Abstract

This case study examines adult participation in learning. Ethnographic methods were employed to document classroom processes and participant perceptions in an adult basic education class. Classroom observations showed that learner participation was for the most part initiated by the teacher rather than by the students. Analysis of the data indicated a close link between the defined teacher and learner roles and the participants' shared perceptions of the teacher as the expert. Analysis also showed that teacher-student interaction was influenced by the teacher's past teaching experience and by her perceptions of the students and their needs. The results of this study demonstrate a need for teacher preparation designed both to increase awareness of appropriate adult education methods, and to provide experience in active learner participation. The study also highlights the importance of dialogue between teachers and learners as a means of involving learners in the learning process.
Résumé

Cette étude examine la participation des adultes dans leur apprentissage. Des méthodes ethnographiques ont servi à documenter les processus et les perceptions des participants dans une classe d'éducation aux adultes. Les observations ont montré que la participation des étudiants était initiée par l'enseignante plutôt que par eux-mêmes. L'analyse des données a indiqué un lien rapproché entre les rôles démarqués des étudiants et de l'enseignante et les perceptions qu'elles ont toutes partagées de l'enseignante comme experte. L'analyse a aussi montré que l'interaction entre les étudiants et l'enseignante était influencée par les expériences antérieures d'enseignement de celle-ci ainsi que par ses perceptions des étudiants et de leurs besoins. Les résultats de cette étude démontrent la nécessité d'une formation des enseignants qui viserait à augmenter la connaissance d'une andragogie appropriée et à fournir une expérience de participation active dans l'apprentissage. De plus, l'étude souligne l'importance du dialogue entre les enseignants et les étudiants comme moyen d'impliquer ceux-ci dans leur processus d'apprentissage.
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Abbreviations

ABE  Adult Basic Education

ESL  English-second-language

L1   First language or mother tongue

L2   Second language (not distinguished from third or fourth languages)

O.P. Observer-participant (the researcher)
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

The history of adult education in Quebec can be traced back to the seventeenth century when the first religious colleges and seminaries were established by the Catholic Church. One of the first major non-denominational adult education initiatives in Quebec, and throughout North America, was the Y.M.C.A. (Young Men's Christian Association), established in 1851. This association, and other adult education efforts, were established to meet the growing needs of the working class to confront and adjust to major economic and social changes brought about by industrialization and socialization. For the next 75 years, adult education was to be the concern of cooperatives, religious organizations, and community groups.

Educational reform in the second half of the twentieth century resulted in the government taking responsibility for adult education, institutionalizing a major sector of it in the process. In 1964, adult education was established in the school boards (Québec: CEFA, Annexe 1, 1982). While the debate rages over the inability of government agencies to offer effective adult education, the reality remains, and it is in such a setting that I propose to study adult participation in learning.
While the practice of adult education dates back to the seventeenth century, research in the field followed far behind. The concept of andragogy, or adult learning, was developed by Lindeman in 1926 (1926/1961), but this research received little attention before the 1970's. It was in 1970 that Knowles popularized and further developed this concept in his book *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*. In the same year, Freire published the well-known *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, in which he advocated learner-centered adult education which would result in empowerment for social change. Although Knowles and Freire differ on the goal of adult education, they do agree that the curriculum must be learner-centred and related to the learner's life experience, that adults are self-directed and should participate in their learning experience, and that the teacher should serve as a group coordinator rather than as a repository of facts. While adult education theory "calls for adults to become self-directed and empowered learners, it is in the praxis that beliefs and assumptions are demonstrated" (Kazemak, 1988, p. 466). If adult educators are to understand the practical implications of adult participation in learning, future studies will need to focus on participation practices in order to show the relationship between theory and practice.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better
understanding of adult participatory learning. Knowledge about the practices and processes involved in an adult learning situation would help to clarify the special needs of both learners and educators in adult education programs. By investigating and describing the environment, the processes, and the perceptions of the participants in an adult basic education program, this case study attempts to add to, and expand on, a small body of qualitative research on adult participatory learning.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed in order to give direction to the observation-participation process. They aim at identifying the context, the processes, and the perceptions of the participants involved in an English-second-language (ESL) class of an adult basic education (ABE) program. Five questions guide the study:

1. What are the major characteristics of the backgrounds of the students and the teacher?

2. What are the major characteristics of the class structure, program content and methodology?

3. What kinds of interaction take place between the teacher and the learners, and between the learners and their peers?

4. What kinds of activities are learners involved in and what are their roles in these activities?
5. What are the participants' perceptions of adult learning and of participation in learning?

**Literature Review**

Research and prominent theories related to adult participation in learning form the basis for this two-part literature review. In part one, I review the various perspectives on adult learning and participation. In part two, I review the practices of adult participation in learning, relating these practices to their theoretical foundations.

**Perspectives on Adult Learning and Participation**

One of the best-known theoretical constructs of adult learning, developed by Knowles (1970), in his book *The Modern Practice of Adult Education*, is based on four andragogical principles:

1. As a person matures the self-concept moves from dependency to self-direction.

2. Maturity brings an accumulating reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.

3. As the person matures, readiness to learn is increasingly oriented towards the person's social roles.

4. As the person matures, the orientation towards learning becomes less subject-centered and increasingly problem-centered. (cited in Warren, 1989, p. 213)
While Houle (1972) espouses the general andragogical principles developed by Knowles, he maintains that there are various appropriate approaches to adult education. In situations where the students rely on the teacher’s authority to meet a set of objectives, the traditional educational approach is appropriate. Student participation is limited to voluntary attendance, taking part in group activities, and basically cooperating with the teacher. The teacher has a defined role as the expert, and employs the traditional methodology of straightforward exposition, with assignment of relevant tasks to the students.

Houle’s self-directed learning approach contrasts sharply with the traditional approach in that it is learner-centered and learner-directed, with learners taking responsibility for planning, evaluation, and even selection of the teacher. Not all education experts share Houle’s broad perspective on participation which includes voluntary class attendance and cooperation with the teacher as the authority figure at one end of the participation continuum, and self-directed learning at the opposite end.

The International Council for Adult Education (1979), defines participation as the intentional involvement of learners “in determining content, levels of competence, and
methods of learning" (pp. 12-13). Bhola (1972), Knowles (1975), Goodman (1986), and Shannon (1989), share this "cooperative" perspective on participation, which involves negotiation between teacher and students. This approach to adult education is aimed at helping learners to cope with their world by building their self-confidence and providing them with problem solving skills.

Another perspective on participation argues for active learner involvement not only in the decision-making aspects of the learning experience, but also in the directing of it. This kind of participation allows learners to gain the experience necessary for them to become active participants in transforming the world in which they live. Advocates of this perspective on learner participation, including Nyerere (1969), Illich (1971), Aronowitz (1981), Freire (1985), and Kozol (1985), agree that the goal of education must be the liberation and empowerment of learners, not only to cope with the world in which they live, but to interact with it and transform it.

Just as there are different perspectives on what constitutes participation, there are also a variety of theories on the factors influencing participation. Brundage and Mackeracher (1980), suggest that age, past experience, education, culture, gender, and motivation are some of the
factors involved. Bruner and Olson (1973), Knowles (1975), and Hesser (1978), view learner experience as an important factor. Houle (1961), and Oddi (1987), maintain that the learner personality and motivation are the major factors. They agree that a goal-oriented individual will be a self-directed learner regardless of the instruction mode.

Rosenthal (1989), maintains that although personality is a major factor in participation, the teacher and the methodology are equally important. Freire (1985), ignores learner-related factors altogether, emphasizing rather the methodology, course content and the role of the teacher as the all-important factors of participation. Both Kozol (1985), and Nyerere (1976) share Freire's view that the course content must be relevant to the learners, enabling them to interact with it; that the methodology must be one of problem-solving and "learning by doing"; and that the teacher must be a coordinator and partner in the learning process rather than the traditional teacher-expert who imparts knowledge to be recorded, memorized and repeated.

**Practices of Adult Participation in Learning**

Many of the studies on practices of adult participation in learning focus on adult basic education and literacy. Literacy campaigns in Cuba (Kozol, 1978), Tanzania (Malya, 1979), and Nicaragua (Arnove, 1981; Cardenal & Miller,
bear testimony to the effectiveness of the kind of participation in learning advocated by Nyerere (1976), Freire (1985), and others.

Hesser (1978), claimed that Freire's approach was inappropriate for adult basic education programming in Pakistan because of its political implications. Another obstacle to using this approach, according to Hesser, was that learners were more familiar with authoritarian teaching methods. She found that Houle's traditional approach was effective when students' needs were met. In order to meet these needs, students were encouraged to participate in course planning and selection of materials.

In his study of learner participation practices in the United States, Jurmo (1987), found that adult basic education programs tended to be teacher-centered rather than learner-centered. One of the reasons for this, according to Jurmo, is that this approach has been carried over from the formal school system in which ABE programs are housed. Skagen (1986) suggests that it is because the teachers are not trained to teach adults.

Since the purpose of second-language teaching is often to assimilate the learners into the culture of the target language, participants are encouraged to adjust to a new
world rather than challenge it. This is one of the reasons cited by Jurmo (1987), for the absence of participatory practices in language programs. Learners' "hierarchical view of the teacher-student relationship" (p. 168), brought with them from their home countries, is also considered an obstacle to participation in learning in such programs. It is important to note here that although Jurmo uses the International Council for Adult Education definition of participation, it appears from his analysis that he shares the Freirian perspective.

While active participation in learning may be an exception in second-language programs, effective use of the Freirian approach to adult learning has been documented by Auerbach and Wallerstein (1987).

Summary of the Literature Review
The different perspectives on participation in learning have been presented in this literature review as different points along the same continuum, each coinciding with a different educational purpose.

There is no consensus in the literature as to the factors influencing participation in learning. Some studies focus on learner characteristics, while others focus on
methodology, content, or the role of the teacher.

Studies of national literacy campaigns, aimed at the empowerment of learners, have effectively used a Freirian model of learner-centered adult education. This approach is seldom found, however, in adult basic education programs and second-language programs aimed at immigrant populations.

Methodology

In order to develop a deeper understanding of adult participatory learning, continued research is needed. Educational researchers, including Bogdan & Biklen (1982), Brice (1982), Hymes (1982), Goetz & Lecompte (1984), and Schieffelin (1986), agree that the best way to begin to understand social process is through adoption of ethnographic methods, the assumption being that educational outcomes are best explained through a description of the context along with class observations and participant interview data. I have chosen, for this reason, to use a methodology within the ethnographic tradition to study adult participation in learning.

The Role of the Researcher

My role as researcher was as observer-participant in a English-second-language class of an adult basic education
The advantage of being an observer-participant was that it allowed me the flexibility I needed to move back and forth from interaction with the class members to observation and note-taking. This enabled me to record processes as they occurred, rather than record my impressions of the processes after the observation sessions. One disadvantage of this role, however, was that it set me apart as an outsider who was there to record what I saw. As an outsider, and fluent in the language the students were attempting to learn, I was considered by some to be a student-teacher, a perception which would have affected my interview results. For this reason, I was unable to use some of the formal interview results which at times contradicted classroom observations and records of informal conversations outside of class.

Over a thirteen week period beginning on March 20th and ending on June 15th, 1989, I spent three to four days a week in the same English-second-language class of an adult basic education program which was housed in an English public secondary school. The class began every morning at 8:30 a.m. and ended at 12:30 p.m. There were two 15-minute breaks, one at 10:00 a.m. and the other at 11:15. I spent the breaks with the students, most times in the cafeteria, and sometimes in the classroom. My records of observation during the breaks were always written after the fact, since
I considered these periods important in establishing rapport with the students, a process which I believed would be hindered by note-taking.

Although I was free to come and go as I pleased, I found that students expected explanations for any absence from class. My obvious pregnancy during the period of data collection could potentially have been a negative factor in my research, since hospitalization made it necessary to miss a week of classes. It turned out to be a very positive factor, however, in that it seemed to shift student attention away from my observer role, to my role of inexperienced future mother in need of their superior, experience-based knowledge about pregnancy, child-birth, and child-care.

### Data Collection

Fieldnotes and interviews were the two modes of data collection I used in this case study. For the most part, I recorded fieldnotes by hand during observations. When note-taking was inappropriate, as during informal conversations, or impossible, as during classroom activities in which I was a participant, I recorded the fieldnotes immediately following the activity or conversation. In all, 204 pages of fieldnotes were recorded by hand.
I divided fieldnote pages into three columns, recording descriptive notes in the first column and reflective notes in the second. The third column was reserved for analysis and coding purposes.

Descriptive notes were records of observed events. They described people, places, activities, and conversations. Reflective notes were my reactions to the observed events. They recorded hunches, ideas, or questions about descriptive commentaries. The analysis column contained notes from which categories would emerge, and which would also be used for cross-referencing in the analysis process. An example of the three kinds of notes is taken from page 60 of my fieldnotes which were recorded on April 7th, 1989:

**Descriptive Notes**
(4) Teacher: Now who will read the conversation?
(5) R: I will.
(6) Teacher: You want to read again?
(7) R: Yes.

**Reflective Notes**
(5) R seems determined to learn to read even though she has difficulty.

**Analysis**
(4) Eliciting participation
(5) Volunteering
(6) Personality/motivation factor

Informal interviews were used throughout the study to elicit information which participants would be reticent to give in formal interviews. These interviews took the form
of casual conversations, which would then be recorded as accurately as possible immediately after they took place. In order to facilitate communication, conversations were carried on in French, English, or Spanish, depending on the preference of the informants.

Two formal individual interviews were conducted with each of the participants during the course of the study. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain more in-depth information and gain insight into participants' backgrounds, objectives, and perceptions about course content and processes. Interview schedules (Appendices A, B, C, & D), were prepared to facilitate note-taking and provide a guide for these formal conversations. Although questions were generally reworded several times or translated into French or Spanish, I was unable to get answers in some cases. In other cases, the informants were anxious to talk and were able to provide me with insights that I could not have possibly gained from informal conversations where other participants were present.

Gaining Entry

The week before this study was to begin, I telephoned the director of an adult basic education program in order to make the final arrangements for the study, and to make an appointment to meet the teacher of the class I would be
observing. I had already gained permission from the school board to do this study, and had visited the school to make contact with the teachers who seemed interested in my study proposal. The director told me that she had been able to find only one teacher who was willing to have me observe his class, but who was unable to gain the students' consent. With this door closed, I called a friend who was teaching in an adult basic education program in another school belonging to the same school board. She explained the political atmosphere in adult education, and suggested that getting cooperation might be difficult, but she would get back to me the same afternoon since her program would be beginning the following Monday. A few hours later I was in contact with Nicole (not her real name), a teacher who had consented to my study being done in her class. I explained my research project to her and arranged to meet her just before the first class on Monday morning. My friend was there to introduce us, and the three of us went to speak to the director who was quick to consent to the study since both the school board and the teacher involved had given their consent.

Following the first break, the teacher introduced me to the class as a university student who would be attending the class for the duration of the semester in order to study adult learning. She asked the students to sign consent
forms, which they readily did. Only on the following day, when a student told me in French that he thought my English was good enough for the next level, did I realize that some students had not understood the teacher's explanation. I explained, in French, my purpose for being there. I believe that being able to converse with the students in French and Spanish during breaks allowed me to establish rapport with many of the students more quickly than if I had been confined to the use of the English language. Another factor that eased entry was that I was soon to have a child, an experience that most of the students could relate to.
CHAPTER II

CONTEXT AND PEOPLE

The Montreal Context

In this study, I describe participation in learning in an adult basic-English classroom setting. In order to understand and fully appreciate this description, it is important to understand the people and the events within the larger context of both the linguistic environment in Montreal, and adult second-language education offered by the two Montreal public school boards.

The Language Environment

Unlike the English-language environments in which the majority of English-second-language programs take place both in the United States and in the rest of Canada, Montreal boasts a predominantly French-language environment. This means that although students who register in such programs perceive an immediate or future need for communication in the English language, very few of them have the opportunity to practice the language outside the classroom. Another feature of the French-language environment is that it produces English-second-language (ESL) teachers who have also learned English as a second language. While such teachers may be more empathetic toward their students with whom they share a language-learning experience, they may also be insecure in the language which they are teaching.
The School Boards and Adult Education

The city of Montreal has two school boards, both of which offer adult education in both English and French. French adult education programs offer English-second-language (ESL) courses which are open to all adults and are obligatory for those students who are working towards a secondary diploma. English adult education programs also offer ESL courses (generally referred to as basic-English courses), which are designed to teach basic reading, writing, and communication skills.

In practice, there is little difference between ESL and basic-English courses, but the policies governing them are different. One of the basic differences is in funding, since the Ministry of Education places no budgetary restrictions on basic education programs, while other second-language programs are required to function on a limited budget. In one of the school boards, only 3% of the second-language budget is allocated to ESL instruction. This severe restriction on ESL education, coupled with a large demand for such education, has forced potential ESL students into basic-English classes. Both of the programs are fully subsidized by the government.

A second basic difference is in curriculum. While ESL courses have a set program which serves as a basis for
student evaluation, basic-English courses have neither a set program nor evaluations. Rather, there is a 200-hour limit after which a student is expected to be literate and is therefore no longer subsidized in the program.

The Setting

The class I observe is part of an adult basic-English program offered by one of the Montreal school boards. The program is housed in an English secondary school where space has been set aside for adult education classes and offices. Classes begin at eight-thirty in the morning and end at twelve-thirty in the afternoon.

The Physical Environment

The classroom is situated on the ground floor near the cafeteria and lockers, and in the same area as the other basic-English classes. Upon entering the classroom, I greet the students who are already there, and take a seat next to one of them. I write down my first impressions:

The classroom is very bright. There are two large windows with vertical blinds. The pale turquoise wall below the window appears to have been freshly painted. A "Happy St. Patrick's Day" sign above the window must be left over from last semester. There are four green shamrocks on an adjoining white wall around a poster of the deep sea world. Two large green chalkboards cover the other two walls. The desks are arranged in the shape of a horse-shoe. There is a large cabinet with teaching materials in the front corner. (Fieldnotes, March ??)
The Atmosphere

The fieldnotes taken during the first few minutes of class and my reflections recorded after the class describe the atmosphere on day one.

The teacher introduces herself to the students as they walk in (There are nine students right now). She seems very friendly, smiling a lot. She asks the students their names. She moves around, sits on a chair near the students. She walks to the chalkboard and writes "How long have you been in Canada?", and then sits down on a desk facing the students. Each student answers in turn. The teacher stands up and walks to the student who is speaking to help him or her rephrase the sentence. She speaks loudly and authoritatively.

(Fieldnotes, March 20)

After class I record my impressions about my first day in class:

I've just come from my first three hours of observation, and I'm exhausted, far from enthusiastic, and wondering what there is to learn in this situation. Am I wasting my time? Do these adults participate beyond answering the teacher's questions or following the teacher's instructions? ... Do students have objectives? Will they tell me what they are? ... The atmosphere seemed tense to me, but what made it tense? The room was bright and cheery. Students sat in desks that had been moved to form a horseshoe. Many students knew each other from former classes. There was no real introduction to the course. Personal introductions were used as a grammar exercise rather than a communication exercise. ... The teacher told me she was comfortable with my being in class but I felt she was uncomfortable. ... She spoke loudly, as if loudness would make the students understand her better. She laughed at the students' mistakes. How did the students feel?

(Field Diary, March 20)
On day two I note that the teacher is more relaxed. She apologizes to the class for speaking very loudly the day before, explaining that she got complaints from the students next door. She tells the students to remind her if she speaks too loudly, and explains that perhaps she was nervous the day before.

As the semester progresses, I find the atmosphere slowly changes, becoming more relaxed. It seems that the students begin to understand the teacher's sense of humour, and they laugh together.

The Participants

The study begins with 21 participants, one of whom is the teacher. Four students drop out in the first two weeks of the program, so that the study is based on the teacher and sixteen students who remain in the program until the end of the semester.

The Teacher

Nicole (not her real name) is in her late thirties, is married, and has two children. All her formal education has been in French, her mother tongue. She began to learn English at the age of six, when she was sent by her parents to an English summer camp. Her knowledge of English
continued to grow as she played with the English children on her street, and read novels. After earning a Bachelors' degree and completing a certificate program in Teaching English as a Second Language, Nicole taught primary school for three years. She was then hired by the Canadian Armed Forces to teach French as a second language to its English-speaking recruits. After ten years of teaching French, Nicole returned to teaching English, filling a teaching position in a secondary school for one year prior to accepting her position as an adult education teacher, a position she had occupied only one semester prior to the beginning of this study.

The Students

The students in this program come from a wide variety of backgrounds. They are all adults, the youngest being seventeen years old, and the oldest being close to sixty years old. Most of the students are in the 30 to 50 age group. Three students are under thirty, and one is over fifty. Three of the students are male.

All but three of the students are immigrants, one having arrived in Canada less than two years prior to the beginning of this study. Of the thirteen immigrants, two are from South America, five are from South-east Asia, and six are from the Middle East. The other three students
are French Canadian.

The students represent a wide variety of educational backgrounds. All but one of the immigrants were educated in their home countries. The one exception was educated in Quebec. All the students have a minimum six years of primary education, and eight of these also have a secondary education. Of the eight, five have completed grade twelve, or university entrance, one has completed two years of university, and one has completed four years of university. Although many of these students may be very literate in their first languages, even the most highly educated student had difficulty reading and writing, having received all of her education in Arabic and therefore being unfamiliar with the Roman script and the English alphabet.
CHAPTER III
PROCESSES

The processes I describe in this chapter are documented in fieldnotes taken by participant observation in the ABE (Adult Basic Education) setting delineated in chapter two. In keeping with the purpose of this study, which is to gain a better understanding of how adults participate in their learning process, I describe the types of interaction which take place between learners and their teacher, their peers, the materials, and the course content. Within these four categories are two major forms of interaction, one being that of teacher-directed interaction, and the other being student-initiated interaction.

Interaction with the Teacher

The majority of class time involves interaction with the teacher. While most of this interaction appears to be teacher-directed, student-initiated interaction is also evident.

Teacher-directed Interaction

There are three basic types of teacher-directed interaction, each involving the students to a different extent. In the first type, the teacher volunteers information while the students listen. The teacher
volunteers news items, comments about the weather, personal opinions, grammar and vocabulary explanations, translations, and corrections. The following is a typical example of correction, explanation, and translation:

Teacher: (Reading) He is wise to that extent.
   B: Wise. What is wise?
   J: Intelligent.
Teacher: No, not exactly. You know the Christmas story about the three wise men who went to visit baby Jesus and brought gifts? Les rois mages.
   B/J: Ah.
(Fieldnotes, May 16)

The teacher frequently voices personal opinions, especially during morning conversation period*. The following example demonstrates the point:

(The teacher asks the students if they remember her telling them about the teenage neighbour who was given a Cherokee Chief by his parents. She tells them that now a second teenager on her street has been given a brand-new jeep by his father.)

Teacher: I don’t understand the parents who do this. My son was very excited and asked for a jeep too. I said sure, we’ll get you three of them!
   A: Maybe they not have control.
Teacher: Well, one of the fellows is kind of wild but the other goes to a private school, and his mother won’t even talk to me because I’m not good enough for her. I never knew there were people like this before. It’s not even because of colour or religion, but because I don’t earn as much money!
(Fieldnotes, May 19)

In the second type of teacher-directed interaction, the teacher elicits information from the students either to
prompt oral expression or to check their understanding of a grammatical or vocabulary item. Oral expression is prompted by means of general questions like the following:

"What's new this morning?"
"Do we have anything to say today before we start?"
"What is the weather going to be like today?"
"Did we have a nice weekend?"

The following episode describes the resulting interaction:

Teacher: What is the weather going to be today?
Y: 14.
Teacher: 14 what? 14 tomatoes?
B: Degree.
Teacher: Yes. What happened recently in Alaska?
(Students try to talk about the oil spill.)
On the south shore something happened too.
J: Stab.
Teacher: You remembered that word. Yes, somebody was stabbed.
And what happened in Russia?
Ss: Elections.
Teacher: That's right. And did we have a nice long weekend?
D, did you eat a lot of chocolate?
D: No Madam, but I drive many cars...
Teacher: How about you, F?
F: Very bad. 
(F says he got 1 ticket and 4 warnings over the weekend. He is speaking a mixture of French and English. The students turn to F, and then begin to ask questions.)
B: What kind of car you have?
(Fieldnotes, March 28)

The following episode is a typical example of the interaction which takes place when the teacher checks the students' understanding of the comparative in English,
eliciting a specific example:

Teacher: How would you make a sentence with beautiful? Start with "Snow White".
   E: Snow white is more beautiful than...
   B: Than slush.
Teacher: Why slush?
   B: More beautiful than slush.
Teacher: Slush is snow and water.
   B: I know. Snow white more beautiful than slush.
Teacher: Snow White! Blanche Neige!
   C/B/J: Ohhh!
(Fieldnotes, March 22)

Similar interaction takes place when the teacher elicits an explanation of a vocabulary item:

(Teacher asks L to read.)

L: Apologize.
Teacher: What does that mean?
   (D guesses. Then B guesses.)
Teacher: You do a boo-boo. Like you drop something on somebody's dress. You apologize. Or you step on somebody's foot...
   G: Apologize you sick okay?
Teacher: No. You need to do something wrong to apologize. Give me another example.
   C: You drink something, and somebody...
   (Acts this out, making a motion with elbow.)
Teacher: Yes, bumps you. What do you say?
   C: I apologize.
(Fieldnotes, May 8)

In the third type of teacher-directed interaction, the teacher attempts to control activities and exchanges. Controlling activities involves not only telling students what to do, but how to do it. The most obvious examples of this are the instructions to write long-hand rather than print.
Controlling exchanges is accomplished through different means of calling the class to order whether directly or by changing the subject of conversation. Some examples of the direct method follow:

(Everyone is talking at once. The classroom is noisy and lively.)
Teacher: Okay, let's get serious.
(G keeps talking - in English - and has the whole class laughing.)
Children children. Take out your list of verbs. Let's see. I marked number 18. F, make a sentence with "felt".
(Fieldnotes, April 5)

(M and G are talking.)
Teacher: (Bangs on desk.)
M and G (loudly)!
(G smiles. A looks hurt.)
R: (Continues to explain her point.)
G: (Explains that it's because women don't work in these countries.)

(Later in the morning):
Teacher: A, you are so quiet today. Can you read the next one?
A: (Shakes her head.)
I not talk.
Teacher: But can you read it?
(A reads.)
(Fieldnotes, April 5)

The more subtle form of control, which involves changing the subject, is illustrated by the following typical episode:

J: The problem is mothers not stay home.
Teacher: Not? How do you say that?
B: Don't.
C: There are not communication parent children.
Teacher: (Nods.) Was it slippery this morning?
J: No, because it was mud.
Teacher: What is mud?
J: Because water in the snow.
Teacher: What do we call that?
C: Slush.
Teacher: That's right.
(Fieldnotes, March 21)

**Student-initiated Interaction**

There are three types of student-initiated interaction with the teacher which take place in the classroom. In the first type, students volunteer news items, corrections, examples of grammar or vocabulary items, compliments, and comments about particular learning activities.

Volunteered news items often have cultural content, as students seem to take every possible opportunity to talk about their countries and cultures. The following episode illustrates:

(The teacher says that Chinese typically have black hair.)

N: Some Chinese have light hair under the arms.
Teacher: Let's not get personal!
N: But in China we have public baths. We see everybody.
R: I would be shy.
R: Ah. Make love everybody and then bath?
N: (Ignores question. Explains that public baths are more economical.)
Ss: You go to public baths?
N: Yes. Everybody in winter.
(Fieldnotes, March 28)

Francophone students, on the other hand, volunteer
information about local news:

F: Chef of police say twenty-seven gangs in Montréal.
Teacher: The chief of police says there are twenty-seven gangs in Montreal?
F: Oui.
Teacher: Yes.
(Fieldnotes, March 21)

The following episode is also typical of the kind of student-initiated interaction which takes place in the classroom when students volunteer examples to show their understanding:

Teacher: Next one. To fight. What's the past tense?
G: Fought.
R: Yes. Yesterday I fought with J.
Teacher: Was J hurt?
R: No. (She laughs and pats J on the back.) She not understand.
J: Yes I understand.
G: Yesterday I fought my son.
Teacher: You don't say fight if it's not physical.
G: But he hit me!
Teacher: Ohhh. That's violence.
(Fieldnotes, April 5)

Correction is another means of student-initiated interaction with the teacher. A typical example follows:

R: What is several?
Teacher: We don't know how many. Maybe two.
      Maybe ten.
N: Dictionary says a few but not many.
(Fieldnotes, March 29)

In the second type of student-initiated interaction, the students make suggestions as a means of initiating
change. Nearly all the suggestions to the teacher come from one of the students who seems to be the spokesperson for the group. Discussion of previous learning experiences take place in the cafeteria during the breaks, usually in the absence of the teacher. R speaks out in the class, asking the teacher to spend more time on phonetics and the ABCs, so that they can learn to read and write English, or on the rules of English pronunciation, suggesting that earphones would be helpful for pronunciation practice.

The teacher responds by telling the student that earphones are too expensive. She tells students on one occasion that English has no rules of pronunciation and on another, that it's a matter of trial and error. To the suggestion about spending time on the ABCs, she responds that it would be possible and the following episode occurs a few days later:

As the students enter the class, the teacher tells each one where to sit. She says she wants to work with some students separately today. The students oblige. All the students from the Middle East are seated on one side of the classroom while all the others are seated on the other. Besides being from the Middle East, the only other thing these students have in common is that they all have varying amounts of difficulty reading and writing. After doing a textbook exercise in the usual way, the teacher looks at the students on one side of the classroom and tells them to work in pairs to compose dialogues. She walks to the group of students on the other side of the classroom and tells them they will work with the alphabet. She tells them to write each letter in long-hand, and begins dictating the alphabet. After each letter, she checks their notebooks,
either commenting "good!" or correcting the form and telling them to practice at home. The exercise takes about twenty minutes. (Fieldnotes, April 20)

In the third type of student-initiated interaction, the students elicit information from the teacher. This is done in several different ways. In the following example, the students' facial expressions cue the teacher that an explanation is needed:

L: Joan. (Pronounces John.)
Teacher: Joan. (Goes to the chalkboard. Writes Joan John.)
Joan is a woman.
N: But pronunciation the same?
Teacher: No N. John and Joan. You know, like Joan of Arc.
(Noticing students' blank faces?)
Joan of Arc was burned. You don't know about her?
N: Jeanne d'Arc.
Teacher: Yes. In French Jeanne d'Arc.
B: Oh!
Teacher: I guess Muslims don't understand this story. (Laughs.)
K, read the next example.
(Fieldnotes, May 8).

The teacher does not always respond to these cues, however, and the students employ other methods of eliciting information, such as telling the teacher they don't understand or requesting an example or asking a direct question. The following episodes demonstrate the three approaches:

Teacher: Let's get back to the present perfect.
R: Can you write example of present perfect on the blackboard?
Teacher: I have rules and examples of the present perfect. Maybe you could write them down. I'm gonna write them out on the blackboard today. (Teacher writes five rules with two examples of each. Students copy.)

Teacher: Are you finished writing? (Most of the students look up.) Let's go over the rules. (She points to each phrase with the yardstick, asking if students understand, and explaining vocabulary when they don't.)

G: Yesterday I understand. Today it's difficult. I no understand.

Teacher: Yes, that's because it's more difficult today. (T goes to the board to continue writing. Writes four more rules with examples.)

(Fieldnotes, April 18)

N: Nicole, can you tell me how to use a dishwasher?

Teacher: Okay. Who has a dishwasher?

K: Everybody.

J: My husband dishwasher. It good for his arthritis.

(Student laugh.)

Teacher: Okay. What machine shall we explain?

J: Washing machine.

Teacher: Okay. You have a maid. Do you understand maid?

J: Woman work in house.

Teacher: Yes. You are rich. You live in Westmount. You have a maid. It's her first day on the job and you tell her how to use the washing machine. (Everybody is talking at the same time.) Okay. Come on, let's go.

G: (Begins to explain how to use a washing machine. P helps her. Other students are talking with each other. The noise level is very high. G makes a motion of opening the washer lid.)

Nicole, what's this?

Teacher: What's that? It's a lid. You open the lid.

P: (Makes a motion of folding the clothes.) And what's this?
Teacher: Fold. You fold the clothes.

J: Can you write this expression on the blackboard? It very good.

(Teacher writes instructions for using a washer on the board. The students copy.)

(Fieldnotes, April 7)

**Interaction with Peers**

Peer interaction, which is interspersed with teacher-student interaction, takes place both inside and outside the classroom. While for certain activities, like role plays, peer interaction is teacher-directed, for the most part it is student-initiated. Peer interaction takes place primarily on two levels, the first of which is friendship.

**Interaction between Friends**

I observe on the first day of class that the students who leave the classroom to go to the cafeteria leave in the company of someone from their own culture. This gradually changes, and by the end of the semester the cultural segregation is hardly evident. Even in the first week of class there is an attempt by the students to get to know one another. The teacher instructs students to ask each other questions with cue words she has written on the chalkboard, but students ask their own questions and are reprimanded for asking questions that have not been practiced! At first they are quickly brought "to order,"
but as the semester progresses, spontaneous student exchanges are frequent and natural both inside and outside the classroom.

Besides asking each other personal questions, students give each other compliments, advice, and sympathy, as the following episodes demonstrate:

R: (Addresses K.) Are you sad that Khomeini died or are you happy?
K: Bad for Iran.
R: I am happy because Khomeini not give me anything. People in Iran afraid of him. (Turns to teacher to explain.) You know Nicole, you very severe. You die and your son or daughter teach after you. Even if I happy you die, I cry because I afraid. In Iran same thing. People afraid of Khomeini even after he die.
K: It problem for Iran.
(Fieldnotes, June 9)

R: (Explains late arrival.) I have trouble with my car.
Teacher: Maybe you should take it to a garage.
J: Call your brother.
R: My brother's at work.
(Fieldnotes, April 17)

I arrive in the class. G is teaching J how to say hello in Arabic and in Farsi. N arrives. He asks J who died in her family. (This is J's first day back after a week of absence because of a death in the family.) J says it was her godson. B walks in and puts her arm around J and says something to her. The teacher walks in, sees J, and tells her it is good to have her back and smiling too.
(Fieldnotes, May 16)

There is not a lot of tension between students, but on
several occasions the sparks fly. Both teacher and peers intervene, but I notice that peers are more effective for restoring the peace, as the following episode demonstrates:

R: Two-and-a-half years, and pay very much money. The lawyer cheat me. I am happy I hear he now not have lawyer permission.

Teacher: They took his permit away?

R: Yes, because he cheat many people.

Teacher: Cheated.

(R looks down. Lips tremble. Eyes fill with tears. She is upset. S bursts out laughing. R screams at her in French.) Calm down! Count till 10.

R: I don't care she don't like my face.

G: R, she sick. Go take a break.

P: Yes, she sick. And she very young. I feel bad.

(S leaves the room. R goes to the door, and asks P to come.)

(Fieldnotes, May 10)

I note upon returning to class after the break that the tension has disappeared.

Interaction between Colleagues

The second level of peer interaction, which is interaction between colleagues, is composed of three different types of interaction. The first type involves eliciting and offering help and encouragement. This type of interaction takes place on a continual basis both during teacher-directed activity as well as during the break. The following examples are typical of such interaction:

(F does not understand "show").

Teacher: Show us how to cross-country ski.

(F gets up, tries to say something. Names ski resort.)

Teacher: No No! Show us how!

B: (Turning to F.)
Demonstration demonstration!
(Gets up to demonstrate.)
(Fieldnotes, March 20)

Teacher: Has anyone used a copying machine before? (C and R raise their hands.)
Okay. Come to the front of the class.
(C grimaces, and stands up with her hands in her pockets. R comes to join her.)
C: (Begins to read.) How...
Teacher: Don't look in your book!
(Silence. C looks very uncomfortable.)
R: (Begins the dialogue for C.)
Can you show me how to use a copy machine?
C: (Takes her hands out of pockets and explains with her hands.) First you...
(Fieldnotes, April 7)

Teacher: Excellent!
B: Estrella!
Teacher: B, speak English!
B: (Turns to Y.) What is estrella?
(Turns to teacher.) Etoile.
Teacher: Star!
Yes, she deserves a star.
(Fieldnotes, March 31)

The second type of interaction between colleagues involves discussion about what is happening in the classroom and how they feel about it. This kind of interaction takes place mainly in the absence of the teacher even though the teacher herself is never criticized. I note that students tend to blame themselves or their physical condition for their inability to understand the lesson, as the following episode demonstrates:
(Students are copying rules and examples of the present perfect tense from the chalkboard.)

Teacher: I'll be right back. (Leaves the room.)

G: (Speaks to K - in Farsi?)

P: Me too. I don't understand.


P: Me too. Me too.

N: I understand because I learn English eight years.

(Conversations are going on in several languages.)

Teacher: (Enters room.) Are we finished? It's almost break time.

R: (Closes book and gets up.) I continue after.

(Leaves room. B and A follow.)

(Fieldnotes, April 18)

The third type of interaction between colleagues involves leadership and following. The main class leader is R, who always announces break time, gets up, and leaves the class with other students following close behind. Since it is effectively break time, the teacher thanks R for reminding her. Later in the semester, when a lesson is particularly difficult, R announces break time early and the teacher makes no move to stop the procession to the cafeteria.

R's influence on her peers begins the very first day she arrives in class. Upon returning to class after the first break, she admonishes her peers to speak English:

We here to learn English. In cafeteria everybody speak French and Arabic. Please everybody let's speak English. It not matter we make mistakes. We don't forget our language. It's impossible. We all immigrants. We can all be friends if we
all try speak English. It's only way to learn, okay? 
(Fieldnotes, March 22).

Later on in the semester R further demonstrates her leadership by organizing cooperation with the teacher. The teacher organizes a field trip to Old Montreal with the other classes. When she discusses the trip with the class, many students demonstrate no enthusiasm. The teacher appears disappointed and says she will not go either but will give a class. During the break R and P talk to the students in the cafeteria. They ask their peers how they can disappoint the teacher like that. They get a promise from most of the students to cooperate, and tell the teacher that they all want to go to Old Montreal after all. Only half of the students show up the next day, and the teacher, sure that the trip has been rained out, never arrives, much to the disappointment of the students who wish to please her.

Interaction with Materials

A variety of materials are being used in the teaching of this course. These include textbooks and handouts, dictionaries, video cassette recordings of televised news broadcasts, cassette recordings of songs, and perhaps most important of all, the chalkboard (generally referred to as
the "blackboard"). Most of the interaction with these materials is directed by the teacher, but a certain amount of it is initiated by the students.

Interaction with Textbooks

Interaction with textbooks plays an important role in this language class. In fact, the teacher's introduction to the course is an introduction to the textbooks. She tells the students on the first day of class that the textbooks for this course will be Expressways, Side by Side, In Touch, Essential Idioms in English, Critical Reading, and Reading Skills, and that she will not skip pages, but will begin on a specific page and continue page by page so that they will be able to tell their next teacher exactly what pages they have completed. Each day, following the morning conversation period, the teacher tells the students which textbook they will work in. She then takes the books from the storage cupboard and hands them to one of the students to hand out. When there are not sufficient books for each student to have a copy, students share. The first textbook to be used each day is invariably Expressways or Side by Side. The teacher announces the page number and asks a student to read the title. She asks another two students to read the first dialogue. As the students read, she corrects pronunciation errors and asks them to repeat. After the first dialogue has been read, the teacher checks to see if
the students understand the vocabulary. Then two more students are asked to do the next dialogue which involves reconstructing the first one with a different set of information. Some students know the strategy for reconstructing, but others seem unaware of any pattern, and simply read the new information. The teacher corrects them and they repeat. On one occasion, she attempts to teach the strategy:

(K has trouble doing the exercise. The teacher helps her. M has the same problem.)
Teacher: M, M. Use the subject in the question. (Walks to the chalkboard.) M and everybody. Why complicate your life? Use the information in the question to give the answer. (Writes the dialogue on the board.)
(Fieldnotes, April 12)

After oral reconstruction exercises, the teacher asks the students to work in pairs and compose a new dialogue with different information. Some students work with a neighbour while others work individually. Most of the students write this dialogue in their notebooks. When the majority of the students have completed the exercise, the teacher asks them either to read it or to come to the front of the class to act it out. The teacher corrects pronunciation errors, and writes grammatical errors on the board, eliciting the corrections from the students.

Not all the interaction with the textbook is teacher-
directed. Many of the students borrow the textbooks for consultation at home. One of the students photocopies all the books in order to have a personal copy in which he can write. Another student copies by hand all the pages which have been covered that day in class. Many of the students copy parts of the text while working on an exercise or during the break.

**Interaction with Dictionaries**

Interaction with dictionaries is primarily initiated by the students, many of whom bring their own dictionaries to the class. The students who use the class dictionaries will stand up during any activity and go to the corner cupboard to get a dictionary. I note that the majority of the students spend a great deal of class time looking up words and then writing in their notebooks. The only students who do not use the dictionary during the class are some of those who express difficulty with reading English.

At first, dictionary consultation is a highly individualized activity, but as team spirit develops among the students, they begin to share their findings. This is done not only during the breaks, but also during teacher-directed activities. Students will get up and walk across the room to show another student the dictionary.
Student-initiated interaction with the dictionary also leads to interaction with the teacher, as the following episodes demonstrate:

U: What is caviar?
N: Shark eggs. (Teacher disagrees and a discussion follows between the two, N consulting the Korean dictionary, and the teacher the Oxford dictionary, which she claims is more credible. Teacher wins. Oxford says caviar comes from sturgeon, a fish which resembles the shark).
(Fieldnotes, April 18)

Teacher: You don't understand shelter?
N: No. (Teacher writes the word on the board.)
J: Bus shelter!
Teacher: Yes. Why do people use a bus shelter?
N: (Looks up from the Oxford English Dictionary he has been consulting.) Protect from bad weather.
Teacher: Good!
N: (A big smile. Holds up dictionary.) Because it says in here!
(Fieldnotes, March 31)

There is very little teacher-directed interaction with dictionaries, but a few episodes similar to the following take place:

Teacher: Consist of. Look it up in your dictionaries. (Helps G look it up.)
N & B: (Address me.) What "made up of" means? (N comes and shows me the dictionary.)
O.P.: (I point to the phrase "consist of"). This phrase consists of a verb and a preposition.
N: Thank you. I understand. (Returns to seat and explains to B.)
K: (Addresses teacher.) Together?
Teacher: No. Made up of.
K: (Shows me her dictionary and reads example.) "The class consists of six

(Fieldnotes, May 8)

Interaction with the Chalkboard

The chalkboard is used continually, mostly to re-enforce in writing what is being expressed orally, whether it be grammar rules, vocabulary items, or spelling. Most of the interaction with the board is teacher-directed. She directs students to copy exercises or rules from the board as the following episode demonstrates:

Teacher: (Begins to write on the board.)
Write what I write. Be sure to skip a line so that you can answer the question. Make a line under the words I underline.
(All the students are busy copying from the board. K, B, & R change seats to see the side board. Teacher fills up side board, moves to front board, and continues writing. K, B, & R move back to their places to copy from front board. Teacher is finished. Sits down at her desk. Looks at some papers. Students are still writing. Teacher looks up.)
S, are you copying what I wrote on the blackboard?
S: (Laughs.)
Teacher: (Looks at J's raised hand.) Yes?
J: (Points to board.) "The" should be they.
Teacher: (Goes to board and corrects mistake.) Pretty good, J!

(Fieldnotes, April 12)

The teacher also uses the chalkboard for corrections and explanations. Whenever a student does not understand a
particular word or how to do an exercise, the teacher will write it on the board.

The students also initiate some interaction with the chalkboard, at times requesting the teacher to write an example or to spell a word, and at other times writing on it themselves for the purpose of verification. The following episode illustrates such interaction:

J is looking in her notebook and writing on the board:

Susan puts my book on my desk
Put my book on my desk
It don't take s because its a order

After examining what she wrote, J changes the last phrase:

It don't take of s because its a order

Teacher walks in. J reads the two examples and asks, "Correct?" The teacher says "yes". J's face lights up. She jumps up and down. Teacher goes to board to correct the third phrase. (Fieldnotes, March 22)

Interaction with Content

I describe interaction with course content in terms of listening, oral, reading, and writing activities, though these categories are not clearly defined in the classroom context. Grammar and vocabulary building exercises are an integral part of most of the activities in all of these categories. For the most part, interaction with course content is teacher-directed rather than student initiated,
as the following accounts will demonstrate.

**Interaction with Listening Activities**

There are two types of organized listening activities in this course. The first involves going to the video room to watch a televised news broadcast which the teacher has video-taped the previous evening. This activity usually takes place once a week. The teacher instructs the students to take notes while they watch. A few students oblige. After watching the video, the students return to the classroom to recount the news. The teacher prompts the students by asking what the first news item was, then what the second item was, and so on. A student who has taken notes will answer, often with one word. A discussion might ensue if the subject interests the students. Sometimes the students ask the teacher questions related to vocabulary they have not understood.

Another listening activity involves listening to songs. During the first week of classes we hear songs coming from the next classroom and the students ask the teacher why they don’t listen to songs. The teacher replies that she has some listening activities based on songs, and she will bring them, which she does on three occasions. The exercise begins with the teacher giving the students a handout with most of the words of the song written out. The students are
supposed to fill in the missing words which are indicated by blanks. The students listen once or twice, and then the teacher asks students to take turns reading. When they hesitate at a blank, the teacher supplies the word. The teacher then tells the students to sing along as they listen for the second or third time.

Interaction with Oral Activities

There are four basic kinds of oral activities, all of which are, to a great extent, teacher-directed. The daily morning conversation periods are usually prompted by a leading question from the teacher. Towards the middle of the semester this changes in that the students often begin by asking the teacher if she has heard a certain news item, or by telling her about a personal problem. Some students say as little as possible during these conversation periods, answering only direct questions. Other students have a lot to say, and carry on a discussion until the teacher intervenes to change the topic. The following episodes illustrate the types of dialogues which take place:

H: (Says her sister came home from the hospital but the baby had to stay.) Because a problem with the blood. Very yellow.
C: Babies always a little bit yellow.
G: Depends the mother what she eat. Important the watermelon because it clean out everything, all the yellow. (Turns to me.) You eat watermelon?
O.P.: Yes. I like it.
G: Good. It good for your baby.
D: I see a film about conquest in Canada.
(He explains that childbirth was difficult for women then.)
Not like now.
(He explains how the conquerors mixed with the 'dian women. He says the women walked to the river to give birth to babies by themselves.)

Teacher: I'm sure that there was some health care for these women. Okay, we'll work with Expressways this morning.
(Fieldnotes, May 5)

K: Excuse me. I know that people. He come to work one day. He cry and cry. I say calm down and I give him a coffee. He said I saw my daughter... Father and mother fight. Mother tell daughter father crazy. One day mother is sick. She know she do something bad in her life. She call father... He cannot believe it really his daughter. Taller than him.

Teacher: Yes, this is not the same news. But G, I'm so happy you're listening to the news in English.
(Fieldnotes, April 5)

The second type of oral activity, which is role play, takes place two or three times a week. As an alternative to reading a dialogue they have just composed and written down, students are asked to come to the front of the class and act out the dialogue. Sometimes students are asked to act out a story. While some students seem very uncomfortable during this activity, others appear to enjoy it, and volunteer to do it, as the following episode illustrates:

(The teacher dictates a newspaper article about a purse-snatching
incident.)

Teacher: Who understands the story?
R: I do.

Teacher: Okay. Go to the front of the class with your purse. Who wants to be the assailant? (N raises his hand.)
Okay. Now act out the story.
(R and N act it out.)
Again. With language. Say "give me your purse" or something.
(R and N begin again.)

N: Give me your purse, baby.
(He knocks R on the head, and grabs her purse.)

R: Hey!
(All the students laugh.)

(Fieldnotes, April 20)

The third kind of oral activity is class presentation.
The students demonstrate little enthusiasm as the following episode illustrates:

Teacher: Who would like to make a presentation in class so that I don't talk all the time? I tried it last class and it worked very well. You can talk about your country, or about how to make something. Who would start? B, would you start?
B: I not have the time. I work every night.

Teacher: What about weekends?
B: I have to clean house and shopping. Si I have time...

Teacher: If I had the time.
R: I not understand.

Teacher: (Explains what is meant by presentation.)
N: I can do it.

Teacher: When could you do it?
N: Now. I not need paper.

Teacher: You need to prepare and write down something. How about tomorrow?
N: Okay.

Teacher: And who will be after N?
(Two students volunteer and the teacher tells the other students to think about it.)

(Fieldnotes, April 5)
The second and last presentation is made the following week:

D goes to the front of class to organize his notes (at least 10 pages), maps, and postcards. He begins: "I talk to you about my country the republica de Colombia, Sud America". The teacher attempts to correct pronunciation, but D ignores the interruptions. He is speaking very fast in a mixture of Spanish and English. Some students are listening, and others are looking in their dictionaries, or writing, or talking with each other. P interrupts D to ask a question. D answers the question and then continues. The teacher interrupts D and asks him to continue next class. It is time to go home. The students clap.
(Fieldnotes, April 14)

The fourth type of oral exercise is games, which are introduced by the teacher during the last hour of class, often just minutes before the class is over for the day. The teacher explains what the students have to do. The games are invariably word games. One of the games is a guessing game. The students play in pairs facing each other, with one facing the chalkboard. The teacher writes a word on the board, and the students facing the board give their partners a clue. The student who guesses the right answer is declared the winner and receives a candy.

For another word game the students are divided into two teams. The division is made through the middle of the class unless a student objects to the unfairness of such a division, in which case the teacher does some shuffling
until there are no more objections. The teacher asks me to keep score. She gives a dictionary definition and the teams have to guess the word, or else she gives a word and the teams have to supply a definition. If a team gives the wrong definition or word, they lose the point and the question goes to the other team.

Interaction with Reading Activities

Reading activities always follow the same pattern and are always teacher-directed, though two of the students tell the teacher they would like to learn to read. The teacher introduces the activity by handing out a text or by indicating the text in one of the textbooks. Students volunteer or are designated to read a sentence or a dialogue out loud. The teacher usually interjects to correct pronunciation. Either students ask questions about the vocabulary, or the teacher asks questions to check the students' understanding. The following episode illustrates the different kinds of interaction which occur during a reading exercise:

The students are taking turns reading a story about the Loch Ness Monster in Reading Skills. N is reading out loud. K is following, reading in a low voice. Teacher asks, "What is 'open mind'?" Silence. Teacher explains. G has her head in her hands. She looks ready to cry again. D continues reading. J is writing in her notebook. Then she follows in the textbook. G is staring into space. W is looking up something in the dictionary. C and N are holding hands while following in the same book. Teacher corrects D's pronunciation. D reads hesitantly. B is looking up a word in the
dictionary. D pronounces as though he were reading Spanish (e.g. jumped: "humped"). The teacher ignores the errors. She asks H to continue. Now G is following in her book. Teacher asks me to finish reading the story. I finish. The teacher asks class, "Do you believe in the Loch Ness Monster?"
(Fieldnotes, June 12)

Interaction with Writing Activities

There are four kinds of writing activities in this course and all of them are directed by the teacher. The first kind involves "composing" or reconstructing dialogues, an exercise the students have practiced orally, and must now do in pairs and in writing. In this writing exercise, as in all of them, the teacher insists on the students writing in long-hand rather than printing. The following episode illustrates the point:

(The students are working in pairs constructing dialogues.)

Teacher: Any problems?
G: Yes.
Teacher: (Walks over to G and looks in her book.)
I want you to write long-hand, not print'
(Fieldnotes, March 29)

The second kind of writing activity involves copying an exercise or grammar rules from the board. The teacher always uses cursive writing so that students will learn to read it. This is difficult for several of the students who tell the teacher that they can not read. On the first such occasion she tells them that she will print for them "this
time", but they will have to learn to read long-hand.

The third kind of writing activity, which is usually done once a week, involves taking dictation. The following episode describes the interaction which occurs:

Teacher: Now we'll have a little dictation. C, will you come to the blackboard to write?
(C makes a grimace, but goes to the board, and begins to write as the teacher dictates the letter they have just finished reading. Teacher notices that G and M are not writing. She looks at G and then at M.)
Please write.
G: I can't. One day I write.
Teacher: Okay. M and G, open up your books and copy.
(Looks at J who is sitting between G and M.)
J, don't get distracted. You write.
(Completes dictation.)
Thank you, C. You may sit down.
(Walks to board and reads out loud. Corrects two mistakes.)
(Fieldnotes, April 7)

The fourth kind of writing activity which involves learning to write cursive, or long-hand, is carried out only once with a group of students who have requested to learn to write, and several times with individual students. In the group writing exercise, the teacher dictates the ABCs and asks students to write each letter down. After dictating each letter, the teacher checks each student's notebook to see if the letter is written correctly. If not, she corrects it, and tells the student to practice at home.
When the cursive writing activity involves only one student, the teacher gives that student a page of cursive written notes to copy. The following episode illustrates:

Teacher: (Addresses M.) You can’t pass to level four if you can’t write long-hand. You practice at home this weekend.
M: Je no have time.
Teacher: Okay. At the break you copy this sheet. (Hands sheet of paper to M.) Monday morning you will give it to me. (Addresses the class.) Okay. Now I will gather your books.
(Fieldnotes, March 31)

J: As usually.
Teacher: As usual. B, can you write it on the blackboard? (B goes to the board and writes.) B, can you write long-hand?
B: Yes. (B erases what she wrote - printed - and writes.)
(Fieldnotes, April 12)

Summary

I have attempted in this chapter to give an accurate picture of the kinds of interaction which take place in the classroom. While it appears that the teacher directs most of the classroom activity, it is interesting to note the various kinds of student-initiated activities which take place simultaneously with teacher-directed activity.
It appears that students participate in their learning process in a variety of ways, with or without an invitation by the teacher to do so. An analysis of student participation will be attempted in chapter five.
CHAPTER IV

PARTICIPANT PERCEPTIONS

In this chapter, I describe participants' perceptions of the people, the materials, the content and the processes involved in this particular learning experience. The perceptions I record in this chapter are documented in fieldnotes taken both inside and outside the classroom. For the most part, perceptions are expressed during private interviews or in informal conversations during the breaks and after class.

Perceptions of Participants

I describe the perceptions that the teacher has of the students and vice versa, as well as the perceptions the students have of each other, as a means of creating a clearer picture of participant interaction which is most certainly influenced by these perceptions.

Perceptions of the Teacher

The students do not volunteer their perceptions of the teacher, and when I ask each of them directly about their perceptions, all are quick to respond that the teacher is very good, and they like her very much. R, on the other hand, does not believe that the teacher likes her, and is close to tears when she tells me, "She don't like my face; I
don't know why". When I ask her why she feels that way, she responds, "Everyone should have a chance. It not fair."
She explains that the teacher asked for a volunteer to come to the blackboard; she volunteered but the teacher chose somebody else (Interview notes, April 26).

Other perceptions that the students have of the teacher are voiced as a response to the following questions (May 23 & June 12):

Do you feel you have any impact on
1) what is taught (the curriculum)?
2) on the way something is taught (the methodology)?
3) on the teacher?
4) on the structure of the class?

Most of the students perceive the teacher as being in complete control of all of the above. A few students elaborate on their perceptions of the teacher's control of the curriculum:

W: The teacher knows best.
P: The teacher knows better than me what I need.
D: Professor should decide because they have a program. The school knows what is important.
N: Teacher has fixed idea of what she wants [to teach]; I don't agree but she is the teacher.

The perception that the teacher knows best is also evident in the classroom. On one occasion when the teacher contradicts the textbook, G suggests to the teacher that "Maybe book is wrong" (Fieldnotes, April 28).
The students do not elaborate on their perception that the teacher is in control of the structure of the class. One of the students, however, disagrees that the teacher is in control, and comments that "The teacher should control more" (Interview notes, May 23).

Perceptions of the Students

The teacher perceives adult learners in general to be motivated and not in need of discipline, unlike adolescents or children (Interview notes, April 26). Other perceptions she has of these particular adults are evident when she instructs them how to answer the following questions in a questionnaire from the school board's research department (Fieldnotes, April 12):

9. Could you tell us what, approximately, is your family's annual income (before taxes and deductions)?
   1. under $10 000 ....
   2. $10 001 - $20 000 ....
   3. $20 001 - $30 000 ....
   4. $30 001 - $40 000 ....
   5. $40 001 - $50 000 ....
   6. over $50 000 ....

11. What was your paid occupation for the longest period of time before arriving in Canada?
   1. Unskilled worker ....
   2. Skilled worker ....
   3. Office worker ....
   4. Semi-professional ....
   5. Professional ....
   6. Executive or specialist ....
   7. None ....

12. What is your main occupation in Canada at present?
   1. Unskilled worker ....
   2. Skilled worker ....
   3. Office worker ....
4. Semi-professional
5. Professional
6. Executive or specialist
7. None

14. What highest level of schooling had you reached before arriving in Canada?
1. Grade school started
2. Grade school completed
3. High school started
4. High school completed
5. Vocational school started
6. Vocational school completed
7. University programme started
8. University programme completed

When several students tell the teacher they do not know what their family income is, the teacher says, "It's probably less than $10 000. Check number one." K is sitting beside me. She marks number four ($30 000 - $40 000) on question number nine. The teacher checks her questionnaire and asks, "Are you sure?" K admits she is not sure, and the teacher tells her to check number one or two.

When the teacher reads question eleven, several women students volunteer that they stayed at home in their country. The teacher tells the students to just mark number one (unskilled worker) for both questions eleven and twelve.

For question fourteen, the teacher instructs students to mark either one, two, three, or four. She corrects herself, "No, not number four (High school completed). Mark
one, two, or three. N objects. He says he has two years of university. The teacher says that university in [Country X] is not the same as university in Quebec and tells him to mark number three (High school started). K has marked number seven (University programme started). The teacher comes to check K's form and tells her to erase her answer and mark number three. K acquiesces.

The teacher's perceptions about N's level of education are voiced on another occasion when N says that he is trying to get into [University A]:

Teacher: You're not ready yet. I hope you know that. It's hard to get into [University A]. [University B] is easier. You're pushing it a little.

N: Yes, but I try'
(Fieldnotes, May 8)

The teacher also perceives some of her students to have learning problems. She explains to me after the first class that this is not a typical adult education class. According to her, these students do not have a very high education and therefore do not participate to a great extent. The teacher has taught some of these students in the previous session, and she shares her perceptions of them with me: S, for example, "doesn't participate; she only laughs". The Iranian students have a lot of trouble reading cursive writing. "Sometimes I have to print for them", she comments. J, she says, has severe learning problems,
"probably tone-deaf. She doesn't seem to advance at all" (Fieldnotes, March 20). The teacher's perception of J is evident throughout the session. I notice that the teacher corrects J's pronunciation more than she corrects others. She also translates into French for J. On one occasion the teacher seems particularly frustrated because J insists on her answer to a question, and says, "J, I'm going to explain to you in French because I don't know how to make you understand" (Fieldnotes, April 5). Near the end of the semester J and D are reading a dialogue. I note that although both of them make pronunciation errors, J is much easier to understand than D. The teacher addresses only J: "You have to concentrate more on your pronunciation" (Fieldnotes, June 9).

The following dialogue between the teacher and myself sheds additional light on her perceptions of the students:

O.P.: Do you think that students' cultures play a role in the level of participation or the way in which students participate in their own learning?

Teacher: Sure.

O.P.: Could you elaborate?

Teacher: Most immigrants want to tell you about their culture. G thinks her country is better than Canada. She distrusts K. She thinks K's son is a spy working for Khomeini. Iranians are difficult to understand.

O.P.: What about students from other cultures?

Teacher: Orientals listen more. What you say is gospel truth. When they ask questions, it's not because they doubt you. It's because they don't understand.
Orientals say what you want to hear.
(Interview notes, April 26)

Another general perception the teacher seems to have of the students is that they are children. In order to get the students' attention the teacher will frequently bang on her desk. She also quiets the class on several occasions with "children, children, let's get serious". The following episode is typical:

U: She is finishes her composition.
Teacher: She is...
U: Finished.
Teacher: Yes. She is finished with her composition. U, I will write it for you (Goes to the chalkboard and writes). It's because this is a passive construction, but I didn't really want to explain it. It's difficult to understand. The normal construction would be... (Writes on the board) "The composition is finished." We change it into passive (Points to the original sentence).
(P is consulting R.)
P, be quiet, or we'll have to put you someplace by yourself.

P: But I don't understand.
Teacher: If you would be quiet and listen, you would understand.
(Field notes, May 19)

The teacher's perceptions of two other students become evident one day when she comments about a student's reaction to the story "Terrible Revenge of a Lover". After students have taken turns reading the story, the teacher asks for a volunteer to re-tell it. One of the students volunteers.

The following approximate dialogue takes place after class:
Teacher: What do you think of [Student A]?

O.P.: Why do you ask?

Teacher: O.

O.P.: I thought she had a real sense of humour.

Teacher: Oh yes? I try not to show it, but sometimes I can't stand her. She has invited me for lunch, and I just can't go.

O.P.: Well, you don't show it. Are there other students that bug you?

Teacher: No, not really. Except [Student C]. She's as stubborn as a mule. Sometimes I get impatient with her.

O.P.: Yes. I've noticed.

Teacher: Today in the cafeteria there were two soups poured and she insisted on having another soup. She said those soups were cold.

(Notes recorded after class, May 5)

The students perceptions of themselves, and adult learners in general, vary. I ask each of the students if adults learn differently than children, and I get the following responses (Interview notes, May 23 and June 12):

B: Adults say what they want to learn.

R: Adults have more control, understand more easily, need less explanation.

K: Adults learn better because more serious, more motivated, children laughing laughing.

D: Adults learn because they need to. They are interested and motivated. Children want to play.

C: Easier for adults because you concentrate on one thing.

One student says adults and children learn the same way.

H: The same. I don't know ABCs. Children not either.
A few students agree that learning is more difficult for adults:

P: Adults have no time to study.
G: Adults have many preoccupations.
U: More difficult for adults.
   Children have better memory.
N: Adults have too many ideas.
   Too much past experience.
   Adults analyze too much.
   Children accept at face value.

These comments about adults most likely reflect to some extent the students' perceptions of themselves. Some students perceive themselves in a more positive light than others. It is interesting to note that the students who believe that learning is more difficult for adults also have a tendency to blame themselves when they do not understand the lesson being taught. Comments like the following illustrate the point:

G: Maybe my problem.
P: Me too. Me too. (Fieldnotes, April 18)
P: I ashamed I don't read and write. (Interview notes, April 25)

Some students also perceive their physical or mental condition to be the cause for learning difficulties, as the following comments illustrate:

F: I don't learn well. I don't sleep at night.
   (Fieldnotes, March 21)

R: I understand nothing today. I don't concentrate.
   I don't sleep well last night but I come to class because I don't want to miss anything. (Fieldnotes, April 20)
W says she cannot concentrate because her mind is on her children. She also says she needs to make friends in order to practice English, but she is too shy and finds it easier to speak Chinese with her husband during the break (Interview notes, April 26).

The students perceive their peers as being better or worse at English than themselves. N, for example, is considered by the students to be good. Many of the students consult him when they do not understand the teacher. During pair work, some will get up to go to ask him a question. Those sitting beside him will consult him throughout different activities. R considers J to be good, and says she likes to work with her. She usually sits beside her and consults her frequently.

I notice that students avoid as much as possible working with M, F or S. G says F is not good, and prefers to work alone rather than working with him. Most often it is K who works with M, and A who works with S. B tells me this is unfair, and that the teacher should make students change places. It is difficult, she says, to work with M and S because they are so slow. B also considers it unfair that she nearly always ends up working with [student X]. She says he is a flirt and has very bad breath because he drinks.
S is considered by some of the students to be sick. She leaves the class frequently, asking the teacher for the keys to the bathroom. She washes her face and returns to class. She speaks to nobody, even during the breaks, and often bursts out laughing during the class. She answers any direct questions and reads when the teacher tells her to. Otherwise she keeps busy consulting her dictionary. Although S does not appear to have friends, she is defended by some student when attacked verbally by another, each time the cause being an inappropriate outburst of laughter.

R is considered a leader. Students listen to her. They get up to leave the classroom when she announces break time. D says R controls the class, but the teacher ought to control it. It's like having two teachers, D says.

**Perceptions of Materials**

The participants talk about their perceptions of materials in terms of liking or disliking. They do not volunteer these perceptions, but share them with me in response to direct interview questions.

**Perceptions of Textbooks**

All the students without exception say they enjoy working with the textbook, and all of them name Expressways
or *Side by Side* as being their favourite. They prefer these two because:

- **B**: Real life conversations.
- **A**: We can use the dialogues outside the class.
- **R**: Good for practice.
  - Ask and answer at the same time.
- **N**: Dialogues.
- **C**: Constructing dialogues is good.
- **J**: Compose dialogues.
- **U**: Easier.
- **P**: I understand.
- **K**: Grammar and exercises.
- **D**: Many examples for past and present.

Three of the students say that there are too many textbooks and that they ought to have only one or two at the very most for the entire semester. They say it is too confusing to jump from textbook to textbook. Only one student says she dislikes working with the textbooks. She says she does not understand.

**Perceptions of Dictionaries**

All but one student say they like looking up words in a dictionary, but two of these do not like to do it in class. **J** says it’s faster if the teacher explains the vocabulary. **K** says her Farsi-English dictionary is too heavy to take to class. **A** says he would like to be able to use a dictionary both inside and outside class, but he cannot find a Persian-English dictionary. **S** says that looking up vocabulary in the dictionary is her favourite
learning activity.

Most of the students say they prefer working with a bilingual dictionary (English and L1). Two students say they also like working with an English-French (L2) dictionary, and one says he likes to work with both the English-L1 dictionary, as well as the unilingual English dictionary.

The one student who dislikes working with a dictionary says she does not know how to read. Another student says she finds it difficult to work with the dictionary because she does not know the English alphabet, but she is trying to learn at home.

**Perceptions of Content and Processes**

Only rarely do students comment on course content or processes. Their perceptions, which I describe here, are for the most part gained through direct questions during personal interviews. I go over a list of class activities and ask students to tell me if they like the activity, dislike it, or feel indifferent about it. I also learn about their perceptions through the following interview questions:
Why do you want to learn English?
Are you learning what you expected to learn in this class? If not, what did you expect?
What activity should be added to the program?
What is your favourite activity, and why?
What activity do you dislike the most, and why?
Which skill (oral expression, listening comprehension, reading, or writing) is most important to you, and why?

**Listening Comprehension**

Two students say that listening comprehension is the most important skill because:

C: If I understand, I can learn the other skills more easily.
D: If you don't understand, you can't speak.

I ask students how they feel about watching the news, which is the main listening comprehension activity in this course. Three of the five students who say they dislike the activity explain:

L: I don't like. I don't understand.
B: I can't understand. I don't like it.

N says he likes the activity but considers it less important than learning grammar.

I also ask the students how they feel about listening to songs. N says this is his favourite activity because he is a musician. Four students say they dislike the activity, and six students say they like only the listening part, but not the singing.
R would like listening exercises that would help her practice English pronunciation. She requests such activities on various occasions, and cites her past language-learning experience as an example:

When I study French in Cof1 [Centre d'orientation et de formation des immigrants, Immigrant orientation and training center], we have, you know ... (Explains ear-phones with hands). If we pronounce wrong, the teacher she correct us. Very good. Why we don't have that here? (Fieldnotes, April 7)

**Oral Expression**

The teacher believes that this is the most important skill for the students to learn. Six of the students agree that this is the most important skill for them. They give the following reasons:

- **H:** I need practice.
- **B:** I can listen and read at home. I have no opportunity to speak and write.
- **K:** Important for living in Canada.
- **N:** Everything is important, but I know how to write so conversation more important.
- **W:** Important for find a job.
- **J:** Important for speaking with confrères of my husband and also girlfriend of my son.

The main oral expression activity in class is conversation, an activity which is basically teacher-directed, and centered around news, weather, and week-end activities. The teacher says this is her favourite activity, "listening to students' point of view because they need to talk to somebody who will listen". Two students
claim this is their favourite activity, but for two very
different reasons. W says that conversation is her
favourite activity, "but listening, not speaking". G says
that it's her favourite activity because she likes speaking.

The four students who dislike the activity give four
different reasons:

M: Talking about news too sad. I cry a lot.
H: Talking about news boring. I not understand.
W: I don't like talking. I think nobody
understand me.
U: I can't talk. I don't speak because I don't
understand.

The teacher believes that students like to talk about
their countries and cultures, and believes that oral
presentations are a good way of giving all the students an
opportunity to speak. She also believes that students need
to prepare their presentations in advance and bring notes to
refer to. N and G do not believe they need to prepare.
Nine students say they like presentations, though only two
volunteer to make one. Seven students say they dislike
this activity, and four of these students explain why:

U: Presentations should be about Canada.
B: I don't like listening to presentations.
   Maybe I'm too tired at the end of class.
L: Because I don't speak.
C: Because I'm very shy. My face is red.

Students make no specific comments about games or role
plays, two other oral expression activities. Nine students
like role play, three dislike it, and four feel indifferent about it. Twelve students like games, one student says it is the worst activity, and three students say it depends which game.

**Reading**

The teacher perceives reading long-hand to be important, and tells the students she wants them to learn this. After the class she explains to me why this is so important: "If students can't read writing, they can't get a job..." (Fieldnotes, April 5).

Only a few students comment about reading activities, but none of their comments refers to reading long-hand. P would simply like to learn to read because "I can't apply for a job because I can't read. I need more phonetics." R says that "to learn phonetics and read English more important than writing". English, she says, "is confusing. Sometimes in English you pronounce the "a" like [a] and sometimes like [ae] and sometimes [e]" (Fieldnotes, April 3). She asks the teacher to "spend one hour each week teaching ABCs and pronunciation" (Fieldnotes, April 14).

C, on the other hand, knows how to read and comments that "we should have more reading comprehension exercises". N agrees that "reading dialogues out loud is very boring", 
and suggests working with newspapers would be a better reading activity.

Writing

The teacher perceives cursive writing to be very important and insists that students practice this skill whenever they write. She warns students about failing to master this skill: "You can't pass to level four if you can't write long-hand" (Fieldnotes, March 31). The students who have never previously learned this skill tell me they enjoy learning to write, and would like to spend more class time learning how.

In general, when students talk about writing they are talking about expressing something in writing rather than actually writing long-hand. B tells me how important it is for her to be able to write: "If I can't write, I can't get a job". She says that she can listen and read at home, but she has no opportunity to speak and write, and therefore needs to practice these skills in class. G also says she needs to learn to write in order to get a job. R says that writing is "important for filling out forms. I need to learn to read and write". She says she expected much more writing in this class. When she tells the teacher this, the teacher assures her that one day she will be able to read and write, and exclaims, "look how long it takes English
children to read and write'" (Fieldnotes, June 9).

There is little creative writing activity in this course. For the most part, writing involves copying from the chalkboard. The students do not comment about this particular activity. Two students say that taking dictation is their favourite activity. Six students say they dislike this activity, two of them explaining that it is too difficult and another two explaining that they are unable to write.

The writing activity that is liked the best involves reconstructing dialogues. The teacher tells the students that this activity is good for them (Fieldnotes, May 4). All but two students say they like this activity. The two who say they are indifferent, explain that it is because they don't know how. Four students say this is their favourite activity. Three students say they enjoy it more when they are working with a student who understands what to do. D explains that everyone wants to advance and not be held back. B suggests that the teacher should encourage students to change places. R would like this to be a homework exercise that the teacher would correct individually: "Better to have homework for teacher to correct. Teacher doesn't know the level of the students if we always correct in class."
Summary

I have attempted to record as accurately as possible the perceptions of the participants as they were shared with me. I acknowledge that the record is incomplete, partially due, I believe, to the participants' discomfort with sharing feelings, as well as their difficulty with expressing themselves in a second language. However partial the information, I assert that there are some obvious correlations between participant perceptions and interaction, which lead to important insights into the subject of adult participation in learning. I analyze these correlations in the following chapter.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Summary

In chapter one, I introduce this case study and pose five questions which then serve as a general guideline both for data collection and for the discussion of the data. The descriptions of the setting and the participants in chapter two, processes in chapter three, and participant perceptions in chapter four, provide detailed answers to all the questions. The following summary, using as its framework the research questions, provides a brief review of the descriptions.

Research Question #1: What are the major characteristics of the backgrounds of the students and the teacher?

The participants in this study come from a variety of backgrounds. Three of the sixteen students are male, and the other thirteen are female. Most of these students are between the ages of 30 to 50, with only three being between the ages of 16 to 30, and only one over 50. The education level of these students ranges from six to sixteen years of schooling, with eight of the sixteen students having completed at least secondary education. The students also represent a variety of ethnic origins, with only three being of French-Canadian origin. Of the other 13 students, two are from South America, five from South-east Asia, and six
from the Middle East.

The teacher is French-Canadian, and has learned English as a second language through exposure to it beginning at the age of six. All her formal education has been carried out in French, although her specialization in teachers' college was English second language. She has an accumulated 14 1/2 years of teaching experience, 13 of which have been spent teaching French as a second language, first to children in primary school, and later to army personnel. She has one year of experience in teaching English as a second language in secondary school, and had been teaching in her present post for only half a year when this study began.

Research Question #2: What are the major characteristics of the class structure, program content, and methodology?

Although the seating arrangement is non-traditional, with student desks arranged in the shape of a horse-shoe, the class structure could best be described as traditional and teacher-centered.

The program content offers little variety, although there appear to be a variety of available materials. Textbook exercises, like nearly all the classroom activities, focus on grammar and vocabulary. Listening activities consist of watching the news and listening to songs. Conversation periods, generally controlled by the
teacher, fall short of exploring issues beyond news headlines, weather reports, or weekend happenings. Reading activities involve taking turns reading out loud the article chosen by the teacher, answering specific questions about vocabulary, and sometimes re-telling the story. Writing activities involve copying and taking dictation, the aim of both being to practice cursive writing.

The methodology could best be described as traditional, where the teacher is engaged in a process of transferring knowledge to her students. The students, on the other hand, generally accept their passive role of listening, copying, answering questions, or doing the assigned pair work.

Research Question #3: What kinds of interaction take place between the teacher and learners, and between the learners and their peers?

The majority of teacher-student interaction is teacher-directed rather than student-initiated, although a shift toward more student-initiated interaction is observed in the second half of the semester. There are three basic kinds of interaction which take place between the teacher and students. In the first kind, the teacher or students volunteer information about current events, weather, personal news, grammar and vocabulary explanations or examples, and corrections. In the second kind, the teacher or the students elicit information about these same
subjects. In the third kind, the teacher controls the activities and exchanges by giving orders or by changing the subject, while only a couple of the students ever make any attempt to initiate change in learning activities or to pursue a topic of conversation.

Peer interaction takes place on two levels. As friends, the students ask each other personal questions, compliment one another, give personal advice, offer sympathy, and defend as the need arises. As colleagues, the students ask each other for help, offer each other both help and encouragement, and share feelings about the learning activities. The most out-spoken student in the group becomes the spokesperson for the students, making suggestions to the teacher about learning activities, and informing the teacher about break time. The same student also encourages student cooperation with the teacher.

Research Question #4: What kinds of activities are learners involved in, and what are their roles in these activities?

The main activities that students are involved in are dictionary research, note-taking, consulting peers, verifying hypotheses with the teacher, role play, grammar exercises, listening exercises, conversation, reading exercises, games, and writing exercises. The students play either active or passive roles in each of these activities, or in portions of these activities. I might clarify here
that when I speak of active involvement, I am referring to that involvement which is initiated by the student, since students are in no way involved in any actual planning of course content or classroom activities. In this particular case, since activity tends to be teacher-centered, it is impossible for students to be actively involved all of the time. Most of the students, for example, are actively involved in dictionary research, one of the few activities that is student-initiated. The majority of students are also involved in note-taking, another activity which is often student-initiated. To be actively involved in either of these two activities, as well as in some of the others, presupposes that the student has the ability to read and reproduce not only printed English script, but also in many cases, the teacher's cursive script. The students who tend to avoid reading and writing activities, for the reason I just mentioned, might be more apt to actively participate in oral activities, initiating conversations, engaging in monologues, and inventing interesting dialogues in role play.

Research Question #5: What are the participants' perceptions of adult learning and of participation in learning?

There is little consensus among the participants as to the nature of adult learning as opposed to child learning. The teacher perceives adults in general as being more
motivated and thus posing fewer discipline problems in the classroom than children or adolescents. On the other hand, she tends to perceive these students as children, and often interacts with them accordingly.

Students' perceptions of adult learners vary. Some believe that adults have more difficulty learning because they have many preoccupations, little time for study, and poor memories in comparison to children. One student comments that there is no difference between adult learning and child learning. Other students believe that adults have an advantage over children because they are motivated and serious, knowing what they want and need. Another student comments that adults learn more easily because they are allowed to concentrate on one subject.

The teacher perceives participation in learning to be closely related to oral expression. She explains that most of the students want to talk about their countries and cultures, and this motivates them to participate. When she says that one student does not participate, but only laughs, she is saying that the student does not talk. In informal conversations, she cites learning problems and low-level education as barriers to participation. She also comments that age is an important factor because of retention ability.
How students perceive participation in learning is unclear. While most of them claim that they have an impact on their learning, they seem to believe that their impact is confined to out-of-class learning activities such as re-copying class notes or preparing something to talk about for the next conversation period by watching the news, looking up vocabulary in the dictionary, and writing a few notes. With regard to classroom participation, students believe that the teacher "knows best" what they need to learn, and they depend on her to make decisions about learning activities.

Discussion

The Teacher and Participation

Because the teacher in this case study is responsible for the methodology, course content, and class structure, she is in a position to share these responsibilities with her students, thereby encouraging student participation. The students have some interesting ideas for the course:

Presentations should be about Canada (p. 70)

Working with newspapers would make reading a more interesting activity (pp. 71-72)

The teacher should assign and correct written work (p. 73)

Phonetics lessons would be helpful for pronunciation and for learning to read (pp. 69 & 71)
There may be several reasons for the fact that none of these ideas is used:

The students do not share their ideas with the teacher, perhaps because they have not been asked to do so;

The students share their ideas, but the teacher does not know how to incorporate these ideas into the program;

The students share their ideas, but the teacher is unwilling or unable to incorporate these ideas into the program.

Whatever the reason, these students have little or no impact on methodology, curriculum or class structure.

This means that the teacher uses her own criteria in her choices of methodology, course content, and class structure, rather than consulting the students about their needs and interests. The criteria of the teacher, in this case, are based on her cultural background, past teaching experience, as well as on her perceptions and pre-conceived notions about her students and their needs and interests.

The teacher's cultural background influences course content, and therefore, student participation. Vocabulary explanations in terms of biblical references (i.e. "wise" as in "wise men"), fairytales (i.e. "beautiful" as in "Snow White"), and North American culture (i.e. "not getting along with spouse" means "divorce"), contribute to non-participation, and ultimately, to cultural illiteracy.
The teacher's teaching experience is evident in her structural teaching approach which was the approach used in the army, and is, in fact, an approach not uncommon in the teaching of second languages.

There are also multiple examples in this case study that are evidence of the relationship between the teacher's perceptions of her students and her interaction with them. A typical example of this is her perception of them as children. There is also evidence that the teacher is influenced by her pre-conceived notions. For example, when a student expresses a need to learn to read, the teacher interprets that need to fit with her pre-conceived notion that the student needs to learn to read cursive writing. The result is that the teacher's priorities override student priorities.

There is no indication that the teacher's own second-language-learning experience has much impact on her teaching practices. The teacher did not learn English from textbooks or chalkboards or teachers, but by being immersed in a situation where she was forced to communicate in that language.

This case is not atypical according to Jurmo (1987), who found that the impact of the learners on methodology,
course content, and class structure is seldom significant in adult basic education programs, or in English-language programs aimed at immigrant populations.

Shannon (1989) believes that it is because the teacher does not have control of these areas. He argues that learners and teachers ought to have control together, the role of the teacher being to listen to the students and foster their independence through self-selection of learning projects and materials. In this case, the teacher does have control, but does not share it. According to Skagen (1987), and Kazemak (1988), this might be because the teacher is unfamiliar with the theories of participatory learning, or because the teacher does not know how to put these theories into practice.

While learner self-direction is one of the central themes of adult education literature, the role of the teacher is given limited attention. It is probably Freire (1970), who has contributed the most to this subject through his controversial beliefs and practices of effective adult literacy education. According to Freire, the teacher's role is that of facilitator or animator, rather than a transmitter of knowledge. The teacher and students are equals and all learners together. They may not all know the same things, but the teacher does not know more than the
students. While Knowles (1970), Houle (1972), and Bhola (1972), seem to agree with Freire, at least in principle, they tend to advocate learner cooperation rather than learner control, the goal of education being to produce critical thinkers, rather than Freire's more extreme goal of empowerment for social and political action.

Methodology and Participation

Traditional teacher-centered methodology, characterized by rote learning as opposed to reflective learning, appears to be a negative factor in adult participation in learning. Many of the episodes described earlier show evidence of how reflection or exploration of ideas is discouraged in favour of "serious work" in textbooks. Houle (1972), and Hesser (1978), would argue that a traditional approach is indeed suitable in this situation, since most of the students are familiar with the traditional methods which are also used in their countries of origin. Houle cautions, however, against the danger of ignoring individual student needs and treating education "as an operative rather than a cooperative art" (p. 109). The successful use of any methodology, Houle points out, depends on the competence of the teacher to adapt that methodology to the situation.

Learner-centered methodology is one of the basic assumptions of andragogy, yet in practice it is an exception
rather than the rule in adult basic English programs (Jurmo, 1987). In his recent study of adult participatory learning practices in the United States, Jurmo cites various reasons for the absence of this methodology, among these the teacher's unfamiliarity with the methodology, the threat it poses to traditional power structures, and the difficulty it poses in assessing effectiveness.

Rosenthal (1989), speaking from a teacher's point of view, states that "the less capable we believe our students to be, the more likely we are to structure tightly their learning." This leads to a teacher-centered methodology which addresses only surface structure (syntax) of the target language, rather than a methodology which would encourage students to explore the reading/writing/thinking connection and thus get involved in the deep structure (semantics) of the target language. Rosenthal has echoed the Freirian concept of a teacher who is a "knowing subject face to face with other knowing (and capable) subjects" (Freire, 1970, p. 217), whose purpose is to encourage students to become critical thinkers, and active participants in their world.

Course Content and Participation

Course content which does not reflect students' specific needs and interests is considered a negative factor
in adult participation in learning, even by Hesser (1978), who advocates traditional methodology. This case study provides us with a great many episodes which support this conclusion. Some students who are discouraged from exploring ideas (i.e. parent-child communication, p. 28), will withdraw rather than make other attempts to participate in conversations. When subject matter, chosen by the teacher, is of no interest to the students (i.e. Loch Ness Monster, p. 51), the result again is withdrawal, or "tuning out" until called upon to read or answer a question. Confusion and discouragement are other results of inappropriate course content which might be associated with the level of the material, the cultural content of the material, or even the amount of new material. When students are faced with too much new material, they either "tune out" or get discouraged. This is especially evident when the new material happens to be a meaningless set of grammar rules, or explanations which are so culturally bound that only those who share the same cultural values could possibly understand them. Whether students "tune out" or get discouraged, the result in both cases is a negative effect on participation.

Class Structure and Participation

Though certain space arrangements may not be conducive to participation, there is no evidence in this case study to
conclude that informal seating arrangements positively affect participation.

Inflexible time arrangements are a negative factor in participation in learning, as illustrated by many of the episodes. Potential discussions were stopped short in order to begin "serious" work in the textbooks. In some cases, teachers feel pressure to complete a program of study laid down by a higher authority (Jurmo, 1987). The teacher in this case study, while not bound by any set program, may have felt pressured by objectives which she had set for the class.

Learner Characteristics and Participation

Students' self-image, personality, and motivation appear to be important factors in participation in learning. This case study shows evidence that a motivated out-going student with a positive self-image will tend to overcome any hurdles to learn what he or she wants to learn. None of these three factors by itself leads to the same result.

Closely connected to students' self-image is their ability or perceived ability to express themselves in the target language, another important factor in participation. It was also found that students tend to blame themselves when they fail to understand, the result being withdrawal rather than challenging the teacher or the material. This also
indicates the important role of self-image, together with personality, in participation.

Students' age and gender were found to be non-factors in participation. There is, however, some indication that cultural background and level of education may influence participation, but this hypothesis requires further study. I suggest that level of education is a construct of self-image, and important only for that reason.

While age, gender, past experience, level of education, culture and motivation have all been listed as factors influencing adult participation in learning (Brundage and Mackeracher, 1980), there is insufficient evidence in this study to support every item in that list. Oddi (1987) proposes that the principal factor governing adult participation in learning is personality. The two main problems with her theory is that she does not separate personality from self-concept or from motivation, and she ignores other factors such as the teacher, methodology, and course content. Freire (1970), on the other hand, ignores learner-related factors such as personality and motivation, and emphasizes the role of the teacher, the methodology, and the course content. Rosenthal (1989), recognizes the influence of personality in participation, but agrees with Freire that the role of the teacher is to create an
atmosphere where learners will be encouraged to take control not only of their own learning, but also of their lives, becoming active participants in a world which they have learned to examine critically.

Questions Raised by the Study

This discussion would be incomplete without some recognition of the questions raised by the study. Does traditional methodology, for example, play a negative role in participatory learning, or does Houle have a valid point in suggesting that the teacher's competence is a deciding factor in the successful use of any methodology?

Another question which must be raised is student preference for any given method. In view of the fact that these students perceived the teacher as being the expert who knew what they needed to learn, might they not have been uncomfortable with a learner-centered methodology, such as proposed by Freire?

The benefits of involving students in decision-making processes cannot be questioned, but if this group of students had been responsible for decisions about content and methodology, for example, would they have been able to come to a consensus on what they wanted and needed?
These and other questions remain to be answered in future studies.

**Implications**

Since the purpose of adult basic English programs is to prepare adults to function in the English language and participate in its culture, it stands to reason that the participation begin in the classroom. This case study describes a potentially ideal learning situation. High attendance and low drop-out rates indicate high student motivation. Government subsidies ensure a wealth of available materials. In the absence of standardization and testing, course content is determined largely by the individual teacher, a privilege and responsibility that might well be shared with the students. Yet, in spite of this opportunity for a stimulating language-learning experience, tailored to meet individual student needs and aspirations, the students in this case study have very little input into learning content and processes. I believe that the case is not a-typical, and that from it emerge issues which must be dealt with if students are to be active participants in the learning process.

**Teacher Training**

If, as has been suggested, the teacher plays such an
important role in encouraging or discouraging student participation, then the teacher must not only be aware of the theoretical framework of participation, but also have the knowledge and experience in order to put the theory into practice. This is the responsibility of teacher training programs, which must provide not only the theoretical framework, but also a role model for teachers to copy. For teachers to be aware of the possibilities for participation, as well as the benefits that these possibilities imply, they must first experience this kind of participation in their own learning process.

**Adult Education Administrators**

If participation in learning is so important, then it is time to re-think strategies, and take strenuous measures to ensure that it takes place in the classroom. This means that administrators will have to become aware of both teacher and student needs. This may well imply changing both policies and practices of selecting and hiring teachers who are trained and have experience in involving students in the learning process. It also implies providing in-service training for teachers who are not familiar with participatory learning. This might further involve the coordination of a team-teaching system, which would allow teachers to see participatory methodology put into practice by their colleagues.
The Role of the Teacher

According to Freire (1983), the teacher's role must change from the traditional role of transferring knowledge, to that of learner, coordinator and animator, if participation and self-directed learning is to take place. In many cases this involves altering perceptions, not only of ourselves as teachers and our roles in the classroom, but also of our students and their capabilities. If the teacher is to encourage the kind of participation which implies both reflection and action, he or she must first perceive the learners as being capable of such participation.

Suggestions for Further Research

In order to verify the findings of this study and develop further insights into the factors influencing adult participation in learning, I would suggest that a similar group of students be followed through their entire program of study. This would allow for the documentation of participation processes and participant perceptions over a two-year period in which the students would be interacting with a variety of teachers, teaching methods, and curriculums. While high drop-out rates in these programs would reduce the number of participants in the later stages of such a project, the study would greatly contribute to our understanding of adult participation in learning.
More research is needed on the effects of methodology on participatory learning. In order to undertake such a study, a preliminary survey of teacher attitudes and descriptions of their teaching methods might be carried out in order to do an in-depth comparative study of at least two classrooms in which contrasting methodologies are used with similar clientele.

More research is also needed on how andragogy training translates into classroom practices. Are teachers, trained in andragogy, better able to involve their students in self-directed learning? A survey of adult education teachers might reveal their contrasting perceptions of participatory learning practices, but only a descriptive study involving extensive observation would make an important contribution to the literature on adult participation in learning.
Bibliography


Conti, G. J. (1982). Directions for the 80's: Goals and strategies for adult basic education. Adult Literacy and Basic Education, (Spring), 10-16.


Appendix A

STUDENT INTERVIEW #1

NAME: ____________________ NATIONALITY: ____________________
DATE: ____________________ MOTHER TONGUE: ____________________

LANGUAGE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

1. What other languages have you learned, and when?

2. How was learning __________ different from learning English?

3. Have you studied English before?

4. How was that experience different from this one?

MOTIVATION

5. Why do you want to learn English?

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

6. What was the last level of school you completed?

7. What do you do for a living in Canada?

8. What did you do for a living in your country?

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

9. What is your favorite activity, and why?

10. What activity do you dislike the most, and why?
11. Are you learning what you expected to learn in this class? ________ If not, what did you expect? ________

12. What activity should be added to the program? ________

For the following activities, indicate like, dislike, or indifference:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>LIKE</th>
<th>?</th>
<th>DISLIKE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Talking about the news</td>
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<tr>
<td>- talking</td>
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<tr>
<td>- listening</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Watching the news</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Giving a presentation</td>
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<td>4. Listening to a presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Doing a role play</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Learning new vocabulary</td>
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<tr>
<td>- teacher explains meanings</td>
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<td>- somebody translates meaning</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- into French</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- into mother tongue</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- looking word up in dictionary</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Working with the list of verbs</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Learning grammar rules</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Constructing dialogues/pair work</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Dictation</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Writing on the blackboard</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. Playing games</td>
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<td>Which one do you prefer?</td>
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<td>Why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Working in books</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which one do you prefer?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Doing crossward puzzles</td>
<td></td>
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<td>15. Working with newspapers</td>
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<td>16. Songs</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- listening</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- filling in blanks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- singing</td>
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<tr>
<td>17. Learning ABC's</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- practicing cursive writing</td>
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<td>(long-hand)</td>
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Appendix B

STUDENT INTERVIEW #2

1. Learning English as a Second Language
Which skill is most important to you, and why?
___ oral communication
___ listening comprehension
___ reading comprehension
___ writing

2. How do you go about learning that skill?

3. Do adults learn differently than children? How?

4. How do you participate in your learning?
___ depend on teacher
___ translate into mother tongue or __________
___ memorize words/dialogues
___ use dictionary Which one? __________
___ ask somebody for help
___ practise during the break or outside of school
___ read newspaper or English books
___ watch T.V.
___ listen to the radio

5. Do you have any impact on:
___ the curriculum
___ the teacher
___ the structure of the program
___ the structure of the class
___ the methodology
___ your learning?

6. How does the education system in your country compare with Quebec's? Other parts of Canada?
Primary (6 years) Primary grades 1 - 6 (6 years)
Secondary (5 years) Junior High grades 7 - 9 (3 years)
CEGEP (2 years) High School grades 10 - 12 (3 yrs)
university (3 years) University (4 years)

16 years 16 years
Appendix C

INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER #1

TEACHING BACKGROUND:

1. How long have you been teaching English as a second language? ________________________________

2. Have you always taught adults? _______________________________
   If not, what was your previous teaching experience?
   ________________________________

3. Where and when did you take your TESL training? ________________________________

4. How would you compare this particular ESL class with other classes you have taught previously?
   ________________________________
   ________________________________
   ________________________________

LANGUAGE LEARNING BACKGROUND

5. At what age did you learn English, and in what kind of setting did you learn it? ________________________________

6. Have you ever studied any other language? ________________________________

MOTIVATION AND OBJECTIVES

7. What, in your opinion, are your students' reasons for wanting to learn English? ________________________________
   ________________________________
   ________________________________

8. What are your objectives for these students? (What, in your opinion, makes them ready for the next level?)
   ________________________________
   ________________________________
BACKGROUND OF STUDENTS

9. What are the students' educational backgrounds, and do you think their educational background influences either the degree of participation, or the ways in which they participate in their own learning? __________

10. Do you think that students' cultures play a role in the level of participation or the way in which students participate in their own learning? Please explain. __________

FACTORS INFLUENCING STUDENT PARTICIPATION?

11. Please rate the following factors thought to influence student participation as having a high, low, or 0-level of importance:

- student's personality __ __ __
- student's educational background __ __ __
- student's cultural background __ __ __
- student's gender __ __ __
- student's age __ __ __
- student's motivation __ __ __
- student's past experience __ __ __
- course curriculum __ __ __
- structure of the program __ __ __
- methodology used by the teacher __ __ __
- teacher __ __ __

Comments: __________

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

12. What is your favourite classroom activity, and why? __________

13. What do you think is the students' favourite classroom activity? __________


15. Which book, in your opinion, is preferred by the students? __________
Appendix D

INTERVIEW WITH TEACHER #2

1. B.A. in Pedagogy, (Breve A), Major in English
   Was this TESL or English literature?

   Have you taken any courses in TESL?__________________________
   Where? and When?__________________________

2. Could you expand on the differences between this teaching
   experience and that of teaching French to army personnel?

3. You learned English through speaking it, yet it seems you
   spend a fair amount of time teaching grammar? Is there a
   particular reason for this?

4. You mentioned some specific characteristics of Orientals'
   style of learning, or the way they tend to participate in
   learning. Can you make any generalizations about other
   cultures? Quebequoi? Lebanese? Iranians? Latins?

5. How much impact do you as a teacher have on:
   What you teach (curriculum)? ________________________________
   How you teach (Methodology)? ________________________________
   When & Where you teach (Structure)? __________________________
   The extent to which and the ways in which students
   participate in their learning? ________________________________