LANGUAGE TEACHER BELIEFS IN CONTEXT:

AN ACTIVITY THEORETICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to expand on our present knowledge of teacher beliefs in general and particularly to investigate the relationship between teacher beliefs and the context in which teachers work. Specifically, the study addressed and expanded the role of context, which has been inadequately theorized in previous studies investigating teacher beliefs. The research design utilized a multiple case study format focusing on four, English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms in two community colleges over the course of a 16-week semester. Focusing on the experiences of four ESL teachers, I examined their beliefs about teaching and learning and the context in which they occurred using socio-cultural activity theory as a framework for analysis. The results showed that common conceptual terms used to describe teachers beliefs about teaching and learning were appropriated from a larger theoretical discourse on language teaching and learning. Shared concepts were incorporated into departmental models and approaches to teaching practice, influencing teacher’s ways of thinking about the activity of teaching and learning. The meanings of collective concepts were also transformed as they were internalized by the teacher subjects and used to mediate classroom actions and operations within context. The results of the study imply that context has a significant effect on the formation and transformation of teacher’s beliefs about teaching and learning.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The objective of this study is to address two related areas of inquiry derived from previous work on teacher beliefs in language teaching. The first aim was to explore the relationship among teacher beliefs on teaching and learning and the context in which teachers work. Secondly, the study aimed to analyze the transformation of teacher beliefs within the context of teaching practice. The research design utilized a multiple case study format focusing on four English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms in two local community colleges over the course of a single academic semester. The purpose of the study was to expand our present knowledge of teacher beliefs in general and particularly to investigate the relationship between teacher beliefs and the context in which teachers work.

Defining Teacher Beliefs

In this section I will discuss the different ways that belief has previously been conceptualized and defined, focusing particularly on the knowledge/belief distinction, the social nature of belief, and the relationship between teacher beliefs and teaching practice.

Previous research on teacher beliefs has focused on exploring the distinction between knowledge and belief, particularly regarding the epistemological status of both constructs (Fenstermacher, 1994). According to Ohlsson (2009), in previous educational research the knowledge/belief distinction has been conceptualized in three ways. First, there is the normative usage in which the terms belief and knowledge denote degrees of certainty ascertained through both the assessment of the truth or falsity of a particular proposition as
well as the subject/believers' justification for believing it to be true. The normative position on the belief/knowledge distinction is also a realist philosophical position in so far as it gauges truth or falsity on correspondence with objective knowledge and truth. In the normative view, belief claims can be characterized as representing a lesser degree of certainty than factual knowledge claims, which meet both necessary conditions of truth and justifiability.

Second, Ohlsson (2009) discussed the “psychological usage” (p. 24) of belief in which the terms knowledge and belief refer to the same construct. In the psychological conception of the belief/knowledge distinction, “a person’s knowledge of topic X is the set of representations that encode what he or she thinks is true of X, independent of the objective truth of the matter” (p. 23). In place of the normative test of truth or falsity being applied to a particular belief proposition, the psychological usage allowed for a variety of truth-values designating different levels of likelihood that a proposition is indeed true.

The third definition of belief, according to Ohlsson (2009), comes from cognitive science and considers a person’s beliefs to be a subset of their knowledge. While the overall knowledge set contains all propositions both true and false, the smaller belief set contains only those knowledge propositions that the individual has categorized as being true, a complete reversal of the normative distinction.

Pajares (1992) found that “beliefs are formed early and tend to self-perpetuate, persevering even against contradictions caused by reason, time, schooling and experience” (p. 324). Throughout adulthood, individuals tend to
hold on to incomplete or incoherent beliefs even when presented with new information. This stubbornness in the face of contrary evidence might be due to what Ohlsson (2009) termed cognitive utility. He stated that, “the value of a theory is not directly tied to its truth or its consistency with evidence but in how useful it turns out to be in enabling our cognitive processes to run with low cognitive load, fast task completion and high goal satisfaction” (p. 29).

Other studies exploring teacher knowledge and belief, focusing on the reason behind teachers adopting certain beliefs in their teaching practice, have cited pragmatic reasons for belief being more advantageous than epistemic claims in the investigation of teacher cognition. The idea that the usefulness of adopting a certain belief is paramount to its’ truthfulness is also practical in the investigation of teacher’s beliefs about teaching and learning because teachers have been exposed, through training and their own past learning and teaching experience, to a multitude of theories, methods and concepts aimed at promoting effective language teaching and learning. They form a body of teacher knowledge that is essential for both the activity of teaching as well as demonstrating membership and teachers conducting themselves professionally within the institution where they teach. According to Kagan (1992), teacher professional knowledge refers to “teachers’ implicit assumptions about students, learning, classrooms and the subject matter to be taught” (p. 66). Teachers, in making their own practical pedagogical decisions, must choose from an array of equally valid models, theories, approaches, concepts and rules for practice. Kagan suggested that teachers make pedagogical decisions based on the
content to be taught and the types of students they will be teaching in accordance with “a belief system that constrains the teachers’ perception, judgment, and behavior” (p. 74) which has evolved through previous teaching and learning experiences.

In contrast, according to Kagan (1992), teachers develop a set of pedagogical beliefs in response to the “uncertainty and ambiguity” (p. 79) inherent in classroom teaching. Because of the complexity of the task and the demand on teachers to make on the spot evaluative decisions pertaining to the effectiveness of their own methods, student learning, and classroom procedures, a system of beliefs needs to be in place for teachers to make sense of the classroom experience and to guide their practice. Kagan elaborated, “A teacher cannot continue to orchestrate instruction and maintain control in the highly unpredictable environment of the classroom without knowing whether things are going well; a teacher must be able to identify, label, solve, and evaluate the solution to problems” (p.79). Thus, Kagan added, “most of a teachers’ professional knowledge can be regarded more accurately as belief” (p. 73). Similar to Ohlsson’s (2009) third definition of belief, teacher beliefs are selected from the larger knowledge set based on their usefulness when applied to classroom practice.

Bereiter (2002) stated that the case is often made for “viewing knowledge within an extended network of relations” (p. 77) in accordance with the post-positivist refutation of the truth-value of empirical theories being paramount in distinguishing knowledge from belief. This view resulted in the epistemological
claim that, “what we call knowledge is merely belief that has gained acceptance in
some group” (p. 78), as well as the critical claim that knowledge and beliefs are
not value free. Instead, “the beliefs that a group upholds as knowledge or truth
are ones that subserve its interests” (p. 78). According to Richardson (2003),
“Truth claims are suspected of masking and serving particular interests in local,
cultural, and political struggles. Wherever truth is claimed, so is power; the claim
to truth is also a claim to power” (p. 188). It follows that justification and
rationality, the other two knowledge conditions, are similarly backed by particular
individual and social interests. Regarding how knowledge/belief claims should be
interpreted by researchers, Bereiter (2002) stated, “We should treat these truth-
assertive objects . . . as theoretical, interconnected and historically and socially
situated. We should be attentive to the motives that lie behind the endorsement
of certain conceptual artifacts and the rejection of others” (p. 78). However,
previous studies investigating teacher beliefs have not incorporated investigation
of teacher motives and in-depth descriptions of context in their designs. In the
next section I address the under-theorized role of context in previous studies
investigating teacher beliefs.

The Role of Context

In the literature on teacher beliefs, context has been conceptualized as
encompassing a multitude of external factors including institutional policies,
standardized tests, colleagues, the availability of resources, classroom layout
and general working conditions (Borg, 2003; Crookes and Arakaki, 1999). In
previous studies, contextual factors were seen as interfering with teachers’
abilities to translate their beliefs into lesson planning and course content
decisions (Burns, 1996) as well as teachers’ choice of motivating styles (Reeve,
2009). However, the majority of previous studies on teacher beliefs that
incorporated context as a variable utilized what Niewolny and Wilson (2009)
termed the “container view” of context which “tend[s] to see context as having
little to no perceived effect on the action contained; context is viewed as a
background or stage on which action unfolds but is not really necessary to
understand the action” (p. 32). The separation of individual actions and
cognitions and the context in which they occur is based on a further theoretical
distinction, namely the division between mental activity and the external
conditions through which it is formed.

Crookes (1997), in his critical assessment of the circumstances under
which language teachers learn their profession and work, expanded the scope of
context to include both the socializing/normalizing function of schools, which
language teachers themselves are a product of, the political/historical
construction of educational institutions and the field of language instruction itself
which provide the justification for school structure, material selection,
administrative decisions and other “context” sourced barriers to the potential
creativity of teacher practice. Crookes lamented that teacher education
programs often do not provide new teachers with a critical awareness of the
socio-historical context of the profession or the political context of their future
teacher roles. Therefore it is unlikely that teachers are aware of the social
reproductive function of their practice, and if they are aware, they are not equipped to do anything to change it.

In opposition to the so-called “container” view of context, in socio-cultural approaches “contexts are not to be equated with the physical surroundings of settings . . . They are constructed by the people present, in varying combinations of participants and audience” (Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, 1983, p. 333). However, in socio-cultural approaches, context cannot be reduced to individual subject interpretation. Instead, contexts in general and classrooms in particular, have rules that define their particular cultural and institutional practices and “orient people to the behavior that is appropriate for a given situation” (LCHC, p. 333). In this way the context within which teaching and learning activity takes place is meaningful in itself.

This more elaborate definition of context is a departure from previous studies on teacher beliefs and takes us one step closer to a cultural-historical activity paradigm illuminating the connections between the context of teaching and learning, teacher actions and teacher beliefs by examining “the ways learning and knowing are a complex set of social practices . . . which are socially entwined with local, institutional, and historical relationships” (Niewolny and Wilson, 2009, p. 27). In the next chapter I review current conceptions of teacher beliefs and explicate the relationship between teacher beliefs and the context in which teachers work through the analytical framework of socio-cultural activity theory.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Context, Consciousness and the Social Formation of Mind

I have chosen to utilize a socio-cultural activity perspective for this study which asserts that context, composed of institutional, cultural and social expectancies of behavior, is embodied in classroom activity and determines the internalization and transformation of teacher beliefs on teaching and learning. In this section I will further illuminate the relationship between context and the social formation of mind in Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory.

Vygotsky viewed consciousness as the “observable organization of behavior that is imposed on humans through participation in socio-cultural practices” (Wertsch, 1985, p.187). According to Wertsch (1985), Vygotsky’s “attempt to reformulate psychology on Marxian foundations” began with the claim that in order to understand the evolution of consciousness in the individual, we must first understand “the social relations within which the individual exists” (p. 58). Marx’s dialectical materialism also influenced Vygotsky’s (1978) developmental method, a central tenet of which was “that all phenomenon be studied as processes in motion and in change” (p. 6).

Vygotsky identified the preoccupation with deriving an explanation for group social behavior from individual psychological processes, present in then predominant biological determinist and behaviorist theories of development, as dealing with a secondary dimension of consciousness (Wertsch, 1985). For Vygotsky, the object of psychological inquiry was directed primarily at illuminating “how the individual response emerges from the forms of collective life” (1981,
language was the primary socio-cultural tool through which he believed thought was organized and could be analyzed. Although Vygotsky did not include an extensive discussion on the effects social institutional principles had on the formation of individual consciousness, he recognized the existence of external social institutional factors that were independent of individual intention and operated in accordance with Marxist sociological and economic principles, namely the collective nature of human labor activity through which human consciousness was thought to have emerged and evolved (Engestrom, 1999).

Vygotsky was mostly interested in the interpsychological processes involving individuals and small groups engaged in communicative activity, which led to the revolutionary idea that learning can lead development and the formation of the theory of the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, interpsychological functioning was not to be equated with previous accounts of individual higher mental functioning. Instead, the connection between the interpsychological and intrapsychological planes of functioning was based on a process of internalization wherein external communicative activity created an internal plane of consciousness. According to Vygotsky (1978), higher mental functions such as attention, memory and the formation of concepts originated as “actual relations between human individuals” (p. 57) before being turned inward and transformed into new psychological entities.

Vygotsky (1978) focused specifically on the significance of tool use, particularly language as the representational system needed to participate in the
social function of communication. Tool use allowed for the mediation of communal activity through the integration of concepts and communal meanings into subjective thought processes.

**Mediation.** Within socio-cultural theory the nature of mental development is characterized as a process of socialization. Mediation explains how communal activity is transferred to the individual intrapsychological plane of thought. In Vygotsky’s (1978) conception of subject-object relations (see Figure 1), the relationship is either direct or mediated through the tools available at a particular place and time.

![Figure 1. The mediate nature of the subject/object relationship (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 62)](image)

Human activity is mediated by an assortment of tools. Tools may be real physical objects used in classrooms to mediate student learning like textbooks, class syllabi, dictionaries, and computer programs. Tools may also be psychological and exist internally as objects of thought like concepts, theories or approaches to teaching. The psychological tools that humans internalize are dependant upon practical, social and interactional needs. According to Kaptelinin (1996), tools are “carriers of cultural knowledge and social experience” (p. 109) and through their specific modes of operation developed through previously determined usage, “shape the way people act and, through the process of
internalization, greatly influence the nature of mental development” (p. 109). Tool use is also situational and dependant upon the availability of tools at a particular time and place in the overall activity.

**Tool use.** The description of tool use in socio-cultural theory begins with the distinction between physical and psychological tools. Both tool types enhance our abilities while simultaneously limiting their scope. Explicating the physical tool type, Scollon (2001) offered the example of a stick used to knock fruit down from a tree. Although the stick enhances the fruit pickers ability by allowing him/her to gather more fruit from higher branches, it also constrains the activity of fruit picking in new ways that were non-existent while hand picking. For example, the picker is unable to judge the ripeness of the fruit to be picked while using the stick. Tool use is also transformative. Over time, repeated use of the stick to pick fruit might also result in more permanent physical changes to the organism, like a change in musculature to accommodate the use of sticks to pick fruit. Unlike physical tools, psychological tools are not used to directly manipulate physical objects. Instead, psychological tools such as language, “increase our capacity to communicate information and knowledge” (Scollon, 2001, p. 117) while also limiting the scope of word meaning to previous historical and communal processes and developments. The use of psychological tools is also transformative. According to Jones (2008), “language is not just an expression of inner mental states but a material cultural tool that is transmitted in social interaction and helps to create these inner mental states” (p. 17).
Vygotsky (1978) reformulated Marx’s conception of tool use to include language as the main psychological tool through which individuals are able to change themselves to reach a basic level of understanding necessary to participate in social activity. Tool use also allows people to reach the higher levels of understanding needed to achieve certain individual and communal goals. According to Vygotsky, language allowed individuals to master their surroundings in a way that produced “new relations with the environment in addition to the new organization of behavior itself” (p. 25) which became the foundation of the intellect and the basis of productive labor. According to Wertsch (1985), psychological tools could be considered social in nature because, like language and other symbolic sign systems, they were “the product of socio-cultural evolution” (p.80), the formation and function of which was social organization through participation in communicative activity with others. That is, language is developed in individuals through interaction with others who already use the shared sign system to think and communicate.

Artifacts. Conceptual artifacts are a particular type of psychological tool, straddling the boundary between the ideal and the material/real world aspects of human activity. Lantolf & Thorne (2006) defined artifacts within a socio-cultural framework as, “simultaneously material and conceptual aspects of human goal directed activity that are not only incorporated into this activity, but are constitutive of it” (p. 62). Lantolf & Thorne use the example of an architects blueprint. The ideal form of the house that the architect plans to build exists in the architects mind, the function of the blueprint as artifact is to mediate the
construction of the house in the real world. The blueprint transforms the ideal of the house in an organized, purposeful way into a real, material version of itself. Thus, according to Lantolf & Thorne “through spoken and written artifacts, humans are able to create ideal objects and use them to plan material activity before carrying it out” (p.63).

Bereiter (2002) stated that conceptual artifacts inhabit a world of ideas, distinct from both the physical world of real objects and the mental world that is constituted of mental states like hopes and intuitions. The world of ideas is a human creation and thus “fallible but improvable” (p. 64). Conceptual artifacts also share the quality of purposefulness with real objects, as in the example of the architects’ blueprint, which allows them to exist as objects of study to be discussed and improved. In the next section I will discuss the expansion of socio-cultural theory into a theory of activity designed to analyze individual psychological functioning and the social context in which it occurs.

The Theory of Activity

Vygotsky (1978) developed semiotic analysis to illuminate the external, sign mediated processes in human interaction that resulted in the formation of internalized mental processes. However, his designation of the word as the basic unit of semiotic mediation of consciousness could not account for the whole of human consciousness which, Vygotsky claimed, was composed of three interwoven spheres of influence, the socio-historical context, the interpsychological and intrapsychological planes.
Wertsch (1985), based on later theories of activity posited by Leontiev, Davydov and Zinchenko, proposed that “tool-mediated, goal-directed action” (p. 208) served as a more suitable unit of analysis than language for analyzing the formation and development of individual consciousness within a socio-cultural framework. As Leontiev (1981) explained, the term “activity” refers to context as a “system with it’s own structure, its own internal transformations, and its own development” (p.46). The theory of activity was an expansion of the Vygotskian conception of the linguistic sign system in which language was both open to expansion through the incorporation of new words representing new concepts, while at the same time limiting the possibilities of thought and expression to that which could be expressed and understood through the medium of human language.

In Leontiev’s (1981) conceptualization, human activity could not be conceptualized apart from the system of social relations. He referred specifically to those relations that comprised the functions of institutions and which themselves were constantly undergoing processes of development and change. According to Wertsch (1985), activity was “grounded in a set of assumptions about appropriate roles, goals, and means used by the participants in that setting” (p. 212). With regard to the impact of activity on individual actions, “an activity setting guides the selection of actions and the operational composition of actions, and it determines the functional significance of these actions” (p. 212). The activity itself did not necessarily determine which actions would be selected by individual participants, instead it merely framed individual action within a
particular social and institutional context and provided the activity framework as a unit of analysis within which individual mental activity occurred.

**Motive.** Motive was the label given to how the socio-cultural assumptions inherent in any particular activity setting became manifest in the selection of actions and operations by individuals to be utilized within that particular setting, and which actions and operations were not selected. Hence the motive for activity, along the same lines as Vygotsky’s theory, could not be understood solely in terms of the biological maturation of the organism nor as a result of individual thought processes. Instead motives must be understood in terms of individuals’ formation of goals and the selection of operations appropriate to their realization occurring within the context in which they were intended for use (Wertsch, 1985).

Previous research on language learning using an activity perspective has explored classroom language learning activity and the motives of individual participants (Lantolf & Genung, 2004), as well as teachers’ abilities to balance compliance with institutional demands against personal pedagogical beliefs (Olson, 2009). However, the empirical investigation of the specific non-reductionist relationship between social institutional factors, interpsychological and intrapsychological action is an unfinished project and leads us to questions that explore what Valsiner and Van der Veer (1988) proclaimed to be “two focal topics that underlie the crisis of contemporary psychology: the intentional nature of thinking and acting by human beings, and the interdependence of individual consciousness with its social context” (p.117). In the next section, I provide
background on previous studies conducted on teacher belief in both education and second language teaching research. I then explain how the activity framework can be applied to the study of teacher beliefs.

**Teacher Beliefs**

The investigation of belief has become important both in subject specific studies in education which attempted to illuminate ways in which beliefs influence learning and teaching (Meijer and Verloop, 2001), as well as more broad theories of cognition and learning. Within the field of educational psychology, teacher beliefs have been implicated as a factor influencing teachers’ choice of motivating style (Reeve, 2009). The link connecting teacher beliefs and teaching practice has been established and elaborated on in previous studies in education (Pajares, 1992) and in the field of language teaching (Borg, 2003; Breen, 1991).

**Sources of teacher beliefs.** For the past 50 years, attempts to conceptualize the relationship between theory and practice in language teaching (e.g. Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Mackey, 1965) have focused on the constructs of “method” and “approach” as embodying the overall plan for language teaching and learning activity, incorporating a set of theories and principles that guide practice as well as a set of procedures to be followed by teachers. Method is defined as, “a specific instructional design or system based on a particular theory of language and of language learning” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 245). Past language teaching methods, such as Audiolingualism and Situational Language Teaching specified content, the order in which it should be taught, and how it
should be taught in addition to specifying the types of teacher and learner roles that were believed to be optimal for language learning.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), the focus on language teaching methods and the prescriptive classroom structures and behavior patterns they entail have been gradually replaced with an emphasis on language teaching approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching and Content-Based Instruction. Approaches are similar to methods in that they both possess “a core set of theories and beliefs about the nature of language, of language learning, and a derived set of principles for teaching a language” (p. 245). However, approaches do not go as far as methods in specifying a set of teaching techniques or ways in which specific principles can or should be applied.

As Crookes (2009) commented regarding the development and change of theories of language over time, “at the same time as one system of ideas was new, fresh, and energetic, another which might displace it already coexisted with it, though on the margins or at a distance” (p. 103). Consequently, teachers’ beliefs on teaching and learning may not always be confined to the dominant language teaching/learning paradigm or to institutionally prescribed norms.

Beliefs and practice. Much of the recent literature on language teacher beliefs deals with the development of teaching approaches of individual teachers and groups of teachers working within the same institutional context. Beliefs have been alternately conceptualized as “principles” (Bailey, 1996), “pedagogical knowledge” (Gatbonton, 1999), and “maxims” (Richards, 1996). Current literature on teacher belief in the area of language teaching has examined the
sources of teacher beliefs, relationship of teacher cognition and practice and the
development of teacher cognitions and teaching practices over time (Borg, 2006).
Common themes include a focus on how teachers accounted for pedagogical
choices in relation to context, effects of accumulated experience on teachers’
beliefs (Crookes and Arakaki, 1999) and additional situational and personal
factors which influenced teacher planning and classroom management (Woods,
1996). These studies exposed the complexity involved in establishing a
connection between teacher beliefs embodied in a particular teachers’ approach
to teaching and learning, institutional and departmental level designations of best
teaching practices and the procedural aspects of planning and implementing
classroom learning activities.

Three main findings can be selected from the previous research on
teacher beliefs reviewed here. First, in the studies cited, belief formation is
defined as a process of accumulation of theories of language teaching and
learning gathered from past teaching and learning experiences. Second, there
are shared beliefs among teachers within similar institutional contexts (i.e.
teachers who share the same approach), which may be translated into practice
through a variety of different teaching activities and procedures. Finally, beliefs
orient and guide classroom teaching behavior through the specification of course
objectives, course content and teacher and learner roles. In this section I look at
several recent guiding studies that have attempted to explain the interaction
between teacher beliefs and classroom practices in language teaching.
Breen’s (1991) model of teacher conceptualization and classroom practices defined teacher beliefs as, “personal theories . . . held regarding the nature of the broader educational process, the nature of language, how it is learned, and how it may be best taught” (p. 472). In Breen’s own conceptualization of the relationship between teacher thought and practice, teacher pedagogical principles were defined as the principles which teachers reported as guiding their classroom work. Principles were situated between teacher beliefs and the context of classroom practice, thus dividing the domain of teacher belief into three functionally separate, interacting categories.

According to Breen’s model, pedagogic principles served the function of mediating the transition of abstract beliefs into teacher actions within a particular teaching situation. Intent on elaborating on the connection between teacher cognition and classroom practice in language teaching, Breen (1991) examined the shared principles of a group of 18 ESL teachers working in a similar context in Australia. The study found that although there were several common principles shared amongst the group, shared principles were often expressed in different observed classroom practices. Additionally, in some cases the teachers studied attributed similar shared practices to different shared principles. For example, all of the teachers reported the use of group or pair work as a common practice but attributed the use of the practice to 23 different principles. These results demonstrated how, “approach does not specify procedure” (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 24) and contrarily how similar classroom actions can be used to support a variety of different teaching approaches even though the rationale
for their use, in terms of a particular stance on how language is best learned, may vary between approaches. Breen concluded that individual teachers formulated their own personal set of pedagogic principles, often realized through a set of favored classroom practices. Even within the similar institutional context of the adult ESL classrooms examined in Breen’s study, teachers were likely to use different teaching practices that they reported to be rooted in similar principles, a phenomenon Breen attributed to teachers’ individual interpretations and enactments of the teacher role.

Breen (1991) emphasized that the relationship between cognition, which in this case included both teacher beliefs and pedagogical principles, and teaching practice was not unidirectional. He concluded that teacher’s beliefs were reciprocally influenced by what happened in the classroom, but did not provide an explanation in the model for how the supposed mediation of teacher beliefs occurred. Instead, his initial definition incorporated a static view of beliefs as personal theories of language, learning and teaching formed through previous teaching and learning experiences. Beliefs were formed early, appeared resistant to change and existed independent of context.

Breen’s (1991) work on teacher beliefs and their effect on teacher practices provided evidence for the existence of shared pedagogical principles and implied the existence of shared beliefs among groups of teachers working in similar institutional and cultural contexts. He called this the discovery of a “collective ideology” (p. 498) that was the source of similar classroom practices within a particular institutional context. Breen acknowledged that, “research has
yet to be undertaken that investigates language teaching in terms of such systematic frameworks of principles held by individuals or particular groups” (p. 498).

A commonality in the research on the concept of beliefs in education is the relationship between individuals’ beliefs and their behavior (Borg, 2001). Specifically, previous research on the connection between beliefs and behavior has theorized a causal relationship between belief, thought and action. Pajares (1992) found that previous studies have shown “a strong relationship between teachers’ educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices” (p. 326). However, according to Richards and Rodgers (2001), beliefs about language and language learning embodied in a particular approach to language teaching do not dictate teaching practice. Instead, course design incorporating a choice of course objectives, course content and the specification of teacher and learner roles fills the gap between theory and practice (p. 24).

Regarding the formation of teacher beliefs and belief modification and change, Borg’s (1998) case study of teacher cognition and instructional decisions regarding grammar teaching found that teacher cognitions were mainly a result of initial experiences of schooling as well as later professional coursework. Interestingly, Borg (1998) reported that neither past negative teaching experiences nor external, contextual factors related to restrictions within the institution where the teacher worked influenced the participants’ instructional decisions.
Borg’s (2003) more recent model of teacher cognition in language teaching incorporated constructs theorized and labeled in previous studies on teacher cognition as “beliefs, knowledge, theories, attitudes, images, assumptions, metaphor, conceptions, and perspective about teaching, teachers, learning, students, subject matter, curricula, materials, instructional activities, self” (p. 82) into a single model. Borgs’ (2003) model posited a two-way interaction between classroom practice and teacher cognition, while both classroom practice and teacher cognition were influenced by additional factors stemming from the institutional, social, instructional and physical context of individual classrooms. According to Borg:

> Contextual factors may interact with teachers’ cognitions in two ways; they may lead to changes in these cognitions or else they may alter practices directly without changing the cognitions underlying them. This latter scenario can lead to a lack of congruence between teachers’ stated beliefs and actual practices. (p. 276)

The next section provides an alternative explanation for the process of belief formation and change within the activity model of cognition and confronts the difficulty in constructing adequate empirical research techniques to explore and analyze individual thinking and action in relation to the social context in which it occurs.

**Internalization, appropriation and the formation of teacher beliefs.**

Previous empirical studies attempting to analyze human cognition from within a socio-cultural paradigm have focused on the Vygotskian theory of internalization
to explain the transfer of thought from the interpsychological to intrapsychological planes (Valsiner and Van der Veer, 1988). Internalization is also an important process in the theory of activity and is combined with a theory of externalization to constitute the basic processes apparent at every level of human activity. As Engestrom and Miettinen (1999) explained, “internalization is related to reproduction of culture; externalization [makes transformation of culture possible through] creation of new artifacts” (p. 10). Thus the two are intertwined in such a way that they are indistinguishable. In Jones’s (2008) interpretation, the central processes of reproduction and transformation are explained as integral to the community producing and reproducing its means of life, that is, organizing mental activity as well as organizing labor activity. According to Jones:

The community reproduces itself as a community of human individuals in these historically specific relations to one another, individuals who feel these humanly produced objects as needs and who are capable of appreciating them - as objects of attention and desire, as models and ideals to be emulated and attained, as instruments to master- in short, of making them into the very substance of their practical and mental interactions with other people. (Jones, p. 79)

Within a socio-cultural theoretical framework, teacher beliefs do not initially come from within the individual but originate as conceptual objects embodied in concepts derived from particular methods and approaches to managing classroom activity. Teacher beliefs consist of a set of theoretical propositions on teaching and learning, possibly accumulated through past experience, that
individual teachers believe to be true or at the very least, practical in achieving certain objectives within particular contexts. If the internalization of the content of teacher beliefs is a process of appropriation, once particular theories of teaching and learning become internalized or incorporated into the individual system of thought, they serve as tools mediating future interpretations of experience and contributing to the structuring and transformation of future actions and eventually the activity itself.

The process of externalization, what Kaptelinin (1996) defined as mental processes manifested in external actions, “so that they can be verified or corrected, if necessary” (p. 109), adds an important aspect of creativity and subject interpretation within the constraints of methods, approaches and contexts that have inherent roles, goals, rules and expectations of behavior. Bhaskar (2011) concluded that culture is not completely a product of communal human activity nor are all human actions determined by it, “rather it is an ensemble of structures, practices, and conventions that individuals reproduce or transform. But which would not exist unless they did so” (p. 60).

**The transformation of beliefs.** According to Block (2003), more recent studies attempting to describe the internalization of new knowledge, theories and skills from a socio-cultural perspective have used the term “appropriation” to not only describe the previously explicated processes of external to internal mediation but also an additional process that Block interpreted as, “the meeting of the external and the internal to form a synthesized new state” (p. 103). Rogoff’s (1995) theory of “participatory appropriation” similarly described the
social origins of mind as being neither completely subjective nor entirely collective. Instead, knowledge is viewed as being in constant transformation and reformulation according to the activity in which an individual is a participant. Being able to communicate with others and act according to the implicit norms and rules that organize group behavior is what Rogoff described as becoming a member of a particular community of practice.

Wells (1999) characterized the process of appropriation of cultural artifacts (a category which includes both real tools and conceptual artifacts) as a three-stage process of transformation. First, modification of the learner’s own cognition occurred which “changes the ways in which he or she perceives, interprets and represents the world.” Second, the tool or concept itself is transformed as it is used, “reconstructed by the learner on the basis of the learner’s existing knowledge”, and assimilated into the activity. Finally, when the reconstructed artifact is used to mediate subsequent actions, the activity itself can be transformed resulting in possible changes “in the social practice and in the way in which the artifact is understood and used by other members of the culture” (Wells, p. 137).

**Interpreting Teacher Beliefs**

At this point it is important to establish an epistemological stance on the investigation into the processes of mediation, particularly regarding the procedures for elicitation and interpretation of beliefs. These include the possibility of reading beliefs out of a text (in the case of narrative and autobiographical methods) or beliefs being assigned to the observed classroom
behaviors through reconstruction and interpretation of classroom events and context. It is evident from past studies that both narrative and autobiographical accounts were effective tools for the documentation of individual teachers’ reflections on classroom events as well as sources for investigating the possible influences of past teaching and learning experiences on the observed organization of classroom activity.

Previous studies attempting to elicit and describe teacher beliefs have looked at the development of instructional activity as a measure of belief development and change (Kagan, 1992), teachers’ cognitive and emotional understanding of their own teaching (Golombek and Johnson, 2004) and the personal pedagogical systems that contributed to classroom instructional decisions (Borg, 1998). Past studies on teacher belief have utilized questionnaires (Meijer, Verloop and Beijaard, 2001), teacher reflective writing and narratives (Golombek and Johnson, 2004), interviews, observations and document analyses as a means of getting at constructs related to teacher cognition and belief.

Golombek and Johnson (2004) applied a socio-cultural framework to their analysis of language teacher knowledge and concept development as socially mediated activity. Specifically they were interested in, “describing how teachers come to know and how this internal activity transforms their understanding of themselves as teachers, of their students and of the activities of teaching” (p. 309). Golombek and Johnson promoted the use of teacher narratives as, “the predominant means of getting at what teachers know, what they do with what
they know and the socio-cultural contexts within which they teach and learn to teach” (p. 308). The descriptively rich, story-like structure of teacher narratives was also effective in exploring the role of emotions and teacher values in relation to teacher practices and according to the researchers, “highlight, in teachers own words, how, when, and why new understandings emerge, understandings that can lead to transformed conceptualization of oneself and transformed modes of engagement in the activities of teaching” (p. 324). The narrative technique is similar to Vygotosky’s (1978) own experiments with “egocentric” speech in which participant’s speech accompanied problem solving activities, first as general descriptions and then taking on a “planful” character “reflecting possible paths to the solution of the problem” they were attempting to solve (p. 25).

Sannino (2008) suggested an approach that relied on teacher autobiographical writing on formative elements of their teaching practice as a means to expose the formation of a subjects’ personal sense of previously occurring events and its’ effect on the formation of individual motives and goals. Valsiner and Van der Veer (1988) theorized that the process of internalization could be examined through longitudinal investigation of the subject’s interaction with others in concert with a description of the subject’s “internal dialogue” resulting in a parallel analysis and comparison of the subjects interactive processes and internal, “intra-active processes” over the course of the activity being examined.

Autobiographical and narrative accounts might also be applied to the notion of motives and objectives in activity theory. Leontiev (1978) claimed that
“Motives are revealed to consciousness only objectively by means of analysis of activity and its dynamics. Subjectively, they appear only in their oblique expression, in the form of experiencing wishes, desires, or striving toward a goal” (p. 123). Thus, according to Leontiev, it was the indirect expression of motives expressed in the form of wishes, desires and purpose that were captured in narrative and autobiographical accounts of classroom activity. Engestrom (2001) elaborated, “in complex activities with fragmented division of labor, the participants themselves have great difficulties in constructing a connection between the goals of their individual actions and the object and motive of the collective activity” (p. 173).

Although Engestrom and Leontiev may not have had classrooms in mind as an example of fragmented actions disconnected from the object of activity, it might be possible to imagine a parallel by examining the complexity of the task of teaching. According to Wells (1999) the two primary objectives that characterize teaching and education are the need to socialize students “into the values, knowledge and practices of the culture” while also “nurturing the originality and creativity of individual students so that each is enabled to fulfill his or her unique potential” (p. 157). Viewing the activity of teaching through a socio-cultural lens, the ideal teacher’s role is:

To help the learner to understand the significance of the activity as a whole, and of the constituent actions and artifacts that mediate its performance and, while taking responsibility for the organization of the overall structure, to involve him or her as fully as possible, providing help
and guidance with those parts of the activity that he or she cannot yet manage on his or her own. (Wells, p. 137)

Robertson (2005) characterized the role of teachers working from a learner-centered approach (opposed to a teacher-centered one) as one of fundamental contradictions between subject expert and teaching/learning expert, group leader and individual mentor, facilitator and evaluator. In addition, teachers are also responsible for operational demands including maintaining discipline while adhering to institutional constraints on content to be taught and other procedures and rules to be followed. Although the general motive of the collective activity of teaching and learning remains embodied in classroom activity, the connections between day to day teacher planning and instruction and the overall collective goal of education might only become evident to teachers through reflection and other elicitation techniques that allow teachers to deconstruct specific instances of their own practice and examine them in detail. Furthermore, as Wertsch (1998) explained, once uncovered, motives for individual mediated action are often multiple and may be in conflict with one another.

The position taken by critical discourse analysts is relevant here. They emphasized that all discourse, including classroom interaction and the discourse undertaken between researcher and research participant, is embedded in context which guides communication to meaningful social ends (Price, 1999). Critical reflection by teachers on their own practices through narrative construction entails a process wherein, “subjects themselves are reconstructed, becoming less a matter of being for or against certain practices and more a matter of
creating them anew, of participating in constitutive practices” (Price, p. 593). This position is insightful because it recognized that belief statements, however they are elicited and interpreted, exist in the realm of discourse which presumes a constraining social influence both in terms of belief formation occurring within the context of the research procedure itself (interviews, teacher reflections) and having to be expressed and interpreted within the context of a particular research paradigm.

The Activity Framework

In this section I will further illuminate the transition from the theory of activity into an activity framework, which can be applied to the analysis of the relationship between teaching practice and teacher beliefs. Leontiev (1981) organized the analysis of events into three categories, activity, actions and operations, with each level of analysis providing a different perspective on the same events. In Well’s (1999) application of Leontievs’ framework to classroom practice, the category of activity was characterized as, “curricular events from the perspective of the teacher’s (implicit) theory of education, as he or she plans what learning opportunities to provide and how students are to engage with them” (p. 171). The category of action involves the processes that are necessary to translate the teacher’s theoretical perspective into reality, such as creating coherent goals of the activity and planning the sequence of operations needed to reach them. The category of operations is used to describe the expansion of the event into the realm of discourse and the interaction that occurs among participants, teachers, learners and the tools that are involved. The level of
operations is important because it is at this level, according to Wells, that “decisions are made as to how to achieve the chosen goal under the conditions that obtain in the situation” (p. 171).

Regarding the link between belief and practice, observation and interpretation of classroom operations by researchers have been used to make inferences about teacher intentions as well as the nature of educational activity as a whole. According to Wells (1999), at the level of operations, three dimensions of observation need to be distinguished: the participants who are involved in the action, their nonverbal behavior, and the tools, particularly language, used by participants to achieve the goals of the overall activity. However, previous studies dealing with teacher beliefs have shown that teaching approach does not specify classroom procedure, nor does the selection of particular teaching tools specify the ways in which they can be used. Instead, in order to understand how the overall activity of teaching English as a second language is linked with course planning actions and classroom operations we must examine teacher objectives, the roles of both teachers and learners, and tool use related to specific learning tasks.

Rules, Community and Division of Labor

Conceptual artifacts (“instruments” in Engestroms’ model), like the theories of teaching and learning developed through prior education and teaching experience as well as real object tools such as textbooks and computer programs which are designed to aid the learning process, also play a central, mediating role in Engestroms’ (1999) model. They are objects of learning activity
themselves and also the means through which future objects are conceptualized, planned and achieved. Beliefs are also conceptual artifacts. They begin as external objects, which teachers learn and internalize and then become tools which teachers use to structure their teaching.

Engestrom posited a new contextual layer of the activity system in addition to Leontievs’ original formulation of the subjects and objects of mental activity being mediated through intermediary tools. Engestrom’s model (see Figure 2) incorporated rules, community and division of labor as additional categories of analysis. These additions to the activity model are helpful because they add further categories of analysis focusing specifically on the context in which mediated activity occurred.

![Figure 2. Engestroms’ structure of the activity system (Engestrom, 1999)](image.png)

Rules, community and division of labor are the basic categories defining the context in which specific actions and operations are planned and executed (Engestrom, 1999). Lantolf and Genungs’ (2002) analysis of institutional power
and language learning success concluded, “Motives and goals are formed and reformed under specific historical material circumstances. As these circumstances shift, motive and goals . . . shift as well” (p. 191). In the field of applied linguistics, the emergence of new methods and approaches to teaching language have coincided with developments in theories of language and language learning which were products of parallel developments in educational theory, philosophy and psychology and the historical and material circumstances in which they arose. The development of theoretical concepts and the subsequent application of abstract thought into a set of beliefs about language and how language should best be taught and learned brought a re-prioritization of the overall motive and goal of language instruction. This is evident in the reorganization of the language course syllabus over time, beginning with objectives and outcomes defined by structural motives and goals and then progressing through functional and interactional ones leading to the current post-method era in which the construct of method itself has been questioned (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). According to Kumaravadivelu (2003) the concept of method is limited in several ways. First, methods are based on “idealized concepts geared toward idealized contexts” and their one-size-fits-all approach “assumes a common clientele with common goals” (p. 34). Second, because methods exist outside of specific teaching and learning contexts they tend to ignore the effects of contextual factors on teaching and learning success.

Despite changes in how language and language teaching and learning have been conceptualized, the basic structure of language teaching activity
within most institutional settings has remained static. Classrooms are usually organized according to an accepted division of labor, the two most common roles being teacher and student. However, according to Lantolf and Genung (2002), “how the specific tasks, powers, and responsibilities of each role are distributed and negotiated . . . varies across time and space” (p. 176). Furthermore, the extent to which roles are negotiable and how the negotiation of roles occurs is influenced by the beliefs of the participants, including teachers and students as well as administrators, curriculum developers and course designers.

In an activity system, rules may be unspoken communal rules that provide the general framework for interaction among people occupying certain roles. These could include, for example, who is allowed to speak and when. Or rules may be explicit and directly stated like in a course syllabus, outlining specific rules of classroom interaction, learning outcomes, student competencies and grading procedures. It should be noted that the difference between the two rule types is a matter of interpretation, since explicit rules are often based on interpretations of communal norms and institutional standards, as well as on issues of power and agency in classroom settings where explicit rules are often stated and upheld by the teacher.

**Subject/Object Relations**

In Engestroms’ (1999) model (see Figure 2), the production of an activity fundamentally involved a subject and an object. Applied to educational activity, subjects can be teachers, students or a group of individuals engaged in activity, the object of which is both the reproduction of knowledge and transformation of
thought through interaction. Methodologically, analysis of activity systems must account for both the systems view embodied in a detailed description of the activity system by the researcher as well as the subjects’ view which is achieved through the selection of one or more members of the activity, “through whose eyes and interpretations the activity is constructed” (Engestrom, 1999, p. 10).

The object of activity can be defined as the specific outcome that motivates activity or as Gallego and Cole (2001) defined it, “the problem or topic that compels the subject into engagement” (p. 96). In the classroom, objects are usually shared, with individual subjects holding variable orientations to a common objective such as getting a good grade or improving their writing skills. Shared objects are transformed as they are interpreted across differing subject roles (teacher, student, administrator, researcher/observer, etc.) and through interaction with other subjects, classroom rules and available tools throughout the duration of the educational activity. According to Nardi (1996), one of the fundamental questions addressed in an activity theory analysis is how to illuminate the objectives of particular subjects and how they are related to the objectives of the group or organization as a whole. According to Gallego and Cole (2001), “Each party to the work directed toward the object seeks to transform it’s own conception of the object into a desired outcome or result” (p. 961). However it is also possible that teachers and students might have differing individual objects of activity that conflict or are in opposition with communal goals.
Aims of the Study

The goal of the present study is to expand our present knowledge of teacher beliefs in general and particularly to investigate the relationship between teacher beliefs and the context in which teachers work. The aims of the study are to:

1. Explore college ESL teacher beliefs on teaching and learning by describing, analyzing and comparing teacher practices and beliefs both within and across institutional contexts.

2. Investigate the possibility of the transformation of teacher beliefs through the description and analysis of the conceptual tools/artifacts that teachers adopt through their teaching practice.
CHAPTER 3. METHOD

Nardi (1996) composed a list of four methodological considerations necessary for effective research undertaken within the activity framework. The first and perhaps most important of these is “a research timeframe long enough to understand (participants’) objects, including ... changes in objects over time and their relation to the objects of others in the setting studied” (p. 95). Second, researchers must pay attention to, “broad patterns of activity rather than narrow episodic fragments that fail to reveal the overall direction and import of an activity” (p. 95). Indeed one of the more inclusive aspects of Engestroms’ activity system model (1987) is that it incorporated descriptions of separate levels of the activity system, such as rules, community and division of labor, together with subjects’ views of the actions taking place, thereby placing less emphasis on fragments of recorded interaction analyzed out of context. Third, Nardi encouraged the use of various data collection techniques such as interviews, sound and video recordings, observation and the use of historical materials in the study. Finally, Nardi insisted on, “a commitment to understanding things from [participants’] points of view” (p. 95), a position shared by the majority of qualitative researchers in education and language teaching (Creswell, 2007).

Research Design

I have chosen a multiple case study format for this project, focused on exploring the activity of language teaching in four different classrooms. According to Yin (2009), “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially
when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). The multiple case study approach was selected both as a means of incorporating an in-depth description of the scope of the institutional context within which the classes were taught and to examine and compare and contrast the beliefs of teachers working in similar and different institutional contexts through the analysis of select teaching/learning tasks. The institutional context was bounded by the time in which the study occurred and as such was a snapshot of institutional policies and procedures reflecting the overall mission of the institution and the department during the time of the study. The individual classroom cases were bound within the institutional context and the events that took place within the courses being taught by the participating teachers.

Based on Nardis’ (1996) recommendation that the investigation of activity systems focus on a broad spectrum of interaction with a long enough time frame to understand teacher and class objectives as they unfold, this study focused on the semester long course. Although institutional planning and the development of teacher and student roles extends beyond the scope of individual semesters, I chose to examine the semester unit because it is an institutionally constructed artifact providing a time frame within which both student and teacher objectives are constructed and evaluated. The semester is also fairly static in terms of a general description of context. For example, classroom rules often are established at the beginning of the semester and do not normally change unless a drastic change in circumstances occurs.
Participants and settings. The study was situated in the context of introductory English as a Second Language (ESL) courses at two community colleges located on the Hawaiian island of O‘ahu. The courses selected might be better classified as English for Academic Purposes (EAP), since the overall goal of instruction was to provide the writing and speaking skills necessary to succeed in college classes. The choice of community college classes and the teaching of language and culture to adults was based on my own experiences as an ESL instructor in a similar institution for the past five years. The community college ESL program settings examined were fairly typical of ESL program settings in terms of the approaches currently being used to teach English language courses. In fact, like the majority of university language institutes and private English language schools currently operating in the United States and other English speaking countries, the ESL curriculum at the community college programs selected for this study incorporated central concepts of communicative approaches to language teaching that became popular in the 1970’s and have remained the theoretically dominant language teaching paradigm for the past 40 years (Richards & Rogers, 2001).

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), the communicative approach to language teaching is characterized by three guiding principles, the communicative principle, the task principle, and the meaningfulness principle. These basic guidelines directing language teaching practice state, first, that only activities involving real communication support learning, second, using language to complete meaningful tasks supports learning, and finally that the language
selected to be learned must itself be meaningful to learners. Thus communicative language teaching practices can take a variety of different forms depending upon the needs of the learners and the particular communicative domain (i.e. reading, writing, listening, speaking) being taught. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) the range of activities and learning tasks is unlimited as long as they, “enable learners to attain the communicative objectives of the curriculum, engage learners in communication and require the use of such communicative processes as information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction” (p. 165). The institutions selected for the present study designed their EAP programs to accommodate the perceived needs of their respective student populations and developed course structures that focus on particular areas of content or communicative skills that the program developers believed to be most crucial to student success as defined by the overall mission and goals of the college.

The community college teachers selected for the study represent an elite group within the language teaching profession. They all possessed graduate degrees and completed graduate course work in second language learning theory and language teaching methodology. The selection of a sample from this particular population of teachers was motivated by the expectation that extensive training was more likely to translate into the ability to articulate aspects of their current practice and relate it to larger pedagogical and theoretical innovations in the field of second language teaching and learning.
The study focused on a sample of four teachers, all teaching introductory college level ESL reading/writing courses in two community colleges within the University of Hawai‘i system. Teachers were selected based on three factors: Willingness to participate in all class observation and interview procedures, an interest in exploring their own beliefs on teaching and learning, and a course schedule that matched researcher availability. The selection of teachers teaching similar courses in different colleges among the University of Hawai‘i community colleges was intended to add a comparative element to the study. Official departmental approaches to language teaching varied depending upon a multitude of factors including the geographical location of the institution, the student population it served, the educational background and teaching experience of the faculty, and the past and present organization of the ESL departments.

The two programs examined in this study offered for-credit and non-credit courses for both resident immigrant students and international students. Incoming students were placed into different course levels through institution-specific writing placement tests administered on arrival by the ESL program faculties. Once placed, students were required to advance through the remaining non-credit ESL course levels until they reached the 100 level and were restricted from entering for-credit courses in other college departments until they had reached an advanced proficiency level. The majority of the international and resident immigrant student populations enrolled in the programs examined in the study came from Japan, South Korea, China and Taiwan.
Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection procedure was conducted in three parts occurring over the course of the semester and consisted of bi-weekly passive participant observation of classroom activity, teacher interviews conducted at the beginning, middle and end of the semester, and an initial description of context and teacher motives and objectives relying on document analysis. All interviews and classroom observations were audio recorded, periodically transcribed by the researcher and labeled for later analysis.

Borg (2006) divided data collection procedures utilized in previous studies on language teacher cognitions into four major categories; self report instruments, verbal commentaries, observation and reflective writing. Regarding the use of self-report instruments, Borg stated that questionnaires may not be the best choice for research studies attempting to match teacher beliefs with actual practices since teacher responses often reflected ideals about what should be done rather than what teachers actually do. Thus self-report was often inadequate “in situations where there is an interest in real classroom practices” (p. 184). In addition, because questions or situations presented to the participant were selected and/or written by the researcher, they may limit the participants’ responses and thereby inadvertently simplify the complexity of the belief system under investigation.

Verbal commentary techniques are divided into an array of interviewing techniques with differing degrees of structure and form. Past studies investigating teacher cognition in language teaching have used stimulated recall
using audio and video transcripts of classroom teaching and interaction to stimulate teacher talk about motives for classroom decisions and actions (Borg, 1998; Breen, 2001). Other protocols include think aloud methods (Samuda, 2005), and semi-structured interviews that rely on open-ended questions that proceed similarly to a two-sided conversation between the researcher and participant.

The use of verbal commentary interview techniques has the advantage of generating data that is more elaborate and personal and also allows the participant to play a more active role in the research itself (Borg, 2006, p. 203). According to Borg, the majority of observation in classroom/teacher research has been of the non-participant variety. Although there are several exceptions, the decision to observe and not participate in classroom activity may be based on researcher fears of interfering with and thereby influencing the lesson in progress and the validity of the data collection as a whole. Or it may be simply due to the fact that it is difficult to take notes on classroom interaction while being an active participant in classroom activities.

The final category of data collection techniques previously utilized in teacher cognition research relied on various forms of reflective writing incorporating teacher journals, diaries and logs, usually used in conjunction with other data sources (Borg, 2006), to make explicit teachers’ thoughts and reactions to past events. Previous studies utilizing reflective writing techniques have focused on explaining the perceived classroom role of second language teachers as well as teacher beliefs about teaching and learning a second
language (Johnson, 1994). In addition, autobiographical writing has been used as a means of explicating prior language learning and language teaching experiences which were believed to have contributed to the participating teachers' then current beliefs about teaching (Tsang, 2004).

According to Cross (2010), the types of methods and data used in previous studies of teacher cognition have corresponded with changes in the conceptualization of cognition from a purely mental process to cognition as a function of context. This change is apparent in the transition from research designs focusing on what teachers think or what teachers do to approaches that included both data types.

Based on data collection techniques used in past studies on language teacher cognition and because of what some researchers have suggested to be the impossibility of teachers articulating the beliefs that underlie their practice (Breen, 2001), my intention was to incorporate into the data collection procedure multiple techniques facilitating the development of a continuing dialogue between the researcher and individual participating teachers that increasingly gained depth as it incorporated new events selected by both the teacher and researcher from observed classroom practice.

As mentioned earlier, activity systems are minimally composed of subjects, objects, the motives that underlie tool selection and the selection of objects, the tools themselves, and contextual factors, which can be further divided into institutional and individual subject accounts. The next section discusses the analysis of collected data, including bi-weekly participant
observations of classroom activity, teacher interviews at the beginning, middle and end of the semester, and a document analysis to describe the institutional contexts.

**Document analysis.** Data collection began with gathering of documents related to a description of the institutional context of the classroom cases examined, focusing particularly on the categories of rules, community and division of labor.

Data sources included college mission statements, information on departmental and course goals and objectives, and required competencies found on the college websites, in catalog course descriptions and individual course syllabi, as well as through access to departmental faculty meetings. Previous “outdated” versions of these documents were also examined with the intention of discovering a more in-depth picture of change and the development of course specific, departmental and institutional goals and objectives over time. The document analysis provided valuable insight leading to a description of the community of teachers, learners, counselors and administrators involved in the teaching of English to foreign students at the institutions being studied.

Documents outlining student placement procedures and ESL department course descriptions were also utilized to reconstruct the rationale for the division of labor apparent in the structuring and sequencing of courses in each department. Although rules exist at all levels of interaction and may be specific to the changing roles that individuals choose to occupy and the approaches to teaching and learning with which they align their own practice, in this study I
focused specifically on the explicit rules that directly pertain to the activities of classroom teaching and learning. Class syllabi were examined to provide the basic blueprint of course objectives and rules that guided classroom behavior and outlined a general pattern of expected teacher and learner behavior throughout the semester. The researcher’s description of the institutional settings functioned as a way to get the reader situated in the context and provided a backdrop onto which the participating teachers’ own thoughts on the institutional and class context could be projected and compared. The rich description of institutional context also served as a guideline for transferability of results to similar language teaching settings in other areas of the world.

**Teacher interviews.** Talmy’s (2010) analysis of past studies utilizing interviews as data generating instruments in qualitative social science research found an ideological divide between what he called the “interview as research instrument” and “interview as social practice” (p. 131). The distinction lies in the core conception of the kind of product the activity of asking and answering questions is able to produce. According to the interview as research instrument view, interviews provide researchers direct access to the internal states, knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of passive subjects. Interview data is often analyzed using content or thematic analysis focused on categorizing what was said and then presented as reports in which the interviewers themselves are not present. The alternative, interview as social practice tradition, focuses on the social element of the interview process “treating interviewing as a social encounter in which knowledge is constructed” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 68).
The interview as social practice still relies on the researcher’s construction of the subject in relation to the particular matter under investigation, by using questions to “draw out the substantiality of these topics, linking the topics to biographical particulars in the interview process, producing a subject who responds to, or is affected by, the matters under discussion” (p. 74). It also, and perhaps more importantly, focuses on the process through which meaning is constructed by both interviewer and subject. According to Talmy’s (2010) analysis, “the neglect of the role of the researcher/interviewer in co-constructing data . . . is common across studies that conceive of interviews as a research instrument”(p. 137).

For this study, a series of three, semi-structured teacher interviews were conducted over the course of the 16-week academic semester. The first interview occurred pre-observation approximately one week before the beginning of the semester and was designed to add a narrative element to the initial data collected on institutional context from the analysis of course syllabi, course objectives, class rules, textbook selection, course schedule, grading, evaluation and placement procedures. In terms of the activity framework, the initial interview also explored the connection between the teacher subjects and the context, minimally composed of rules, community and division of labor. It was the researcher’s goal to encourage teacher participants to provide as much detail as possible on the rationale behind their course planning decisions to enable the co-construction of a cohesive narrative describing the participants’ interpretations of institutional requirements, their own objectives for the course and the tools they had selected or had been provided with to achieve those objectives. The initial
interview also examined teachers’ own descriptions and interpretations of the general activity of language teaching through questions focused on illuminating the participating teachers prior teaching and learning experiences and exposure to different approaches to teaching language, the perceived purpose of the class they were planning to teach, and what institutional and perceived social needs different aspects of their classes fulfilled.

Interview 1 took approximately one hour, and used a semi-structured format where teacher participants were asked a pre-determined set of questions prompting discussion with certain responses explored further based on researcher interest and teachers willingness to discuss their experiences. See Appendix 1 for a list of questions for Interview 1.

The second teacher interview took place during the semester midterm, between weeks eight and ten approximately. The midterm interview was designed to further illuminate the connections between subjects, course objectives and the motives that substantiated them as the actual teaching/learning activities of the class unfolded. The interview focused specifically on developing a dialogue on the teachers’ perceived roles, student roles and course planning as a means of tracking the development and change of the initial objectives envisioned in planning the trajectory of the course. In concert with the ongoing class observation and description of the particular objectives, tools and conceptual artifacts produced to mediate student learning, the participating teachers were asked to describe the lesson planning activities they had undertaken since the last interview, their relation to the objectives of the
course, and the rationale (x is a reason for doing y) behind their use in the classroom. The researcher also requested that participants select particular instances of planned classroom practice that they thought were successful/unsuccessful in reaching a particular teaching/learning objective. The teachers were asked to explain how the objectives of the selected activity fit within the general framework of the course. The midterm interview took approximately 45 minutes and used a semi-structured format. Please see Interview 2 questions in Appendix 1.

The third and final teacher interview occurred at the end of the semester, between weeks 15 and 16. In addition to questions related to the completion of class goals and objectives discussed in previous interviews, the teachers were asked to reflect on how their own perspective had changed over the course of the semester. This prompt was not included as a means of assessing the transformation of teacher belief over the course of the semester but rather as a means of negotiating a concluding stance on belief transformation within the context of the interview procedure. The final interview took approximately 80 minutes, and used a semi-structured format. Interview 3 questions are included in Appendix 1.

Observation. The third phase of the data collection procedure was the observation of classroom activity in which planned actions and operations became manifest in the interactions between teachers and students. Bi-weekly classroom observation occurred for the duration of the four, semester long courses. The eight total observations per classroom case were audio recorded
and field notes were also taken by the researcher focusing specifically on the
details of classroom activity at the level of planned teacher actions, operations,
and classroom learning tasks. An observation protocol (see Appendix 3) was
designed by the researcher to organize classroom observations and provide an
in-depth picture of classroom activity. The observation protocol was used to
focus observation on actual teacher and student roles, perceived teacher
objectives, tool use and student grouping within specific learning tasks.

Classroom observation data contributed in several ways to the overall
investigation of teacher beliefs and the context in which they arose. First, audio
recordings were examined for teacher directives or explicit rationales for
particular actions or tasks given by the teacher when explaining the purpose of
teaching and learning activity to the class, giving feedback on language form and
usage and evaluating student progress. Second, observations were used to
illuminate how teachers used both conceptual and real tools to solve problems as
they emerged. Third, observation was used to describe the organization of
classroom activity, including observed teacher and student roles. Finally,
observation data was utilized to select particular instances of teacher practice
where teacher motives were unclear or where initial course planning decisions
were questioned or perceived as unsuccessful. These instances were then
brought up by the researcher and discussed further during the subsequent
teacher interviews. Once data collection was completed, the four classroom
cases were analyzed separately and the data then compared both within and
across institutional and teacher cases.
Author Positionality

In this section I discuss my own background, effects it may have had on the study, and how I have attempted to limit researcher bias in the data collection procedures. Similar to the teachers selected for this study, I possess a graduate degree in applied linguistics, have experience teaching English in a foreign country and for the past five years I have been a lecturer in the ESL department at a local community college. Our similar backgrounds and experience put me in the position of an insider already possessing a general orientation to institutional requirements, departmental models of learning and the types of approaches teachers were using in their classrooms. When I began teaching at Crater Community College (CCC), Brad (one of the teachers participating in this study) was assigned as my faculty mentor. I observed his class several times during my first semester at CCC and it was through these observations that I was introduced to the departmental “opportunities model” and the learning cycle approach to teaching and learning. I was aware of the potential bias but included Brad as a participant in the study because of his teaching experience and willingness to reflect on his teaching practice. I minimized bias by following the same research protocols as used with the other participants.

The origins of the study and the construction of research questions were also rooted in the context where I taught. As a lecturer I had also experienced first-hand many of the situations and frustrations that the participating teachers described in their interviews and was interested in how institutional contexts affected teacher’s thinking about their practice.
The choice of a qualitative, case-study methodology and the selection of activity theory as an analytical framework was based on personal interest in socio-cultural theory and critical approaches to teaching and learning. However, the choice of descriptive and analytical tools was also informed by previous research in the area of teacher beliefs and the perceived need to innovate and expand on an established body of knowledge. In order to limit researcher bias, I have tried to limit the description of contextual factors and teacher beliefs to participant interpretations of observed classroom actions and the analysis of documents outlining institutional goals and constraints on teaching practice.

According to Talmy (2010) “complex relations of power” (p. 137) permeate the interview process. Many of the power asymmetries between researcher and subject that Talmy discussed, including differences in status, social class and age, were limited in this study due to my status as a peer. However, according to Briggs (2007) “power lies not just in controlling how discourse unfolds . . . but gaining control over its recontextualization – shaping how it draws on other discourses . . . and when, where, how” portions of discourse will be used (p. 562). I have attempted to limit the effects of recontextualization in my study by situating teacher’s beliefs within an in-depth discussion of the context in which they arose.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis focused on comparing teacher descriptions of classroom activity, observed practices and data gathered on departmental and institutional expectancies of teaching and learning behavior. The data analysis procedure
was comprised of both an initial open coding and an additional axial coding procedure. During the open coding process the six conceptual categories of the activity framework (subjects, objects, tools, rules, community and division of labor) were filled in with data containing teacher, researcher and institutional descriptions of the overall activity of teaching ESL classes in the contexts examined. Seven shared themes were identified from data from individual teacher cases. These themes emerged through the open coding procedure; teacher background, teacher roles, goals and objectives, students, classroom activities, expectations, and grading and evaluation. Each theme was related to one or more categories present in the activity framework. The additional axial coding procedure was used to elaborate on the extent of the relationships between these categories while also taking into account the context of the separate teacher and institutional cases.

**Subject themes.** Teacher background and teacher roles provided background on participants past teaching experience and their preferred classroom roles.

**Teacher background.** Teacher background provided a brief sketch of the educational and teaching background of the participating teachers and outlined the types of approaches to language teaching and learning teachers had come into contact with in the past. Teacher background dealt specifically with how teachers past experiences contributed to their current teaching approaches and their beliefs on how language was best taught and learned.
**Teacher roles.** Teacher roles incorporated data explicating teachers’ ideal classroom roles together with teacher accounts of their perceived classroom roles as they developed and changed over the course of the semester. Ideal roles were compared with documentation of teacher’s actual roles in observed classroom tasks.

**Object themes.** Teacher’s goals and objectives and beliefs about students defined the object of classroom activity.

**Goals and objectives.** The theme of goals and objectives included teachers overall course goals related to the teaching and learning of language and course content. Goals and objectives were presented as personal, subjective constructs related to larger institutional and departmental goals and objectives. This section contains data on institutional objectives as presented in college mission statements and departmental goals and objectives, as well as observational reports on how specific objectives were presented to learners within individual classroom tasks and assignments.

**Students.** Data on teachers’ beliefs about the students they were teaching was included to provide a picture of perceived student needs and preferred learning styles, as well as perceived barriers to learning and student engagement in classroom activities. Teachers also described the types of students they preferred to teach. Classroom observation data was also utilized to describe the classroom division of labor, including student roles and responsibilities in the activity.
Tools, rules, community and division of labor themes. Classroom activities, grading and evaluation and teacher’s expectations of students described the details of teacher planning, actions and operations within the contexts examined.

Classroom activities. Classroom activities combined data on both observed and unobserved classroom activities that participating teachers chose as exemplars of their individual approaches to teaching English. This theme also explored the rationale behind classroom activity choices, tool use, and teacher’s evaluation and discussion of why different activities were perceived as being more successful than others. This section includes participating teachers’ explanations and rationales for the selection of class materials and context sourced constraints on the selection and use of particular teaching tools as well as observational data describing classroom organization and specific teaching and learning tasks.

Expectations. Teachers had expectations about almost every aspect of the courses they were teaching. In particular, teachers had clear expectations of their students’ language abilities and their capacity to participate in planned classroom activities. Teacher expectations of student learning were often based on departmental expectations of student progress and more general theoretical orientations to how language is best taught and learned.

Grading and evaluation. This theme examined both departmental and individual teacher policies on course grading, evaluation of student language skills and giving feedback.
**Grounded theory methods.** Cultural historical activity theory has been discussed as a compatible partner to grounded theory methods (Seaman, 2008). Seaman mentioned that the well-defined but non-restrictive nature of activity theory methodology allowed for the emergence of theory without forcing concepts. It was important, however, that the multiple aspects of the activity system served as data sources rather than as predetermined conceptual categories into which collected data was forced. According to Charmaz (2006), grounded theorists often bring with them a set of assumptions and perspectives based on their own background knowledge and experience, influencing their choice of research topics and conceptual focus. Corbin and Strauss (2008) did not condone the use of predetermined theoretical frameworks in theory creation but also acknowledged several instances in which theoretical frameworks may be useful. For example, theoretical frameworks may be useful in choosing a methodology for a study or, in the case of the present study, a previously defined theoretical framework can provide the initial, organizing concepts upon which a middle-range theory of teacher beliefs is built (p. 40).

In recent years a constructivist strain of grounded theory has emerged in response to criticisms of grounded theory's methodological shortcomings in representing the synthesis of subjective experience and social context, as well as the foreseen need to reconcile positivist foundations with poststructuralist conceptualizations of the subject and knowledge formation. According to Charmaz (2006), a constructivist approach to grounded theory focuses on both how and why, “participants construct meanings and actions in specific situations,”
but “only after establishing how people construct meanings and actions can the analyst pursue why they act as they do” (p. 130). In addition, constructivist grounded theory must not only theorize the interpretations of research subjects but also recognize the interpretive nature of the overall theory being generated by the researcher. According to Charmaz (2010), meaning can only be uncovered by going beyond the initial analysis to explore underlying values, beliefs and ideologies in addition to the context in which they arise.

Seaman (2008) stated that grounded theory and activity theory had “complimentary ambiguities” (p. 5), with grounded theory providing useful procedures in data collection and analysis where data collection and analysis procedures in activity theory were underspecified. Conversely, activity theory’s emphasis on the relationship between individual mental processes and context offered grounded theory “clear strategies for substantively analyzing how social situations are constituted by culture” (p. 5). Overall, Seaman believed that activity theory was able to expand grounded theory analysis in new directions through “broadening the historical and cultural context of a study,” and “suggesting important sources of data that have been underspecified in traditional grounded theory literature” (p. 7).

The expansion of grounded theory analysis through the incorporation of activity theory is most evident in the comparison of the units of analysis of both systems. Activity theory takes the activity framework itself as its unit of analysis, comprised of subjects, objects, the means that mediate them, as well as more explicit contextual factors embodied in the constructs of division of labor,
community and rules (Engestrom, 1987). In the most recent version of the activity model, analysis has focused on examining the contradictions that arise in activity and how contradictions are or are not resolved by multiple subjects within organizational contexts (Engestrom, 1999).

The synthesis of the structured activity model with grounded theory’s pragmatic focus on emergence and procedural analysis is a substantial development contributing to the current literature on both activity theory and constructivist grounded theory in several important ways. First, the inclusion of grounded theory methodology addresses the perceived shortcoming regarding the exclusion of subjectivity and sensuous experience in the basic triangular representation of the activity system (Roth, 2009; Sannino, 2011). I argue that subjectivity and experience need to be addressed in ways that preserve the ontological and epistemological foundations of both theories while also addressing poststructuralist critiques of objective knowledge and positivist research methods in education. The complimentary structural and methodological aspects of grounded theory and activity theory seem particularly suited to meet that challenge. In this study, the combination of the activity framework and grounded theory model are embodied in the initial open coding and additional axial coding procedures.

**Axial coding.** Within the activity system the categories being analyzed and the properties that define them are already formed as part of a larger conceptual framework that illuminates the relationship between teacher thought, teacher practice and context. In addition to the preliminary open coding
procedure, the analysis was designed to further explore the relationship existing among major categories and subcategories in the data, such as teacher objectives and observed classroom tasks, as well as the connections between the major categories of the activity system themselves. This can be accomplished through an additional axial data coding procedure, which helps to contextualize teacher beliefs and locate them “within a conditional structure” which is defined by “the circumstances in which problems, issues, happenings, or events pertaining to a phenomenon are situated or arise” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 127).

Strauss and Corbin (1998) stated that an organizational structure is needed to order the linkages among categories and keep track of emerging connections in the data. Paradigm is the term used to describe the analytic stance that integrated process, or the description of how a person, in this case the teacher being studied, acts/interacts with structure. Paradigms are formed from three basic parts. First, “conditions” which, according to Strauss and Corbin, are “a conceptual way of grouping answers to the questions why, where, how come, and when” and form the context “in which phenomenon are embedded” (p. 128). Conditions themselves, “arise out of time, place, culture, rules, regulations, beliefs, economics, power, or gender factors as well as the social worlds, organizations, and institutions in which we find ourselves along with our personal motivations and biographies” (p. 130). In this study, conditions were closely related to the motives for teacher planning actions as well as to teacher descriptions of ideal roles and observed divisions of labor. Second,
“actions” are defined as either purposeful acts taken to resolve a problem or undertaken in response to unexpected events or, perhaps much more commonly within educational/institutional contexts, as routines based on previously worked out strategies which are implemented and kept on track through classroom rules and procedures. According to Strauss and Corbin, actions included not only the observable physical, verbal and non-verbal interaction among individuals but also internal discussions and reflection going on within the individuals themselves, for example, a teacher weighing individual teaching goals against institutional or departmental ones while designing a course syllabus.

“Consequences” comprise the final piece of the paradigm puzzle. Consequences may be intended or unintended and are unavoidable because they occur as the result of both action and inaction. According to Strauss and Corbin, describing the consequences of actions, “as well as explaining how they alter the situation and affect the phenomenon in question, provides for more complete explanations” (p. 134). Through the grouping of coded interview, observation and document data into conditions, actions and consequences, a more complete picture of the research subjects’ interpretations of teaching experience emerged parallel to a description of the specific circumstances in which their beliefs about teaching and learning were articulated.

Once the data coding procedures were completed and the activity system categories and sub-categories were saturated, the individual teacher and institutional case analyses were compared to develop and strengthen central
themes that appeared in both data sets as well as to discover variations between cases.

**Trustworthiness.** The trustworthiness of the study was assured through several measures built into the data collection and analysis procedures. First, a description of researcher bias emerged through the description of conditions that arose during both class observation and interview procedures as well as through the examination of the dialogue itself in which particular aspects of the researchers past experience or theoretical orientation became part of the discussion and thereby contributed to the co-constructed narrative of teacher practice. Second, the use of multiple data collection techniques allowed for the comparison of observation, interview and institutional/biographical data to construct a holistic picture of the activity of language teaching within the context of the institutions and classrooms examined. Third, the longitudinal design of both classroom observations and teacher interviews allowed for member checking as a way for participants to clarify and elaborate on their previous descriptions of classroom activity. Finally, in addition to researcher interpretations of interview and observation data, sections of transcribed raw data are included in the final report alongside researcher interpretations so that the inductive process and the grounds for interpretation become more transparent to readers who may then reach their own conclusions.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

The results of the study are presented as four case studies, both individual and grouped within two institutional contexts. Each case study incorporates longitudinal data from participants teaching different ESL courses over the course of one academic semester. Institutional contexts are presented first with a description of the institutions, the ESL programs or departments, and of the students and the participating teachers. Individual teacher cases include in-depth descriptions of classroom activity and teacher beliefs about teaching and learning and how they fit within the overall activity model. Common themes between individual teacher and institutional cases are then analyzed and discussed.

Institution One: Harbor Community College

Harbor Community College’s (HCC) main campus is located in a large middle-income suburban community on the island of O‘ahu. HCC has approximately 8,000 students enrolled every semester and an average of 70 international students from 26 countries enrolling annually. HCC’s overall mission is to provide members of the community access to educational programs, which contribute to workforce, personal and community development. HCC’s institutional philosophy states that HCC is “committed to providing an educational environment that accepts people as they are and fosters the development of each student’s unique talents” (HCC website). HCC’s open door admissions policy reflects their philosophy of inclusion and community development.
**Program description.** The English Language Institute (ELI) at Harbor Community College is a non-credit program providing “high quality English instruction to students wishing to improve their English for academic, professional, or personal purposes.” According to the program website, students receive 18 or more hours of instruction per week while enrolled in the ELI. The program was divided into a series of three courses focusing on the improvement of different combinations of English language skills; listening/speaking, reading/writing, grammar and pronunciation. Courses were scheduled as eight-week sessions with two courses fitting within the sixteen-week academic semester.

In keeping with the institutional open door policy, no TOEFL test score was required for admission to the ELI. Placement within the program was determined by a placement test administered when students first enrolled. According to the participating teachers, students who tested into the ELI were typically more accurately placed than students who had advanced through the program. Once students were placed they needed to pass each course with a 70% or better final course grade to move on to the next level. However, after completing the same course three times, students were automatically promoted to the next level. The participating HCC teachers believed that this process of automatic promotion was in place as a way for the program to retain students. Although most students in the ELI were perfectly capable of progressing, “some students take longer and need more exposure to the language” (Lisa, HCC teacher) and for some students it was impossible to learn enough language to
progress in one eight-week session. According to the teachers interviewed, most students did eventually advance through the program and those who passed the advanced level courses in the ELI were then allowed to register for credit coursework at HCC the following semester.

**Students.** The student population in the ELI reflected the diversity of the college and the island of O‘ahu, with students hailing from places as far ranging as Japan, South Korea, China, Tahiti, Sweden and Taiwan. Students ranged in age from 18 to 65 years old and brought with them a wide range of educational backgrounds, abilities and experiences. According to the teachers, most students in the ELI had not had much previous exposure to using English in their everyday lives. As a result, HCC teachers described students as having “a very wide range of abilities and past experiences” (Curt, Interview 2) and being generally “inhibited and tense” (Lisa, Interview 1) with ambiguous language learning goals.

Students in the ELI were divided into two general categories, recreational and degree seeking. According to the teachers, recreational students usually did not have plans to enter credit courses at HCC. Although several of the recreational students in the classes observed had lived in the United States for up to five years, they had been living in communities where they could get by using their native language and had relatively few opportunities for complex interactions with native English speakers, thereby limiting their opportunities for interacting in English. According to the teachers, many of the recreational students chose to enroll in the ELI at HCC for instrumental reasons such as the
location was near their home, they needed a student visa to stay in the United States, and the relatively inexpensive tuition at HCC.

Because the ELI accepted all qualified students who applied, recreational students were often misplaced into courses above their actual proficiency level, resulting in higher rates of course repetition than if there were appropriate lower level courses for them. According to one teacher, some recreational students could potentially spend five or more years learning English in the ELI before developing the English language skills necessary to function in an academic classroom. Having repeating students in the same courses up to three times in a row affected teacher lesson planning and resulted in teachers not being able to use their “best stuff” (L2) and having to develop new materials in order to accommodate repeaters.

Teachers characterized degree-seeking students, in contrast, as having more specific goals, particularly career goals that required an Associates degree to achieve. Several degree-seeking students in the courses selected for this study had English-speaking family members in the United States and needed to speak English in order to communicate with them. According to the teachers, overall, degree-seeking students spent a lot more time preparing for classes and seemed better attuned to the expectations of academic life. Teachers believed that some degree-seeking students were also misplaced and that often the ELI curriculum was not rigorous enough to meet their needs.

According to the participating teachers, after completing the intensive English program, most students moved on to developmental English classes and
eventually to English 100, fulfilling the college English requirement. However, once students left the ELI they were often faced with what one teacher described as a “sink or swim scenario” (L3) in which the student’s English language abilities were put to the test in the authentic academic environment of credit coursework. Teachers had mixed feelings about how well the ELI was preparing students for the inevitable transition to credit classes.

It's just kind of hard to know that somebody's spending so much time and money and what's most likely going to happen is that he'll spend more time and money in our program and then he'll go into the credit side and he'll have the sink or swim scenario and he'll sink and he'll fail out and he'll go back to Korea -- it's just not an ideal situation for the student. It seems like something's not right with that. (L3)

Although the ELI was an accelerated, intensive English program, the program goals of intensive English instruction were balanced with the fact that the program accepted everybody who applied. According to the teachers, this meant that they often had to teach students who were not prepared to do academic work.

We are an accelerated program, so we are moving quickly and students who can catch on quickly and who come in with a lot of experience and language proficiency . . . they are going to do really well, and the students (who are not as prepared) are going to lag behind. (L2)

Partially in response to the perception by teachers and administrators that more students were sinking than swimming once they exited the ELI, and the
perceived need to give ELI students more time to develop their English language skills ("some people need longer to learn" (L1)), there was a recent push in the program for stricter grading procedures that reflected students’ needs to repeat courses. However, according to the participating teachers, the department had not yet found an effective grading and student promotion policy that could be applied to the whole program. Instead teachers and administrators occasionally got together and, “just kind of hashed things out, sometimes bringing samples of student work, talking about students and figuring out what we think would be best for them in terms of their language proficiency.” (L3)

When asked about their students’ expectations of ELI courses at HCC, both participating teachers were unsure about what their students expected from their classes. Occasionally teachers had given students questionnaires asking them to evaluate different aspects of their ELI courses. Usually teachers received positive comments, but teachers believed that this was because students did not know how to express any kind of critical or negative feedback about the course or the instructor and even if they could, they might not feel comfortable recommending doing something different.

**Teachers.** Both participating teachers were lecturers, had taught ESL at HCC between one to five years and had received their graduate degrees from the same department.

**Teacher Case 1: Lisa.** Lisa is a Caucasian female in her early thirties. At the time of the study she had taught at HCC for five years. She was a lecturer and as such her teaching contract was renewed every eight weeks depending
upon student enrollment in the ELI. Lisa had a Masters degree in second language teaching and during the semester that she was interviewed, she was also in her third year of a doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Hawai‘i. During the Fall 2011 semester Lisa taught two eight-week sessions of the 7-credit high intermediate listening and speaking course at HCC. The first eight weeks she had a small class of 5 students. In the second session, she had 10 students in her class, a “blend” of six high-intermediate (level 3) students and four advanced (level 4) students.

**Teacher background.** During the second year of her doctoral program, Lisa began working together with several other graduate students and a faculty researcher on a project investigating what she described as social cultural approaches to working with English Language Learners (ELL) in mainstream K-12 classrooms. Lisa’s role in the project was to collect classroom data, but she also attended teacher-training courses together with the participating elementary teachers in order to learn what the teachers were studying so she had a frame of reference for the data collection. Through her participation in the project, Lisa was exposed to a variety of teaching techniques and strategies for teaching ELLs, which she adapted for use in her community college English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. In particular, Lisa mentioned the concept of scaffolding, the use of strategies like K.W.L ("What do you know? What do you want to know? What did you learn?" (L1)), and the use of tools such as graphic organizers, as being “something that all elementary school teachers do,” (L1) and that were also effective when applied in the ESL classes she taught at HCC.
Although there was a division between the K-12 “ELL stuff” that she was studying and the Community College ESL setting where she taught, Lisa felt that her doctoral program coursework and research experience were helping her become a better teacher and meet her students’ needs. Her teaching situation allowed her to try new practical techniques and teaching strategies with her students.

Time management was also an important aspect of her teaching. Lisa believed that she was organized, preferred complex classroom activity structures and tended to over prepare for her classes. Lisa devoted particular attention to lesson planning and giving students enough time to complete their work in class so they did not feel overwhelmed. Lisa preferred to structure classroom activities in easy steps that built upon previous learning and which eventually culminated in two graded group presentation projects every session. When assigning homework, Lisa liked to send her students home with clear expectations and manageable assignments.

The time constraints imposed by her doctoral program were also having possible negative effects on her teaching. The additional workload of studying for exams and completing homework assignments had taken some of the focus off preparing for the classes she was teaching. The increasing demands on her time necessitated that she occasionally teach her courses on “autopilot” (L2), relying on the textbook and investing a minimal amount of prep time. Because she had taught the same courses repeatedly over the past five years, even on autopilot Lisa could avoid the types of major disasters, “which could happen your
first semester of teaching” but still felt “not 100% pleased” (L2) with her passable teaching performance.

Lisa had also developed what she described as “a fear of running out of stuff to do” which began in the early days of her teaching and caused her to over prepare. Over preparing and setting unrealistic goals that could not be accomplished within the class time allotted resulted in time management issues that emerged over the course of the semester, such as having to postpone student presentations until the next class meeting. These issues fueled Lisa’s doubts about how much students were learning in her classes. Lisa perceived her students as not being able to proceed “step by step” (L2) because they had been given too much work to do on their own.

At midterm, when asked to reflect back on the first half of the semester, Lisa felt, perhaps due to increasing demands on her time and teaching on autopilot, that she had been setting unrealistic goals for the class and unintentionally overwhelming students by “trying to cram in too much” (L2). Lisa stated that she was usually more organized and structured and normally planned class time better.

Teacher roles. Lisa saw the teacher role as complex and multifaceted. Her stated role was to support students in whatever they were able to do and to encourage them to try new things, to work on certain skills more than others, and to encourage them to become more mature human beings. Also her role was to give students tools and create opportunities for students to learn language, “to plan and prepare and think creatively and figure out and use what I know from
the theoretical side and also what I know from experience to make those
techniques happen” (L1). Lisa also believed that it was her role to hold students accountable for their work, and to be the voice that points out what students could do better through critical feedback on their English listening and speaking skills. However, Lisa did not like to scold students for behaviors that she believed to be potentially detrimental to their learning, for example, consistently arriving late for class and not turning in homework assignments. Lisa admitted that disciplining students was not her strength. Instead she, “just lets them not do whatever they don't want to do” and did not believe in trying to “change them or push them into changing” (L1). Lisa saw this stance as being the difference between teaching children and adults.

Lisa stated that she preferred smaller classes and student group projects because the small class size allowed her to put students on the spot if there were disciplinary problems and group work forced other students in the group to pressure them into completing their assignments. When the class size doubled during the second session, Lisa changed her stance on class size and stated that she preferred larger classes because they allowed for more possibilities with student grouping and positively changed her classroom role by making the class less teacher-centered.

Classroom activities. Lisa was observed using the assigned course textbook as the starting point for most of her lessons. She believed that there was probably a better book they could be using in class but she used the program mandated text since she already had materials developed based on the
content presented. Because she had “a lot of other stuff going on,” (L1) she
didn't have enough time to develop new materials. Although she had been using
the same program-selected text for five years, she believed that the program
would be open to changing books. However, she found that none of the teachers
was willing to invest time in the process of selecting and trying something
different. Because she was teaching a blended level course in both the first and
second sessions, Lisa had to develop and adapt her teaching materials and
classroom activities to accommodate students with different proficiency levels.

Group work and pair work were essential parts of her teaching process
and students were often observed working in small groups. Lisa took her
emphasis on student collaboration further by designating roles within groups,
sometimes allowing students to choose their own roles and sometimes assigning
them. Observed student roles differed depending on the project and included
writer, reporter, timekeeper, team manager and marketing director. Each role
had a corresponding responsibility attached. Lisa believed that if student roles
weren’t made clear then students would not be able to actively participate in
groups.

Lisa was happy when students were engaged in classroom tasks. Lisa
defined engagement as when students were, “doing something and they are
really listening to each other and speaking” (L2). When students were engaged
in a particular activity, “they are doing what the class is about” (L2) and this
allowed the teacher to step in and offer support or feedback, which was the kind
of learning support that Lisa preferred to provide. Lisa designed classroom
activities to create situations where students had to speak and listen to others in order to complete classroom tasks “where there is no way that they are just going to sit there” (L2). Lisa stated her preference for jigsaw and information gap activities because “Everybody is doing something . . . As a teacher I get freaked out if somebody is not engaged, so I have to force them to be engaged whether they like it or not” (L1).

Lisa’s description of the graph interpretation activity illustrated her preference for complex activity structures as a way to keep students engaged while working in groups. The graph interpretation activity began as a teacher guided lesson focused on understanding and summarizing the information in several graphs related to the topic of the death penalty. The activity began with a whole class discussion, teacher questions about the information in the graphs and student reactions to the information. Students were then put into pairs and each of the pairs was given a new graph related to the death penalty. Students were then asked to explain their graph to the other groups. Lisa believed the activity was a success because students were talking about the information in their graphs, were asking the teacher clarification questions and connecting the information in the graphs to prior knowledge of the topic. However, when Lisa put a similar graph interpretation exercise on the quiz, students were not as successful as she had expected.

Expectations. Lisa felt that the curriculum was a little bit beyond the reach of her students. Activities that worked really well with previous groups of students were too difficult for her current group. Lisa reported that when she first
started teaching at HCC, the ELI received a government grant that brought in international students from all over the world to study. The students who were selected received a full scholarship to study at HCC and, according to Lisa, were very motivated to learn English. These students “spoiled” (L3) her but also challenged her to come up with bigger and better lesson plans, raised her expectations of students and allowed her to strengthen the curriculum. Several years later, HCC lost the grant and the motivated students stopped coming. As a result Lisa had to adjust the difficulty of her courses, making them easier for the types of students who were now enrolling. For example, Lisa used to cover three chapters in the textbook every term, now she only had enough time to cover two. Lisa felt that her current students also needed to raise their own level of achievement by showing more enthusiasm for learning English, participating more in class, and putting more time into class assignments. For this reason it had become particularly important to Lisa that students were placed correctly when they entered the program.

Goals and objectives. Initially Lisa stated that she did not articulate to herself or her students the objectives of the course and admitted that she was unaware of the official course objectives that were included on her course syllabus. Lisa did not require the students to become familiar with the official course objectives because she believed that students were not able to understand them and instead were more interested in practical questions specific to course assignments, presentation format and homework. Instead, Lisa had goals related to skills she wanted students to master, for example, being able to
work together in a small group, taking notes on lectures, talking with other
students about homework assignments and carrying on a conversation in English
without teacher direction (L1). Eventually Lisa admitted that the course did have
objectives but they remained unarticulated and were not something she
systematically tried to accomplish.

Later in the semester, perhaps in response to the perceived mismatch
between teacher and student goals, Lisa stated that, in general, she had been
trying “to simplify . . . to go more in depth with less” (L2). This was not in terms of
simplifying the course content, but instead covering less material and fewer
activities and going more in depth with the materials she already had. Rather
than just going through the “superficial” (L2) motions of listening and note taking,
Lisa wanted her students to leave her class with knowledge of the topics that
were presented and discussed in class. For Lisa, “learning is going more in
depth and understanding the ideas . . . quality over quantity” (L2). However, at
the end of the semester Lisa was displeased with students not being able to
formulate a response that showed their full understanding of the ideas presented
in her lectures, even though they had been discussed in class several times.
Lisa believed that although students had shown improvement in their listening
and speaking skills, her new objective of increasing the depth of learning had not
been met.

Conditions related to student placement and grading were central in Lisa’s
explanation of teaching activity in the ELI. The combination of a perceived
decrease in overall student English proficiency and the ELI’s open door policy
meant that both degree seeking and recreational students were often misplaced in classes that were too difficult. The process of only being able to repeat a course twice before being automatically promoted to the next level affected teacher lesson planning because students were repeating levels more frequently and not wanting to repeat with the same course materials and assignments. For Lisa, a temporary solution was to cover less material in each term more in-depth, a tactic that was ultimately perceived as unsuccessful. Overall, Lisa saw the lack of an effective departmental grading and student promotion policy as being responsible for the lack of student success and the eventual sink or swim situation students faced once they left the ELI.

**Teacher Case 2: Curt.** Curt is a Caucasian male in his early thirties. He had been teaching at HCC for one year and had also taught English in a Japanese public junior high school for four years before returning to the US to attend graduate school. Similar to Lisa, Curt was a lecturer in the ELI at HCC. He had a BA in English and a Masters degree in second language teaching from the University of Hawai‘i. Curt was always interested in teaching English in the community college system and decided to get his MA so he could meet the minimum qualifications to teach there. During the Fall 2011 semester Curt taught two eight-week sessions of the seven-credit high intermediate/advanced reading and writing course at HCC. The first eight weeks he had a small class of 6 students. The second session he had 12 students in his “blended” level class.

**Teacher background.** Through his studies and teaching experience, Curt had been exposed to a variety of different approaches to teaching ESL (content-
based, task-based, problem-based and project-based) and believed that “the core thing they have in common are just solid teaching practices, best practices if you will” (C1). Curt also believed that all teaching approaches were valid and worth pursuing but was not sold on any one approach as a “silver bullet theory” (C1) and was skeptical of claims that a particular approach was the best way to teach.

Over the past year Curt taught almost every course offered in the ELI and had recently begun teaching developmental writing classes through the English department at HCC. Curt admitted that he had been extremely busy during the semester; in addition to his ELI course he was teaching two other developmental writing courses that he had never taught before. Even though his ELI course met twice a week for two hours and 45 minutes, he felt that he was not getting as much done as he would have liked. Curt admitted that he was “not a great time management guy” (C2) and under the additional strain of teaching new courses and a mixed level ELI class he had to be very well organized in order to accomplish his teaching goals.

Curt struggled with balancing the workload of teaching three courses. Midway through the semester, he voiced his concern that teaching was “a lot of work . . . and you’re compensated the same amount no matter how much work you put into it” (C2). Although Curt loved teaching, he admitted he had to “call it quits” (C2) sometimes when preparing for class and unfortunately was not always able to follow through with what he had originally planned on accomplishing because of his busy schedule and additional teaching responsibilities.
Teacher roles. Curt described his reading and writing class as a place where students learned new vocabulary, discussed topics they were interested in, and gained experience facilitating a small group. Curt described his ideal classroom role as facilitating a collaborative learning experience, which he described as selecting and presenting materials and providing the “backdrop” (C2) for student learning. Curt believed that teaching others and making mistakes in the process were the best ways to learn. Curt admitted that he was unsure exactly how to fulfill the facilitator role and that his actual role varied depending on the type of classroom activity or lesson being taught. Curt also believed the teacher role was dependant upon the students he was teaching. He expressed concern about his ability to facilitate collaborative learning with his blended level group. “I’d like to just facilitate learning in a positive way, where they’re actually using the language that they are learning . . . but I’m not sure exactly how to do that yet” (C2).

In the ELI the majority of the students were from East Asian countries. Curt explained that Asian students usually had experience with lectures and rote memorization rather than interaction and other student-centered communicative teaching practices. Curt felt that students needed as much language input and opportunities for output as possible and that working together on group projects created a more positive classroom environment where students were more comfortable taking risks using the language they were learning. Although Curt felt that collaborative activities, where students worked together to provide input, produce output and give feedback, were effective in improving students’
language as well as creating a more positive learning environment, some students did not think their classmates were acceptable teachers and wanted Curt to present and explain course content and provide more feedback on their errors.

Similar to Lisa, one way that Curt was observed encouraging collaboration was by assigning different duties to individual group members. He did this to ensure that students were responsible for one aspect of the group project, making the assignment easier if students were able to cooperate but making the assignment more difficult if everyone in the group did not participate fully.

Goals and objectives. Besides the departmental student learning objectives included on his syllabus, Curt mentioned giving students the opportunity to write in English, having students learn from their mistakes and understand the purpose of classroom activity as additional teacher and student objectives. Over the past seven or eight years Curt had developed a bank of “lessons, tools and activities” (C1) that could be applied in different situations with minimal adaptation. Curt utilized the assigned course textbooks as much as possible but believed it was hard for students to apply the contents to their own lives. Although Curt described himself as “not a huge book fan” (C1), he often found it less time consuming to use the book in class than creating or adapting new course materials. Instead Curt tried to focus on designing and adapting supplementary activities and readings that complimented textbook content themes.
Curt’s objectives for the class remained the same throughout the semester but the schedule had changed. Because he was coordinating both level 3 and level 4 groups in one class, when it came to lesson planning and delivering course content, Curt believed that “everything is tentative” (C2). Curt loved it when students asked questions. However, in observed classes, if students asked too many questions he was not able to follow his lesson plan, which, according to Curt, happened almost every class. Because Curt was essentially teaching the same content, using the same textbooks and teaching the same students repeatedly, he “recycled” materials, which he admitted, “gets old [for the students] by the third time around” (C1).

Classroom activities. Curt stated that he preferred collaborative types of activities for developing both linguistic and communicative skills in his students. Curt believed that students needed as much “input and output” (C1) as possible, and although he was capable of giving it to them, he preferred students to collaborate and practice with each other. This resulted in “the environment changing for some students in a more positive way . . . they feel more comfortable exposing themselves to each other . . . and taking a risk to use the language that they already have or that they are trying to acquire” (C1). However some students were less accepting of the collaborative model and wanted feedback on their English from the teacher only.

Curt stated that he preferred classroom activities that had an end goal. For example, in his reading circle activity, students had to find an article that they were interested in, summarize it, write comprehension questions that they...
disseminated to the whole class, and then finally lead a class discussion of the article. The goal of the activity was for students to gain experience finding research materials, facilitating small group discussions and asking different types of questions. These were skills that Curt believed were required in “every level of education in the US,” (C1) and were particularly useful in his student’s future college courses. According to Curt, even students who did not put much effort into their reading circle projects learned that the less work you put into your project the less interesting the resulting analysis and discussion will be. Curt had first learned about the reading circle activity when he was an MA student and now used this particular activity structure in several of the observed class meetings.

*Evaluation and grading.* The final course grade was determined by student performance on quizzes on vocabulary or content from the textbook and class discussions, as well as student essays. Curt had rubrics for all of the assigned essays based on the course textbook content. Curt often preferred to stick closely to the textbook because he believed it gave both the teacher and the students “something to fall back on” (C2) in cases where expectations or directions were unclear.

According to Curt, attendance, homework and class participation used to be more heavily weighted when evaluating students, but the class evaluation had shifted and was now more “performance based.” Correlating with the change in focus from participation to performance-based evaluation was an overall decrease in students’ average grades. "They were all A or B students, now they
are all B or C students.” According to Curt, the overall decrease in student grades meant, “that either our (ELI) standards are too high or the students just aren’t doing it and from my perspective the students just aren’t following directions” (C1).

**Students.** Students had differing experiences and backgrounds in terms of academic writing but Curt believed that most of his students had limited exposure to and practice with reading and writing in English. Curt believed that since most of his students were from Asia they were accustomed to learning English through lectures and memorization rather than through interaction or simply using English to communicate. Curt stated that some students had difficulty adjusting to a less teacher-centered classroom. He believed that some students were more comfortable taking risks using the language they already had or were trying to acquire, but other students, “want it just from the teacher because they don’t feel that their classmates are acceptable teachers” (C1).

Curt preferred students who asked questions, participated actively in class, challenged him as a teacher and “do what they are supposed to do, but also understand why they are doing it” (C1). However, Curt did not often explicitly state the purpose of classroom activities in observed classes and seemed to prefer it when students could infer the purpose of classroom learning activities. He admitted that the purpose of classroom work “oftentimes gets lost” (C1).

**Expectations/blended instruction.** Several conditions arose that affected classroom actions and teacher perceptions of the overall success of classroom
activities. First, Curt mentioned time constraints as having an influence on his teaching practice. During the semester of the study Curt was simultaneously teaching two additional developmental writing courses at HCC, which affected the amount of time he was able to allocate for preparation. Curt felt that the short eight-week sessions made it difficult to measure student improvement. He was confused whether students were learning anything in his ELI courses.

Being forced to teach a blended level course also had a significant influence on classroom activity. Initially, Curt reacted negatively to the lack of tools he had been given to teach two levels in one classroom. The blended instruction model and more importantly the motive behind the use of the blended model were not clearly expressed to him or the students. Curt decided to teach the blended level course by keeping level 3 and level 4 students separate in the class, completing the same course readings but submitting separate writing assignments, perhaps in response to students’ initial negative reactions to the blended level course and their unwillingness to collaborate and teach each other. The additional complexity of teaching two different levels during one class period made it harder for the teacher to organize and plan class activities and made all course planning decisions “tentative.”

Curt had received limited training in teaching blended level courses. The previous semester a speaker had come from Baltimore to conduct a workshop on teaching mixed level classes, which reassured Curt that other teachers were using the model. However, after completing the training he still felt that the model was not clearly expressed. According to Curt, at the beginning of the
semester the only tool he was given by the program director was a piece of scrap paper, “I was told to draw a line down the middle and then do part of my lesson plan for one course on the left side and the other half on the right side” (C3).

Although there were other teachers in the ELI who taught blended courses, Curt believed that his was the only class where the students were supposed to be taught level 3 and level 4 curricula simultaneously. According to Curt, there was a big difference between the two student groups in “just about everything, (especially) speed of retention and reading abilities” (C2). Curt was against the blended course from the beginning but was “made to do it.” The ELI director told him that he was a good teacher who was capable of meeting the challenge of teaching the course. However Curt believed that the real rationale was financial, they didn’t want to divide the class into two sections and hire another teacher. “Why have two classes of six when you can have one class of 12” (C2)? In order to make the best of the situation he convinced himself that it would be a good opportunity and something that he could mention in a future job interview as a difficult situation he was able to overcome. However as the semester progressed, Curt’s other teaching duties limited his ability to allocate time to the additional preparation that his blended class required, which resulted in Curt, “just kind of letting it fly” (C2).

Curt had taught blended classes at HCC before but felt that teaching both the level 3 and level 4 reading and writing curriculums separately in one class was a wasted effort. Curt also believed that despite his reluctance to teach the blended course, he was “definitely capable of doing it” (C2). However, at the end
of the semester Curt stated that the blended level course had not been a positive experience for him or the students in his class. According to Curt, students also had an initial negative reaction to being placed in a blended level course. At the beginning of the semester they didn’t understand why level 3 and level 4 students were in the same classroom together. It got to the point where, Curt recalled, the class members were spending half the class time addressing, “disgruntled comments and questions about the situation” (C2). In order to address the situation and keep the class on track, Curt reported that he told the class that students complaints and further discussion of the blended level situation were useless since, in his assessment of the situation, he had no power to change anything.

Look, this is it, complain all you want but I have no power to change it. So I encourage you to complain, I encourage you to voice your opinions . . . not only in the end of term evaluations but in the interim as well, but don’t do it to me because I got no say in this. I’m just trying to do the best I can. (C2)

Because of the blended levels, Curt increased the workload of the class and ended up assigning four student essays instead of the two or three he normally assigned in his non-blended courses. Curt claimed that throughout the semester he “never sufficiently introduced the subject” (C3) to the point were he was confident that students could take over and effectively collaborate with each other and learn. Even though he did eventually see improvement in students’
language skills, overall he felt that his teaching of the course had been ineffective and inefficient.

**Institution Two: Crater Community College**

Crater Community College’s (CCC) campus is located on the slopes of Diamond Head State Monument within walking distance of the urban tourist center of Waikiki on the Hawaiian island of O’ahu. The largest community college in the University of Hawai‘i system, CCC had nearly 9,500 students enrolled for Fall 2011 and 650 international students from 53 countries enrolling in various programs at CCC in Spring 2010. In 2010, almost fifty percent of the international students enrolled at CCC were from Japan, twenty five percent from South Korea, and five percent from the People’s Republic of China. International students also came from Europe, Vietnam, Micronesia and the Philippines. In Fall 2010, international students made up 6.6% of the student body, but because they were paying higher non-resident tuition rates, were responsible for 32.9% of total tuition revenue for the college (International Education Annual Report, 2010). In 2010, fifty-two percent of international students at CCC selected Liberal Arts as their major, eleven percent chose Travel and Tourism, six percent chose Hotel and Restaurant Operations and four percent majored in Culinary Arts. The ESOL Department at CCC administered both credit and non-credit ESL programs at the college and at the time of the study employed seven permanent tenured faculty and five full-time lecturers.
Program Description. The ESOL department at CCC provided credit and non-credit courses to both immigrant and international students. All ESOL courses were designed and taught utilizing a content-based approach.

**ESOL 94.** ESOL 94 is a non-credit course designed to serve both international and resident immigrant students enrolled at CCC. International students must score above 500 on the TOEFL test in order to be placed into ESOL 94 or complete either ESOL 92 or ESOL 197 as prerequisites. ESOL 94 is offered as a sixteen week, semester long course which meets for approximately ten hours per week. Because the course is non-credit, students did not receive letter grades. Instead they received NC (no credit), CR (credit) or CR+ (passing) final grades. Only those students who received a CR+ as their final course grade were able to advance to the ENG/ESL 100 level. There was no limit on how many times students could repeat ESOL 94. Unlike the ELI students at HCC, students enrolled in ESOL 94 were allowed to simultaneously enroll in other credit courses at the college and begin working towards their degree. In Fall 2011, there were 5 sections of ESOL 94 being taught. Each section was allowed a maximum of 26 enrolled students.

**ESL 100.** According to the CCC course catalog, ESL 100 (3 credits) is “a first year, native speaker level college English class . . . (where) students will develop strategies and skills for effective college writing and critical reading and thinking.” Once students passed ESOL 94 they were able to select either ESL 100 or English 100 to satisfy the college English course requirement. Unlike English 100, ESL 100 was specifically designed for non-native writers of English
and as such provided a specific emphasis on language instruction and language development. According to one of the teachers interviewed, both English 100 and ESL 100 courses were intended to answer the institutional question, “Can the student write?” (T1). These courses also served the gate-keeping function of ensuring that students met minimal institutional requirements to do academic work.

According to Tom, the ESL 100 instructor interviewed in this study, ESL 100 was more rigorous than English 100 because of differences in the amount of writing, reading and revisions assigned. He believed that English 100 students were only assigned four papers during the semester, were provided with limited peer feedback, and were graded using a “nice little rubric” (T1). In contrast, ESL 100 students wrote a new two-page paper every week, and revised and rewrote each paper twice after discussing their errors with peers and incorporating teacher corrections.

During the semester that the study was being conducted, one section of ESL 100 was being taught as a six-credit learning community combining ESL 100 with an introductory Linguistics 102 course taught by a cooperating professor. The learning community met for two and a half hours every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon. In the teacher’s description of the origins of the class, the learning community was originally intended for immigrant students, to “figure out how their language is developing and what they need to do for their long-term language goals” (T2). The learning community had an article packet, which served as the course textbook and the curriculum was intertwined with shared
content and assignments. The articles in the packet were intended as a starting point for the application of the relatively abstract linguistic topics into what was perceived to be happening in students’ lives as they learned to communicate in English while living in Hawai‘i.

The classroom division of labor in the learning community was complex and encompassed the actual labor of both teachers and students in the course as well as divisions based on teachers’ perceptions of student labor. In the learning community, observed class time was divided equally between the two instructors. During the linguistics portion of the class, Tom sat in the back of the classroom correcting student papers, and was sometimes observed engaging in dialogue with the cooperating teacher and students about class topics. Even though they shared some assignments, Tom believed that the cooperating teacher and their differing disciplinary backgrounds required a division in student assessment duties. “I can’t assess them on linguistic skills because I am not a linguist, and she can’t really assess them on writing skills, ESL writing skills” (T1). According to Tom, in the past the learning community had been structured around the cooperating teacher’s presentation of linguistics content through class lectures and the course reading packet. Tom, following this format, was observed giving a brief summary of the main ideas of linguistic course readings and checking student comprehension through a mixture of comprehension and reflective questions. He planned for students to share and discuss their answers in class but soon found that students were not asking a lot of questions about the difficult linguistic content.
**Content based instruction and the opportunities model.** Content-based language instruction is defined generally as “the integration of particular content with language teaching aims,” and is manifested in the classroom as “the concurrent teaching of academic subject matter with second language skills” (Brinton et al., 1989, p. 5). Content has been defined as any material, “that is cognitively engaging and demanding for the learner,” (Met, 1991, p. 150) while providing a meaningful context through which communication can occur. Ideally, content-based instruction provides a framework for simultaneous language and academic content learning.

In ESOL 94, course content was divided into three, alternating semester long themes. During Fall 2011, the content theme for all ESOL 94 sections focused on environmental issues, presented to students in five textbook chapters. Chapter content themes included deforestation, human overpopulation and the threat of global warming. ESL 100 also had a preset content theme, but since the section observed was being taught as a learning community, the theme had been changed to coincide with the linguistics content taught in the cooperating teacher’s section.

In addition to the content-based approach to course-design, the ESOL department at CCC had developed its own model of second-language learning known as the opportunities model. According to the opportunities model, in order to acquire a second language, learners needed to follow a prescribed learning cycle in which learners were provided with opportunities to receive input in the target language, produce written and spoken output, participate in interactions
and get feedback from teachers and peers on their work. In addition, language learners had to rehearse what they learned and understand language learning and processes of learning in general.

In ESOL classes at CCC, students received input in the form of course readings and independent research for papers and oral presentations and produced output in the form of verbal and written interactions with others in class. They wrote essays on assigned topics and reflections on what they learned. Students were able to rehearse and perfect output they produced through oral presentations and by asking questions in class. Classroom activities were supposed to be designed to follow the learning cycle of input, output, feedback and rehearsal while using course content to provide the material for student interaction and course assignments. Learners were also observed being taught different language learning strategies, for example, how to learn vocabulary or how to improve pronunciation. According to the model, opportunities had to be provided by the teacher for students to understand how to learn best and how to study language more efficiently.

**Teachers.** The participating teachers had between seven to ten years of teaching experience at CCC. Tom was tenured faculty while Brad held a permanent, non-tenure track position. Both teachers had also graduated from the same MA program.

**Teacher Case 3: Tom.** *Teacher background.* Tom is a Caucasian male in his early forties. Tom first came to Crater Community College as a student in 1995. Initially he was interested in studying culinary arts but changed his
emphasis after taking a part-time campus job as a writing tutor. He found that
the international students he was tutoring were grateful for his help, which further
encouraged Tom to apply for a position as a classroom tutor in the ESL
department. After finishing his degree at CCC, Tom transferred to the University
of Hawai‘i where he received his BA degree and his MA in Second Language
Teaching. In 2004 he returned to CCC to teach full time in the ESL department
and had been teaching there for the past 7 years.

In 2007 Tom created a web page outlining his previous teaching and
educational experience, his teaching philosophy and examples of teaching
materials he had created. In the introduction of his teaching philosophy Tom
described the characteristics that make him a successful language teacher:

I have always considered myself a cultural boundary crosser . . . As a
boundary crosser, I have learned a great deal about other people and the
world around me in part due to openness to other cultures. This openness
has also helped to broaden my perspective and better understand culture-
specific behavior. I feel that these are essential qualities for a language
teacher to possess, and in fact, it is this awareness that motivated me
initially to enter the field of teaching ESL. (Tom’s Homepage, 2007)

Tom stated that he was the type of person who learned from his mistakes. He
tried to use his own experiences to advise his students, and help them
understand what they were doing and to make choices.

Tom had grown up in a Spanish speaking community on the continental
U.S., and studied Spanish for four years in school. He remembered his Spanish
learning experiences fondly and recalled the communicative teaching practices and immersion setting which allowed him to develop fluency in Spanish as a child. Tom contrasted his Spanish learning experience with his later experiences learning Japanese as an adult. His Japanese class was based on grammar drills with minimal attention paid to communication, which he perceived as incompatible with his preferred learning style. According to Tom, his past language learning experience had a substantial effect on how he taught, particularly in the development of an “underlying belief system” (T1) that operated in concert with a selection of theories and approaches that guided his teaching. “I look for methods or approaches that help me make students think, reflect and use language as much as possible” (T1).

Tom was familiar with a variety of different methods and approaches to language teaching but rather than selecting a single theory or approach, he preferred to select ideas from different theories and approaches that he believed were effective. The process of “picking and choosing” (T1) allowed Tom to tailor his instruction to perceived student needs and institutional demands. For example, even though Tom believed in communication as the basis of language learning, “We [teachers] also have to satisfy their [students] other needs and their other demands and have to satisfy institutional needs, and sometimes communicative language teaching, it's limited in some ways” (T1). Thus Tom admitted to using grammar translation activities in his classes even though it had not been a particularly effective method for his own language learning and was the antithesis of communicative language teaching practices.
Teacher roles. Tom perceived himself to have multiple roles related to his overall objective of student success. Initially Tom described the teacher role as looking for “methods and approaches that make students think, reflect and use language as much as possible” (T1). This position potentially influenced his initial formation of the learning community and the description of his ideal role as a facilitator of discussion of content themes and language. However, by midterm Tom’s conception of the teacher role had changed from facilitator to “telling students what to do,” due to both real and perceived changes in classroom activity.

Reflecting on his ideal role, Tom stated that he would like to be viewed as a facilitator. Since he was already familiar with the assigned course reading content and the grammar points that students needed to improve upon, Tom preferred class activity to be structured around a question and answer format, with students asking questions about content or language they could not understand. Tom contrasted the role of facilitator with lecturing, which he believed he was not good at and generally preferred not to do. At the beginning of the course Tom had high hopes for how he was going to structure classroom activity in a way that would accommodate his preferred teaching role.

I thought I could just say . . . here’s the basic idea about his article, here are your questions, read this, answer your questions; the next day I could get them together and say okay, you guys discuss your questions and I’d float around and listen to them and kind of collect some ideas and then just have a discussion as a whole class. (T2)
However, by midterm students were not asking a lot of questions about the content and were not “forthcoming with answers or discussion,” (T2) which meant that Tom had more class time which he filled with talk about vocabulary and grammar. By the last week of the semester Tom stated that the biggest lesson he had learned over the course of the semester was a re-conceptualization of the teacher role as a result of a conflict between his ideal role as facilitator and perceived student success.

If I really want the students to be successful then I've got to just tell them what to do. I can't expect that they're just going to do it and that means I've got to be on top of it. I've got to be intrusive. It kind of goes against what I would rather do, but if I want student success I think that's what I got to do. (T3)

*Goals and objectives.* Tom’s overall motive for teaching the ESL 100 course was student success. Student success was dependent upon the teacher’s perception of students needing to develop a sense of “where they are” (T1) in terms of their English language skills and the acquisition of coping strategies to deal with being evaluated in an academic environment. The construct of student success was embodied in two teacher objectives: helping students become better writers and developing student awareness and strategies for coping with college. Related to the first objective of helping students become better writers, the course content and the learning community format were intended to provide a focus for student writing and teacher feedback. For Tom,
improvement was related to student output, defined as the amount of writing that students completed.

According to Tom, the overall objective for ESL 100 was to “help students become better writers” (T1) while also maintaining the gate-keeping function of only allowing students with the potential to be successful in future college courses to pass. Because it was the last chance for some students to develop their English writing abilities, Tom believed that students needed “as many opportunities to write as possible” so that they could develop their writing before being “left to their own devices” (T1). Tom’s orientation towards providing opportunities for students to write directed his classroom practice and was reflected in his goals and objectives for the course. He explained that the content of the learning community was intended “to focus them on the topic so they know clearly what they are writing about so they don’t have to struggle with the writing task” (T1). The linguistic themed content was intended for students to develop awareness and strategies to cope with writing in English and being evaluated in a college setting. Explicit grammar instruction and vocabulary activities were also intended to improve student writing, and extensive written feedback from the teacher was provided to help improve student paper drafts.

Because this was Tom’s fourth semester teaching the learning community with the same cooperating teacher, at the beginning of the semester he was confident that he would be able to achieve the course objectives. Tom made the course objectives clear to students by including them in the syllabus and by frequently reminding students why they were in class. “In the learning community
especially we have to remind them regularly, like every week we remind them this is a six credit class” (T1). By midterm Tom stated that his objectives had remained unchanged but he admitted having had to make adjustments in response to some students not performing as expected. Many students in the learning community were falling behind in the linguistics section of the course, causing students to neglect the course readings assigned for the ESL portion of the course. As a result, both Tom and his cooperating teacher had to adjust. In sections of his regular ESL 100 course, fifty percent of class time was devoted to language instruction, for example, grammar, collocations, and vocabulary activities. This semester Tom was spending an estimated seventy-five percent of class time on language activities, a decision he believed was helping poorly performing students who could at least have some limited success with vocabulary and grammar quizzes, “because it is what (students) are most familiar with” (T2).

Even though they were able to complete all of the planned course content, conflict emerged when Tom and his cooperating teacher had different approaches to classroom activities. For example, the cooperating teacher would often start the class by lecturing on linguistics content. According to Tom, his cooperating teacher was a very good lecturer and was able to hold students’ attention for the whole hour while she spoke on different linguistics-related topics. Tom did not feel comfortable lecturing and believed that long teacher lectures were de-motivating for students and that lecturing was a good way to lose student engagement (T1). Tom also recognized that students were very
interested in (or simply accustomed to) explicit grammar instruction, and although it conflicted with his intended teacher role, he eventually provided more, perhaps as a way to compensate for his lack of lecturing.

At the end of the semester, Tom did not know if they would be offering the learning community again in the future. Tom acknowledged that he and his cooperating teacher had developed their pedagogies differently, which had an influence on their classroom activity choices and the approaches they were taking with students. According to Tom, just like a marriage, he and his cooperating teacher had “grown apart over time” (T3).

**Students.** ESL 100 is intended for non-native speakers of English. Although non-native speaker students had a choice between English 100 and ESL 100, native English speakers were not allowed to register for ESL 100 courses. In Spring 2012, there were over 40 sections of English 100 offered at CCC and only three sections of ESL 100. According to Tom, many students chose to take ESL 100 because it was the only section open. Tom divided the students who registered for the ESL 100 learning community into two different groups, those who selected the course because they wanted to further develop their language and were comfortable with getting feedback on their language, and students who selected the class as a last resort or were taking the learning community as a way to satisfy several college requirements at once.

Both groups were composed of international students and local immigrant students. According to Tom, the economic and social contexts of these groups were different. International students generally performed well in class and were
“into developing their language and they are interested in grammar and they like that kind of study, it’s familiar to them” (T1). Local immigrant students on the other hand had already completed some years of high school in the United States and choose ESL 100 because, “they realize that they are not going to get the type of language feedback that they really need” (T1) in an English 100 class. According to Tom, immigrant students often worked to support themselves, and sometimes their families, while going to school and, because they wanted to get better jobs, they “become really aware that their language is something they need to work on” (T1).

Tom believed that some students were going to pass the class regardless of the teacher, because they were motivated, had goals and knew what they wanted. Tom labeled these students as “persistors” who “persist no matter what because they want to pass the class. They want grades. They have goals. They want to graduate” (T3). There was also a group of students in the class Tom described as “borderline” (T2). According to Tom, community college was full of borderline students who were unable or unwilling to come to class consistently and “just don’t know what they are supposed to learn” (T2) despite having had the course objectives explained to them repeatedly. In the following passage Tom discussed a typical borderline student who was having issues with work and coming to class consistently:

She comes about 50% of the time, she’s an immigrant Thai woman, married an American guy, moved to America, wants to go to college, but works in a restaurant and her income and her husband basically trump her
school work. And it just makes it difficult to teach this woman, you know, even to work with her. Even if you buy into the “I'm not teaching you, I'm helping you develop your language. I'm the facilitator.” Even if you buy into that, I can't even facilitate anything because she's here half the time. (T2)

Tom believed that because these students were missing classes they were not learning. Although Tom and his cooperating teacher were “really trying to do more for students” (T3) during the semester, they were struggling with balancing student independence and telling students what they needed to do to be successful in the course. Tom elaborated:

People have different ways of looking at it. I know there are teachers, their philosophy is, “These are adults, I shouldn't have to tell them anything. They know when the assignment is due. They know what you're supposed to do in college and that's it. I'm not going to be their parent. I'm not going to police them.” (T3)

According to Tom, one of the realities of teaching in a community college is that you had to deal with students who didn't do well in high school and may not have developed the study habits necessary to be academically successful. Inevitably there were students at CCC who were going to fail “no matter who their teacher is” (T2).

In Tom’s class, instruction was tailored to the motivated students who wanted to learn. He believed that students were motivated when the class had clear learning objectives; “it keeps them engaged when they have a clear
purpose and I have made that purpose very clear” (T1). Overall Tom preferred to teach the “students who choose the course and know what they are getting into” (T1), even though they were often the most demanding students to work with. According to Tom, he often received student evaluations saying the course was too rigorous and too hard but he seemed proud of that fact. Of the eighteen students originally registered for the course, only twelve remained in the learning community at midterm.

*Expectations.* Although the learning community format was different than the traditional sections of ESL 100 that Tom usually taught, at the start of the semester he was confident because he had taught the class three times previously with the same cooperating teacher. Together they had created a well-established curriculum for the two courses and reportedly had good results the last time they taught the learning community together. However, during the semester of the study several conditions changed. Perhaps most importantly, students were not completing class projects on time and were coming to class unprepared for discussion and to receive feedback on their work even though the teachers had set clear due dates and were constantly reminding students.

Because most of the initial structure, content and assignments for the learning community were similar to those used successfully in the past, Tom believed that students’ lack of engagement with course content and class projects was a function of student motivation. For several years Tom had been working on a way to motivate students who he described as, “not getting it or not into your (teaching) style or not interested in school” (T3). Over the years he
realized that he needed to be proactive with students and take care of problematic situations as they arose in his classes. This was a position he had developed through experimentation with several different disciplinary strategies. Although Tom realized that some students, “don't want to be ridden and they would rather drop out and just not hear it from you” (T3) he also acknowledged his fear, “that if you don't tell the student early and often, ‘You're failing,’ then by the end of the semester they're going, ‘Well, no one told me’ . . . and then they're going to complain” (T3).

Tom believed that if he wanted to maintain his objective of student success, previously defined as helping students become better writers and developing student awareness and strategies for coping with college, then he needed to tell them directly to come to class and hand their work in on time. Initially Tom went through a period where he was telling the whole class directly when assignments were due and reminding the whole class that all assignments had to be turned in on time, “without pointing to people because I didn't want to make people feel like they were being directly confronted” (T3). Tom also tried public humiliation which consisted of directing comments to individuals who were coming to class late or not handing in assignments on time ("Oh, it's so good to see you today. Wow, I haven't seen you for a week" (T3)) in the hopes that being shamed in front of the group would change their behavior. Shaming was a technique he thought might be particularly effective with Asian students. Unfortunately, both disciplinary strategies were unsuccessful in achieving the desired results. Tom’s newest technique was to be “a little more direct and less
public about it” (T3), telling students individually that they needed to hand their work in on time, without stating it in front of the class and also providing lists of missing assignments to students who needed to make up work.

**Classroom activities.** One of the original goals of the learning community was for students to examine their own language development as a way to familiarize themselves with linguistic concepts through application to their own experiences. Initially many of the planned class projects dealt with the application of linguistics concepts to student-generated data. The student’s first class project was on inter-language phonology. In preparation for the project students had been learning about phonology in the linguistics portion of the course, had taken a quiz on the content and were then asked to study their own pronunciation together with a partner and eventually write two course papers using their collected data.

According to Tom, the purpose of the activity was for students to “analyze themselves . . . and develop an awareness of their own limitations” (T3) regarding English pronunciation. There were assigned due dates for various steps of the project, which included data collection, class discussion and handing in and revision of paper drafts. The step-by-step process of project goals and due dates was “meant to scaffold (students) so they can collect the data and then write the paper” (T3). However, the activity did not turn out as planned because many of the students were not collecting data on their own and thus missing opportunities for class discussion and feedback from both teachers and peers. When students were unprepared for class discussions or to receive feedback on
their work, the teachers had to resort to Plan B, and as Tom explained, “Plan B is usually just winging it” (T3) which was perceived as a waste of class time. According to Tom, the resulting student essays were also weak and lacked the detailed combination of course content and personal experience that the teachers were aiming for. Tom believed that class assignments that required students to do work on their own were often “hit or miss” (T3) and could only be effective if students were responsible and understood the overall purpose of the activity.

Students also completed a weekly vocabulary log. Tom gave the students the words that he wanted them to study taken from the following week’s class readings. Students performed an in-depth analysis of the assigned words in order to understand them in context, an activity that Tom believed provided “really good linguistic training” (T1). At midterm the students were reportedly enjoying the vocabulary logs and Tom was happy because the students were “using the tools that I recommended them to use” (T2) and they were asking more questions about vocabulary.

Grading and evaluation. In learning communities at CCC teachers were encouraged to have a common grading system so students didn't get confused. Tom’s cooperating teacher had been using a point-based system of grading for her linguistics courses, which Tom decided to adopt for both courses in the learning community. Every assignment was worth a certain number of points and points were counted at the end of the semester to calculate a final course grade.
According to Tom, if students completed three drafts of every essay and kept up with other class assignments and homework then their language would become more accurate. The assigned essays and the subsequent processes of teacher feedback, student discussion and revision served as the initial tools through which student English skills were improved. Class assignments were also structured according to Tom’s belief that the more students wrote, the more accurate their writing would become.

In ESL 100, students wrote one, two-page essay every week for fifteen weeks. Students’ first paper draft received a “basic cursory content review” (T1) by the teacher to see if student papers were on topic and utilized the information they learned in class. The second draft received thorough grammar correction by the teacher. Once revised, the third draft was then resubmitted for a grade. Students exchanged their drafts with each other and discussed their “individual approaches to writing” (T1) but were not observed giving each other feedback on content or grammar errors. Tom stated that he did not like peer-feedback and felt it was totally useless in improving students’ writing skills. Interestingly, in Tom’s 2007 teaching philosophy he stated that he regularly had students engage in peer feedback and believed that “students seem to enjoy and benefit tremendously from this activity” (Tom’s Homepage, 2007). Instead of students giving each other feedback and correcting errors, by exchanging and discussing their essays with each other students realized, “if their paper sucks and they are sitting next to a person who really got it . . . they are going to figure that out . . . ‘I spent two hours putting this thing together and it really shows’” (T1).
Tom made it clear that ESL 100 was not a class where students were guaranteed an easy A. In fact students could complete all of the assigned course work, demonstrate improvement in their writing over the semester and still not get an A for their final grade. For Tom, A papers were “excellent in terms of clarity” (T1) but not necessarily grammatical accuracy or word choice.” Instead Tom’s criteria for excellence was, “can I read this and not be confused?” (T1).

According to Tom, the goal of the feedback he had been giving students all semester was aimed at clarifying their language. Ultimately, Tom assessed the clarity of student writing. He validated his position of authority by referring to his training and his position as a native English speaker. “I’m a qualified teacher and I’m a native speaker who has pretty good understanding and does a lot of reading; if I’m confused about your writing, you still have to develop your writing” (T1).

**Teacher Case 4: Brad. Teacher background.** Brad is a Caucasian male in his early forties. Originally Brad wanted to be a high school teacher. He received a BA in English and a minor in education and taught high school English but decided after several years of teaching to move to Japan and teach in an English conversation school. He then moved to Hawai’i to get his MA degree in Second Language Teaching (SLT). After graduating from the SLT program, Brad began teaching part-time at several university ESL programs in Honolulu and in 2001 he began his current job teaching ESL courses at CCC. He had been teaching at CCC for 10 years at the time of the study. During the semester he was interviewed, Brad was teaching one section of ESOL 94 and one section of
ESOL 91. Although Brad had taught the same courses and the same content for ten years, he liked to experiment with new approaches and do things differently every couple of years (B2).

**Teacher roles.** Brad explained that his ideal role in the classroom was as a resource who could “confirm or disconfirm (student) hypotheses” (B1) about language and their understanding of course content. Several observed classroom activities that Brad had designed allowed him to attempt his ideal teacher role, but Brad admitted that overall his main role was reading student papers and editing them. Brad believed it was important for him to “correct all the errors so (students) know where they are,” (B2) but also believed it was not a “good role for the teacher” and would have preferred students to be “exploring” (B2) on their own.

**Goals and objectives.** Overall Brad’s goal for his ESOL 94 course was to have students improve in their ability to listen, speak, write and interact in English. Brad had set up clear writing goals for the students “to write . . . a fluent, clear, accurate, academic essay . . . a 600 word essay in 90 minutes without using any dictionaries” (B2) and to eventually reach a new departmental goal for ESOL 94 students to produce twenty pages of revised prose per semester. Brad chose the number of words and the time limit based on departmental goals (500 words in 60 minutes) that were set by the program coordinator for ESL 100 courses. According to Brad, at the beginning of the semester most students were unable to reach the goal of writing a 600 word in-class essay, but once they
realized that they had to do it and after they wrote the first draft of every assigned essay in class, they were able to come closer to reaching this goal.

Another goal that Brad had set for his ESOL 94 course was to improve the accuracy of student’s language, particularly in their writing. However, because of the increased departmental expectation of student writing output, Brad felt that he was spending too much time correcting student paper drafts, particularly since student grammar errors were always the same and he was not seeing progress in the overall clarity of student writing. As a way to address his own questions about the effectiveness of teacher feedback on student writing, Brad had decided to use an “accuracy formula” as a way of providing feedback to students on their grammar errors and to show improvements in written clarity in a more objective way. Rather than relying on teacher comments and corrections to evaluate their progress, the accuracy formula would provide a number that told students exactly the percentage of sentences that were correct in their paper. The accuracy formula had been developed by Brad in concert with the program coordinator the previous semester as a way to talk with students about the accuracy of their language, as a way for teachers to reflect on the effectiveness of their teaching and as a substitute for letter grades on student papers. Departmentally, the accuracy formula was being promoted as a tool all ESOL 94 instructors could use to standardize the way in which student feedback was given across different course sections. The accuracy formula also changed the way that Brad corrected student papers because instead of “figuring out what the student needs and trying to correct it for the student or decide if you’re going to try to lead them
to the answer or have them find the answer,” (B2), Brad simply checked to see if whole sentences were correct or not. The new type of correction allowed him to “fly through the papers” (B2) and spend more time planning class activities.

By the end of the semester, Brad reflected that the accuracy formula was initially very effective as a way to communicate with students about their errors and for Brad to reflect on his own teaching practices, particularly the effectiveness of correction and feedback on student papers. However, accuracy of student writing had only increased from 18% to 20% by the end of the semester. Brad believed that the accuracy formula was “not sensitive enough or fine grained enough” (B3) to show student progress on targeted language skills. Reflecting on whether or not the objective of increased accuracy was met, Brad stated, “if my objective is to get everyone to write clear sentences, correct sentences . . . they are nowhere near that” (B3).

Another objective that Brad had been working on was to get students in his class to understand his intended purpose for classroom activities and particularly to understand the “learning cycle” (B3) which was based on the departmental opportunities model. The learning cycle was the main theoretical tool utilized by the teacher to mediate the new focus on the process of learning as a student-learning objective. The individual components of the learning cycle, previously summarized (per Brad) as “do work, get feedback, rehearse and make progress” (B3), were explicitly presented to students at the beginning of the semester using a series of power-point presentations created by the ESOL program director. For most students, however, the goal was often “to get the
information at any cost,” (B2) which often conflicted with the course goal of improving different language skills and focusing on the process of learning. Brad provided the following example illuminating how students often chose the easiest or quickest solution to get information when working in groups with their peers:

They will show their paper to their partner . . . They'll read the sentence or they'll memorize the sentence and they'll explain it, but if their pronunciation is off or if their listener has a weaker vocabulary or if there's just words they don't know, the listener won't understand and so instead of working that out, through listening and speaking strategies, they just show the answer and say, “Here it is” . . . Or they write it down for them. (B2)

Brad wanted students to understand the purpose of classroom activities was not to get the correct answer but to interact in English and specifically to provide peer feedback to other students through the use of clarifying questions when breakdowns or difficulties in communication occurred. Brad believed that students’ reluctance to provide feedback in peer groups and that their singular focus on finding the answer in the easiest way possible was the result of a “mindset that (students) had been socialized into” (B2). Brad believed that both international and immigrant student groups were used to taking the easiest route to communication as a matter of survival in their daily interactions with English speakers. According to Brad, at the end of the semester students were able to understand the learning cycle approach that Brad had been implementing and reflected on “how eye opening . . . it was to just think about learning that way” (B3).
Several tools were observed being used to monitor student understanding of the learning cycle model. Students completed daily written reflections, which they handed in at the end of class. They also completed weekly reflections, which they compiled in a reflection journal, submitted with the final portfolio. According to the teacher, students responded positively to collaborative peer revision group activities following the process of the learning cycle and over the course of the semester became more engaged and more focused on improving their language while working in small groups with classmates.

Students. Brad believed that most ESOL 94 students’ goals were “to finish ESOL as soon as possible and maybe learn some language along the way” (B1). According to Brad, most of his students really wanted to learn English but ESL classes “don’t usually do the things that they really need” (B1). Brad believed that his students were motivated by compelling course content, and being able to “see that they can learn and make progress” (B1). For Brad, feedback from the teacher and from peers was an essential element in the development of language skills and maintaining student interest in learning and improving their English. “The more feedback that I give and the more basic the feedback is and the more we discuss it in class, the more interested in language they become” (B1). Brad believed that once students understood the process of learning embodied in the learning cycle, they were able to see that they were learning and then they wanted to learn more (B1). Compelling content was also important for Brad to keep his students motivated. The choice of topics that Brad selected, within the program mandated ESOL 94 course topic of environmental
issues, were designed to be relevant to students lives. Brad equated topic relevancy to an overall increase in student engagement and learning. Although required course readings were difficult and sometimes admittedly “out of reach of the students” (B2), Brad viewed the difficult content as an opportunity for students to make mistakes, ask questions about their errors and receive feedback from the teacher and from peers.

Brad also recognized that his students had lives outside of school. Many of the immigrant students in his classes worked full-time, had families and/or were taking a full credit load. Students in his class reported that they spent between one and a half to fourteen hours per week on homework for his class. Having enough time to do their work was an issue for most students. Brad’s awareness of student time constraints made him question both the quality and quantity of the assignments he was giving to students and think about how he could more effectively use class time to alleviate time constraints on student work. Ideally, Brad wanted “to give students assignments that are going to benefit their English, and that they will do because they have enough time” (B3).

Overall, Brad liked to teach students who were willing to try new things and who were unafraid of making mistakes. Brad believed that many of his students were afraid of taking risks because they didn't want to be embarrassed. However it was essential to the learning cycle approach that students produced extensive written or spoken output in order to receive feedback. Thus Brad tried to create an environment were students could “safely take risks” (B1) with their developing language and progress through the learning cycle.
*Expectations.* Brad had high expectation of his students but questioned if his expectations were realistic. He believed that he was stricter than most of the other teachers teaching sections of ESOL 94 at CCC. At the ends of past semesters he often asked other teachers in the department to reread borderline student papers and give him a second opinion on his students writing ability. His colleagues often judged the writing sufficient to continue on to the 100 level. After a few years of doing that, Brad realized that, “the level that I think students need to achieve is not really what they need to achieve” (B2). He eventually ended up passing students, “who I don't think really have strong language skills just because otherwise no one would pass” (B2).

*Classroom activities.* Brad divided the course content into four topics related to the semester’s content theme. Brad used the program mandated textbook readings together with an online environmental footprint quiz to introduce topics related to food, goods and services, housing and carbon consumption. For each three-week unit, students were required to (a) do a group presentation, (b) write a two-page essay on course content, which was then revised by the students, and (c) at the end of the unit write a two-page self-reflection on what they had learned. This reflection was revised and compiled in a reflection journal. Since Brad had taught ESOL 94 many times before, he had most of the course already planned before the semester began. He could “flip the switch” (B2) and didn't have to invest much time in creating new content or assignments during the semester. Brad admitted that because the overall course structure was already in place, he did not “have to create anything or be creative”
(B2), which allowed him to “focus on grammar, language level and other things” (B2).

One of the “other things” that Brad experimented with during the semester was group grammar correction and peer editing of student papers. In one observed reoccurring classroom activity, students were assigned to small groups of three or four and asked to discuss the recently corrected drafts of their papers. Because Brad was only providing limited feedback by checking sentences as correct or incorrect, it was up to the students to figure out their own errors and how to fix them.

I just checked off the sentences that were accurate. So the sentences that are not accurate I didn't make any corrections. The ones that are not accurate they have to figure out why they're not accurate and correct them. (B2)

According to Brad, several groups understood the purpose of the activity, discussing grammar and interacting with each other in English, while other groups were observed simply trading papers with little discussion or sitting quietly reading their own papers. Regardless, Brad believed the activity was a success and received positive comments from students during the activity as well as in student’s weekly reflection papers.

They really like (correcting each others papers in class). A lot of students write in their weekly reflections how helpful it is. Learning from other students in the group is helpful and reading other students’ papers and
looking at their errors is helpful to learn more about grammar and trying to

go through the process of figuring it out themselves. (B3)

Grading and evaluation. Brad struggled with grading. He found in the
past that giving students grades on their assignments early on in the course
changed their attitudes and their interactions with others in the class, especially
when they had a lower proficiency level than others. Brad did not want to
penalize students at the beginning of the semester for weak writing because he
believed it wasn’t fair for him to expect them to be good writers at the beginning
of the semester. Improvement was more important. The minimum requirements
for the course were completion of all assigned papers and presentations. If
students completed all of their work they could submit a final portfolio at the end
of the semester, which Brad then evaluated. Brad did not grade any
assignments during the semester and only graded the final paper, final
presentation and the final portfolio. Instead of grades, Brad saw student papers
as opportunities for feedback from the teacher and decided to use the accuracy
formula as a way to communicate with students about their progress. At the
beginning of the semester Brad was confident that the accuracy formula was
“gonna be enough to get them to see where they are or at least make them
aware of how far they have to go” (B1).

However, by the end of the semester Brad was having trouble making it
clear to some students that they were not going to pass without discouraging
them. Brad assumed that students would be “getting the message” (B2) from the
amount of red ink on their papers and the accuracy formula number he was
providing. At the end of the semester some students who were not passing submitted portfolios and completed final projects even though they hadn’t completed all of the course papers and were therefore ineligible for advancement to the 100 level. Of the twenty-one students originally registered for the course, fourteen students passed the course, two didn't pass and five stopped coming.

**Cross Case Analysis**

The ELI at HCC and ESOL Department at CCC were very similar in many respects. They both offered non-credit programs to a diverse mix of international and immigrant students. The goal of both programs was to provide support to students who needed help improving their English for mostly academic purposes.

Commonalities amongst the participating teachers were also evident. All of the teachers included in the study had advanced degrees with specializations in teaching English as a second language and had experience teaching in a variety of institutional and cultural contexts. Their dedication to the profession of language teaching and their students was evident in their in-depth descriptions of how and why they taught. Teachers also shared an orientation to a general theory of language learning and teaching that resulted in similar classroom actions and procedures and a shared conceptual vocabulary through which their beliefs were expressed.

Differences also emerged between institutional contexts as well as between teachers teaching within the same institution. In this section I will explore common themes emerging from the activity of teaching English as a second language in the selected community college ESL programs.
Theme one: Shared beliefs. This theme explicates several shared beliefs, how they were appropriated into the description of classroom practice and transformed by individual teachers to accommodate changing roles, goals and motives within the activity structures of the classrooms examined. This section also illuminates the connection between shared concepts and shared practices within the programs examined.

Collaboration. Collaboration is commonly defined as working together with others to accomplish a common goal (Mercer and Howe, 2012). According to Mercer and Howe, within educational contexts, collaboration “means more than students working together in a tolerant and compatible manner.” Instead, “being engaged in collaborative learning means that participants are making a coordinated, continuing attempt to solve a problem or . . . construct common knowledge” (p. 15).

All four of the participating teachers in the study believed that student collaboration was a key factor in student learning, and they initially described their own ideal teaching roles as facilitators of collaborative learning activity. Teachers were observed offering support, giving on-demand feedback and answering student questions. However, at HCC both teachers at different points in the semester voiced concerns about how to use collaborative learning techniques effectively, particularly in courses where the students had different English proficiency levels. In the classrooms examined, observed collaborative activities followed a similar pattern of organization; students were arranged in various configurations by the teacher, group members were given clear duties
and roles and they proceeded through a predetermined series of steps to achieve a product. This product was presented to the teacher and sometimes the whole group for evaluation. Group work activities in both HCC classrooms reflected teacher preference for activities where, “everybody is doing something” (L1), and for both HCC teachers, collaborative group work was primarily a way to force student participation in classroom activities and to use group pressure to motivate students to engage with the content. Both teachers were also wary of the additional time it would take to plan and orchestrate successful collaborative learning activity in their courses.

At CCC, Brad intended to use collaboration as a tool for students to provide feedback to each other on their language accuracy errors. The students who Brad described as not afraid of making mistakes and open to trying new things worked most productively in small student groups. Other students preferred to correct their errors individually. Brad felt that group grammar correction and discussion were helpful in getting students engaged in improving their language, but he was concerned about the subsequent lack of improvement in grammatical accuracy as measured by the accuracy formula, a result Brad believed was caused by students not completing the essential steps of revision and rehearsal.

In all of the classrooms examined, although collaboration was believed to be an essential component of classroom learning activity, collaboration was never the object or goal of activity itself. Instead collaboration was utilized as a
tool through which student products were realized and additional teacher goals of engagement, student progress, persistence and participation were pursued.

**Engagement.** At CCC and HCC the concept of engagement was used to clarify teacher motives for classroom actions as well as a single term encompassing student interest in course content and student participation in class activities. The teachers’ definitions of engagement were a result of the community college contexts and the students enrolled. The open door admissions policy at both colleges attracted “borderline” students who were often unprepared for academic work and in some cases not interested in school. Many of the immigrant students enrolled in ESL courses were also working full-time, supporting families and struggling with completing assignments and other course work on time. Thus, engagement in both institutional cases was defined as students attending class regularly, completing assignments on time and showing interest in course topics.

In both CCC classrooms, student engagement was perceived as being a product of teacher planning and actions, specifically the result of giving students opportunities to take part in the four-step process of the learning cycle. When students did not take up opportunities to produce output in Tom’s case or to receive and rehearse feedback in Brad’s case, conflicts emerged, contributing to the transformation of future classroom actions, the formation of new divisions of labor, changing teacher roles and leading to different learning outcomes.

**Interpreting the learning cycle approach.** Tom and Brad were teaching different courses, had different measures of student success (persistence versus
progress), differing beliefs on the effectiveness of certain classroom actions and operations (the importance of peer feedback activities for example) and differing conceptions of their own classroom roles. However, the teachers’ descriptions of both teacher and student motives for classroom activity were presented both to students and to the researcher in common terms appropriated from the departmental opportunities model and the learning cycle. At HCC, although the departmental approach to teaching and learning was not explicitly presented to teachers, teachers used a similar collective terminology to explain classroom activity. For example, Curt also mentioned providing opportunities for input and output as motives for much of his class planning.

At CCC, aspects of the learning cycle approach were interpreted and weighted differently by Tom and Brad. For Tom, output was the most important component of the learning cycle and the focus of classroom activity. Tom believed that student learning, and particularly improvement in the accuracy of student writing was contingent upon the volume of what they wrote. The emphasis on student output, writing and revising essays, as well as handing in assignments and homework on time, also influenced Tom’s definition of student success. He defined success as the ability to persist regardless of the heavy workload, a workload which Tom himself described as being more rigorous than most sections of English 100. Tom’s emphasis on output became problematic when students were not completing course assignments on time, missing class and then not being able to follow through and complete the learning cycle with the necessary rehearsal and feedback. Conflict between the departmental ideal
and the reality of classroom activity prompted changes in both teacher and student roles as well as a renewed focus on disciplinary strategies and having to remind students about completing course work.

Brad’s reaction to departmental demands for increased student written output was very different from Tom’s. Brad had been providing extensive written feedback on multiple drafts of student essays and felt that he was already spending too much time finding and correcting student errors. Rather than reducing the amount of output required for the course, a decision that would have gone against departmental expectations, Brad decided to modify the way he provided feedback on student papers to accommodate the increased volume of required written work and used peer feedback as a tool to address both the departmental expectation that students be provided with opportunities to understand how to learn more effectively and to position himself in his preferred teacher role of facilitator.

**Theme two: Uncertainty about the results of their teaching.** Although much of the case descriptions focused on explicating the processes of classroom activity, the eventual end product of teacher and student labor was important because it was around this product that the activity of language teaching, the actions of lesson planning, the development of teaching and learning tools and the structuring of classroom interaction were organized. In the four classrooms examined, the product of teacher labor could be summarized generally as an improvement in student English language skills and student preparation for success in college courses. More specifically, the goal was the production of
individual students who exhibited the competencies necessary to be successful in college courses. However, in both of the programs examined, teachers were often uncertain about the results of their teaching.

At HCC, once students graduated from the ELI they were left to their own devices in credit courses. HCC teachers voiced concerns about the sink or swim situation students often faced. Although much of the HCC teachers’ discourse focused on the personality and motivational traits of individual students, and program rules and procedures that were perceived to be beyond the teachers’ control, teachers themselves ultimately felt responsible for their students’ successes after leaving the ELI. Many of the students who were spending the most time in the ELI program were also the same students who failed once they entered credit courses. Ultimately, at HCC, teachers believed that judgment of their student’s English language competence and readiness for college was beyond the teacher’s control.

At CCC teachers were less concerned with students adapting to regular college course work since students were simultaneously enrolled in credit courses and ESOL classes. The institutional model at CCC put ESOL teachers in the role of gatekeeper and gave them the power to decide if student English language skills were sufficient to continue on with college course work at CCC. However, CCC teachers were concerned about student’s lack of motivation and their limited improvement in language accuracy over the course of the semester. This resulted in Brad having to lower his expectations of the level of language
accuracy his students needed to achieve and the promotion of non-proficient students “because otherwise no one would pass” (B2).

According to teachers, students were also unclear about the products of classroom activity. The ideal student product was described by a set of course-level competencies presented to students on the first page of the course syllabi. Competencies were usually given a cursory introduction by the teacher on the first day of the course but were difficult for students to internalize since they were presented in terms geared more toward teacher understanding (e.g., “Make appropriate generalizations and inferences and draw valid conclusions from given information” (ESOL 94 syllabus)) and lacked an explanation of how such competencies were related to classroom activity and student success. In order to confront this issue at CCC there had recently been a departmental push for teachers to be explicit with students about the purposes of classroom activities and how particular activities were related to larger course goals and objectives. The emphasis on purpose translated into a pedagogical focus on making the processes of the learning cycle more explicit and motivating students to do their work with the implied promise of progress and promotion as their reward for compliance.

At CCC, the majority of classroom activity could be characterized as both students and teachers adjusting to the demands of achieving required competencies and appropriating the mode of production used to fulfill that need. The selected mode of production was embodied in the learning cycle and the planned actions and operations designed to support the learning cycle process.
The one competency that was made explicitly clear throughout the semester in both classes at CCC was the students’ abilities to produce twenty pages of revised prose. Because of its simplicity and ease of measurement, the twenty page criteria and the completion of student work became the prerequisite competency that had to be met before all others were addressed. In the cases where students were able to attain the twenty-page competency and progress through the multiple revisions and drafts outlined in the learning cycle, they were left with a collection of essays written on various topics, each with its own grade or accuracy score, compiled and submitted for a course grade.

One could argue that the production of student work fulfilled the student’s objective to improve their writing skills or their desire to practice writing in a less threatening, structured environment. However, since students were required to pass ESOL courses and often forced to be engaged in classroom activities and assignments that were not related to their own interests or particular language needs, it is likely that the product itself functioned only as evidence of persistence and progression through the prescribed learning cycle process. Course outcomes reflected the fact that most students were able to meet the objective of understanding how important feedback was and understanding how progress could be made through the processes of the learning cycle. However, the actual progress in language accuracy that was promised was much harder to quantify and present to students as a clear product of the labor they had invested over the course of the semester. In Brad’s class, where arguably the most emphasis was put on creating tools to provide feedback to students on their progress, “the
dream of really improving (student’s) English” (B3) was contrasted with the reality of only one or two students making the progress that Brad had expected in terms of language accuracy.

**Theme three: Intensification of teaching.** Intensification is simply an increase in the amount of work for both students and teachers resulting from larger classes, combined levels, and increased institutional pressures to produce more with less. According to Kesson (2003), intensification “occurs when the pace and timing of labor processes are speeded up to accommodate new production demands” (p. 19). The language teaching enterprise, especially in the for-profit institutions examined in this study, does not operate above the logic of production, seeking to maximize profits and minimize expense. The process of intensification was most obvious in Curt’s experiences teaching the blended level course at HCC. Because he was teaching two different groups of students simultaneously, a decision Curt felt was motivated by financial concerns in the ELI, he ended up teaching four different essays rather than the two or three he would normally assign in his non-blended course. Most importantly Curt felt that he “never got a break” (C3) while he was in the classroom and thus was unable to sufficiently plan and monitor classroom activity as it unfolded.

At CCC, Brad reacted to the requirement to provide feedback on multiple student drafts by modifying the way he provided feedback on errors in student writing and moved toward a more collaborative model of peer grammar correction as a way to lessen the burden of increased labor. Although the teachers in this study faced the intensification of teaching and other production demands with
ingenuity and creativity, they did not receive an increase in salary for their additional labor.

**Theme four: Teacher status.** Teacher status is related to the concept of “proletarianization” which Kesson (2003) defined as “working conditions characterized by increasing loss of control over the labor (teaching) process and lack of autonomy” (p. 16). The teachers in this study considered themselves professionals and had similar credentials and teaching experience as other faculty members at the institutions where they taught. However, being a lecturer in the ELI at HCC meant that the teachers were overworked and teaching a larger credit load than tenured faculty in other departments. They were also underpaid, receiving no health insurance or other benefits because of their contractual status. Perhaps most importantly, they had no job security since they were re-hired at the beginning of every eight-week term. Combined with increasing demand from ELI administrators to consolidate students into blended level classes and a lack of both theoretical and practical teaching tools to support them, teachers were left with a lingering sense of powerlessness and frustration. The resulting effect on classroom activity was an overall lack of engagement with the teaching process. Although both HCC teachers were dissatisfied with the course text, they were unwilling to select a new one because it would mean extra work on top of their already busy schedules. Because teachers were unsure if they would be rehired for the following term, they tended to rely on teaching materials that had already been developed and recycled them throughout their courses. Finally, once students had become acquainted with classroom
procedures, teachers began to teach the class on “autopilot,” generally doing whatever took the least time to prepare. According to HCC teacher comments, these patterns of behavior were directly related to frustrations with student placement, their status within the institution and the lack of tools provided.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

The goal of this study was to investigate the interaction between teacher beliefs, teacher actions and the context in which they occurred through the construction and interpretation of individual classroom activity systems from the perspectives of the teacher subjects. According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), the activity framework’s focus on the interaction between subject and structure “privileges human agency while also understanding it as mediated and constrained” (p. 224) by approaches to teaching and learning, the real and conceptual tools available, classroom rules, teacher and student roles and divisions of labor. Focusing on the experiences of four ESL teachers in two community colleges, I examined their beliefs about teaching and learning using activity theory as a framework for analysis. I found that collaboration, engagement and other conceptual terms used to express teacher beliefs were appropriated from a larger theoretical discourse and incorporated into departmental models and teaching practice, influencing teacher’s ways of thinking about the activity of teaching and learning. The meanings of collective concepts were also transformed as they were internalized and used to mediate classroom actions within context.

Teacher Beliefs, Concepts and the Collective Ideology

According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), Vygotsky distinguished between two types of meaning that could be internalized. The first type, meanings in their objective existence were, “produced by society and have their history in the development of language” and comprised what Leontiev called, “the ideological
representation of society” (p. 89). The first type included word meanings, concepts, and artifacts understood as products of previous mediation taking place throughout the development of particular communities of practice. These meanings had a communal, objective significance, which contributed to the formation of the ideal representation of organizations and the purpose of classroom activity which institutions and individual teachers tried to emulate. The second type of meaning encompassed the individual’s subjective interpretation of communal meanings. These meanings were rooted in the individual’s own background and experiences yet constrained by the activity in which they were put to use. In this study, subjective interpretation of communal meanings took place on several levels. First, concepts were selected and transformed into a departmental model or approach based on departmental needs, defining the activity of teaching and learning at the departmental level. Concepts were then interpreted and internalized by teachers as they applied them in the classroom.

Dewey (1960), in his discussion of reflective thought, acknowledged the possibility that beliefs could be picked up from others and become accepted on the grounds of popular acceptability and not through individual mental processes of observation and examination. According to Dewey, beliefs might also arise unconsciously as the result of tradition, instruction, imitation and the reliance on some form of authority sanctioning and promoting them. I examined the role of context in the development and transformation of ESL teacher beliefs. What were the effects of the “ideological representation” of teaching activity on individual teacher beliefs?
In the data collected for this study, it was evident that teachers used similar conceptual terms to describe their beliefs about the language learning process and their own teaching practice. Concepts such as collaboration, engagement, input and feedback were used together with specific models and approaches to teaching and learning to explain individual teacher actions. In the cases examined, teachers used common conceptual terms to express beliefs about the goals of teaching and learning activity, as well as to clarify motives for particular classroom actions and operations and to explain teacher roles. The collective conceptual terms that teachers used were also a means of interaction with both students and colleagues.

In the four classrooms examined, common conceptual terms seemed to function similar to Breen’s (2001) “pedagogic principles,” forming the collective ideology Breen discovered among teachers working within similar institutional settings. However, instead of concepts serving simply as an intermediary step mediating the transition of teacher’s previously held beliefs about teaching and learning into classroom actions and operations, I found that shared concepts were also the source of teacher beliefs and were used to align teacher discourse on beliefs, motives and classroom actions with the contexts in which they taught.

Teacher needs were diverse and dependent upon institutional demands, perceived student needs and other contextual constraints. Concepts that were part of the collective ideology of the department and the activity of teaching college ESL, appeared to the teachers as a means to satisfy their needs within the context of the particular demands of the institutional activity structure. In the
cases examined, teachers used common conceptual terms to explain the purpose of classroom actions while also communicating their position on how to learn to students. Common concepts were also used to legitimize teacher actions, aligning teacher practice with larger theoretical frameworks and current approaches to teaching and learning.

**Transformation of Concepts**

Although teachers used similar concepts to describe motives for classroom actions, it became evident through the comparison of what teachers said and what they did in the classroom that the concepts teachers selected underwent a process of transformation. According to Leontiev (1978), once concepts were internalized their meanings remained abstract and difficult to define while still maintaining their objective significance and carrying in-themselves remnants of “methods, objective conditions, and results of actions regardless of the subjective motivation of the human activity in which they were formed” (p. 87). In the present study, the process of transformation was comparable to the processes of appropriation of cultural artifacts outlined by Wells (1999) in which shared concepts were assimilated, transformed when combined with teachers previous knowledge and experience, used to mediate further actions, and transformed once again upon reflection on their effectiveness in achieving class goals. Clear examples of the transformation of belief occurring parallel to changes in classroom actions as a result of contextual factors can be found in Brad’s interpretation of the concept of feedback and Tom’s interpretation of engagement at CCC.
**Feedback in Brad’s class.** In Brad’s class several actions were related to the objective of student progress utilizing feedback and the accuracy formula as tools. First, Brad had changed the way he gave students feedback on their assignments. This was partly due to departmental demands for increased student written output outlined in the course competencies. Instead of correcting all student errors, which took time and had negligible results on student progress in the past, Brad began to mark whole sentences as incorrect without specifying what the individual errors were. Here Brad was challenging a common departmental practice of providing more explicit types of error correction as feedback on student papers. Once the process of giving feedback had been simplified, it took much less time to correct student work and Brad began giving “feedback” on everything students wrote.

The purpose of student group work also changed as a result of changes in the feedback students were receiving. Students had to find the errors in the marked sentences in their papers by communicating with group members and asking the teacher questions directly. In Brad’s case, the composition and direction of actions and tool choice were rooted in conditions emerging from particular demands of the institutional setting and perceived teacher roles and responsibilities. These conditions directed actions towards accepted practices within the learning cycle but also resulted in new actions and operations based on teacher interpretation. These actions could be seen as arising from the particular set of conditions within which a need was generated “which gives shape and direction to activity” (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006, p. 223).
The division of labor in Brad's classes had previously been based on the teacher doing most of the work correcting student papers, handing papers back to students and having students revise based on his corrections. However, this system placed considerable time constraints on the teacher and, due to increasing enrollment and large classes, Brad was spending his free time outside of school correcting student papers. Brad was also dissatisfied with his role "reading and editing student papers" (B2) and questioned the effectiveness of correction of student errors on the development of accuracy in written and spoken English, since the grammatical errors in student papers were often repeated.

The confluence of teacher objectives, conditions and selected actions resulted in multiple consequences manifested in different aspects of the overall activity of teaching and learning English during the semester. First, change took place in the teacher's perceived role. Brad was doing less reading and editing of student papers and structuring classroom activity so that he could act closer to his ideal role as a resource, answering student questions as they arose. Changes also took place in the classroom division of labor. Overall students were asked to be more involved in the process of finding and correcting their own errors and the errors of their classmates. Over the course of the semester Brad's conception of feedback had developed into a set of preferred actions, roles and beliefs he felt to be most effective in promoting student interaction and learning within the particular context of his ESOL 94 course at CCC.
Brad defined engagement as the mental state that was a prerequisite for student learning. According to Brad, the engaged state occurred when students “were given opportunities to test hypotheses and get feedback and ask questions” (B1). Through Brad’s emphasis on providing feedback, students “became more aware of how weak their English was” (B3), which Brad believed resulted in students becoming more engaged in improving their language. By the end of the semester, Brad believed students understood how important feedback was, understood the learning cycle and how to make progress, and were able to produce more output. However, in terms of meeting his objective of improvement in language accuracy, only one or two students made the progress the teacher initially expected.

The apparent contradiction that emerged between the effectiveness of his teaching and the lack of expected student language improvement motivated Brad’s revision and restructuring of operations, tools and roles as well as revision of the beliefs associated with them. However, the conceptual framework of the departmental opportunities model and the learning cycle, which provided the blueprint for the overall organization and goals of classroom activity, were never openly questioned by any of the teachers. In addition, Brad’s continuing dissatisfaction with student progress, even with his changes in teaching actions, had not been sufficiently addressed. He needed to continue reflecting on and evaluating his actions and beliefs in order to accommodate to the specifics of the context within which he taught.
**Engagement in Tom’s class.** In Tom’s case, the concept of engagement arose during his discussion of the types of classroom activities that motivated students to learn. For Tom, this concept was closely related to the purposes of classroom actions and activities, student’s understanding of content and their interest in course topics. He believed that students were engaged only when they had a clear purpose (“why they are reading something, why they are listening to something” (T1)) and the teacher had made the purpose very clear. Although Tom felt it was the teacher’s role to decide the purpose and explain the course content to students, he was wary of lecturing too much in class lest he lose student engagement. Initially Tom believed he could measure student engagement by the number of questions students asked in class, and believed “if students are interested they will ask questions” (T1). However, at midterm Tom believed that students were still engaged and were “fascinated” (T1) by the linguistics course content even though they had not been asking many questions in class.

Tom based his perceptions of successful/unsuccessful student groups on students’ participation with the learning cycle. The student division of labor in Tom’s class was solidified into two groups, persisting students who were keeping up with the demands of writing and revising their assignments and borderline students who were not. Tom had struggled with unmotivated “borderline” students which he further grouped into three categories, students “who are not getting it” (T2) in terms of understanding course content, students he perceived as not into his teaching style, and students who were not interested in school.
Tom’s concern for how he could better engage borderline students led to an increased focus on disciplinary strategies aimed at telling students they were failing early enough in the semester to avoid confusion. This strategy also minimized student complaints about course grades at the end of the semester.

Tom’s reaction to the students’ perceived lack of engagement prompted a gradual change in his instructional behavior towards a “controlling style” (Reeve, 2009) of motivating borderline students. According to Reeve, when teachers are expected to produce certain outcomes, the pressure to perform and conform, in this case, to departmental expectations of the amount of output produced, is often passed on to students “in the form of a controlling motivating style” (p. 165). Tom was fully aware that he was telling students what to do and that his actual role was very different than the ideal role he had initially described. Tom’s description of “what he would rather do” centered on his role as facilitator in a quasi-collaborative classroom. He preferred to be supportive of student autonomy, allowing students to ask questions and control the topic of discussion while maintaining control over content, course assignments and evaluation of student work. For Tom, the adoption of a controlling style was necessary to achieve student success within the context of his course, even though it conflicted with his previously stated beliefs on learning and his preferred teaching style.

**Aims and Teacher Beliefs**

Crookes (2010) believed that language teachers should have a set of beliefs and values about their teaching practice that “go beyond mere statements
of methodological preferred practices” (p. 1127). However, in the data collected for this study teacher’s rarely expressed beliefs that could be characterized as “aims” and if they did they were often not followed through with action due to perceived lack of student interest and cooperation, lack of appropriate tools and training, or other institutional constraints.

Dewey (1960) explicated three criteria involved in the establishment of teacher aims. The first condition stated that aims must be reflective in the sense that they incorporate “foresight, observation and the choice of the better among alternative possibilities” (p. 104). According to Dewey, existing educational and moral theories, which promoted ends lying outside of the actual conditions at hand, violated the first condition and limited teachers to a predetermined choice of means used to achieve their goals. Regarding the source of external ends in education, “Teachers receive them from superior authorities; these authorities accept them from what is current in the community” (p. 108). For Dewey, the conditions under which we ought to act are not predetermined but instead intricately related to the situation in which action is required. In this way aims were flexible and could be continuously evaluated on their ability to direct educational activity successfully.

In complex situations, aims remained flexible and could be revised in light of conditions that may arise or may have been initially overlooked in the original formulation of the aim. In contrast, ends imposed from outside of the activity were rigid because, “what happens in the course of action neither confirms, refutes nor alters them” (Dewey, 1960, p. 105). Thus, the second criteria of good
aims that they must be experimental, allowed legitimate and intellectually valuable aims to grow and change as conditions developed. The third criteria of good aims was the idea that the end in which aims terminate must also serve as a means to further ends.

According to Crookes (2010), the apparent lack of aims expressed by teachers in this study may be due to the fact that “most language teachers have never been presented with any formal orientation to a major area of relevance for developing statements of values or beliefs.” If asked to outline the pedagogical beliefs that guide their practice, Crookes believed teachers “might not have adequate sources to turn to” (p. 1127) outside of institutionally sanctioned models and approaches. In addition, Thorne (2005) stated that “certain social-material conditions may impoverish, rather than afford, opportunities for developmental transformation, with obvious ethical and pedagogical implications” (p. 402). In this study, contextual factors such as lack of job security, lecturer status, intensification of teaching due to larger classes, frustration with student placement, and lack of tools to support pedagogical innovations resulted in feelings of powerlessness, uncertainty about the products of teaching, and in some cases an overall lack of engagement with the processes of teaching and learning.

**Activity Theory and the Investigation of Teacher Beliefs**

This study expanded previous descriptions of the relationship between context and teacher thought by situating beliefs within the activity framework and elaborating on how the internalization and transformation of teacher beliefs were
a function of context. According to Lantolf and Thorne (2006), “constructing an activity system as a research object involves defining the roles that people, institutions and artifacts play in moment-to-moment practice” (p. 224). The activity framework privileges subjectivity while also recognizing that individual thought and action are mediated and constrained by the conceptual and real tools available, communities, rules, and divisions of labor that structure teaching and learning activity within institutions. In this study, the mediated interaction between teacher subjects and their objects, in concert with additional contextual factors embodied in the categories of rules, community and divisions of labor influenced the internalization and transformation of teacher beliefs about teaching and learning. Although activity theory has been utilized mainly as a descriptive framework in this study, according to Thorne (2005), activity theory also functions as an applied methodology which “encourages engaged critical inquiry . . . lead[ing] to the development of material and symbolic-conceptual tools necessary to enact positive interventions” (p. 403).

According to Breen (2001), the investigation of shared beliefs emerging from the context of classroom practice can be used for pedagogical innovation by generating “grounded alternatives to the ‘accepted wisdom’ of language teaching methodology emanating from certain academic traditions” that are removed from the actual context of teaching (p. 472). Further research is needed focusing on how students’ perspectives might be included in the transformation of classroom activity through the adoption of socio-cultural approaches to teaching and learning grounded in the needs and goals of teachers and students. Pedagogical
innovations must be supported through the introduction of new concepts and approaches to teaching while teachers are learning how to teach but also through the provision of tools and training required for in-service teachers to use what they have learned effectively.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study incorporated data on student and administrator’s motives and goals that were limited to the perspectives of the participating teachers. In future studies, the scope of investigation could be expanded to include not only interpretations of classroom events from the perspective of teachers but also from the perspectives of students and administrators. Incorporating interpretations of classroom activity from student’s perspectives would provide an additional level of interpretation of communal concepts and elaborate on the questions of if and how teacher’s beliefs about students were jointly constructed through student-teacher interaction.

The number of participants and the sixteen-week timeframe of data collection were also limiting factors in the study. Further studies focusing on the analysis of shared beliefs and the context in which they occurred should be expanded to include more teachers working in the same institutional context. The inclusion of more teachers within a single department would provide a more conclusive account of shared beliefs and their interaction with specific contextual variables. The timeframe of future studies should also be expanded to capture the evolution of conceptual change at the departmental and institutional level.
coinciding with larger societal movements and theoretical trends and innovations in the field of language teaching.
Appendix 1

Interview Questions

Interview one: Pre-observation.

1. Why did you become a language teacher?
2. Describe your past teaching experience.
3. Describe your education and teacher training.
4. Is there a particular theory/method/approach that has influenced your development as a teacher?
5. Does the college/department you work in promote a particular approach to teaching ESL?
6. What is the overall plan for the semester?
7. How do you determine the objectives of the course?
8. How do you make your students aware of the objectives of the course?
9. How do you determine the course grading and evaluation procedures?
10. What kinds of materials do you plan to use in your class?
11. Are there any restrictions on the types of materials you can use in class?
12. Are there any restrictions on the topics/content that you can teach?
13. What is the students' purpose for taking your class?
14. What do students learn in your classes?
15. What do you think motivates your students to learn?
16. What inhibits their language learning?
17. What kinds of students do you like to teach?
18. What kinds of activities are best for developing linguistic skills?
19. What kinds of activities are best for developing communicative skills?

20. How long have you been teaching?

21. How long have you taught here?

**Interview two: Mid-semester.**

1. How would you describe the students you teach?

2. Do your students expect a certain type of teaching style?

3. How have you been evaluating your students’ language skills?

4. What kinds of learning activities/assignments do your students enjoy doing most?

5. How would you rate your teaching performance so far this semester?

6. What is your ideal role as a teacher?

7. Describe your current classroom role.

8. Has your role in the classroom changed since the beginning of the semester?

9. At this point in the semester, what do you know about your students?

10. Have your expectations of your students changed since the beginning of the semester/last interview?

11. Have your objectives changed since the beginning of the semester?

12. Do you believe your students are learning?

13. What evidence do you use to gauge student learning?

14. What are some examples of particular classroom activities or tasks, occurring within the past several weeks, that you believe were successful?

15. What was the objective of the activity or task and why do you think it was successful?
16. What are some examples of particular classroom activities or tasks, occurring within the past several weeks, that you believe “didn’t work” or were not successful?

17. What was the objective of the activity and why do you think it was not successful?

18. How were the objectives of the successful/unsuccessful activities discussed related to the overall objectives of the course?

19. How have your perspectives on teaching changed since the beginning of the semester?

**Interview three: End of the semester.**

1. Were you able to successfully meet your objectives for the course?

2. At this point in the semester, what do you know about your students?

3. Have your expectations of your students changed since the beginning of the semester/last interview?

4. What are some examples of particular classroom activities or tasks, occurring within the past several weeks, that you believe were successful?

5. What was the objective of the activity or task and why do you think it was successful?

6. What are some examples of particular classroom activities or tasks, occurring within the past several weeks, that you believe “didn’t work” or were not successful?

7. What was the objective of the activity and why do you think it was not successful?
8. How were the objectives of the successful/unsuccesful activities discussed related to the overall objectives of the course?

9. How have your perspectives on teaching changed since the beginning of the semester?
Appendix 2

Teacher Consent to Participate in Research Project:
Language Teacher Beliefs in Context: An Activity Theoretical Approach

My name is Adam Mastandrea. I am a Doctoral student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Hawai‘i at Manoa (UH). The purpose of my current research project is to examine language teachers’ beliefs as they arise within daily course planning and teaching activities.

Project Description - Activities and Time Commitment:
*Interview* - You will be asked to participate in 3 interviews occurring at the beginning, middle and end of the academic semester. Each interview will last for about 25 to 30 minutes. I will record the interview using a digital audio-recorder. I am recording the interview so I can later type a transcript – a written record of what we talked about during the interview - and analyze the information from the interview. If you participate, you will be one of four participating teachers who I will interview individually. If you would like to preview a copy of all of the questions that I will ask you, please let me know now.

*Observation* - In addition to the interviews, I will observe your class once every two weeks (8 observations total) over the course of the semester. During the observations I will record the classroom interaction using a digital audio recorder.

**Benefits and Risks:** I believe there are no direct benefits to you in participating in my research project. I believe there is little or no risk to you in participating in this project. If, however, you are uncomfortable or stressed by answering any of the interview questions, we will skip the question, or take a break, or stop the interview, or withdraw from the project altogether.

**Confidentiality and Privacy:** During this research project, I will keep all data from the interviews and observations in a secure location. Only I will have access to the data, although legally authorized agencies, including the University of Hawai‘i Committee on Human Studies, have the right to review research records. After I transcribe the interviews and recorded segments of class observation data, I will erase the audio-recordings. When I report the results of my research project, and in my typed transcripts, I will not use your name or any other personally identifying information. Instead, I will use a pseudonym (fake name) for your name. If you would like a summary of the findings from my final report, please contact me at the number listed near the end of this consent form.

**Voluntary Participation:** Participation in this research project is voluntary. You can choose freely to participate or not to participate. In addition, at any point during this project, you can withdraw your permission without any penalty of loss of benefits.
Questions: If you have any questions about this project, please contact me at via phone (808) 927-8701 or e-mail (mastandr@hawaii.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, in this project, you can contact the University of Hawai‘i, Committee on Human Studies (CHS), by phone at (808) 956-5007 or by e-mail at uhirb@hawaii.edu.

Signature(s) for Consent:

I agree to participate in the research project entitled, “Language Teacher Beliefs in Context: An Activity Theoretical Approach.” I understand that I can change my mind about participating in this project, at any time, by notifying the researcher.

Your Name (Print): ________________________________

Your Signature: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 1:</th>
<th>Activity 2:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student Grouping</strong></td>
<td><strong>Student Role:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Role:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teacher Role:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Technology used:</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Materials used:</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Classroom Organization:**
- **Class Topic:**
- **# of Students Present:**
- **Date:**
- **Teacher:**
- **Class Start Time:**
- **Class End Time:**
- **Objectives of the class:**

**Pre-Class Activity:**
- **Non-Instructional activity:**

**Post-Class Activity:**
- **Observation #:**
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