Research Report

Migrant Students' and Employers' Perspectives on Cooperative Education in New Zealand: Implications for English Language Teaching

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New Zealand has at present a low unemployment rate and a shortage of skilled workers. There are also many immigrants from non-English speaking countries who are unemployed. These migrant New Zealanders often have no locally based work experience, know little about the culture of work and are lacking in English proficiency. Employers on the other hand can be reticent to employ a migrant for a variety of reasons; the main ones being the migrant's English language skills and lack of NZ-based work experience. Ways to overcome these barriers for the migrants, both linguistic and sociolinguistic, can best be addressed in a TESOL course which includes a cooperative education module. Addressing employer attitudes is more difficult but there are examples of 'good' employers who welcome migrants. There are also benefits for employers in accepting migrants on unpaid work experience such as learning about diversity in the workplace and addressing their EEO principles. This paper summarizes data collected through employer and student interviews and questionnaires that investigated perceptions of both employers and employees on what migrants need in English language training courses to best prepare them for the workplace. The paper also gives examples of authentic spoken workplace texts (ASWTs) that can be used in the classroom to prepare migrant students for co-operative education. It is suggested that these texts can be used to lead students into discussing not only linguistic issues at work but also sociolinguistic situations and issues that they will come across. The paper also frames these ASWTs within a model of teaching entitled the 'Authentic Independent Motivational teaching model' (Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education, 2006, 7(2), 16-23).

Keywords: TESOL; students; employer attitudes; EEO, New Zealand.

Many migrants experience difficulties in finding full time employment in New Zealand for a variety of reasons, including a lack of English language skills, a lack of work experience in NZ, not knowing NZ workplace culture, and even institutional racism. This is a concern not only to the government, but also to employers who are finding it difficult to fill key positions with skilled employees and more particularly to the new migrants who can feel unappreciated and disenfranchised by their new country of choice (Boyd 2003; Winkelmann & Winkelmann 1998). As Statistics New Zealand (2004) reports:

> Language skills can be a particular problem for some migrants, especially those from non-English speaking countries. The fact that people from non-English speaking countries or with limited English language ability tend to fare worse in the labour market or take longer to achieve parity with other groups is also well documented. (p. 2)

In order to seek improved ways to bridge the gap between the employability of migrants and gaining employment, data in this study was collected through employer and student interviews and questionnaires. The students in this study were all attending an employment preparation training course for migrants with English as an Additional Language (EAL). The employers are all from local businesses within the Auckland (New Zealand) metropolitan region. The questionnaire investigated perceptions of both the employers and employees on what migrants need in English language training courses to best prepare them for the workplace. This paper reports on these findings and further to this proposes a teaching model that best serves the needs of EAL migrant students and employers.

Background

Research into cooperative education has often analysed the benefits to employers and their perceptions of the learning or the benefits and perceptions of the students to the learning (e.g., Braunstein & Stull 2001; Coll & Eames, 2004; Cullen, 2005; Gowing, 1997; Martin & Leberman, 2005). The researchers from North-eastern University in Boston in their 'little study' found that cooperative education students performed very well, and in general fared better than regular college students did with respect to pre-professional employment, recruitment, and permanent employment performance (Braunstein & Loken 2004, p. 237-238).

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The literature on what to teach in the classroom when preparing EAL learners for the workplace generally promotes the use of authentic workplace texts in the classroom (e.g., Brent, 2001; Brown, 2005; Robbins, 2001). It also suggests the use of problem-posing techniques that builds on the learners' own experiences rather than assuming they have no experiences of work from their own country (Wallerstein & Auerbach, 2004). Boud and Solomon write that it is important to spend time on developing the curriculum in courses that include cooperative education. Boud and Solomon (2001) write:

> While the core of the curriculum is workplace learning activities, these do not stand alone. Considerable preparation is needed if meaningful and worthwhile programmes are to be panned to suit the diversity of students. (p. 44)

This study was designed to focus on the perceptions of employers and potential employees (students) as to what should be in the curriculum for an English language course that is training adult students to find work in New Zealand. All the courses that students were enrolled into contained a work based learning component as a compulsory part of the course. Such courses for migrants are common in many parts of New Zealand and indeed the world. Some employers in New Zealand are reticent to employ a migrant for a variety of reasons. They may say that migrants are deficient in one or all of: English language skills (vocabulary, accent, slang, small talk), NZ based work experience, knowing how to fit the organisational culture, knowing NZ rules and regulations, or Kiwi (New Zealand) sociability skills. As is recorded by Statistics New Zealand:

> Migrants may also encounter barriers to prospective employment because qualifications obtained overseas are not recognised and accepted in this country or because of discrimination by employers (2004, p. 2).

Conversely employers in New Zealand may themselves lack experience working with migrants, lack knowledge of the up-side of diversity, be ethnocentric, have few global goals, be threatened by well qualified migrants or think that non-standard pronunciation is a critical barrier to employment. However, with New Zealand having the lowest unemployment rate for many decades at 3.6% (The Jobs Letter December, 2005), employers are more willing to look at migrants as potential employees as it is becoming more and more difficult to find new workers to fill employment vacancies.

The fact is that EAL migrants to New Zealand are often well qualified. Figures from the 2001 census show that the percentages of immigrants who had been living in New Zealand less than 10 years with university degrees were 24% from China, 46% from the Philippines, 36% from Sri Lanka, 37% from Iraq, 28% from Indonesia, 58% from Egypt, 36% from Croatia, 46% from Pakistan and 17% from Korea (Statistics New Zealand, 2004, p. 5). However, many of these migrants still find themselves either unemployed or under employed. They may have no or little locally based work experience, know little about the culture of NZ organisations and work, lack in English proficiency (e.g.,

vocabulary, fluency, pronunciation, cultural knowledge) and sometimes have 'attitude' issues (e.g., if they had high status positions in their own country they may in New Zealand have to accept lower status positions; negative thoughts about NZ employers and society).

Addressing these intercultural issues and workplace culture issues is a key objective of the employment preparation courses at Unitec New Zealand. Taylor (1995, p. 20) observes that "Co-op educators must adopt instructional strategies that use the workplace as a learning site." The work experience component of the courses which are overviewed below, is central to the process of informing and educating new migrants on workplace issues, guiding them to reflect on issues around the work environment and interpersonal communication within the workplace.

Methodology

The two researchers are lecturers in the School of Language Studies at Unitec New Zealand, a key tertiary institute in Auckland, New Zealand. This school focuses on the teaching of English language to both international and NZ permanent resident migrant students. The Certificate in Employment Skills English Programme is a set of full-time, 17 week courses designed to assist students with job search skills, interview skills, basic communication strategies, English language tuition and basic employment skills (in the area of healthcare, trades, computing and office skills). Within the Certificate in Employment Skills English courses there is a three-week full-time work experience module where the students work from between 25 and 40 hours per week in an industry linked to their previous employment or a sector in which they are intending to gain work in NZ.

The surveys were distributed by the researchers to the employers where the migrant student cohort were doing their work based modules. The surveys were designed to identify key issues and barriers to employment from the perspective of employers and potential employees, and to look for any significant differences in perceptions between these two groups. The findings of the survey were also used to inform the content and goals of the employment preparation courses.

Demographics and Identification of Employers

The findings of the surveys were entered into SPSS (a statistical analysis software package). The data were from a range of employers and employees in the local Auckland metropolitan area. There were 45 respondents to the survey. 36% were employers, 64% were migrant employees. The employers came from a range of employment fields – finance, manufacturing, trade services, education and retail. The data were analyzed to see whether there were any noticeable trends and variations between the two key groups – employers and employees. Were there any noticeable differences in the perceived importance of language skills necessary for employment between these two groups?

The questionnaire did not ask for the specific nationality of the employees (nor the employers), however all the employees came from the Certificate in Employment Skills English Programme which has students from a range

of ethnicities from African, Indian, Chinese, and Middle Eastern countries. The employees were from a range of employment situations with the majority being in education (28%) and information technology (17%) or finance (17%). 17% were working in engineering and manufacturing, with a small percentage being in trade services (3%) and the health sector (3%).

Twenty four employees and 16 employers in Auckland were asked to complete a questionnaire on what they perceived as the key training needs of migrants. The employer is seen as what the market wants and what the employer thinks is important. The employees' view is what the student (client) wants or sees as important. The questionnaire was divided into four sections:

Section A: What English language development do immigrants need?
Section B: What areas of workplace training do immigrants' need?
Section C: What organization and delivery methods do immigrants need?
Section D: What key factors hinder the employment of immigrants?

Research Findings and Discussion

Spoken communication and accuracy were perceived to be of very high importance by both the employers and employees. None of the respondents identified this as not being important, and 93% of employers and 88% of employees perceived this skill as being very important. Overall written communication and understanding was perceived as being almost as important as spoken skills, although one employee responded that they did not perceive written skills to be important in their job (although the employer did think it was important). However, the general perceived importance was very high for both groups. Interestingly, idiomatic speech was not seen as being of such great importance, with 43% of employers and 16% of employees rating this skill as being very important (see Table 1). Employers valued this more highly than employees, although the combined categories of important/very important were almost the same for the two groups – 79% and 76% for employers and employees respectively. This would appear to imply that both employers and employees value accuracy and communicative ability over idiomatic speech. Both groups were asked a similar question as to the perceived importance of spoken fluency, which had 50% employers indicating it was very important along with 40% of employees.

Overall written accuracy was not as important, although still important to the majority of respondents. 13% of employers and 4% of employees perceived that written accuracy was not important (see Table 2) – this reflected the nature of retail/customer service based employment that the respondents were involved with, for all other employers and employees written accuracy was seen as important or very important. Punctuation was also rated highly, again with the combined categories of important/very important being rated almost the same for the two groups – 94% and 96% for employers and employees respectively. Similarly, the perceived importance of being aware of New Zealand

workplace culture, general social etiquette (politeness and manners) and the ability to work in a team were of equally high importance to both employers and employees. This is a positive result and indicates that there was a shared understanding of the importance of these attributes by both employers and migrant employees.

A variation in perception did come out, however, in the area of customer service. Here, it appears that employers place a higher level of importance on customer service than employees do. While 75% of employers rated this attribute as very important, only 40% of employees rated it the same (see Table 3), with the majority rating it as only important (52%). While it is apparent that both groups rate this as important, employees appear to be somewhat less concerned about it than their employers. Interestingly, 8% of employees responded that they did not perceive any importance in this attribute. It is unclear as to whether this was purely because of the specific nature of the employment tasks for these respondents, or a general attitude, but it is still an important difference in perception.

Another variation in perception occurred in how employers and employees perceive the importance of being flexible in their role and employment. The majority of both

TABLE 1
Participant rating of language skills: Idiomatic speech

Respondent	Level of Importance (% response)		
	Not Imp	Imp	Very Imp
Employer (N=16)	21	36	43
Employee (N=29)	24	60	16

TABLE 2
Participant rating of language skills: Written accuracy

Respondent	Level of Importance (% response)		
	Not Imp	Imp	Very Imp
Employer (N=16)	13	37	50
Employee (N=29)	4	60	36

TABLE 3
Participant rating of language skills: Customer service

Respondent	Level of Importance (% response)		
	Not Imp	Imp	Very Imp
Employer (N=16)	0	25	75
Employee (N=29)	8	52	40

TABLE 4
Participant rating of language skills: Flexibility

Respondent	Level of Importance (% response)		
	Not Imp	Imp	Very Imp
Employer (N=16)	0	25	75
Employee (N=29)	10	35	55

employers and employees perceived flexibility as being very important in the workplace (see Table 4), however, a larger number of employers (75%) did so than employees (55%). And again, 10% of employees did not perceive this as being important at all. From comments gleaned in talking with the respondents, it appears that while all employers see the value and importance of people being able to work in different roles and circumstances, some employees perceive that just being able to do their stated job description well is all that is required. This has important implications for the teaching and preparing of students who undertake work placements and who are potential employees in the future.

Five other important findings were:

1. 95% of employers see poor English as a barrier whereas only 50% of migrant employees do
2. 50% of employers say that being overqualified is not a barrier to finding work whereas 40% employees do see it as one
3. Nearly all the employers (95%) want new employees to have productive language skills and likewise 90% of migrant employees see this as very important
4. 93% of employers want people with NZ work experience.50% of migrant employees are reluctant to do lower jobs than what they are qualified to do whereas only 20% of employers see this as a barrier to migrants finding work, and
5. A majority (75%) of migrant employees see competing with Kiwis in the job marketplace as being a key barrier to them finding suitable employment whereas only 10% of the employers perceived this as an issue.

Implications for the Classroom

One key objective of this survey was to reflect on both the content and the teaching models that were being used within the ESL classroom in our school, and possibly reframe the methodology and learning outcomes. There are several teaching models in the literature most English language teachers will be familiar with. The Presentation, Practice, Production Model (PPP) (critiqued by Scrivener, 1996); the Authentic Use, Restricted Use, Clarification and Focus Model (ARC) (Scrivener, 1994); Task Based Learning (TBL) (Willis, 1996) and the Engage, Study, Activate Model (ESA) (Harmer, 1998).

The new model proposed in this study is entitled the 'Authentic Independent Motivational Teaching Model'. In this title 'authentic' is defined as 'language naturally occurring as commutation in native-speaker contexts of use, or rather those selected contexts where standard English is the norm' (Kilickaya, 2004, p. 1). The model promotes the use of authentic texts from workplaces to be used as key resources in the classroom where "an authentic text is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience and designed to convey a real message of some sort" (Morrow, 1977, p. 13). Independent here refers to each learner having to have to take it upon themselves to reflect on their own learning and past work life and critique these so as to be able to decide on their own future employment choices. The students have to independently find their own co-operative education work integrated placement (which is compulsory).

One key goal of the cooperative module is for the learner to practie the English language and English social skills at the coal-face in a workplace, where they do not have the luxury of a trained English language teacher who may often slow down their speed of speech. As Bartkus (2001) writes social skills are most important in succeeding at work:

> With regard to social skills, internship success is enhanced when the student is able to communicate effectively in an interpersonal work environment. In other words, student interns who understand and are able to exhibit appropriate social behavior will find that their chances for career success will be considerably improved. (p. 50)

'Motivational' refers to having the students intrinsically very interested and motivated to understand the content and language of the course as the classroom activities and work-integrated modules are relevant to their previous work experiences and are focused on their employment aspirations. The model also includes a substantial element of motivational teaching. For example the migrants are taught to be positive about finding work and not to take the negative knock backs personally. The goal is for them to think "I can………." and not "I can't …….." In the classroom 40% of the time is using materials that improve their confidence and motivation, and 60% on material directly improving their English language skills, though at times it is hard to clearly differentiate between the two. In the 40% component the students are introduced to successful previous students (i.e., an 'authentic' person who was in their situation before but now has a job).

The model also includes allocated time for one on one assistance coaching outside class (approximately two hours per week). These coaching sessions educate the learners to think more positively about themselves, give them personal time, and teach them that to be successful they need to learn English language skills and also society and workplace skills.

In this model there are two sources of workplace issues introduced in the classroom. Firstly, some are derived from this survey (e.g., customer service, need for flexibility) and secondly some are sourced from the lecturers' professional experiences in teaching migrants and visiting workplaces (e.g., health and safety in the workplace, making complaints, apologizing to your boss, asking for clarification, time management, confidence, etiquette, understanding the workplace). These issues are introduced typically through authentic workplace conversations. From these conversations students can at the same time be learning both the vocabulary and the cultural background to topics and situations, which in turn better prepares them for how to talk and behave in a workplace.

The authentic conversations include situations from the workplace that not only teach linguistic features such as vocabulary and grammar, but also include sociolinguistic and pragmatic language features using authentic spoken workplace texts. As Mishan (2004) writes:

> The many advantages for using authentic rather than purpose written materials of language learning, have by now been generally accepted by the teaching community

and include the richness of authentic texts in terms of their cultural and linguistic content, the opportunity to select materials that are relevant, appropriate, and interesting to particular groups of learners, the motivational aspects or learning from authentic rather than didactic material, and so on. (p. 219)

In the classroom the lecturer works with the learners to identify the key speech acts in the interactions (e.g., directives, apologies, refusals) and then investigates how these are realized in relation to the context (e.g., gender, age, job role and status of speaker).

Below are examples of these texts taken from data collected by Pascal Brown in his role as a research associate in the Language in the Workplace Project (LWP) at Victoria University of Wellington, started in 1996 (Brown, 2000; Holmes, 200; Stubbe, 1998).

Example 1

Context: A factory production line, where Arthur (34 and of Pakeha New Zealand ethnicity) is the supervisor and Fred (36 and of Samoan ethnicity) is one of the workers on his team. Fred is packing boxes on a packing line and Arthur is walking past him doing a check up round. Fred is trying to be friendly to a person on his team:

Arthur:	What did you think of it?
Fred:	what?
Arthur:	the rugby
Fred:	oh man [shakes head]
Arthur:	poor effort eh?
Fred:	[shakes head] (..)
Arthur:	you could do better
Fred:	(eh?) [leans forward]
Arthur:	they could all do better
Fred:	[nods] yep
Arthur:	yeah all over now [claps hands together] soccer now eh? Change from rugby [spreads out arms] gone
Fred:	[laughs].

This texts shows that workplace talk includes social talk (e.g., about sport) that migrants need to be able to interpret. In this extract, we see Arthur, the Pakeha team leader, stopping to chat about rugby with Fred, a Samoan shop floor operator, in a display of male bonding within a workplace culture that is reinforced by social activity. Using this interaction a teacher can particularly discuss with students professional lexis (or lack of it) structure of the interaction and the asymmetrical power relationship between the two participants as to how this affects their talk and workplace collegiality. Koester (2004) writes that workplace and professional talk differ from ordinary conversation but in this example there is ordinary talk within the context of the workplace and new migrants are not always aware of when talk is task specific or 'ordinary' and trying to be friendly and collegial. It can also be used to discuss what is acceptable in terms of the relationship between these two workers, whether or not the power differential limits what one party is allowed to say, versus what is happening in this example.

A second interaction exemplifies how a team manager complains to her team members about their spelling mistakes.

Example 2

Context: A ministry of the New Zealand Government. The people are Sara (53) the manager of a team within this ministry, Ripeka (48) a communications manager for the ministry, and Ella (42), Simon (37), and Marisse (34) who are all report writers who work in the team. The team has worked together for about one year. Sara is holding a weekly meeting with her team. She raises the problem of writing errors occurring in documents produced by the team. These documents include letters sent to the public and reports posted on the ministry website and sent to government officials.

Sara	…which leads me onto one other item which I haven't got on the um agenda ah is it alright if I…?
Ripeka	yep, sure
Sara	and that's the um issue of writing [deep breath]. Um when, um whenever you –er- we're drafting, well, I've noticed a couple of mistakes creeping into our work. That's stuff that, that even that I've looked at. I notice it because the letters go through - all the letters that go out of the ministry go through what's called the day file. They also go through, er, each manager as well as our own staff. Sometimes suddenly as I'm re-reading I spot a spelling mistake which I didn't see the first time or a grammatical mistake
Simon/Ella/Ripeka	mm, yeah.

Koester (2004) again notes that workplace and professional talk is often goal oriented, may have restrictions on turn-taking and "there may be restrictions on what kinds of contributions are considered allowable" (p. 2). Presenting example two above to students could lead into discussion on these aspects of discourse. What is the key point being make in this discourse? What are the protocols being employed? What type of response is expected or 'normal' in these situations? This 'unpacking' of the text leads to a greater understanding of typical workplace interactions, and differing workplace cultures. This is vital information for the new migrant wanting to fit in to the New Zealand workplace.

One final suggestion for the classroom is to give the migrant students the details of this actual survey with its findings, and have them discuss the implications for themselves as the future employees in companies. Some of them may possibly in the future also be employers (or have been or already are) so they could reflect on their personal experiences in comparison with the findings.

Conclusions

In summary employers involved in this survey particularly want new migrant staff to have very good production language skills that allow them to communicate well with others, understand NZ workplace culture (e.g., workplace etiquette), handle written language of the workplace (e.g., faxes, emails). Employers also want them to have New Zealand work experience, have initiative and be confident.

The AIM Teaching Model proposed in this paper stresses teaching with authentic spoken and written texts in context, motivational work and coaching, and teaching about the culture of the workplace and New Zealand

(through authentic texts). It also includes an authentic workplace experience for the students, which is gained through a compulsory cooperative education component of the course.

The AIM Teaching Model has similarities with the problem-posing philosophy of Wallerstein and Auerbach (2004) in teaching where:

> Problem-posing assumes that education is not value-free but is embedded in a social context. Immigration or community members bring to the classroom a richness of experience: their knowledge, their troubles, their strengths, and their skills. By inviting students and teachers to participate as co-learners, problem-posing enables students to shape their own learning, to think critically, and to make decisions outside the classroom that may set new directions for their lives. (p. 1-2)

Introducing and discussing authentic spoken texts is very useful when teaching migrant students as it introduces interactive examples of real workplace talk that will assist the students once they are doing their work experience placements or fully employed.

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APPENDIX
NEEDS ANALYSIS FOR IMMIGRANT EMPLOYMENT
STUDENT/CLIENT FEEDBACK

AIM: To identify core learning needs from immigrant employees.

Please identify the type of industry you would like to work in:
(especially those that match your previous qualifications & experience)

Business type: ☐ Engineering   ☐ Manufacturing ☐ Healthcare/Medical
                ☐ Education   ☐ Service   ☐ IT / Telecommunication
                ☐ Retail / Customer Service
                ☐ OTHER (Please indicate _____)

Number of Employees: ☐ 0-5   ☐ 5-20   ☐ 20-50   ☐ 50 +
(size of company you would like to work in)

A   ENGLISH COMMUNICATION

From your own experience what areas of English language development do immigrants need?

Please indicate the *importance* of the factor and make any comments alongside. At the end please add any other factors you think significant.

Factor	Very Important	Important	Not Important	Comment
Overall understanding of what is said				
Overall understanding of what is written				
Spoken communication overall				
Spoken accuracy				
Idiomatic speech				
Spoken fluency				
Pronunciation				
Tone of communication				
Written communication overall				
Written accuracy				
Appropriate writing style / tone				
Formatting / style conventions for different purposes				

B   WORKPLACE CONTEXT

From your own experience what areas of workplace training do you need or those that would enhance your chances of getting a job?

Please indicate the *importance* of the factor and make any comments alongside. At the end please add any other factors you think significant.

Factor	Very Important	Important	Not Important	Comment
Understanding of NZ workplaces				
Understanding of Kiwi culture				
Understanding of social etiquette				
Participation in teams / meetings				
Time management				
Customer service				
Tone and style for phone and email				
Accounting basics				
ICT skills generally				
Office administration skills				
Safety and security				
Environmental sensitivity				

Treaty issues				
Employment relationships				
Flexibility and adaptability				
Dealing with harassment				
Confidence level				
General introduction to industrial relations				
Introduction to the NZ income tax system (e.g. PAYE, tax deductions etc)				

C   ORGANISATIONAL / DELIVERY MATTERS

What sort of training assistance and options should your employer provide you as a new immigrant employee?

Please indicate the *importance* of the factor and make any comments alongside. At the end please add any other factors you think significant.

Factor	Very Important	Important	Not Important	Comment
Credit towards a formal qualification				
Training by a certified education provider				
Employer contribution to fees				
Employee contribution to fees				
Training in company time				
Training outside company time				
Training specific to business type				
Online/ web-based courses for self-access				
Employment conditional on satisfactory completion of staff development				
Classes in weekends only				
Classes in evenings only				
Study over 15 weeks to ensure language improvement and culture development				
Study intensively over 2-4 weeks to minimise distractions				

D   PRE-EMPLOYMENT MATTERS

Do the following factors hinder or stop you from getting a job in New Zealand?

Please indicate the *strength* of the factor and make any comments alongside. At the end please add any other factors you think significant.

Factor	Yes Definitely	Sometimes	No	Comment
Lack of NZ experience				
Poor English generally				
Lack of interview skills				
Standard of CV / application				
Over-qualified for the job				
Fit with company's culture				
Social skills inappropriate				
Speech is difficult to understand				
Reluctance to do lower level tasks				
Level of qualification / expertise unverified				
Adequate – good NZ born applicants are available				
Other – please indicate here:				