social interaction with others. Understanding or learning is reported to have occurred when individuals begin to put the pieces together and develop their own conceptions. Both teachers and students initiate topics for in-class discussions.

*ICI are a Forum.* In-class interactions with others are perceived as a forum where individual conceptions are built upon and changed. The majority of learning is seen to occur outside of class. The teachers' role is to assist students in communicating meaning by looking at ways these conceptions can be applied in academic and non-academic structures. In-class discussion focuses on learning processes. It is believed that by building life skills academic skills will follow.

The social and communicative nature of language distinguishes it in many ways from the teaching and learning of other subjects. The teaching and learning of a second language in particular involves developing cultural knowledge and understanding of the target language community. The diversity of students' backgrounds, along with variations in L1 and academic content within an EAP context, add to the complexity of

these experiences. The framework of categorical descriptions presented in this paper does not describe these complexities. It describes the variations in ways that these L2 teachers perceive the relationship of ICI to the teaching and learning of EAP, and their own role in the process, in a way that is easily accessible to both educators and researchers.

The categories of description add to the existent body of L2 research on teachers' conceptions in that they illustrate consistent reports between what teachers believe and do that parallel previous reports of Surface and Deep approaches to teaching reported in other areas. Consistencies between conceptual development and practice are indicated in how the social natures of the ICI were experienced in actual lessons and reported on by the teachers. Cohesion within categories is evidenced by the fact that teachers reporting similar levels of ICI conceptual development also report similar teaching practices. These consistencies of description in the categories are important findings, as they infer a relationship between the teachers' conceptual development of ICI and the specific teaching practices reported. Two of the teaching practices described are particularly noteworthy, as they are considered very important factors in second language learning. These are 1) the use of learners' first language in the classroom and 2) the development of learners' self-regulation skills through in-class discussion of learners' outside experiences.

Significantly, the stability of the categorical framework is supported through the clear variances that exist between categories as well as the consistencies within categories mentioned above. An example of one such variance between categories is apparent when we examine the different ways in which the teachers reported how they experienced the object of the study or the subject of the lesson discussed. The experiences reported not only differed, they also appear to follow a hierarchical pattern,

with ICI reported as being peripheral to, related to, and finally the object of study itself. Similar variances between categories of description can be evidenced in the ways the teachers describe how they experienced 1) the processes of teaching, 2) the process of learning and 3) their own roles within those processes in specific lessons.

The findings from the study presented show some interesting patterns between this group of EAP teachers' conceptions of ICI, how they conceive of learning and teaching, and the actual classroom practices they adopt. Research into teachers' conceptions of in-class interactions can assist teachers and educators in discovering ways to enhance the teaching-learning environment in the classroom; it can also assist in the development of teacher training programs. Future research should look into expanding and refining this conceptual framework across larger groups of teachers and developing similar conceptual frameworks in related areas. Developing an understanding of how teachers' collective conceptions may relate to actual teaching-learning practices is an important area of discovery for all educators.