

Lund, L. Supervisor Perceptions of Workplace ESL Instruction

The percentage of foreign-born workers in the United States labor force is growing at the same time that workplace literacy demands are increasing. Some employers respond by sponsoring workplace ESL instruction. The social practices theory of literacy considers the relational nature of language learning and use. Examining social practices within workplaces may help identify and address barriers to successful workplace ESL programs.

This study sought the perspectives of supervisors in medical manufacturing companies regarding workplace ESL courses and the dynamics of workplace culture that affect participation in those courses. Two supervisors were interviewed and completed an attitudinal study. The results suggest that supervisors who have input into the design and implementation of ESL programs may have a positive, supportive attitude toward the courses in their company. Further study is needed, so that a broader spectrum of attitudes workplace stakeholders may be understood by workplace educators.

SUPERVISOR PERCEPTIONS OF WORKPLACE ESL INSTRUCTION

by

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To give up your country is the hardest thing a person can do: to leave the old familiar places and ship out over the edge of the world to America and learn everything over again different than you learned as a child, learn the new language that you will never be so smart or funny in as in your true language. It takes years to start to feel semi-normal. And yet people still come - from Russia, Vietnam, and Cambodia and Laos, Ethiopia, Iran, Haiti, Korea, Cuba, Chile, and they come on behalf of their children, and they come for freedom. Not for our land (Russia is as beautiful), not for our culture (they have their own, thank you), not for our standard of living (it frankly ain't that great), not for our system of government (they don't know about it, may not even agree with it), but for freedom. They are heroes who make an adventure on our behalf, showing us by their struggle how precious beyond words freedom is, and if we knew their stories, we could not keep back the tears.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, I started a job in the human resources department of a company whose work force consisted largely of non-native English speakers. One of my duties was to coordinate in-house English as a Second Language (ESL) classes for employees. The upper management of this company had made the decision to offer these classes without soliciting input from frontline supervisors regarding the necessity of the course, the curriculum, or how production needs would be met while employees were taken off assembly lines to go to class. I, a new employee without history or established relationships in the company, was soon hearing from the ESL instructor that some employees were not showing up for ESL class. When I followed up with workers, they told me that their supervisors would not release them from the work floor so they could attend class. When I approached the supervisors, I heard that there was just too much work for the employees to go to class. I sought advice from my superiors on how to ensure class attendance, and was told to let supervisors know that they “had to” send their people to class. (I had no authority to tell anyone that they “had to” do anything.) In meetings, supervisors would promise, especially if upper managers were present, to permit their employees to attend class, but they failed to do so on a fairly regular basis.

I felt saddled with an impossible task. Upper management had made a commitment to providing an educational opportunity to employees, but supervisors had a problem with that decision. The instructor did not understand why the company had

invited her to come in to teach, yet employees were missing classes. It was difficult to meet learning objectives in light of sporadic class attendance. Some frustrated employees asked why they had been offered the opportunity to participate in English instruction, but were not allowed to attend. Other employees expressed the desire to drop out of the classes because they did not want to face the negative reactions they got from supervisors or peers.

As I developed relationships with the supervisors, I learned that some of them resented the imposition of the ESL classes, which caused several problems for them. Firstly, some supervisors did not believe that the company should sponsor the classes during paid work time. They saw it as unfair to other employees, who were not offered a similar opportunity. Some supervisors even considered it unfair to themselves, who had to pursue educational opportunities outside of work time (though the company paid full tuition for some of them who were in expensive undergraduate and graduate programs). The second source of supervisor resistance stemmed from the requirement to meet production quotas with workers taken off the floor. Even supervisors who supported the instruction did not know how to balance workers' educational needs with production requirements, and did not feel that upper management had considered this conflict when initiating the courses. It began to seem as if the workplace ESL courses were creating as much tension as benefit. Unfortunately, these dynamics delayed the implementation of other educational initiatives that had been planned in this workplace.

After I myself became a workplace ESL instructor and member of a statewide workforce ESL training task force, I experienced and heard about other workforce education initiatives that were met with supervisor resistance. Sometimes when hearing what I believed to be unfair criticism of employers - and especially supervisors - leveled by educators, I found myself wanting to defend the supervisors. Supervisors in companies in which I have taught have spent hours with me, teaching me what I needed to know in order to develop and teach the courses: vocabulary, processes, company culture etc. If they had not been supportive of ESL instruction, I do not believe they would have done this. So, although I have felt frustrated when employees did not appear in class because there was “too much work,” I tried not to automatically assume that the supervisors were just being resistant. I understood that they sometimes felt that they had no choice but to keep their employees on the floor in order to meet production deadlines.

It has seemed to me that some educators do not try to understand the perspective of business, and immediately take an adversarial stance. For example, I heard one instructor say that she was uncomfortable teaching in a workplace because she felt it put her in the position of advocating for management, rather than her students. Perhaps the fact that I have been a supervisor myself, though not in a manufacturing setting, gives me a wider view of the concerns of the many stakeholders in any workplace. I do not agree that becoming a workplace instructor means that one is acting against the interests of

one's students. Rather, I believe that equipping LEP (Limited English Proficiency) employees to communicate better can empower them, both at work and away from work.

As I began to research participation levels in workplace ESL, I read several scholarly articles which gave me the sense that their authors had an admirable wish to advocate for workers learning English but that these authors had not worked hard enough to understand the employer perspective. For example, Boyle (1999) accuses employers of limiting their employees' learning by controlling the amount of time the workers are allowed to attend class. While acknowledging that not everyone who wants or needs classes can be released from work, Boyle interprets the fact that companies do not generally sponsor long-term educational opportunities as a sign that they do not want the employees to "learn too much" (1999, p. 266). Gallo (2002) characterizes the workplace as a site where "profit takes precedence over humanity" and accuses workforce training of "allowing corporations to limit and control" educational opportunities for their employees (p. 55).

Moore (1999) writes that employers oppress workers by "not allowing them to attend classes because of increased production demands, rather than attempting to accommodate learning needs" (p. 3). While this could be true in some cases, I believe we must consider that supervisors are often under intense pressure to meet deadlines. Competition is cutthroat for manufacturers in today's global market.

While acknowledging the existence of supervisors who are less than supportive of their employees' language learning, reading statements like the above has made me want to give supervisors a voice. Coinciding with my belief in and advocacy for workplace education is the understanding that the learning needs of employees can not supersede the need of a business to meet production demands, make a profit, and keep people employed. I submit that supervisors must be involved from the beginning in identifying and meeting challenges to workplace ESL programs.

Workplace ESL

At the beginning of the 21st century, the United States is more racially and ethnically diverse than at any previous time in the nation's history. The composition of the country's population is reflected in its labor force, also more diverse than ever before. The social, demographic and economic factors driving this change include lowered birthrate, an aging baby boom generation, and increased participation by women and minorities in the work force. Immigration, however, has been the major source of the growth in diversity. Today, one in seven U.S. workers was born outside the country, up from one in seventeen in 1960. The same forces driving major changes in the U.S. labor force in last fifty years of the twentieth century are expected to continue in the coming decades (Mosisa, 2002; Toossi, 2002; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007).

Today's workers need more English skills than were previously necessary to perform the "low- skilled" jobs traditionally filled by immigrants in this country (Grognet, 1994). Increasingly, certification by entities such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is seen as essential to doing business in the international marketplace. Certifying bodies place high importance on the practices of continuous improvement and quality assurance, which require extensive record keeping. Even manufacturing operations, which have traditionally relied on oral communication, are now moving to print-driven practices. Increased literacy demands are placed on workers in the form of quality statements, standardized written work procedures, and documentation (Jackson, 2004; Kleifgen, 2005).

Another workplace trend is the widespread adoption of a participatory business model, whose stated purpose is to empower workers and make them more accountable to each other. Employees in this environment are expected to make decisions and solve problems as part of a team. When this way of doing business is introduced in a company, workers whose knowledge and use of English had previously been adequate to do good work can feel displaced in their own jobs (Burnaby, et.al., 1992; Farrell, 200; Folinsbee, 2004; Harper, et. al., 1996; Hull, 1997; Hunter, 2004; Hunter, 2007; Jackson, 2004; Moore, 1999). Before, they just needed to know how to run their machines. Now, as Belfiore says, they must learn "new words and new ways to talk and write about" their jobs (2004, p. 39).

Coinciding increases in dependence on foreign-born labor and workplace language requirements have spurred growth in employer-sponsored English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction for LEP workers. Employers see the need to help employees improve their English skills in order to serve customers better, increase productivity, work more effectively in teams and comply with standards. Additionally, some employers hope that stronger English skills will enhance employees' lives outside of work, or provide those in entry-level positions with an opportunity to advance within the company (Boyle, 1999).

Once the logistical details of a worksite ESL course have been determined - days of the week, time of day, participant compensation, and level of instruction - the time comes for workers to indicate whether or not they wish to participate. The opportunity to take a class on the premises of one's job would appear to be an attractive proposition. Instruction is, at the least, free of charge to employees and at best, offered during paid work time. Workers need not worry about transportation, additional childcare arrangements, or time taken away from domestic responsibilities, common concerns with community-based education.

Employee Participation

It might be expected that workers would jump at, and indeed be thankful for the chance to improve their English communication skills. But that is not always the case. A number of researchers studying workplace literacy programs have documented some

level of nonparticipation (Burnaby, Harper & Peirce, 1992; Goldstein, 1995; Milton, 1999; Peirce, Harper, Burnaby, 1993). In my experience coordinating ESL courses in a packaging plant and as an ESL instructor in several workplaces, I have seen eligible workers choose not to participate in courses offered. An employee who declines the opportunity may be seen by company management, ESL instructors, and co-workers as unmotivated, if not ungrateful. But could there be more to the picture than an individual who just does not care about learning?

Nonparticipation in workplace ESL classes might be attributed to some of the same factors that depress participation and retention rates in community-based educational adult literacy programs. People who are not literate in their first language find learning English daunting. They may be intimidated due to limited exposure to formal education or an unpleasant history with the schooling they have had. Some learners, whose previous education was based on a model of authoritative teacher and passive students, find teaching methods used in adult classes in the United States conflict with what they consider to be “school.” Some express the belief that they are too old to learn. Others become frustrated when proficiency does not increase as fast as they believe it should, or when they are placed in a multi-level class, which is fairly common in the workplace (Bell, 1991; Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Hull, 1997; Malicky & Norman, 1994). A learner’s motivation, however, is affected by more than the kind of individual circumstances named above.

The characterization of language learning motivation has changed over time. Early second language acquisition theory assumed that, with good instruction, any person who had the aptitude could learn a new language. Later, researchers identified individualized characteristics which were believed to make up the profile of a good language learner, including attitude toward speakers of the target language (Brown, 1980; Gardner, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Schumann, 1976). More recently, second language learning theorists have taken a much broader view of motivation than simply the sum of an individual's personality traits. Motivation level is dependent on role and social identity, power relations, and belief in future possibility. Multiple realities of learners' lives, the people with whom they interact, and how and where those interactions occur, set the stage for how much time and effort they are willing to invest in learning and using English. Investment level is not fixed, but changes according to environment and circumstances, and can be different for the same person at different times (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000; McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995).

The social practice view of literacy (alternatively called sociocultural, socially situated, or social relational) considers the relational nature of language learning and use (Belfiore & Folinsbee, 2004; Boyle, 1999; Burnaby, et. al, 1992; Defoe, et al, 2004; Jackson, 2004). Applying this understanding to workplace ESL instruction, we can see that employee motivation to participate is influenced by dynamics of the workplace culture such as social distance, power relationships, and the commitment of various

stakeholders to the learning and use of English. Examining social practices and varying stakeholder perspectives within workplaces can help us identify and address barriers to success of workplace ESL programs.

The following are examples of varying perspectives I have encountered among workplace stakeholders. They illustrate how position in a company's culture and power relationships can affect one's view of workplace ESL instruction.

- *Front line supervisors not included in the decision to offer ESL instruction sometimes appear to feel that the classes have been imposed on them. These supervisors are under pressure to meet production quotas and deadlines, and may express frustration when employees are released from work in order to go to class. Some supervisors voice skepticism that workers really want to learn English, suggest that workers already know the language but choose not to use it, or accuse workers of only going to class for the money or to get out of work.*
- *A bilingual line lead appears threatened by line workers learning English. He unilaterally makes the decision to punish workers who participate in class by assigning them work on a more physically demanding machine than the workers who do not go to ESL class.*
- *Some participants in workplace ESL instruction say that they are not supported in their efforts to go to class or to speak English: supervisors do*

not exercise patience, do not allow workers time to ask questions, or do not provide proper training. Some who attend class are denigrated by co-workers for “wasting their time” in English class.

While I have also seen positive attitudes from many supervisors, line leads and frontline workers, the above scenarios are not uncommon. They have led me to question if company support for and worker participation in workplace ESL courses would be higher if the programs were designed, promoted, and delivered in a way that recognized the interests and needs of various stakeholders within the culture of a business. I have chosen to focus specifically on supervisors because they represent the level of management that works most closely with LEP employees. According to Burnaby, et.al, supervisors are “the most important link between corporate vision and the employee” (1992, p. 319) and are the workplace stakeholders, other than the LEP workers themselves, affected most directly by educational programs. Yet, in my experience, it seems that supervisors are often left out of decision making about workplace ESL classes. I believe that understanding the challenges faced by supervisors and soliciting their involvement in the planning and implementation of workplace ESL instruction could lead to more successful courses.

Research Question

What are the perspectives of supervisors in medical manufacturing companies regarding the design and implementation of workplace ESL courses and the dynamics of

workplace culture that affect participation in those courses? I believe that a better understanding of supervisor views and beliefs will contribute to the design, promotion and delivery of instructional programs that are beneficial to both workers and employers.

Implications

When developing workplace ESL courses, educators spend a great deal of time and effort learning essential job functions, doing literacy audits, and gathering authentic materials. We develop customized assessment, curriculum, and evaluation. Yet the most skillfully designed course will not succeed if participation is low. Considering the perceptions and experiences of supervisors as major stakeholders will help workplace ESL educators understand the identities and contexts present in the environment in which courses are offered. This awareness may make it easier to identify and address barriers to participation in order to provide successful workplace ESL programs.

Conclusion

At the same time that employers in the United States depend on more foreign-born labor than ever before, English language demands are increasing in the workplace. Some companies respond by offering instruction in workplace ESL for their employees. As we attempt to understand why some LEP workers choose not to participate in employer-sponsored ESL instruction, we cannot view motivation as a personality characteristic or the product of an individual's life circumstances or history. Rather, we must be aware of the identities and relationships existing within the culture of the

workplace, and how they influence the learning and use of English. I hope to show the importance of the perspective of supervisors, and how their investment can aid in the development and implementation of a successful workplace ESL program.

Chapter two is the literature review. Reviewed is literature regarding workforce demographics and increased language demands in today's workplace, as well as the history and advantages of workplace ESL. We can see how second language learning theory has moved from characterizing the learner as an individual with fixed attitudes and motivation to the learner as social being, with multiple and dynamic identities and investment levels. Workplace factors affecting participation are discussed, followed by a representation of research showing the importance of the supervisor-employee relationship.

Chapter three describes the research methods used to carry out the study. This is followed by a presentation of the study results. The final chapter discusses implications of the findings.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

By examining the perspective of supervisors in companies that offer workplace ESL instruction, I hope to better understand the dynamics of workplace culture that affect employee participation in the courses, and to examine those insights in a way that will contribute to the design and promotion of courses that are beneficial to both workers and employers.

This chapter reviews literature dealing with the following: workforce demographics in the United States and increased language demands in today's workplace; the history and advantages of English as a Second Language instruction in the workplace; motivation and general language learning; motivation and workplace ESL; and the importance of supervisors to employee learning.

Communication Demands in Today's Workplace

Workforce Demographics

This literature review begins with a look at two coinciding trends in today's workplace: higher numbers of foreign born workers and the increasing communication demands placed on them. Between the years 1996 and 2000, the total U.S. labor force increased by 6.7 million workers. Almost half of that number were foreign born. Today, one in seven workers in the United States was born outside the country, up from one in seventeen in 1960 (Mosisa, 2002). Demographic trends contributing to the shrinking native born workforce include a decline in the birthrate after the Baby Boom (1946 to

1964) and the fact that that Baby Boom generation is now beginning to retire. Predictions are that in the year 2012, there will be 165.3 million jobs in the United States, but a labor force of only 162.3 million to fill them (Horrigan, 2004). How will this difference of three million job openings be addressed? Immigration, the primary driver of increased workforce diversity in the last half of the twentieth century, is expected to continue as a major source of labor (Toossi, 2002; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007).

Data has not been collected regarding the number of U.S. workers with limited English proficiency (LEP), but according to the 2000 U.S census, 6.5 million adults in the general population report that they speak English “not well” and three million “not at all” (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007).

Increased Language Demands in The New Workplace

Since the 1980's, it has become increasingly common for businesses in the United States to organize into self-managed work teams. The basis of this approach is the leveling of hierarchy in order to empower workers and increase their control and accountability. Employees are expected to participate in teams that make decisions and solve problems, and to document that they have done so. This assumes proficiency in both written and spoken English. Though the underlying philosophy of the participatory workplace is empowerment, it has the potential to disempower employees who do not understand or do not express themselves well in English. A lack of language and literacy skills may mark a worker, even one previously proven successful based on job

performance and skills, as a liability rather than an asset to his employer (Burnaby, Harper, & Peirce, 1992; Castleton, 2000; Farrell, 2000; Folinsbee, 2004; Harper, Peirce, & Burnaby, 1996; Hull, 1997; Hunter, 2004; Hunter, 2007; Jackson, 2004; Katz, 2000; Moore, 1999).

The introduction of self-managed work teams is not the only thing that can make a worker feel displaced in a long-held job. There is intense pressure on today's businesses, especially manufacturing concerns, to become certified by a national or international agency such as the International Organization for Standardization (ISO). Certification, meant to ensure quality and safety, is demanded by customers and considered necessary for survival in the global marketplace. A business seeking certification must demonstrate, via paperwork, conformance to internationally sanctioned standards. Correctly completed documentation is tantamount to evidence that regulations have been followed and problems have been solved. Every certified company develops a quality manual made up of the organization's quality policy, procedures used to meet requirements, and detailed processes showing how all work in the company is carried out. These processes document product identification and traceability, inspection, corrective action, and delivery (Defoe, 2004; Defoe, Folinsbee, & Belfiore, 2004; Farrell, 2002; Folinsbee, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Kleifgen, 2005).

Much written material in the workplace is so formal and densely worded as to be functionally inaccessible to many employees, especially those with limited English

proficiency (Hunter, 2004). Gallo says that “company documentation is often encoded in a baffling blend of legalese and technical obfuscations that confound even the most educated and experienced readers” (2002, p.51). Even so, because certification is so important, there is a danger that corporations will place more weight on documentation than they do on the actual practices of their workers. When representatives from certifying agencies visit worksites, they often spend more time auditing paperwork than observing people and machines. This can send the message that the generation of information is more important than the production of goods and services, and can devalue workers with limited language skills. (Folinsbee, 2004; Kleifgen, 2005).

In light of the increased language and literacy demands necessary to meet production quotas, comply with regulatory requirements, follow manufacturing protocol, address safety concerns and meet customer demands, some companies decide to sponsor ESL instruction for their employees (Boyle, 1999).

Workplace ESL Instruction

History

Employer-sponsored education has a long history in the United States. As early as 1913, company schools offered employee training in English, math, science, and citizenship. By 1914, there were enough employers sponsoring this kind of education to form the National Association of Corporation Schools. The belief that workers' need for basic education should be met with public dollars led to government-funded vocational

schools and later, as part of the War on Poverty in the 1960s, Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language instruction (Boyle, 1999).

At the end of the 20th century, the United States simultaneously experienced great economic expansion and a large increase in non-native English-speaking workers. As more LEP workers were hired, many employers expressed the need for expanded literacy training. From 1988 to 1996, the federal government funded workplace literacy demonstration projects, materials development and professional development, but it was the passage of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 that directly linked adult literacy education in the United States with employment goals (Imel, 2003). The stated purpose of the legislation is to

provide workforce investment activities...that increase the employment, retention, and earnings of participants, and increase occupational skill attainment by participants, and, as a result, improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the nation (U.S. Department of Education, 1998, section 106).

The Act authorized the creation of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), part of whose purpose was to provide support for workplace literacy in the form of resources and training materials for teachers and the creation of adult learning standards. Today, workplace ESL courses are provided by community colleges, school districts and private instructional firms. (Boyle, 1999; Mosisa, 2002).

Advantages of Workplace Education

Gallo (2002) calls workplace instruction an accessible, relevant and effective form of adult education. A major advantage of workplace ESL instruction is that it can reach learners who, for any number of reasons, do not have access to instruction in other settings. Community-based programs are chronically underfunded and often do not have sufficient capacity to meet demand (Boyle, 1999). Prospective students can be on waiting lists for many months before starting classes. Attending community-based ESL classes is difficult for people who do shift work or work more than one job. Others, when not at work, are busy with household and family responsibilities. Some female workers say that their husbands do not want them to learn English or will not allow them to go to school: ESL instruction offered under the employer's auspices may be the only opportunity these women will have to study. There are fewer transportation or child care problems with classes on work premises, which are usually held at least partially during normal work hours. Classes during paid work time provide a break from the work floor, an incentive for many employees. Some companies pay employees to attend class outside of regular work time or provide a financial incentive, such as a stipend or raise, if the employee completes the course. Even if there is no financial compensation, many workers appreciate the fact that their employer has organized a class and consider it a reward for their hard work (Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Duff, et. al., 1986; Harper, et. al., 1996).

Nonparticipation

Despite the perceived benefits, some employees, when offered a chance to participate in ESL instruction, decline to do so. Nonparticipation, often puzzling to company management, ESL educators and co-workers, is frequently attributed to the motivation level of the individual employee rather than the complex combination of people and dynamics that make up a workplace.

An examination of the literature concerning motivation and language learning reveals a shift in emphasis from the individual learner to the social situation in which the language is learned and used. What follows is a review of that research, and a discussion of how it can be applied to the workplace.

Motivation and Language Learning

Motivation

Learning a second language (L2) has a deeply social dimension. It requires exposure to, if not incorporation of much of the L2 culture. Because of this, the study of motivation in language learning was initially undertaken by social psychologists, rather than linguists (Dörnyei, 2003; Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

Behavioral scientists define motivation as the effort and perseverance necessary to act on a goal. In order to reach the goal of learning a language, a student has the responsibility to identify and implement learning strategies, to acquire language content

and skills, and to take risks to use the language in order to develop fluency. Motivation can be viewed as the willingness to carry out these responsibilities (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000; Gardner, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

The Language Learner as Individual

Until the late 1950's, it was generally agreed that the two components necessary for second language acquisition (SLA) were intelligence and verbal ability (Gardner, 2001). Differences in attainment were attributed to individual student aptitude, what is conventionally called having "an ear" or "a knack" for language learning. Gardner and Lambert (1972) hypothesized that this "knack" could be found in an individualized profile, some quantifiable measure of individual commitment that would explain why, given the same learning opportunities, some people learn a language well and others do not. They believed that attitudes, values, and motivation were basic elements of an individual's personality, and that situational factors such as quality of instruction had only limited effect on raising or lowering motivation level.

Gardner and Lambert (1972) suggested that there are two types of motivation: *instrumental* and *integrative*. A person with instrumental orientation is seen to have little interest in the target language community, but wants to learn its language for utilitarian purposes such as employment. An integratively oriented learner, on the other hand, is positive about and interested in interacting with members of the L2 group, and perhaps even wishes to become similar to them. Integrative orientation was believed to be the

more powerful of the two, causing a learner to be more likely to put forth the effort necessary to learn the new language well.

Instrumental and integrative orientations were seen to be, at least in part, determined by *social distance*. Social distance refers to the position of speakers of a minority language in relation to speakers of the target language community. The greater the distance, the more negative the attitudes these groups hold about each other, the less contact there is between their members, and the less likely language learning will occur. For example, ethnic stereotypes can strongly influence how a learner is viewed by the dominant language group. Nonnative speakers may be regarded with suspicion, kept at a distance, and therefore, denied access to authentic communication with speakers of the majority language. At the same time, the learner's community of origin may view speakers of the target language negatively and exert pressure on the learner not to give up membership in their group (Schumann, 1975, 1976).

Social distance theory suggests that as learners have positive experiences using the L2, they will gain more self-confidence, which will in turn generate motivation to learn more of the language. This overlooks how restricted opportunities are for many nonnative speakers to interact with English speakers. Inequitable power relations create inhibitions in language learners and prevent them from maximizing contact with target language speakers. Even learners with a strong desire to learn and a positive attitude toward the dominant English-speaking culture are not always given the opportunity to

speak, or may not take the chance if they fear ridicule. Reality is more complicated than simply choosing to speak or not to speak the target language. Yet it is usually the learners who are blamed for not integrating more fully into English-speaking society. Those who make little progress are often seen as undisciplined or unmotivated (Duff, Wong & Early, 2002; Hansen & Liu, 1997; Norton Peirce, 1995, 1997, 2000).

Social Identity and Language Learning

In the 1990's, research emphasis moved from the personality of an individual learner, understood to be static and often described as motivated/unmotivated or introverted/extroverted, to how L2 use is situated in and changed by social context. In order to understand why a vacillating level of commitment to L2 study and use can be seen within the same individual, sometimes within a single lesson or interaction, it was deemed necessary to look at aspects of a learner's life inside and outside the learning environment. This is called social identity.

Social identity is not fixed but flexible, tied to one's membership in some social groups and nonmembership in others. Any one person possesses a repertoire of social identities, determined by roles played in work, family or community settings. Language serves to enact social identity and display group membership (Dörnyei, 2003; McNamara, 1997; Rubenson & Schütze, 1993). Social identity is different from *cultural identity*, which is the relationship of an individual to others who have similar history, language, and ways of understanding the world (Hansen & Liu, 1997).

Norton Peirce (1995) studied five immigrant women in Canada to determine how social identity affected the ways they created, responded to, or resisted opportunities to speak English. Through diaries, questionnaires, interviews and home visits she learned that each woman, though highly motivated to learn English, was reticent to speak in certain social situations. A woman who had been a professional in her home country was uncomfortable speaking English to doctors, teachers or other Canadian professionals due to what she felt was her diminished status. Another woman did not like to speak in front of people from her L1 group who spoke English well.

Studying Hungarian teenagers learning English, Dörnyei and Kronos (2000) found students' level of engagement in language learning tasks to be situation-specific, rather than based on general motivation. The researchers looked at communication-oriented teaching methods which involved working in pairs or groups, and concluded that an individual learner's performance cannot be evaluated without taking into consideration the influence of peers. Specifically, it was determined that social status and perceived group cohesiveness affect engagement and finally, language output.

Malicky and Norman (1994) conducted a three-year study of the reasons for participation and persistence of ninety-four adults in literacy programs in Alberta, Canada. In the initial interview, participants were asked to indicate why they had entered the program. Thereafter, the subjects were interviewed at six-month intervals. If they were still attending classes, they were asked their reasons for continued participation. If

they had dropped out, they were asked their reasons for leaving. Subjects gave social reasons for their participation: becoming more independent, meeting family obligations, expanding social networks. The researchers concluded that reasons behind participation and persistence are tied to the identities of individuals and their interaction with their environment, rather than intrinsic personality traits, skill level, or the structure of the literacy program.

Miller (2000) linked language use, social interaction and identity as she studied immigrant students moving from an intensive English program to mainstream courses in Australian high schools. Ironically, learners had more real opportunities to speak English when their peers were other non-native speakers than they did after they moved into a situation where native English speaking students were the majority. There, the language learners defined themselves as “other” and distanced themselves from the dominant group. They felt they could not be insiders because they did not know how to say and do the right thing. Miller concluded that language acquisition and use cannot be isolated from social context.

As Norton Peirce (1995) studied successful language learners, she focused on the situations in which learning takes place, rather than isolating individual characteristics or learning strategies. Over a period of twelve months, the learners she followed kept records of their interactions with native English speakers. They reflected in a journal on their language learning experiences at home, at work, and in the community. Norton met

regularly with participants to discuss their insights and concerns. In addition, detailed questionnaires were administered at the beginning and end of the study.

Norton assigned primacy for successful second language acquisition to the opportunities learners have for authentic conversations in their communities and the response they receive there. For example, one of the women, whose job provided little opportunity for conversation, felt her co-workers identified her as stupid. After she changed to other jobs that allowed her to speak more, she learned more English and developed social affiliations. Norton and Toohey (2001) suggest that learners do not focus on learning language structures per se, but work to have their identities respected and valued. A more powerful identity, with its possibilities for conversation, is linked to language learning success.

Willingness to Communicate and Power Relations

Willingness to Communicate (WTC) describes the probability of a person engaging in discourse – speaking up - as opposed to staying quiet. WTC was originally conceptualized as an individual personality trait, rather than something that would vary according to situation, and was applied to communication in one's first language (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998).

MacIntyre, et. al (1998) applied the WTC concept to predicting L2 use. They wanted to know why some people avoid speaking up in an L2 while other, less proficient learners actively seek out opportunities to use the L2, and why the same learner is

inclined to speak in one situation and not another. Because communication is a social event, the researchers were resistant to explaining these variations in terms of individual profiles or personality differences. They identified over 30 variables that might have an impact on WTC in any specific situation, such as the learner's age, gender, and social class; the number of people present and their power relations; the degree of formality; and the topic discussed. For example, if an interlocutor, either native or fluent L2 speaker, possesses a superior command of English to that of the learner, making allowances for the learner's limitations by simplifying speech, slowing down, or making other attempts at negotiating meaning will affect the learner's WTC. Also possibly influential are elements that extend beyond immediate circumstances, such as the learner's prior experience using the L2 and orientation toward the target language community. Because the WTC theory looks at many variables beyond the personality traits of individual learners, including intergroup attitudes and social climate (Dörnyei, 2003; Dörnyei & Kornos, 2000), it lends itself well to examining specific environments, such as the workplace.

Investment in Language Learning

Addressing variation in the willingness to engage in L2-based interactions, Norton Peirce suggests that, rather than considering learner motivation, it is more useful to look at *investment* in language learning. Investment is described as the personal capital one is willing to devote to the pursuit of learning the L2, with the expectation of a return.

The return usually takes the form of access to resources - material or otherwise – which are unavailable without proficiency in the target language. Investment is different from Gardner’s instrumental motivation, a fixed personality trait. Rather, investment involves complex and multiple interests and reflects the learner’s relationship to the larger society. By investing in the target language, the learner is also investing in her own social identity (Norton Peirce, 1995, 1997).

Utilizing Norton Peirce’s concept of investment, McKay and Wong (1996) studied four Mandarin-speaking adolescent students moving through the seventh and eighth grades in a California public school. In an effort to understand why some learners take advantage of every available strategy to use and progress in English while others do not, the researchers interviewed the students, their families, peers and school personnel. In addition, they visited classes and collected writing samples. While assessing English language development, the researchers identified multiple identities of the students. All of the students shared the identity of recent arrivals to the U.S. and members of a “model minority”: Asians who are expected to excel in written work while speaking passively (p. 595). The students’ social context entailed simultaneously learning English and learning about power relations and rules of social - including racial - discourse in the United States. This was coincidental to doing the normal adolescent work of establishing their personal identities: musician, sportsman, male, female, person of color, etc. The researchers concluded that learners’ needs and identity struggles should not be viewed as

distractions from the task of language learning, but as the very factors that determine the level of investment in L2 learning.

Skilton-Sylvester (2002) examined how shifting identities and the day-to-day language learning contexts of adult Cambodian women shaped their investment in a Philadelphia ESL program. For example, the role of wife can translate to different identities and different investment in learning English. For one woman, who while single worked as a restaurant cashier, marriage brought an end to her participation in English class because she would no longer be working in that job. Another woman was married to a man who did not speak English. Because this woman had been designated as the language learner in the family, her identity as wife defined her investment in language learning. A third woman's husband had originally supported her participation, but changed his mind after her level of social interaction increased. He decided she would work in a job that demanded so much of her time that there was no time to attend class. This woman said that her husband did not want her to learn English because "maybe I will find a boyfriend" or "run away" (p. 17). For each of these three women, the identity of wife influenced her ability to maintain the identity of student. Similarly, Skilton-Sylvester found the roles of mother and worker brought different identities and different investment in learning English. She disputes the notion that coming to class is an individual decision which reflects interest in the course and internal motivation to learn English. Rather than viewing participation in ESL instruction as a completely voluntary

path to meeting goals, Skilton-Sylvester advises that context must be acknowledged, even as it pertains to the goal-setting itself because goals are not set in isolation, but influenced by culture. Individuals, contexts, and cultures are ever-changing and mutually influential.

Social Practice View

Today, language learning motivation is seen as more complicated than originally conceptualized: the manner in which a person responds to and creates opportunities to speak English is dependent on many, sometimes conflicting forces in his life. Instead of classifying an adult learner as motivated or not motivated and asking “Why doesn’t he want to attend ESL classes?”, the more appropriate questions may be “What is his history?”, “Who does he regularly come into contact with and what power relations are present?” and “What is going on in his life, both at and outside of work?” To consider these elements is to take a social practices view of language learning and use (Belfiore & Folinsbee, 2004; Hunter, 2004; Jackson, 2004). The social practice definition of literacy and language learning examines the multiple ways that language is used in a person’s life. Attention shifts away from the individual and internal cognitive processes of learning to the learner as a social being interacting with others in a community of practice (Taylor, 2006).

The social practices approach emerged at the end of the 1990’s, as the skill-based approach which had previously dominated the field of adult learning came into question

(Case, Ainsworth, & Emerson, 2004). Adult literacy researchers and practitioners began to see literacy not as a static or individual attribute, but one that is embedded in social and communicative practices. Social practice theory does not define literacy only as reading and writing. It also includes listening and speaking, as these are key to interacting effectively with others in a social world (Castleton, 2000; Gee, 2001).

A social practices view of language use requires an understanding of how learning is situated and enacted. Looking at workplaces as communities of language practice may bring us closer to understanding investment and participation levels in workplace ESL instruction.

Investment in Workplace ESL

The literature tells us that motivation for second language learning cannot only be viewed as an individual learner trait. Because language learning is a social undertaking, the context in which learning takes place and the roles played by various parties within that context must be taken into consideration. There are many factors at play, including learner identities, power relations, opportunities for communication using the second language, and the learners' orientation to speakers of the target language (Dörnyei & Kormos, 2000; Malicky & Norman, 1994; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Norton Peirce, 1995; Rubenson & Schütze, 1993). Understanding second language learning situated in the workplace requires consideration of the same elements present in any culture. Farrell

calls workplace language education a “strategic intervention in the social practices and social relationships of work” (2000, p.20).

The next section discusses factors that affect participation in workplace ESL, as suggested by the literature: structural limitations, mixed messages, uncertain outcomes, a workplace discourse that includes a worker deficit approach or limited opportunities to speak, workers’ multiple identities, social pressure, and diverse stakeholder perceptions. Following that is a look at the particular importance of the direct supervisors of LEP employees in the social practices of workplace language learning.

Structural Limitations

While investigating perceptions about Australian women’s nonparticipation in workplace language instruction, Milton (1999) found barriers to participation included inconsistent promotion of the program within the company and confusion about the need for supervisory approval to attend the course. Burnaby, et. al. (1992), studying workplace English programs in Canadian garment factories, also saw that some employees did not participate simply because they did not know about the classes or how to gain access to them. Sometimes supervisors were just as unclear as frontline workers about the status of the program within the company and its target population. Supervisors in the Canadian garment manufacturing plants found it difficult to get an answer from management about which and how many workers were to go to training, and the priority assigned to training within the company’s operations (Peirce, et. al., 1993).

Participation in ESL classes is sometimes related to the way workers are compensated for their work. In an Australian meat products factory (Milton, 1999), workers were paid for only half of the three hours they spent in class, which affected their pay and made them ineligible for overtime pay. Burnaby, et. al. (1992) found that some employees in a Canadian Levi-Strauss plant were reluctant to attend class because the time away from the work floor reduced their productivity level as calculated by the company and therefore, their earnings. My own experience includes teaching in a company in which employee wages were very low. Different departments competed for the highest productivity, with all the members of the winning department receiving a monetary bonus. Absence from the work floor resulting from going to class might take an individual employee (or her department) out of the running for the extra money.

Mixed Messages

At the same time as businesses articulate a commitment to providing educational opportunities for their workers, they must maintain profitability. Even as management expresses the importance of English instruction, production demands may override learning needs, resulting in workers being required to stay on the work floor rather than going to ESL class. Employees receive mixed messages: the company wants them to learn, but the company needs them to produce. This unclear directive affects supervisors, too, some of whom feel uncomfortable deciding who can go to class and who must stay behind. They do not know how to balance the benefits of sending their workers to class

with the work that needs to be done (Belfiore & Folinsbee, 2004; Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Gallo 2002; Milton, 1999; Peirce, et. al, 1993).

Moore (1999) directed a large project, funded by the United States government, whose focus was to investigate issues of empowerment and workplace learning. After observing companies that called themselves “learning organizations” yet did not allow employees to attend class, she emphasized the need for workers to be provided a clear and honest message about the kind of support they can expect for attending classes.

I have seen that these mixed messages can also frustrate workplace educators, who sometimes find it difficult to understand why they have been assigned to a company and have worked hard to create lessons, only to see their students held back from attending the scheduled class. This experience is sometimes interpreted as supervisor resistance, when it may, in fact, be beyond the supervisor’s control (That is not to say that supervisor opposition does not exist in some cases.).

Yet another kind of mixed message occurs when there is a mismatch between company policy and practice. Workers learn to navigate contradictory messages: they have been trained in the importance of following written procedures and documentation, but the reality of the work floor tells them that getting the product out is more important than paperwork (Belfiore and Folinsbee, 2004). Workers in this situation may see reduced value in studying the language needed to complete documentation if they are being told - directly or indirectly - not to worry about the paperwork.

Uncertain Outcomes

There is little empirical evidence that clearly links workplace ESL instruction to increased employee productivity, retention, advancement, or income (Gallo, 2002). Even so, employers and workplace educators sometimes base promotion of courses on the premise that improved English skills will open up opportunities for career advancement. Across business environments, worker belief in advancement is a significant predictor of motivation to take advantage of training (Clark, Dobbins, & Ladd, 1993). However, Gallo (2002) cautions against an overly simplistic view that language instruction will lead to promotions. Within the reality of the workplace, there may be little actual opportunity for advancement, English or no English, and LEP workers who are aware of this may not be invested in ESL classes.

Even if measurable outcomes are not realized, many employers experience non-quantifiable benefits from ESL courses, such as increased worker self-confidence and ability to communicate, positive attitudinal change, reduced inter-group tension, stronger work teams, and loyalty on the part of workers who feel that their employer cares enough about them to invest in their education (Boyle, 1999; Burnaby, et.al., 1992; Castleton, 2000; Duff, et. al, 1992; Goldstein, 1995; Harper, et.al., 1996; Hull, 1997).

Workplace Discourse

An alienating discourse and the influence of power groups within a workplace culture can pose formidable obstacles to participation in ESL programs (Milton, 1999). If an instructional program is born of a worker deficit approach or if communication in English is not facilitated or rewarded, lowered employee investment may be seen.

Worker Deficit Approach. The worker deficit view attributes economic downturns and the failure to compete in the international marketplace to the low literacy of the labor force. As work environments have become more data-driven and language skills have come under increased employer scrutiny, workers have sometimes been blamed for communication breakdown, lack of productivity, noncohesive teams, and workplace injuries. This view can set up a we/they dichotomy and distract from larger institutional problems (Castleton, 2000; Hull, 1997).

A narrow skill-based view does not consider how language is woven into the social relationships, identities, power issues and conflicting perceptions of the various actors within a workplace. The worker deficit approach can create an expectation of unilateral learning: LEP workers have to change - to learn English - but others in the surrounding culture do not have to adjust their practices in any way to facilitate better communication and understanding. Workers who feel blamed for their company's problems may have diminished investment in language instruction (Belfiore, 2004; Castleton, 2000; Defoe, 2004; Folinsbee, 2004; Gallo, 2002; Hunter, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Katz, 2000; Li, 2000).

Some employers who use the participatory team approach assume that the messages promoted in the workplace would automatically be embraced if employees simply had the language skills to understand those messages. Studying workplace ESL programs in three Canadian garment manufacturing plants, Harper, et. al. (1996) found otherwise. They observed workers who attended classes for years and developed English proficiency, yet did not participate in decision making processes, task forces, committees, etc. because of the social cost of doing so. Describing workplace ESL classes held in an electronics plant in California's Silicon Valley, Katz (2000) reminds us that silence should not automatically be equated with low language skill. Some employees come from cultures in which it is not acceptable to speak up. They may be operating under a politeness system which dictates that it is not the place of a subordinate to express an opinion, especially one that differs from that of others. To do so sounds argumentative. Some workers may come from a background where speaking up was politically and personally dangerous.

Similarly, it should not be assumed that the only reason employees do not complete documentation carefully and correctly is that they have low literacy skills. Applying the social practices theory, we may see that resistance to workplace text is actually resistance to the message found in that text. Rather than viewing paperwork as quality assurance, workers might see it as something that can get them in trouble by documenting mistakes and creating traceability (Belfiore & Folinsbee, 2001; Hunter,

2004). I have taught in more than one manufacturing setting in which production workers have been trained that quality is always more important than quantity. They knew this as the official company line yet confided to me, as did their supervisors, that quantity often took precedence in the everyday world of pressure to complete product orders. In these situations, supervisors and line leads did not place importance on the correct completion of paperwork. However, when audits turned up deficient documentation, it was attributed to the poor English skills of front-line workers, rather than the direction they had received. Upper management in these companies did not understand - or chose not to recognize - what was happening, and explained paperwork noncompliance as a language skills issue.

Opportunity to Speak. Workers may see no need to participate in ESL courses if there is not an opportunity for them to put the English taught to practical use or if their attempts to speak English are met with supervisor impatience and criticism, rather than encouragement (Gallo, 2002). This is not a skills issue, but a reflection of the social practices of the workplace. If the workplace is structured in a way that restricts, rather than encourages, opportunities to use language, possibility is denied to language learners ((Belfiore & Folinsbee, 2004; Hull, 1997; Norton & Toohey, 2001). An employer's commitment to increased communication must include creating opportunities to speak English and incorporating the expectation that English will be spoken (Katz, 2000).

Workers' Multiple Identities

While encouraging employees to better themselves by increasing their language skills, we must be sensitive to their social, political, and economic histories. Workers respond differently to the opportunity to participate in ESL instruction, depending on circumstances of their lives. Some bear effects of the trauma of war, torture, and refugee camps. Many have had to abandon home, property, family, culture and profession. Their economic, physical and psychological challenges may be too great to add language learning to the load. Previous education is also a factor. Schooling in their native country may have been a negative experience for some workers. Some are not literate in any language, and find learning English too daunting a task. Others might have experienced the particular oppression visited on educated people by some regimes. (Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Goldstein, 1995).

Cultural and religious identity can influence a worker's desire to participate in ESL classes. Culture is the reference point from which a person takes action and makes meaning, which affects, but does not completely determine a person's behavior (Lee & Sheared, 2002). Culture and religion are inextricable for some groups of people. I have seen that some Muslim students find it very foreign to talk about goals. They say that in Islam, one never thinks about tomorrow, as it is in God's hands. Without an orientation toward the future, one may not have high investment in changing one's present. Buddhist students may be orientated toward finding their path, but not necessarily choosing the path or setting goals in order to reach it (Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). These approaches are

contrary to the general U.S. value of making one's own way, and may seem frustratingly fatalistic to the ears of a manager who wishes to help a good employee advance in the company. They also may influence a person's investment in learning English.

To succeed, workplace classroom contexts must tap into who the learners are beyond simply workers. While understanding the value of employment skills, individuals also seek to gain language skills that are useful in social and personal settings. Employees will be more engaged if they can apply the language they are learning in the workplace to settings outside the job. Milton (1999) appropriates contemporary business parlance and reminds us that in order to cultivate investment in ESL instruction, courses need to "add value" to the lives of the workers themselves, not just to the company. (Boyle, 1999; Gallo, 2000; Katz, 2001; Moore, 1999; Skilton-Sylvester 2002.)

Social Pressure

Work is a social activity, and the workplace is a community: co-workers form social networks that provide support, share information and help each other cope with change. Because the language we use is a primary identifier of the groups we belong to, learning and speaking English may come with higher costs than benefits for some workers (Miller, 2000; Milton, 1999).

Goldstein (1995) interviewed women who had emigrated from Portugal to Canada, where they worked on an assembly line. They were a tightly-knit working unit, and speaking their first language (L1) functioned as a symbol of membership. Any

woman who used English was seen as betraying the group and her roots, and was relegated to outsider status. For these women, participating in company-sponsored ESL instruction would have meant paying the cost of losing her friends and their help on the job.

Wales (1994) saw that some participants in Australian workplace classes faced ridicule and hostility from co-workers who felt that studying English showed a lack of solidarity with fellow immigrants. Harper, et. al. (1996) heard from some workers that peers found the speaking of English to be offensive because they considered it “showing off” (p.6). This is consistent with what I have heard from some participants in workplace classes I have taught: co-workers tell them they are wasting their time learning English, or ask why they think they are “better” than others.

Milton (1999), also in Australia, studied women’s nonparticipation in workplace language instruction, and found that some workers felt pressured by their peers not to attend English class because to do so was considered capitulation to management. Refusing something to which management had assigned importance was a way to show collective “push back.” This workplace had adopted the new empowerment discourse, which the employees did not understand and had no interest in learning. Nonparticipation was one way they felt they could exercise some control over their circumstances. Ironically, the route these workers took to taking control was directly contradictory to management’s empowerment discourse.

Access to peers is important, and sometimes the need for affiliation wins out over the need to learn English. In the Canadian garment factories Peirce, Harper & Burnaby (1993) studied, ESL classes were held during employee lunch breaks. Some workers withdrew from English classes rather than missing out on eating and chatting with their friends. Workers tend to form social groups made of those from their language community (Burnaby, et. al., 1992). This has been evident in settings where I have worked: many employees wish to share prayer, dietary traditions or social customs with people from a similar background. In some cases relationships pre-date the workplace: co-workers may have grown up together in their birth country or survived refugee experiences together. The identity of worker may be less important than that of friend, associate, or relative, and individuals may not want to jeopardize these relationships over a few hours of English class.

As companies organize ESL courses, it is important to consider the importance of their employees' peer relationship, which may take precedence over the need to learn English as a path to personal gain. Employers must also examine the discourse that is operating within the company: nonparticipation in English learning may be seen as group solidarity or resistance to management.

Diverse Stakeholder Perceptions

The profile of a particular business is often expressed in terms of its mission statement, standardized processes, flow charts and profit margins, but it is human beings

with their histories, perceptions and group dynamics that form the unique culture of each workplace. Research on motivation for second language learning and use in the workplace has often focused on a narrow representation of involved stakeholders, with the strongest voices given to educators and worker/learners. Yet even with limited examination of the perspectives of managers, supervisors, human resource personnel and co-workers of learners, many different orientations toward on-site ESL instruction have been unearthed (Boyle, 1999; Wales, 1994).

As director of federally-funded project investigating issues of empowerment and workplace language learning, Moore (1999) discovered discrepancies in how workplace ESL is viewed by different layers of organizational hierarchy. Upper managers, who wish their company to be seen as a “learning organization” may see instruction as essential to building strong work teams. Supervisors, however, might not support their employees in attending classes and English-speaking co-workers might disparage LEP workers’ attempts at participating in work teams. Moore’s impression was that although employee empowerment may be a stated value of a corporation, greater worker independence sometimes leads to oppression by lower management, who fear the loss of control they’ve enjoyed in the traditional social order of the workplace. This fits with my experience of the line lead who assigned more physically demanding work to employees who participated in ESL class than to those who did not.

Wales (1994) documented the experiences of instructors of workplace English in Australia. Data was collected through questionnaires and interviews. Instructors observed managers who supported workers in receiving instruction and realizing their potential, while supervisors and co-workers in the same organization thought that LEP employees should have learned English already and that any difficulties they were having were due to laziness, stupidity, or lack of commitment to their new country. This second view was quite widespread, manifested in attitudes ranging from “paternalistic to hostile” (p. 202).

Boyle (1999) studied Massachusetts employers who sponsored workplace classes. In interviews with managers, classroom observations, and informal conversations with teachers, she heard about the resentment that surfaced among supervisors and co-workers when employees left their work assignments to attend classes. In one case, this fanned already-existing ethnic tension.

Burnaby, Harper and Peirce (1992) studied the attitudes of an array of stakeholders in Canadian garment factories which sponsored workplace ESL instruction. They conducted interviews with human resource personnel and other managers, supervisors, workers who were currently taking and had previously taken the courses, eligible workers who did not participate in the courses, and instructors. They visited the ESL classes in addition to observing oral and written communication patterns of the workplace. Workers who participated in ESL instruction reported experiencing

resentment from those around them. Supervisors who needed to adjust their work floors to accommodate the absence of employees going to ESL class viewed the educational program as more work for themselves. Both supervisors and peers questioned the fairness of a policy that released certain workers from their duties, but required other employees to pursue educational opportunities off the clock. Native English speakers wondered why class participants had not learned English before they started their jobs, and suggested the LEP workers were going to class simply to collect the stipend offered by the company. Co-workers who were also non-native speakers, but who had been in the country for a longer time, said that they had had to make their own way without help and wondered why newer arrivals were entitled to this company benefit (Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Peirce, et. al., 1993).

There is no easy answer to why employees do or do not participate in workplace ESL instruction. The literature suggests many factors that affect worker investment in employer-sponsored ESL programs: structural limitations, mixed messages, uncertain outcomes, a workplace discourse that includes a worker deficit approach or limited opportunities to speak, workers' multiple identities, social pressure, and diverse stakeholder perceptions. I believe that worker participation in and company support for workplace ESL instruction will be higher if courses are designed, promoted and delivered in a way that recognizes the interests and needs of various stakeholders within the culture of a business. In particular, an awareness of the attitudes and beliefs that front line

supervisors bring to the planning and implementation of the programs may bring us closer to understanding and facing employee nonparticipation.

Importance of Supervisors

I have chosen to focus on supervisors who work closely with LEP employees because, other than the workers themselves, they are the company stakeholders most directly affected by a workplace ESL program (Burnaby, et. al., 1992). Because LEP employees and their native English speaking peers often do not socialize with each other, supervisors may have more English language contact with workers who are learning English than do any other group of people. The supervisor's role in encouraging employees to express themselves in English is crucial. In Canadian garment factories, workers often expressed a desire to improve communication with their supervisors (Harper, et al., 1996; Peirce, et. al. 1993).

Business management research shows that the quality of the supervisor-employee relationship influences the daily experience and long-term success of an employee. Supervisors allocate and organize work and make decisions about training, promotions, and wages. Truckenbrodt (2000) administered questionnaires to supervisors and the workers they supervised in an information technology company in the Midwest. Both groups were asked to characterize the working relationship of supervisors and employees. The results showed that employees who feel that their supervisors support them and recognize their potential are more loyal to their employer and more committed to their

work. Truckenbrodt concluded that because supervisors can be role models and a positive influence on those they supervise, supervisor training should emphasize mentoring, effective interpersonal communications, and the joint development of goals.

Clark, Dobbins & Ladd (1993) sampled 245 participants from training courses in twelve organizations. Trainees completed a questionnaire assessing their motivation to learn from the training offered them. Results showed a link between worker anticipation of supervisor support and motivation to participate in and learn from training. The conclusion was that supervisors must be made aware of the importance of creating an atmosphere which encourages experimentation with new ideas and new skills.

Supervisors can have a directly negative impact on the language learning experience of workers. One way to do this is to deny workers permission to attend class. Another is to expect immediate and dramatic improvements in language skills and productivity. Employees who have participated in training need to believe that their supervisors will be patient and show tolerance for mistakes while the workers try out their new skills (Boyle, 1999). To avoid these pitfalls, supervisors must be knowledgeable about the course of instruction and believe in its importance. To this end, some companies offer special training classes for supervisors to better understand the complexity of the language acquisition process and to build support for language courses.

Good communication between supervisors of class participants and workplace ESL instructors is key. Supervisors can tell teachers about the language needs that should

be addressed in instruction and can report on the progress of individuals outside the class. In turn, teachers can help supervisors find ways to support learning (Burnaby, et. al, 1992). Supervisors can act as coaches who help reinforce language learning in the context of work, as employees attempt to transfer learning from the classroom to the job.

Significance of This Study

Research has shown that direct supervisors play an important role in their employees' participation and application of training. However, these findings have not been widely applied to ESL training. Despite evidence that supervisors strongly influence the learning and use of English by their employees, in my experience they are often left out of decision making about workplace ESL programs. By soliciting input from supervisors in the planning and implementation of workplace ESL courses, I believe we will see a higher level of investment on their part and on the part of the employees they supervise, leading to more successful instruction programs.

Conclusion

At the same time that the labor force in the United States becomes more dependent on foreign born workers, the need for English language proficiency is increasing in the workplace. Widespread adoption of participatory management models and international certification demand worker proficiency in both written and spoken English. In light of these changes, some employers sponsor workplace ESL instruction. Despite the perceived benefits of workplace ESL courses, some employees choose not to

participate. These workers may be seen as unmotivated by management, co-workers and teachers who view language learning as training in a discrete skill, separate from the social constructs of the workplace.

Language learning motivation, once characterized in the literature as an individual pursuit, is now seen to be a social process, affected by the learner's identity, roles and interactions. Taking a social practices approach to language learning and use in a workplace requires an understanding of its people and their relationships. An employee's choice to participate in workplace ESL instruction may not be as individual a matter as it first appears. There may be costs as well as benefits associated with learning and using English in the workplace, and if workers perceive costs to be too high, they could resist participating in ESL classes. Factors that have been shown to affect participation include structural limitations, mixed messages, uncertain outcomes, a workplace discourse that includes a worker deficit approach or limited opportunities to speak, workers' multiple identities, social pressure, and diverse stakeholder perceptions. Of particular importance is the relationship between employees who are learning English and their direct supervisors.

By examining the perspective of supervisors in companies that offer workplace ESL instruction, I hope to better understand the dynamics of workplace culture that affect employee participation in the courses, and to examine those insights in a way that will

contribute to the design and promotion of courses that are beneficial to both workers and employers.

The following chapter describes the research method used to study the perspectives of supervisors in workplaces where ESL instruction has been held.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

What are the perceptions of supervisors regarding workplace ESL courses and how workplace culture affects participation in them? This chapter describes qualitative research methods used to seek the views of supervisors in medical manufacturing companies that sponsored workplace ESL courses. Understanding the supervisor perspective may be useful in improving the design and delivery of workplace ESL instruction.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

Qualitative research dissects a phenomenon in order to look at its parts. This type of research is well-suited to the study of human organizations, such as a workplace (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998; Swanson, Watkins & Marsick, 1997). One type of qualitative research is ethnography, whose purpose is to understand a culture through the perspective of its members, and especially to elicit the way they make meaning of

particular events or behaviors (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). My study is ethnographic, in that I am examining the beliefs, values, and attitudes underlying the behavior of a specific group of people: those who directly supervise workers who are candidates for workplace ESL instruction.

The researcher

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for the collection and analysis of data. The researcher must seek balance between being involved in, yet distant from, the data and she must identify her own values, assumptions and biases (Creswell, 2003; Marsick & Watkins, 1997; Swanson, Watkins & Marsick 1997). I bring bias to this study in that I had developed relationships with class participants and supervisors in the workplaces which were the settings of my planned research. In two of the workplaces, I was the sole curriculum developer and instructor for the ESL program and I also provided communication training to supervisors. In the third setting – a program much larger than the other - I came in as a teacher after the curriculum had been written and the instructional program had been in place for more than a year. In that workplace, I was one of four instructors who taught workers from three different shifts. I taught a pronunciation class made up of learners from a variety of departments, and I had little to no contact with supervisors. The twelve – week session in which I taught turned out to be the last session the program was in place.

I formed warm relationships with a majority of the workers who participated in the classes I taught. In all three workplaces, some course participants shared stories of what they perceived to be negative attitudes or unfair treatment from supervisors. At times employees would ask for my assistance with language they could use to stand up for themselves or to report wrongdoing. Many other course participants told me that their

supervisors were supportive of employees participating in class, using English on the work floor, and advancing in the company. These anecdotes colored my view of supervisors, leading me to believe that they held a variety of attitudes toward ESL instruction.

Very rarely, I had a class participant who unashamedly admitted that he was only in class to get away from the line and to collect the stipend. A student fitting this profile might forget to bring course materials or appear less than fully engaged in class. In a case like this, I sincerely understood why a supervisor might be less than enthusiastic about adjusting production in order to send the employee to class.

I had varying experiences with the supervisors in these workplaces. Occasionally, supervisors would disparage the motivation or cultural practices of employees, but for the most part, I found supervisors supportive of their employees and helpful to me as I developed and taught the courses. When the classes were in session, I was disappointed by the generally low level of response I received to my requests for supervisor feedback about employees' language learning and use, but I learned to alter my expectations. I also saw evidence of upper management or the human resources department in a company making decisions that directly affected supervisors without seeking supervisor input, and I appreciated the difficult position that supervisors were put in as a result. Overall, I respected the difficult and pressured job supervisors had, and was aware of the difficulty involved in releasing workers from the work floor in order to attend class.

In summary, I had previously been involved - to various degrees – in the culture of each of the three workplaces in which I planned to do my research. In one of them, I formed generally, though not universally, positive relationships with supervisors as they helped me understand the work that my ESL students performed and the environment in which they performed it. In the second company, the supervisors were more mixed in their communication with me regarding their employee’s language use and learning. In the third workplace, I had virtually no relationship with the supervisors previous to interviewing them. I had, however, heard from other instructors and from school district personnel that this company’s management had been very supportive of their employees’ language learning. The success of the program led me to believe this was true. These varying experiences led me to expect a diversity of perspectives among the supervisors I would interview.

The setting

My planned research was to be set in three medical device assembly plants in a large Midwestern city, all of which had previously sponsored workplace ESL courses for their employees. In all three settings, assessment and instruction were provided by the adult education department of a local school district. The programs were partially funded with federal and state dollars and partially with fees paid by the employer. In compliance with government requirements for adult education, a standardized assessment was used to determine the level of English functioning of the employees. Instruction level ranged

from beginning to intermediate. In all of the companies, assembly workers follow written procedures, comply with documentation requirements to ensure quality, and are officially encouraged to participate in work teams. In each company, a customized curriculum was developed that included functional skills such as reading and following work processes, asking questions and speaking up on the job, completing quality documentation. The curriculum also included understanding measurement and equipment, reporting accidents and calling in sick, reading benefits information and completing benefits paper work, and participating in work teams. In one company, a pronunciation course was offered on each of three work shifts.

Participants

Participants in this study were supervisors who work directly with LEP workers who participated in ESL instruction. These supervisors, as part of their company's ESL program, had received training in cultural influences on language use and strategies for communication with LEP employees. I planned to speak with two supervisors from each of three companies, but unfortunately, I was only able to secure interviews with two supervisors, both from the same company. The supervisors interviewed had had input into the curricula of the ESL courses offered in their companies; they were asked to identify language essential to the job, and the circumstance of communication breakdown. During the early stages of the ESL program – before I was part of it –

supervisors were apprised of course content so they could reinforce learning on the job. There was less of this kind of communication with the pronunciation class I taught.

Because I joined this program in its final stages, after it was well-established and the curriculum already developed, I had little contact with supervisors while I was teaching. I had not met the supervisors I interviewed for this study. In order to obtain the company's consent to do this research, I contacted the training director who had been the company's primary organizer of the program. She provided me with the names of two supervisors who were willing to be interviewed.

Data Collection

My research objective was to ascertain perceptions of the frontline supervisors of employees who participate in workplace ESL instruction, particularly regarding dynamics within the workplace culture that might affect employee participation. Stemming from themes established in the literature, the interview questions I used were grouped into five categories. Within each of these categories, several related questions were asked of the supervisors. Categories were as follows:

1. Needs and opportunities for workers to use English
2. Supervisor input into their company's decision to offer workplace ESL instruction
3. Balancing production demands with educational needs
4. Reasons employees participate in workplace ESL classes

5. What workplace educators should know

In order to address the components of the research objective, I used two approaches to data collection: personal interviews and an attitudinal survey. These two instruments are described below.

Personal interviews

The intent of an interview is to understand individuals' experience by having them describe their own world (Creswell, 2003). Anthropologists and sociologists use the term *informer* to describe a good interviewee: one who understands a culture well enough to explain to the researcher what is going on (Merriam, 1998). I hoped to tap this insider status in my interviews with supervisors. In e-mail correspondence used to set up appointments and at the beginning of every interview I outlined my purpose: to get the perspective of supervisors about what happened with workplace ESL in the company and how workplace ESL programs could be better designed in the future.

I used a semi-structured interview, utilizing a set list of questions (Appendix A) because I wanted to see how each supervisor viewed the same themes. At the same time, I used an open-ended, conversational tone in order to encourage participants to share their insights. This structure allowed for probing (asking for more details and clarification), and left an opening for interviewees to provide me with new topics or issues that I hadn't known about or thought of. I had originally envisioned face-to-face interviews, but in light of the difficulty I had reaching and getting response from the supervisors I wished to

speak with, I realized that the only way I would be able to collect any data was via telephone interviews. As I spoke to the supervisors, I took notes for each question asked. In order to facilitate candor, I guaranteed anonymity to all participants. They were assured my notes would not be available to anyone but me.

Attitudinal survey

Bias may be present in personal interviews (Creswell, 2003). Anonymous surveys encourage respondents to be truthful and are, therefore, useful for collecting information on sensitive matters (Patten, 2001). To encourage candor, I used a second source of data collection. After the telephone interview, study participants were sent an attitudinal survey, which they were asked to complete and send back to the researcher by mail. A self-addressed, stamped envelope was provided. Respondents were ensured of confidentiality with this instrument.

The attitudinal survey (Appendix B) used a Likert-type format. A Likert scale asks respondents to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with simple declarative statements (Patten, 2001). The survey listed statements consistent with my research objective and asked supervisors to rate the degree to which they agreed with statements regarding issues that might surface in a workplace offering ESL courses. There was also space provided in which supervisors could provide further written comments.

Analysis

In order to establish similarities or differences in the responses provided by supervisors, my notes from their interviews were compared. Interview results were summarized according to theme and put into a table format. The Information that emerged was summarized, compared, and analyzed in narrative form. Quotations which illustrated the themes or provided particular insight were included as a way to lend credibility to my analysis of supervisor responses. Results of the attitudinal survey were entered and presented in the survey form.

This chapter has described data collection methods used to seek the perceptions of supervisors in medical manufacturing companies that had sponsored workplace ESL courses. The following chapter presents the results of the interviews. Chapter Five discusses the implications of these findings for workplace ESL instruction and makes recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

Language learning and use are greatly influenced by social practices of the culture in which they are situated (Belfiore & Folinsbee, 2004; Hunter, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Taylor, 2006). What insights can supervisors provide into how design and implementation of workplace ESL instruction, as well as factors within the culture of the workplace, influence investment and participation?

Literature regarding the motivation to learn and use an L2 has shifted from the view of motivation as an individualized, static trait to a reflection of a learner's identity in the surrounding culture (Dörnyei, 2003; Dörnyei & Kronos, 2000; Hansen & Liu, 1997; Malicky & Norman, 1994; McNamara, 1997; Miller, 2000; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Norton Peirce, 1995; Rubenson & Schütze, 1993) In fact, many theorists now find the term *investment* more pertinent than *motivation* when referring to a learner's commitment to language acquisition (McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton Peirce, 1995, 1997; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002).

Research into employee investment in ESL learning and use in the workplace has identified the following barriers to participation: structural limitations; mixed messages; uncertain outcomes; an alienating workplace discourse, including a worker deficit approach and limited opportunity to speak; workers' multiple identities; social pressure and diverse perceptions of various company stakeholders (Belfiore, 2004; Belfiore & Folinsbee, 2004; Boyle, 1999; Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Castleton, 2000; Clark, et. al. 1993;

Defoe, 2004; Folinsbee, 2004; Gallo, 2002; Goldstein, 1995; Harper, et. al., 1996; Hull, 1997; Hunter, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Katz, 2000; Li, 2000; Miller, 2000; Milton, 1999; Moore, 1999; Peirce, et. al., 1993; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002; Wales, 1994).

Because of the particular importance of the relationship between supervisors and the employees they direct (Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Clark, et. al., 1993; Harper, et. al., 1996; Peirce, et. al., 1993; Truckenbrodt, 2000) I chose to interview supervisors in companies that had sponsored workplace ESL instruction. The purpose of the interview was to understand the supervisors' perceptions of the need for English language instruction in their companies, the way the course was implemented, and environmental and cultural factors that influenced participation. The interview questions used (Appendix A) were grouped into five categories, related to the aforementioned barriers to participation.

I had originally planned to interview six supervisors in three different workplaces. However, it proved difficult to get in contact with people I had previously worked with. In two of the companies, the human resources people I had known were no longer there, which made it challenging to obtain company consent to do the study. Once I had consent, I attempted to reach several of the supervisors I knew. Some of them had left the companies and several of those who were still in the same positions did not respond, even to a second request. Two supervisors, who had been highly supportive of the ESL program and helpful to me as an instructor, indicated that they wished they could help,

but they did not have time to talk to me. Another initially agreed to speak with me, but did not reply to my attempts to schedule an interview. During the time I worked with them, certain supervisors expressed negativity about their company's ESL program, and I had hoped to be able to include their perspectives in my results. Declining to be interviewed may reflect their attitude about their employees' English use and learning. Other factors influencing the low level of response may have been the time lapsed since I had worked with these supervisors (two to three years), and to their heavy workload. In the end, I interviewed two supervisors who work in the same company.

An attitudinal survey (Appendix B) was used as a form of triangulation. Surveys were mailed to the supervisors who were interviewed, along with a self-addressed stamped envelope to facilitate return.

Interviews

Interview results are organized according to the following themes:

- Needs and opportunities for workers to use English
- Supervisor input into the decision to offer workplace ESL instruction
- Balancing production demands with educational needs
- Reasons employees participate in ESL classes
- What workplace educators should know

Figure 4.1 represents a side by side comparison of supervisor response, according to theme. Following that, a narrative of interview responses is provided.

Figure 4.1: Summary of Interview Responses

Theme	Supervisor A	Supervisor B
<i>Years in company</i>	8	6
<i>Years in current position</i>	8	5
<i>Percentage non-native English speaking workers (est.)</i>	80-90%	90%
<i>Needs and opportunities for workers to use English</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow manufacturing processes • Communicate with other team members • “English only” policy • Respond to regulator questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow manufacturing processes • Communicate with other team members • “English only” policy • Understand training
<i>Input into company’s decision to offer ESL instruction</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “huge” amount of input • Supervisors unanimously in favor; upper management ambivalent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not have input • Unaware of disagreement among company stakeholders
<i>Balancing production demands with educational needs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor cooperation • Non-native speakers not in class expressed resentment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisors “worked it out” with teachers • expression of resentment about workers in class who “didn’t need to be”
<i>Reasons employees participate in workplace ESL classes</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve English • advance in company • get out of work (initially) • nonparticipation due to timidity, age, identity disagreement about proficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve English • advance in company • get out of work • nonparticipation due to timidity, culture
<i>What workplace educators</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work teams strengthened • Individual confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work teams strengthened • Benefit to company

should know

level increased

- Gender disparity in interest

Theme I: Needs and opportunities for workers to use English

Research has shown that workers' investment in learning English may be diminished if they do not have opportunities to put the language to practical use (Belfiore & Folinsbee, 2004; Hull, 1997; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Gallo, 2002). There is clearly opportunity to use English in the workplace which was the setting of my research. Both supervisors I interviewed said that it is imperative that frontline employees, whose position title is operator, use English to do a good job. Both said that reading and following processes (step-by-step procedures) is crucial. If operators cannot demonstrate that they understand and are following a process, the result may be a defective product, which could endanger lives (the company manufactures devices for implant into patients' bodies). In addition, mistakes could cause the company to face consequences from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the federal agency that inspects the manufacture of medical devices. When FDA auditors visit a work floor, they ask operators to point out the exact step they are on in the written process. As one supervisor told me, if an operator "shows the wrong thing, the company can get into trouble with the FDA."

While the supervisors considered reading the most important English skill needed by operators, both also mentioned the necessity of oral communication for operators so that they can communicate with one another, with supervisors, and with representatives

of the company's quality control department. One supervisor said he believes the greatest need for workers to use English on the work floor is so that misunderstandings are avoided. His employees come from many different language and cultural backgrounds, and he said that it is "too tough" to try to get people to work as a team if they are not speaking the same language. Because there were previously conflicts between employees with different L1s (not understanding each other, thinking that another group was "talking about them"), the company has now instituted a formal expectation that everyone must use English on the work floor. An employee who violates the policy can receive a warning, and even be terminated from his job. Both supervisors mentioned that this rule is difficult to enforce, but that it has pushed some employees who were previously timid about speaking English to do so.

The "English only" policy was also instituted to make sure that all workers receive exactly the same training, imperative for quality and regulatory purposes in an atmosphere of such exacting manufacturing standards. One supervisor said that before the requirement was instituted, if workers told peers in their L1 how something was to be done, supervisors could not be sure that the correct information was being conveyed.

Both supervisors indicated that the encouragement workers receive to use English on the job extends beyond the English-only requirement. Less formal methods are also used, such as supervisors circulating on the work floor, asking workers to explain what they are doing and which step they are on. By incorporating the expectation that English

will be spoken, this workplace shows a commitment to increased communication (Katz, 2002).

Supervisors brought up several factors which might discourage workers from speaking English, including lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, and the fact that it is “easier” to use one’s first language. One supervisor also mentioned social pressure from others in a worker’s language group to speak the L1 rather than English. This is consistent with the findings of Miller (2000) and Milton (1999). Because the language used is a primary identifier of the groups we belong to, using English may be seen by some non-native speakers as a form of denial of one’s community.

Theme II: Supervisor input into the decision to offer workplace ESL instruction

The two supervisors interviewed said that they had had a good deal of input into decisions about offering ESL classes and their instructional content. Supervisors were involved from the beginning in deciding who would go to class and how the program would be instituted in the company. Both said that the decision to offer the classes was a good one: one supervisor said that the company, a vast majority of whose frontline workers have limited English, had for years encouraged employees to attend community-based ESL courses. Even when employees were told at performance reviews that low English proficiency was holding them back from advancing within the company, their general response was that they were not able to attend classes due to the constraints of time and domestic responsibilities.

Because previous research has revealed diversity of stakeholder perceptions regarding workplace ESL (Boyle, 1999; Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Moore, 1999; Peirce, et. al., 1993; Wales, 1994), I was curious to find out the specific experience of the supervisors I interviewed. They told me that within their company, there was unanimous agreement about the need for workers to improve their English skills, but that upper management was ambivalent, due to cost, about whether the company should sponsor the courses. The interviewees believed that supervisors across the company were generally in favor of offering the classes. This response is the opposite of what has been seen in other workplaces, where upper managers were more enthusiastic about offering ESL instruction than were supervisors (Boyle, 1999; Moore, 1999; Wales, 1994).

Theme III: Balancing production demands with educational needs

Previous research has found that supervisors sometimes feel ill-equipped to juggle production demands with the need to send workers to ESL class (Belfiore & Folinsbee, 2004; Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Gallo, 2002; Milton, 1999; Peirce, et. al., 1993). The supervisors I interviewed were responsible for figuring out how to make the classes work in their company in light of production demands. Strategies they implemented included offering classes during employee lunch time, staggering classes across shifts and departments so that no one work area would be disproportionately affected by employee absence, and “borrowing” workers from other departments during especially busy times. These supervisors said that this collaborative effort was what made the classes a success.

Clearly, they both had a high level of investment in making the program work, and seemed to be very proud that it had.

Several researchers have found resentment among co-workers of those who attend workplace ESL courses (Boyle, 1999; Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Peirce, et. al., 1993; Wales, 1994). When asked how employees who did not participate in the class were affected, one supervisor I interviewed admitted that it was “somewhat of a hardship for those who had to work harder.” The other supervisor said that, in his department, there had been some murmuring that certain class participants did not really need the class, that they had the necessary English skills to do their job, but were “faking” low proficiency in order to get out of work. The people who were heard to express the greatest degree of resentment were non-native English speakers who had a higher level of English proficiency than those who attended class. Interestingly, Burnaby, et.al. (1992) and Peirce, et. al. (1993) observed a similar dynamic in Canadian workplaces.

Theme IV: Reasons employees participate in workplace ESL classes

The supervisors interviewed indicated that the majority of employees offered the chance to participate in ESL courses agreed that they needed the instruction and were very appreciative of the opportunity. Some workers knew from their employee performance evaluations that low English proficiency was holding them back from advancing within the company. At the same time, both supervisors mentioned rare cases in which employees appeared to take advantage of the classes primarily as an opportunity

to get out of work. One supervisor was aware of some workers who started attending class in order to leave the work floor, but who started liking it once they realized benefit from the instruction.

I asked these supervisors why they think some employees who are offered the chance to participate in classes decline to do so. Both mentioned older workers who do not believe they can learn, or who are approaching retirement and just want to “tough it out.” Milton (1999) found that some workers nearing retirement had reduced investment in learning English. Another reason for nonparticipation mentioned by both supervisors was the shyness of some workers and their fear of being singled out and having to talk in front of other people in the class. One employee did not agree with the assessment of her English level: she thought her English was fine and she did not need the class. In one department, females were anxious to participate in classes, but males seemed to view instruction as something for the women. This particular dynamic was not mentioned in the literature.

Both supervisors believed cultural considerations contributed to nonparticipation. One said some “Chinese ladies, who just want to work and not talk,” were not interested in the ESL course. The other supervisor said she had a group of employees who objected to what they saw as the company trying to take away their identity. They said, regarding their L1, “This is my language. This is who I am. The company is trying to clone me and make me American.” This was a group of older men who were very proud of military

service in their original country. The attitude of these men is consistent with the writing of Schumann (1975, 1976), who says that some L1 communities exert pressure on their members not to give up membership by speaking the dominant language of their adopted country. Social pressure not to speak English, which is seen as betraying one's roots, has been seen in workplaces by Goldstein (1995), Miller (2000), Milton (1999), and Wales (1994).

Theme V: What workplace educators should know

Among all company stakeholders, supervisors have the closest relationship with LEP workers. Supervisors' investment in their employees' language learning and use can affect employee participation in workplace ESL instruction. Both supervisors interviewed were overwhelmingly positive about the ESL courses and their benefits to employees. They said the instruction strengthened work teams. One supervisor made the observation that employees who were in the course together now help each other out more than they previously had. About employees who attended the classes, this supervisor said, "In meetings, they used to look at the floor. Now, there's a world of difference. Everyone's looking at me. The classes made them into more confident, stronger individuals. They came out of the class standing up tall, making eye contact." This assessment is consistent with literature about outcomes. Although no measurable link has been established between workplace ESL instruction and increased employee productivity, retention, advancement, or income, both workers and their employers cite

non-quantifiable benefits such as increased self-confidence and ability to communicate, positive attitudinal change, reduced inter-group tension, stronger work teams, and loyalty on the part of workers who feel that their employer cares enough about them to invest in their education (Boyle, 1999; Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Castleton, 2000; Duff, et. al, 1992; Goldstein, 1995; Harper, et. al.,1996; Hull, 1997).

Upper management made the decision, for financial reasons, to discontinue courses in this company. The supervisor who noted her employees' new-found confidence said she would have liked to see the classes continue. The supervisor's assessment was, "I don't care how much it costs. It's worth it in the long run."

Attitudinal Survey

As a form of triangulation, a confidential attitudinal survey was sent to each interviewee, who was asked to return it in a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Using a Likert-type format, supervisors were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with twenty statements. The statements fell into categories which matched those of the interview questions. Responses generally corresponded with interview responses, with the exception of two items. One supervisor agreed with Statement #13, "Some employees choose not to participate in class because they're not encouraged to use English on the work floor". This is contrary to the interview, in which both supervisors indicated that workers are encouraged, and in fact required, to speak English. The percentage of non-native English speaking workers as indicated on the confidential

survey differs from numbers given in the interview. Survey results are shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2: Attitudinal Survey Results

Number of Responses

Please mark the choice that is closest to your position on each of the following statements.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. It is not necessary for frontline workers to use English in order to do their jobs well.				2
2. Frontline workers already have the English skills they need to do their jobs well.			1	1
3. Frontline workers do not have many opportunities to use English on the work floor.			1	1
4. Frontline workers take advantage of the opportunities they have to use English on the work floor.		1	1	
5. Frontline workers need encouragement to use English on the work floor.	1	1		
6. It is my role as supervisor to encourage frontline workers to use English on the work floor.	1	1		
7. I had input into the company's decision to offer workplace ESL courses to employees.		1	1	
8. I supported the company's decision to offer workplace ESL courses to employees.		2		
9. Workers attend English classes out of a commitment to do their jobs better.		2		
10. Workers attend English classes to get out of work			2	
11. Some employees choose not to participate in English class because they don't think the class will help them do their job better.		1	1	

Figure 4.2 (page 2)	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12. Some employees choose not to participate in English class because they don't think they can learn more.		1	1	
13. Some employees choose not to participate in class because they're not encouraged to use English on the work floor.		1		1
14. Some employees choose not to participate in English class because of negative comments they hear from co-workers who have to pick up the slack on the work floor.		1	1	
15. Some employees choose not to participate in English class because of negative comments they hear from their supervisor about being gone from the work floor.			1	1
16. Sending workers to English class benefits everyone in the department.	1	1		
17. Releasing workers from the work floor in order to go to class is unfair to other workers who have to stay on the job			2	
18. I received direction from management on how to meet production needs while employees were in class.			1	1
19. Workers attending class results in an unacceptable level of lost productivity			2	
20. Losing some productivity because workers go to class is worth it in the short run because improved English means increased productivity in the long run	1	1		

Figure 4.2 (page 3)

Other comments you have about the workplace ESL courses that were offered in your company:

These classes provided not only English but a higher level of self confidence in our workers. The workers that attended all experienced a sense of company loyalty and commitment also for our ability to help them. Since discontinuation of the program, results and English speaking has declined.

Background Information

How many years have you worked for the company? 6/8

How many years have you worked in your current position? 2/8

What percentage (approximately) of the employees you supervise are not native English speakers?

Less than 25% 25 – 50% 1 50 - 75% 1 more than 75%

Survey results reflect the overall positive attitude of respondents. Both of these supervisors appear to understand the importance of encouraging non-native speaking employees to use English, and both believe it is their role to provide that encouragement. Both supported their company's decision to sponsor ESL instruction, and believe that workers' motivation to participate is born of a commitment to job performance, not a desire to avoid work. Both indicated that sending employees to

ESL classes is not unfair to those who stay on the work floor, and that the results of instruction are beneficial to everyone in the department. These supervisors were empowered to implement their own flexibility and creativity in balancing educational and production needs, and both expressed a high level of satisfaction with the ESL program. It would be interesting to compare the success of this program with others in which supervisors had different attitudes about the need for encouragement, the benefit of instruction, or had a different level of involvement in the implementation of the courses.

Conclusion

Chapter Four has shown results of supervisor interviews and confidential attitudinal surveys. Respondents were supportive of their company's decision to offer workplace ESL instruction. They did not characterize employee absence from the work floor as a problem, but indicated that courses were beneficial to their entire department. These supervisors had a high level of involvement in the implementation of their company's ESL program, and were very satisfied with its results. In Chapter Five, I discuss implications of the research results as they pertain to companies sponsoring workplace ESL programs and educators who design and deliver those programs.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of my study was to understand the perspective of a group of stakeholders who've not often been asked about their experience of L2 learning and use: those who directly supervise workers who participate in workplace ESL instruction. I have drawn on my experience coordinating and providing workplace ESL instruction and training supervisors in communication strategies, on literature regarding learner identity and the social practices theory of language learning, and on interviews with supervisors. In this chapter, I will state implications for companies that sponsor workplace ESL

courses, as well as for the educators who design and provide the instruction. I will also discuss the limitations of the study and make recommendations for further research.

Implications

A review of the literature shows the prominence of identity and investment in language use and learning (Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Goldstein, 1995; Milton, 1999; Norton Peirce, 1995; Skilton-Sylvester, 2002). Also important is social practices theory, which states that language learning and use are influenced by the multiple ways that language is used (Belfiore & Folinsbee, 2004; Hunter, 2004; Jackson, 2004, Taylor, 2006). These have shaped my belief in the importance of understanding the perspective of various stakeholders within the workplace as a community of language practice. In particular, I have sought the views of front line supervisors because, other than workers themselves, they are the stakeholders most affected by the introduction of a workplace

ESL program (Burnaby, et al, 1992). A better understanding of supervisor perspective provides implications for company policy and for educators.

Company Policy

Because mixed messages have been identified as a barrier to the success of workplace ESL instruction (Belfiore & Folinsbee, 2004; Burnaby, et. al., 1992; Gallo, 2002; Milton, 1999; Peirce, et. al., 1993), I believe that companies sponsoring instruction need to develop clearly-stated policies regarding the purpose of an ESL program and how it fits into business operations. Direct supervisors, as the people who work most closely with employees participating in ESL instruction, must be involved in decisions about whether to offer courses, who should attend, and how to make the program successful in light of scheduling, financial and production concerns. A lesson can be learned from the supervisors I interviewed, who had a great deal of investment in making their company's ESL program work: they attributed the program's success to supervisor creativity and cooperation.

Any company seeking to cultivate an organizational culture of employee growth must work to dispel the perception that training and development opportunities are not offered to all employees on an equal basis. If company support for ESL appears different than for other types of education, e.g., instruction is offered during work time or participants receive a raise or bonus for completing their course, a rationale needs to be stated and any disparity needs to be addressed (Burnaby, et. al.,1992; Truckenbrodt,

2000). Policy should clearly address matters such as who can go to class, and for how long. A procedure should be spelled out regarding excusing workers from production duties in order to attend class. This would relieve pressure on supervisors juggling workers' educational needs with production demands. It would also let employees and instructors know what to expect. If the company employing the supervisors I interviewed had spelled out their policy regarding who would be offered the opportunity to participate in workplace ESL classes, they might have avoided the problem of some employees questioning whether others really belonged in the classes. No course will ever be completely seamless, but if all stakeholders begin from the same understanding – written company policy - there will be less room for misunderstanding.

Burnaby, et. al., (1992) suggest that companies sponsoring workplace ESL instruction identify one person who is specifically responsible for the program. This person would work with the educational provider in all aspects of the program, e.g. assessment, instruction, evaluation, promotion of the classes within the company, and liaison between supervisors and teachers. Having been a teacher in a company where I received input from a human resources representative, a manager and supervisors, all working from different sites, I believe that having a designated “point person” within the company streamlines decision making and reduces confusion. The supervisors I interviewed work in a company that sponsored the most successful workplace ESL

program I have seen. This company had one person who took major responsibility for all aspects of the program.

Increased Communication Between Teachers and Supervisors

In my work coordinating and teaching workplace ESL courses, I have often been frustrated by limited communication between teachers and supervisors, which can lead to misunderstanding and diminished effectiveness of instruction. Burnaby, et al. (1992) say that supervisors need to feel connected to what is being taught in the workplace ESL classes. Teachers can suggest ways for supervisors to support classroom learning, and supervisors can provide feedback about how learning can be used in the work environment. The two supervisors I interviewed, who clearly had high level of investment in their company's program, expressed that they had maintained regular contact with teachers. They believed in the instruction and were invested in its success. In my experience, it has appeared that supervisors who do not feel their input is valued have less investment in making sure their employees make it to class and benefit from instruction, and do not respond to teacher requests for feedback.

More Effective Educators

Teaching ESL in the workplace is different from teaching in other settings. In order to succeed, Mansoor (1994) says that workplace ESL instructors must work to understand the culture of the workplace. Training of workplace ESL educators must include elements that may not be pertinent to teaching in other settings. These include

understanding the values and perspectives of the business community and appreciating how curriculum must intersect with the mission of a company.

Rubenson & Schütze (1993) say that many aspects of learning are ignored if educators focus only on transmitting knowledge and skills without understanding the social factors at play in a workplace. According to Belfiore and Folinsbee (2004), “workplace educators often stop at the classroom door and miss how people use or don’t use their literacy learning to get things done at work” (p.196). Defoe, et. al (2004) say that workplace educators must anticipate the layers existing in the organization in order to design and deliver courses that “truly fit and serve the whole range of stakeholders within the workplace” (p.234). To do so is to enact a social practices approach to language learning. For example, if the supervisors I interviewed had made teachers aware of employee concerns about preserving identity while learning English, the teachers might have been able to address this in class and diffuse some of the tension. Unfortunately, the social practice view may be unfamiliar to, and resisted by, educators who are accustomed to a more traditional approach of skill deficit remediation. In addition, traditional instruction is reinforced by government policy and funding - based on individual skill levels - as well as limited resources and time to develop more complex instructional programs.

Social factors emerging from supervisor interviews included resentment on the part of co-workers who were not involved in classes, resistance to using English as an

identity issue, and gender and cultural differences in response to the opportunity to participate in language learning. Although these factors were minimized in the setting from which my interviewees came, the literature and my experience indicate that they sometimes become obstacles to the success of workplace ESL programs. Educators must be aware of the social factors present in the environment in which their students' language learning and use is situated if effective instruction is to be designed and delivered.

Limitations

This study's first limitation is the small number of interviews conducted. A concentrated effort to obtain more interviews proved unsuccessful. The two supervisors interviewed held a generally positive, supportive attitude toward the workplace ESL program in their company. Both of their names were supplied to me by the company's human resource director, who was in charge of the ESL program. She may have chosen two people who she knew would respond positively. Another possibility is that she put out a blanket request among supervisors for volunteers to talk to me, and only those with positive attitudes volunteered. Any of these contingencies supports the need for more extensive study of supervisor attitudes.

A second limitation is that this study did not compare and contrast the perceptions of supervisors to those of other stakeholders in the same workplace. This is beyond the scope of a master's degree capstone.

Recommendations for Further Study

Despite difficulties in getting supervisors to respond to my inquiries, the interviews that did occur yielded interesting responses from which some conclusions can be drawn. For example, the fact that these supervisors were in support of the program and were empowered to “make it work” appears to have been a large part of its success. Unlike other programs I have been involved in, the supervisors cooperated with other departments to swap workers, change schedules and otherwise use the flexibility given them to ensure that both production and educational needs were met. I believe that they could be held up as an example for other workplaces which have had difficulty with this challenge.

Another interesting result of these two interviews was how rather than speaking of objective measures of English usage, both supervisors spoke of the program's benefits in terms of more confident individuals and stronger work teams. I believe that more companies would benefit from this kind of thinking, rather than the belief that everything taught in class must be “work related”.

Drawing on my personal communication with other supervisors and on anecdotes from workplace ESL instructors, I believe that a broader spectrum of supervisor attitudes

exists than those reflected in this study. More work should be done to elicit the perceptions and attitudes of those who supervise employees who participate in workplace ESL instruction. It would be interesting, for example, to see how the degree of supervisor investment in making workplace ESL instruction work correlates with the overall success of the program. Because of the nature of manufacturing settings (fast pace, high pressure, frequent turnover in management personnel), instructional providers should make this supervisor feedback an expectation of the program. The difficulty I had in gathering information about ESL programs after the fact shows that this must be done during the time the course is being delivered, or shortly afterward. I also believe more comparison should be done of the perceptions of employees and supervisors within the same company regarding opportunities to speak, encouragement and discouragement on the job and how these affect participation in ESL instructional courses.

One supervisor I interviewed mentioned that the females he supervised were more likely than males to show interest in participating in ESL classes. I have not seen this dynamic mentioned in the literature, nor have I seen it myself. It would be interesting to compare investment and participation levels in male and female workers.

My approach to future workplace ESL programs will incorporate information from the interviews. I will make an effort to understand not only employees' literacy needs, but also the culture of their workplace. Important environmental factors to consider include opportunities to use English, encouragement provided, and social

pressures which may keep workers from learning and using English. I will encourage supervisor involvement in decision making from the start, and I will request that their ongoing feedback be a requirement of the program.

Conclusion

In light of demographic information that projects a rise in foreign born workers (Toossi, 2002; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007) at the same time that on-the-job language requirements increase (Grognet, 1994; Jackson, 2004; Kleifgen, 2005), it appears there will be a growing need for workplace ESL instruction in U.S. companies. There is much more to learn about how to design and deliver these programs in order to provide the most benefit for employers and employees. As we increase our knowledge about how instruction can address social practices, we should see a higher level of investment in ESL programs by a range of involved stakeholders: company management, supervisors, educators, and the employees who are learning English within the culture of the workplace.

APPENDIX A
Interview Questions

Profile of Study Participants

Supervisors

Length of time working in this company

Length of time working in current position

Percentage of employees supervised who are not native English speakers

Interview Questions

A. Need/opportunities for workers to use English

1. How necessary is it for frontline workers to use English in order to do a good job?
2. What opportunities do frontline workers have to use English on the work floor (spoken or written?)
3. How do you see employees taking advantage (or not taking advantage) of opportunities to use English?
4. Do employees need encouragement to use English?
5. What kind of encouragement to use English on the job do frontline workers receive in your company? in your department? from you specifically?
6. What discourages frontline workers from using English in your company? In your department?

B. Input into Company's Decision to offer Workplace ESL

7. What input did you as a supervisor have into the company's decision to offer workplace ESL classes to employees?
8. What was your opinion about the company's decision?
9. As the decision to offer ESL classes was made, were there differing views regarding the need for classes among the various company stakeholders (management, human resources, supervisors, workers?) Could you explain?

C. Balancing Production Demands with Educational Needs

10. What plan was made for balancing production needs with taking workers off the floor to go to class?

11. How were the workers who did not participate in the class affected?

D. Reasons Employees Participate in Workplace ESL classes

12. Why do you believe employees participate in workplace ESL classes?

13. Why do some employees who are offered the chance to participate in classes decline to do so?

E. What Workplace Educators Should Know

14. What would you like workplace educators to know/to consider/to do when they set up ESL courses in a company?

APPENDIX B

Survey: Supervisor Views of Workplace Language Learning

Survey: Supervisor Views of Workplace Language Learning

Please mark the choice that is closest to your position on each of the following statements.	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. It is not necessary for frontline workers to use English in order to do their jobs well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Frontline workers already have the English skills they need to do their jobs well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Frontline workers do not have many opportunities to use English on the work floor.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Frontline workers take advantage of the opportunities they have to use English on the work floor.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Frontline workers need encouragement to use English on the work floor.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. It is my role as supervisor to encourage frontline workers to use English on the work floor.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I had input into the company's decision to offer workplace ESL courses to employees.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I supported the company's decision to offer workplace ESL courses to employees.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Page 2	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9. Workers attend English classes out of a commitment to do their jobs better.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Workers attend English classes to get out of work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Some employees choose not to participate in English class because they don't think the class will help them do their job better.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Some employees choose not to participate in English class because they don't think they can learn more.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. Some employees choose not to participate in class because they're not encouraged to use English on the work floor.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Some employees choose not to participate in English class because of negative comments they hear from co-workers who have to pick up the slack on the work floor.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Some employees choose not to participate in English class because of negative comments they hear from their supervisor about being gone from the work floor.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. Sending workers to English class benefits everyone in the department.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. Releasing workers from the work floor in order to go to class is unfair to other workers who have to stay on the job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Page 3	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
18. I received direction from management on how to meet production needs while employees were in class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
19. Workers attending class results in an unacceptable level of lost productivity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
20. Losing some productivity because workers go to class is worth it in the short run because improved English means increased productivity in the long run	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other comments you have about the workplace ESL courses that were offered in your company:

Background Information

How many years have you worked for the company? _____

How many years have you worked in your current position? _____

What percentage (approximately) of the employees you supervise are not native English speakers?

- Less than 25%
- 25 – 50%
- 50 - 75%
- more than 75%

Thank you very much for your participation in this study. It will contribute to a better understanding of the supervisor’s perspective of workplace ESL courses. To ensure confidentiality, there is nothing on the survey or envelope that identifies you.

Please return your completed survey in the attached envelope. Thanks! Laura Lund

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