

English in the Workplace: An Employer's Concerns

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This paper describes a study of English (ESL) in the workplace programs in three factories of a garment manufacturing company, Levi Strauss & Co. (Canada) Inc. (Burnaby, Harper, & Peirce, 1990). It is of interest in this volume for two reasons. First, little attention is paid elsewhere in this collection to the roles, responsibilities, and needs of employers with respect to official language learning by adult immigrants. Second, there is considerable focus in ESL provision in Canada on government-sponsored and other programs which prepare immigrants for initial employment, for general orientation to life in Canada, and for citizenship. (See Burnaby, "Features and Issues," this volume). This paper is concerned with what happens to immigrants once they are employed, and how they and their employer interact around the fact that most of the immigrants have very little command of English, the dominant language in the areas in which the factories under study are located.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we provide some background on the history of English in the workplace in Canada. Then we describe the rationale and research strategy for this study. Next, we provide an overview and comparison of our findings in the three plants. In light of this context, the main discussion in the paper is organized around the objectives for the study and questions generated about the ESL programs in the plants by company plant managers. In our view, the latter discussion is significant not only for the findings we developed about the ESL programs but also for the perspectives on immigrant workers revealed by the kinds of questions that the plant managers posed. Finally, we discuss implications of our findings for the company, for the involvement in ESL of Canadian employers, and for further research and analysis in this field.

Some Background on English in the Workplace in the Canadian Context

In order to provide some context for the data and findings of this study, we offer here a brief overview of the history and the role of ESL programs in the workplace in Canada. Although Canada is a country populated mainly by people who are immigrants or the descendants of immigrants, the formal teaching of Canada's dominant languages to immigrants is a relatively recent phenomenon. For most of Canada's history, people who have come to live in English or French areas of the country have learned those languages through "submersion"

(that is, learning language informally through everyday exposure to it) or have managed to live here without learning the dominant language at all. Whatever language training was available was provided by charitable and non-profit organizations (Hawkins, 1988).

After World War II, Canada received many immigrants; first, displaced persons from northern Europe, then, economic migrants from southern Europe (largely to central Canada), and finally, as a result of changes in the Immigration Act in the mid-1970s, immigrants and refugees from all over the world. In the 1960s, some of the provinces which were receiving many immigrants began to initiate ESL/FSL programs for children in schools and for adults. In 1967, the federal government inaugurated a pre-employment program of ESL/FSL for adult immigrants destined for the labor force. Relatively recently, there has been a trend to support ESL/FSL programs for adults through community agencies. Today, especially in areas of high immigration, there is a great proliferation of official language programs offered by school boards, colleges, universities, community agencies, private institutions, and so on, some of these being located in workplaces and/or through unions. Provinces, colleges, and school boards differ greatly in the priority they place on supporting language training for immigrants within their jurisdictions. In sum, language training in this country began in charitable efforts, moved to government-supported pre-employment and general training, and has evolved into a wide variety of services supported by many institutions.

Formal language in the workplace training has had a chequered history over the past fifteen years or so. In some provinces it was offered as part of the federally sponsored training in the 1970s. School boards, community colleges, and some private agencies have increasingly made contracts with employers over the past decade or so to offer language training in the workplace. To a large extent these contracts were a result of the educational body approaching the employer, not the other way around. Some unions have also been active in setting up language training in the workplace or union hall, with or without the co-operation of management (Turk & Unda, 1991). The Ontario Ministry of Citizenship (1989) has developed its support for English in the workplace to become multiculturalism in the workplace. In other words, it promotes programs that not only provide language training and cultural orientation for workers but also includes cross-cultural training for non-immigrant employees so that each group learns to adjust appropriately and productively to the others. Recently, Employment and Immigration Canada has been experimenting with pre-employment and job entry level training that combines ESL with job skill development. (See Burnaby, "Features and Issues," this volume).

In light of this situation, we would like to make three points which readers might keep in mind with reference to our study. One concerns the importance of workplace language training as a means of reaching immigrants who have no other practical access to language training. There is a strong tendency for new immigrants to get employment as soon as possible once they enter the country. Canada Employment Centres promote this. (See Belfiore & Heller, this volume). On the immigrants' part, obviously the need for income is a primary motivator. However, it appears that many immigrants also have a strong psychological need to have the security and stability of employment even if there might be significant long-term benefits to their taking language training before looking for a job. It is often the case that they have strong motivation to earn money not only to provide for themselves and their immediate families but also to assist their relatives in their home countries and to bring some of them to Canada. Once established in the kinds of jobs that are available to people who have little official language fluency, they are often too committed to the demands of their work and family to find the time to take language classes. Shift work often makes it impossible for them to get access to classes. Also, for those with very little command of English/French and few

contacts in the community, it is very difficult for them to get information about what classes and other settlement services are available to them. Cultural factors and/or childcare responsibilities often make it specially difficult for women to get to language classes. Our point here is that English in the workplace classes offer unique access to official language learning for people, particularly women, who are in a work and home situation where they have no time or resources to manoeuvre themselves into a better position economically, socially, culturally, or civically.

Our second point concerns the role that workplace language training plays in labor force development in Canada. Immigrants bring with them valuable skills, developed at the expense of their home country. Canada benefits greatly from these skills, but many of them are not available to the labor market if the immigrants do not speak English or French. It is largely with this perspective in mind that the federal government has supported, since the 1960s, official language training for immigrants destined for the labor force. Such training has almost always been offered as pre-employment training rather than in the workplace. In the past decade or so some provincial governments, school boards, colleges, unions, and a few private sector organizations have taken the initiative in introducing language training into the workplace for those workers who have found employment but have not learned the language. As immigration continues to increase, employers, particularly those in areas which receive many newcomers, are becoming increasingly aware of the need for and advantages of providing language training for their immigrant workers. In this field, Levi Strauss has gained the reputation of being a leader (Howard, 1990). In the late 1970s, Levi Strauss, entirely on its own initiative, supported the development of curriculum for the teaching of English in its relevant plants and implemented a program using its own personnel (Bell, 1982). Various factors in the early 1980s halted this initiative, but it was taken up again in the mid-1980s in co-operation with a school board, a college, and a private firm which offers ESL training. Most other English in the workplace programs that we know of were initiated by educational delivery institutions and labor (Turk & Unda, 1991) rather than by the company itself. In sum, there is a great deal of scope for involving employers in ESL for adult immigrants, and employers' roles as stakeholders in this training should be made the most of in terms of their responsibility and the benefits to them.

Our third point is that there is a wide range in the kinds of skills and experience that immigrants bring with them to this country. It may not be apparent at the initial stages of an ESL program in the workplace what the needs of individual workers might be. Differences hidden beneath the surface may account for the varied reactions that immigrant workers have to English language classes, to trying to speak English to other staff in the plant, to promotion in the company, to integration into the social life of the plant, to taking initiatives in their work, and so on.

Such differences include the following: (1) Immigrants differ considerably with respect to the amount and kinds of change they have to make in order to adjust to life in Canada. Cultural aspects between their home country and Canada may be more or less different. People who have come from rural areas and who are now living in an urban environment have specific adjustments to make. Also, many are working in an occupation that is different from the one they had before coming here. Factors such as these place varying learning loads on individual immigrants. (2) Immigrants' needs change over time as they learn, one by one, to deal with all aspects of their lives in this new country. Their priorities and purposes for learning change. For example, immigrants who have been here for some time and who have children who were brought up here may have concerns about communicating with their children who increasingly speak English rather than their mother tongue. (3) Experience in

ESL teaching has shown that learners who have low levels of education and literacy in their first language are likely to experience specific difficulties with regular language classes. Factors in these difficulties include lack of experience in formal educational situations, the amount of reading and writing used by teachers in classes, and the fact that these learners cannot use literacy as a personal aid for language learning (for example, notes or bilingual dictionaries). It has been demonstrated that such learners can do well in ESL learning, but generally only if they are taught in classes designed to take into account the point at which they are starting to learn both the oral language and literacy skills (Burnaby & Bell, 1990). (4) Immigrants differ with respect to the amount of confidence they have in being able to learn English and to participate fully in Canadian life around them. Cultural, educational, age, and other factors influence their level of confidence (Burnaby & Bell, 1990). (5) Some immigrants, and particularly refugees, may have suffered trauma as a result of leaving their home countries. Those who left countries at war especially may feel guilty about having left others behind and have suffered atrocities on the way here. It may take them years to stabilize their personal lives with respect to these experiences (Heipel, 1991; Beiser, 1991). (6) Finally, but critically, immigrants' language learning and cultural adaptation is strongly influenced by the kinds and qualities of formal and informal learning opportunities they have in their environment. Supportive contacts with English speakers and opportunities to use the language in unthreatening circumstances enhance language learning and the cultural exchange that goes with it. Efforts to make immigrants aware of the settlement services available to them can help relieve them of the task of learning everything in isolation and by trial and error (Maguire & Lewis, 1988).

Appreciation of these differences in background can help any company to develop means to support immigrant workers to the immigrants' own benefit and that of the company.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to identify and analyse significant factors relating to the English-as-a-second-language (ESL) program of classes at three Levi Strauss & Co. (Canada) Inc. plants in Brantford, Stoney Creek, and Edmonton. The focus was on three kinds of factors: (a) those relating to workers' choices about taking part in the program; (b) those relating to the impact of the classes on participants; and (c) those relating to the impact of the classes on other stakeholders in the plants.

Background to this Study

In the spring of 1989, a representative of Levi Strauss contacted the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) to identify a researcher who would undertake to assess the ESL program in its three relevant plants. Barbara Burnaby agreed to conduct the study as principal investigator. Bonnie Peirce and Helen Harper were hired to work as research officers on the project. We will refer to ourselves in this chapter as the OISE team.

We were particularly interested in being involved in this work because the research question that was proposed was to identify not only the linguistic outcomes on the ESL program but also the social impact on the participants and other stakeholders. We found this question to be a refreshing and progressive change from the questions usually raised by

managements of businesses with regard to the outcomes of training programs in their organizations. The company management had just been through an exercise in specifying its mission, vision, and values (Howard, 1990) and was concerned about being able to convey the results to all employees. Also, it was considering involving workers in independent work teams which would entail more oral communication among workers than was normal in many of the company's current plant operations. The ESL programs in company plants were the result of management initiatives rather than those of unions or educational institutions. Thus, the context for this study offered us the opportunity to explore English in the workplace programs that were unusually management-driven and in which management indicated strong interest in the social outcomes both inside and outside of the plants.

In the late fall of 1989, the OISE team met with several members of the management of Levi Strauss in order to work out the details of the study. To assist us in focussing our study, the plant managers were asked to develop a list of questions that they would like to have addressed in the study. The OISE team was then invited to attend a meeting of the plant managers in which the managers discussed the priority they would place on the thirty-three questions they had raised. It is common in conducting evaluations or assessments for the researcher to work from a formal set of objectives that management has for the training program. It became clear to us that Levi Strauss did not have a set of objectives as such for its ESL program but was developing the program on an experimental basis. We saw this as a reasonable way to proceed and understood that members of management had positive and flexible expectations of the outcomes. Thus, we approached our study as a task of identifying, describing, and analysing the dynamics of the program as it presently exists rather than one of matching particular outcomes with specific, predetermined objectives.

It was arranged that the OISE team would spend the equivalent of two working weeks in each of the Stoney Creek and Brantford plants and, because of practical constraints, one week in Edmonton. Our data gathering approaches were:

- interviews with human resources personnel and other managerial staff
- interviews with people delivering the ESL classes
- observations of oral and written communication patterns in the workplace
- observations of ESL classes
- review of documents related to the ESL classes
- individual and group interviews with supervisors
- individual and group interviews with workers who were taking or have taken ESL classes
- individual and group interviews with eligible workers who have not taken classes

The focus of the data gathering included:

- the history of the ESL program
- stakeholders' views of the program's purpose and effectiveness
- demography of the population in the plant who are eligible for ESL classes
- issues related to communication in the plant
- description of the classes, including recruitment, methods, class demography, content, and so on
- impact of the classes on participants
- impact of the classes on others in the plant
- impact of the classes on communications and other relations in the plant.

Overview and Comparisons between the Three Plants

In order to draw together the detailed findings from each of the three plants, we offer a comparison of the three sites, starting with demographic information about the labor force and the participation in the classes and then moving to further discussion about operations in the plants, details about the classes, access to classes, and so on. Similarities and differences will be noted along with any interpretations we might have. We will also outline the factors related to the ESL program that we found to be common to all plants.

Plant Operations and the ESL Classes

According to the situation at the time of our study, the Stoney Creek and Edmonton plants have much in common both in the sewing work done in the plants and the fact that they have only one shift. Most of the jobs in the Brantford plant differ from those in the other two plants in that most of the work is in laundering, pressing, and packing clothes, and there are three shifts. Language research work, to say nothing of language development training, is affected by the fact that noise levels in most areas of the sewing plants is so great that protective earplugs are mandatory for all personnel in the affected areas, thus reducing the clarity of oral communication. Also, the nature of the work in all the plants is such that verbal communication is minimally useful for basic operations since most operations can be demonstrated clearly. This said, there is a great deal of work-related and social communication needed in the plants for full participation in the life of the plant communities. The unions are dominated by Canadian-born workers and appear to have taken little notice of the special interests of non-Canadian-born workers.

At Stoney Creek and Brantford, ESL classes are offered for one hour, three times a week at lunch/dinner breaks. The company releases the participants with pay for half an hour of each class and the employees take their half-hour lunch/dinner break as the other half of the class. In Edmonton, classes are conducted after work or on Saturdays with a stipend paid by the company for their attendance. The differences among the plants with respect to their operations do not seem to have much impact on the ESL classes, but other factors do.

Demographics of the Plants Related to Participation in ESL Classes

The total work force at the three plants at the time of our study was approximately 370 at Stoney Creek, 478 at Brantford, and 512 at Edmonton. Rough percentages of non-Canadian-born employees were given to us as 60 percent at Stoney Creek, 50 percent at Brantford, and 95 percent at Edmonton. Approximate numbers of participants in the ESL classes at the plants were 40 at Stoney Creek, 20 at Brantford, and 143 at Edmonton. The following percentages of non-Canadian-born employees engaged in ESL classes indicate considerable differences among the three plants: Stoney Creek 18 percent; Brantford 8 percent; and Edmonton 29 percent. However, these percentages must be interpreted in light of a number of factors. First, not all non-Canadian-born workers need or want English language training for a variety of reasons. A precise assessment of this requirement for language training is not within the scope of this study. However, considerations of this factor will be discussed further in the

description below of the characteristics of the labor force in the three plants. Second, the differences among the plants might have to do with aspects of access to the classes, a subject considered separately below. Finally, the differences might relate to the quality of the classes themselves, again a subject addressed under its own heading below.

The labor forces of the three plants exhibit some differences. While some employees of the Stoney Creek plant have been there for more than ten years, there is considerable turnover in staff. The result is that the plant has to conduct a fair amount of training of new employees, and that the majority of employees are relatively young and new at the job. This non-Canadian-born group is quite ethnically varied and inclined to be composed of recently arrived immigrants. Thus, the need for English-language training is likely to be quite high for the non-Canadian-born group. Also, since most of these employees are young women, many have significant family responsibilities outside of their work hours. This factor influences the scheduling of English classes (that is, not outside of regular working hours). Supervisors at Stoney Creek tend to be representative of the ethnic composition of the lineworkers (the workers that they oversee). This means that many supervisors can communicate with the machine operators in their own languages although production lines tend to be of mixed ethnicity.

The Brantford plant appears to have experienced a shift in the past decade from a primarily Canadian-born work force to one with a considerable proportion of immigrant workers. These workers come from mixed ethnic backgrounds. Because of the plant's policies on assigning workers to shifts, the non-Canadian-born workers are most concentrated in the night shift and, to a lesser extent, in the afternoon shift. The fact that there is no ESL class available during the midnight shift may contribute to the low percentage of non-Canadian-born workers in the classes at that plant. This plant employs slightly more male immigrant workers than the other plants. Therefore, considerations of child care and domestic responsibilities in scheduling language classes might play a lesser role than in the other plants. The supervisors tend to be Canadian-born English speakers, and the lines are mixed ethnically. The night shift supervisor speaks several languages in common with his workers.

In the Edmonton plant, the immigrant work force generally has much more seniority than that in the other two plants. Also, the ethnic composition of the plant is primarily Asian. These workers are much more established in their jobs and in their lives in Canada, but that does not mean that their ten or more years of experience in Canada has resulted in much English language learning either on the job or in their community contacts. However, since most of the women are older, with established families, restrictions regarding their attending ESL classes outside of working hours are generally not as great as those on the young working mothers at Stoney Creek, for example. Many of the supervisors are not Canadian-born. However, a good number of these are Europeans who, although they are not native speakers of English, do not share common languages with the predominantly Asian-born work force.

Access to ESL Classes

At Stoney Creek, access to ESL classes is negotiated between the workers, the human resources personnel, and the supervisors. Workers are informed about the classes in their orientation to the plant by the human resources personnel and supervisors play an important role in encouraging workers to attend. In the past there were a few occasions on which individual workers were asked not to attend class on a specific day because of production needs on the line, but this seems to have been rare. Workers can enter or leave the ESL classes whenever they want.

In Brantford, information about the classes available to workers comes from supervisors and co-workers. The profile of the program is not high. It is supervisors who decide which workers can enrol in each seventeen-week session of classes. Usually only one or two workers from each line are enrolled. Workers must ask each class day if they can attend, but permission has rarely been withheld in recent months. When workers ask to take a second session, supervisors often refuse permission on the grounds that others should be allowed the chance to go. There seems to be some misunderstanding between the supervisors and the teacher since the teacher says that she could accommodate more students than she currently has in each class. The only person from the wash section of the plant (a section of the plants whose timing of output affects the timing of all other sections) who was given permission to take the classes was a member of the custodial staff. The wash supervisors feel that the production demands of that section are such that it is difficult for workers to be released at a specific time. The wash workers are all men who operate as a team, and there is a considerable amount of language learning on the job because of this arrangement. The night shift workers have no language class on their shift. They have been offered the opportunity to attend any of the classes in the other shifts but have not attended. Our data do not give us a clear idea why this was the case, but we suspect that the time and transportation difficulties to travel to and from the plant several hours before or after their shift was not convenient for them.

In Edmonton, access to classes is arranged by the human resources personnel and the company, English Language Professionals, that provides the classes. To our knowledge no learner is refused access. Supervisors are not involved in access decisions because the classes are offered outside of work hours.

Attendance at classes relates to production in the Stoney Creek and Brantford plants because workers leave their lines for half an hour of work time for each class. Supervisors at Brantford saw this as somewhat of a problem for them, but management generally did not. There are few men in any of the classes. While this is reasonable given the predominantly female work force, we also wonder if at least some men might feel uncomfortable studying in virtually all female classes. Their language might not be proper for a mixed group, according to a few supervisors. Also, there are no supervisors in any of the classes at present, although there were some in Edmonton earlier in the program. Again, this is understandable since supervisors must be able to speak English quite fluently in order to get that job, but they also might feel uncomfortable studying alongside their workers.

Schedule of the Classes

At Stoney Creek and Brantford, workers can attend three one-hour classes each week. Half an hour of each class is the workers' lunch break. Although some class time is lost while the workers buy their lunch in the cafeteria, this arrangement seems to work well since those who attend do not have to take time away from their other responsibilities outside of work hours. In Edmonton, all the classes are offered outside of work hours, after work, or even on Saturdays. Given the high rate of enrolment and attendance, this arrangement seems to be satisfactory. It is our understanding that one reason why workers at the Edmonton plant are prepared to go to classes outside of work hours is because their family responsibilities are less demanding relative to those of the younger women at Stoney Creek and Brantford. Other factors might include the fact that transportation is less of an issue since many have cars. While there does not seem to be a problem with scheduling, a survey of the workers about their preferences for class times would be valuable for any workplace ESL program. This would be specially useful if other kinds of classes, for example, more advanced classes, were to be

considered for those whose English is above the levels of the present classes but who would like to learn more. We have strongly urged that some arrangement be made to provide classes for the night shift at Brantford.

Structure and Curriculum of the Classes

At Stoney Creek, learners are admitted into the classes on a continuous intake basis; in other words, the teacher will take on new students at any time. It is challenging as well for new students who must catch up to the class. This approach is demanding on the teacher since she must design her lessons so as to accommodate new students who have not covered the same material as the rest of the class. It also means that the size of the class fluctuates. In Brantford and Edmonton, classes are arranged into set sessions (seventeen weeks at Brantford and twelve to fourteen weeks at Edmonton). The only real disadvantage to using sessions is that new workers who are eager to get into English class right away have to wait.

At both Stoney Creek and Brantford, there are two classes per shift. The teacher at Stoney Creek divides her students into more and less advanced so that she can focus her instruction better on the students' levels. The Brantford teacher does not divide the students according to level, but this may be because the students' English is mainly at the beginner level. In both plants, consideration might well be given for special arrangements to be made for the teaching of those students who have low levels of education and of mother tongue literacy or who seem to lack confidence in their ability to learn. In Edmonton, the large enrolment permits two streams (one for those with low levels of education and the other for the more educated students), and each stream contains four levels. Incoming students in Edmonton are carefully and discretely screened and placed appropriately. It is not clear whether the teachers at the other two plants were trained or experienced in dealing with learners with low levels of education.

Class sizes varied across the plants. The teacher at the Stoney Creek plant has little control over the size of the classes. Our presence in that plant to do the study seemed to have raised awareness about and interest in the program, so the classes were expected to grow after we left. The classes at Brantford only have five students each. The teacher indicated that she could take more. Class sizes in Edmonton could theoretically be controlled because of the large size of the program. However, some students who had been together in a class for a long time appeared to be unwilling to have their classes divided even when they get rather large. We feel that this situation poses no real problems. In general, several factors influence the issue of class size. The more homogeneous the language levels and the higher the education level of the students, the larger the classes can be. It takes a very experienced and industrious teacher to handle a large, mixed class since multiple activities must be designed for individuals and small groups to work on at their own level. Of course, the size and furnishings of the classroom have some bearing on the optimal sizes of classes. In industrial settings, classes must often be held in rooms that are an unsuitable size, are noisy, and lack the usual classroom equipment.

At Stoney Creek, the curriculum appeared to be largely structured on points of grammar and pronunciation although plant-related material was integrated into some lessons. At Brantford and Edmonton, the curricula involved both work and other related content and the teachers were prepared to modify lessons on the basis of topics or items of interest that students introduced in class. English language teaching inevitably involves content that is relevant to a number of different situations. Companies sponsoring English classes should be clear about the extent to which they expect the course content to relate directly to language

needed in the workplace. Just what language is really needed in the workplace often requires study by a specialist in communication (Goldstein, 1991). We were somewhat surprised that the materials developed by Jill Bell for Levi Strauss were not known to the teachers in Brantford and Stoney Creek (Bell, 1982). Evaluation of student progress formed an important part of the program in Edmonton. Such evaluation is valuable both for the students and for the company. We assume that the teacher at Brantford also reports on the students' progress. It is more challenging for the teacher at Stoney Creek to evaluate students' progress because of the continuous intake system.

While not all of the teachers at the Edmonton plant have formal teaching credentials, they have a well-developed curriculum to work with and professional development support from English Language Professionals, the private company that provides the ESL training in that plant. Since the teachers in the other two plants work alone, it is important that they be well prepared to handle all aspects of teaching English in the workplace (appropriate teaching methods, curriculum development, negotiation of course content with the company, screening and evaluation of students, and so on).

How Learners Are Remunerated

The question of compensation to workers for their time as well as their tuition was an issue at all plants, but for different reasons. At Stoney Creek there are a considerable number of new workers. Those who had not yet reached 100 percent capacity in their operations were reluctant to attend the class, or felt that they were losing money by attending classes because their quarterly average (the rate of pay for the half hour they spend in class on company time) did not reflect their current productivity level. At Brantford, some supervisors expressed concern that the time taken for English language classes might affect the overall production of the plant and thus reduce the bonuses they receive based on the overall profits of the plant. In Edmonton, workers who attend class receive a stipend over and above the amount of money they make during the working day. The question was raised that some workers were attending the classes just to receive the stipend. According to the evidence we gathered, this possibility seems highly unlikely. In all three plants, it was noted in interviews that immigrant workers are compensated for their time to receive training in the plant while all workers receive only tuition support if they choose to take courses in educational institutions outside of the plants and if the proposed training is approved by management. Since we did not interview non-immigrant hourly-rated workers in the plants, we do not have a clear idea of the extent to which this is a point of friction.

Summary

In the case of all plants, three factors are common. The most important and general factor is the need for the company to develop a policy on the purpose and nature of the ESL classes. Second, and closely related to the first, is the issue of the remuneration by the company to workers for ESL class time relative to other programs in the company that reimburse workers for tuition only if they take further training offered outside of the company. Third is the need for better communication between the ESL teacher(s) and supervisors for various reasons.

It is clear that several factors influence the current characteristics of the ESL classes at the three plants under study. The composition of the labor force is one factor. At Stoney Creek, the workers are newer and younger; in Edmonton, they are older and more likely to be cross-trained (that is, they can work at several different jobs in the plant); in Brantford, there are

more men and there seems to be some sensitivity on the part of Canadian-born workers to the increasing role of immigrant workers in the plant. Second, supervisors have various degrees of power with respect to access to ESL classes: in Stoney Creek, they help choose and encourage the workers to participate; in Brantford, they act as gatekeepers; and in Edmonton, they have no role at all. Third, the relationships of the English language teacher to the plants differ: in Stoney Creek, there has been a succession of teachers supplied from educational institutions with little apparent support by those institutions for the teachers to adapt to the particular teaching circumstances; in Brantford, an independent teacher has been hired by the company with pay to develop curriculum but no external source of professional support; and in Edmonton, the teaching is undertaken by a professional firm that works closely with company management and provides support to the teaching program, including professional development for the teachers. Finally, the fact that the company has not articulated a policy on the purpose and nature of the program has left various employees with disparate assessments and expectations about the program, its value, and its outcomes.

Findings of This Study in Light of Its Objective

According to the objectives for this study the focus was on three kinds of factors: (a) those relating to workers' choices about taking part in the program; (b) those relating to the impact of the classes on participants; and (c) those relating to the impact of the classes on other stakeholders in the plant. Here we will review the data we collected in light of these focusses.

Workers' Choices about Taking Part in the Program

In terms of workers' choices about taking part in the ESL program, we perceive two influential factors. One is the means by which workers gain access to the program. This was discussed at some length earlier in this section. It seems that workers in some plants have virtually unrestricted access to the program while others can enrol only with their supervisors' permission. In each plant, human resources personnel, supervisors, and teachers play differing roles in informing workers about the classes, getting them into the classes, and allowing them to continue after they have studied for a period of time. Clearly, differences in both the structure of the work in each of the plants and the demographics of the labor force contribute to variations in management's decisions about access to ESL classes in each of the plants. We have no reason to believe that there were differences at the management level across the three plants with respect to attitudes to worker development or the value of the ESL program. The one group largely excluded from participation is workers in the wash section at Brantford, although they have better opportunities than most of the other workers to learn English through communication on the job. Also, there is no class on the night shift at Brantford. Although those workers were invited to take part in the classes offered during the day or afternoon shifts, none has done so for reasons of the inconvenience. We speculate that some men may be hesitant to take part in classes dominated by women and that supervisors might not like to study with their workers. In the latter case, too, it is clear that supervisors' English skills are usually well above those addressed in the classes.

The second factor we note here has to do with the confidence and experience of non-English-speaking workers to take part successfully in an ESL classroom situation. As we noted in the introduction to this paper, there are a number of factors such as range of personal experience before coming to Canada, difficult circumstances under which they left their home country, and level of formal education that are likely to have a strong influence on immigrant

and refugee workers' preparedness to take part in regular ESL classes. These factors may result in some potential learners not having the confidence to take part in classes in the plant, in their dropping out of those classes, in their not learning much in those classes, or, alternatively, in their being frustrated that the classes are not challenging enough. In Stoney Creek and Brantford, supervisors make the decisions regarding access to ESL classes, and they are likely not to have much preparation to make decisions about such sensitive cases. In Edmonton, English Language Professionals not only do the screening of potential participants to the classes, but have also set up several streams in the classes they provide in order to meet the particular needs of participants. When learners are placed in classes that suit their needs and circumstances, they can be expected to progress more quickly and successfully. If teachers in Stoney Creek and Brantford were hired with specific skills in identifying learners with particular needs, and if they were in a position to make separate learning arrangements for participants with special needs, it is likely that all potential learners could be better accommodated in classes. In our experience, teachers who work for an educational institution on a "piece work" basis (that is, part-time work in one or several locations) are not well screened for their qualifications, paid less than their full-time colleagues, and not compensated for their time in doing needs assessments, liaison, or classroom materials preparation.

It should be noted that most of the participants in the Levi Strauss ESL classes we interviewed would not have taken an ESL class outside of the plant. Such factors as convenient hours and location, encouragement on the part of the employer, convenient transportation, and familiarity of surroundings are important in their participation in ESL classes of any kind.

The Impact of the Classes on the Participants

The second focus we identified in our objectives for the study concerned the impact of the classes on the participants. Our findings in this respect are highly positive. Virtually all the participants like the classes, think that they are learning language and other knowledge about life in Canada that is valuable to them, and enjoy the experience. They report that they can now communicate with store clerks, doctors, the company nurse, and bus drivers. One participant noted that she could now read more of company memos than the date. Supervisors mostly report an increase in participants' ability to express themselves and in their self-confidence; however, doubts were expressed about the progress being made by some participants. Some ESL class participants we interviewed explained their hopes for the classes in terms of their desire to be able to defend their ideas and positions in the workplace. Others indicated that the classes had been too hard or too elementary for them. The social networks developed in the classes, especially in Edmonton, seem to fill an important gap for many of the learners.

Language learning can be a lengthy process, especially for isolated women, working in jobs that make linguistic communication difficult, and with access to only three hours a week of language training. The ESL programs at Levi Strauss have not been continuously in place for a long time, and not all participants have attended classes for very long. Thus, it is not surprising that the OISE team did not encounter dramatic stories about changes in the communications patterns among immigrant workers in the plants. Some interviewees indicated that the classes are probably a significant factor in recruitment and retention of workers. We are also of the view that the classes play a role in increasing the quality of work-related communication, although we cannot be precise about the kinds or amounts. Even those workers enrolled in the program tended to keep to their mother tongue social groups at

work. We were told that speaking English within a mother tongue group was looked on as inappropriate (Goldstein, 1991). We are certain that the classes play an important role in the morale of most participants and in the good perception of the company in the community.

Negative impacts of the ESL program indicated by the participants concern the worry on the part of some of them, particularly in Stoney Creek, that they are losing money by taking part in the program or adding stress to their lives. However, this concern was not a deterrent to many.

Impact of the Classes on Other Stakeholders in the Plant

With respect to impact of the classes on other stakeholders in the respective plants, supervisors seem to be the most affected. To a small extent in Stoney Creek and to a considerable extent in Brantford, supervisors reported that the program means more work for them in order to adjust their lines. Also, supervisors in these plants have added responsibilities in deciding who should go to class. In Stoney Creek, supervisors seemed enthusiastic about the anticipated and perceived benefits, while those at Brantford had a more difficult time balancing the benefits of sending workers to class with the immediate demands of work needing to be done. Supervisors in all three plants felt that they were not well connected with what was being taught in the classes.

Management was highly supportive of the program. One aspect of this support concerned the role of the classes in developing a more flexible work force and, in particular, in promoting participation in independent work teams envisioned for the future. Human resources personnel were also pleased about generally better communications with the workers. One noted that more workers were phoning in to report that they would be absent rather than having a family member do it for them.

Supervisors, managers, and other employees raised the question of the fairness of the company's policy in paying immigrant workers for part of their time to take ESL, while other workers only received compensation for their tuition expenses if they took training courses.

Questions Developed by Plant Managers for This Study

This section of the paper has been included to provide insight into the concerns of the plant managers of the company about the ESL program and the OISE team's responses to those concerns — a sort of dialogue between business people and second-language teachers. While it repeats many of the points made above, we thought it worth including here to suggest where bridges might be built between the interests and understandings of the two groups. We have analysed the questions developed by plant managers for this study into three categories: (1) role of language, literacy, and ethnic issues *in current plant conditions*; (2) role of language, literacy, and ethnic issues *in planned developments in staff relationships*; and (3) issues specifically related to the English language classes. While we have not been able to address directly a number of the 33 questions outlined, we have developed insight into some of these issues. Some of the question were included in more than one category. The managers' questions are printed in bold type below and the OISE team's responses are printed in normal type.

Role of Language, Literacy, and Ethnic Issues in Current Plant Conditions

Under the heading of the role of language, literacy, and ethnic issues in current plant conditions we identified eight questions.

(1) **Why aren't ESL participants using their English — is it related to level of encouragement, acceptance?** We see various reasons for this. In addition to points made below about opportunities to speak English, one reason is the strong pattern of using other languages to communicate on the floor and in social situations. The larger the ethnic group in the plant the stronger these patterns tend to be. People who have a non-English language in common feel awkward speaking English with each other, and may be criticized by their peers for showing off or trying to complicate the communication. Another reason concerns people's levels of confidence, even if they have been taking classes. Certainly, encouragement and acceptance on the part of English-speaking staff can and apparently does make a considerable difference here. We were under the impression that our study itself acted as a catalyst for some people, especially supervisors and instructors, to renew their efforts to encourage the use of English, to promote an accepting atmosphere, and to raise awareness about the classes. Perhaps regular reminders in terms of special events, awards, and so on, would keep this momentum up. We caution, however, that pressure rather than encouragement for the immigrants to speak English could undermine the good will created by the provision of the ESL program.

(2) **What opportunities do we provide to use English?** The short answer to this is not very many. The nature of the work, noise in the plants, and the constitution of the labor force make it difficult to provide an English-speaking environment from which workers can learn. We did not have the time to study the language learning effect of work teams, such as that in the wash area at Brantford, but expect that such working arrangements make a considerable difference regarding exposure to English and subsequent language learning. We would not encourage the company to apply pressure on non-English-speaking employees to speak English either on the job or in social situations since they generally feel insecure enough about their abilities already. Gentle encouragement from supervisors, instructors, management, and all other English-speaking employees, particularly on social topics, would be the best strategy to increase English language use.

(3) **To what extent do language and literacy levels impede promotional opportunities?** Clearly, language and literacy skills are increasingly demanded as employees move up the hierarchy in any of the plants. Those non-English speakers who have been promoted have developed their English skills well, although some have found the challenges difficult. For example, one supervisor said that it was difficult for her to get up the courage to use the public address system in the plant. We note that operators do not have to have any literacy skills except to read numbers and place gummed stickers on the right place on simple forms. If they want to monitor their progress or check on their pay, they must learn to read the production print-outs and their payslips — again a matter of reading numbers. Supervisors' jobs also involve mostly reading numbers, although they have to make certain reports and are involved in written work in training exercises. Transfers to jobs in the office almost inevitably involve more literacy skills in English. While language skills in oral English can clearly be an impediment to promotion (an issue that the company may well want to address), we suggest that it is also worth considering the role that literacy skills in English plays in promotion of immigrant and Canadian-born workers alike. A company that employs people who don't speak any English is also attractive to English speakers who have low literacy skills. The

positions that the latter occupy in the work force as a whole and at what levels in the company might be a useful topic of study. We suggest that oral communications and specific literacy courses be offered to any employee who is interested in being promoted.

(4) **Do we give opportunities for job enhancement?** From our limited observations in the plants, it appears to us that job enhancement strategies are not having much impact on language learning in the plants. While the buddy system for new workers in Stoney Creek may have some language learning impact in some cases, and the multi-ethnic dinner creates considerable good will, most initiatives such as rap sessions, the company newsletter, community programs, and the like seem not to attract the participation of the non-Canadian-born workers. Certainly, hesitancy about their ability to express themselves adequately is an important factor in their reluctance to participate, but their lack of knowledge about the intent and consequences of their involvement in these activities may also play a role.

(5) **What are we doing to maintain loyalty?** **Comment:** the union does not seem to be supportive of immigrant employees. We gained some information about the unions in our interviews and observations. They do not seem to provide translated documents in most instances except during negotiations. Union leaders have not pressed to have union-related information included in the curriculum of the ESL classes. They have had a difficult time recruiting immigrant workers to take part in their activities and, despite their efforts, the local union representatives come from Canadian-born employees. The cultural backgrounds of the immigrant workers probably give many of them a variety of attitudes to the role of unions. Also, as elsewhere, the language demands of participating in union activities may seem too much for others. On the other hand, if the unions were in some way perceived as a negative factor by immigrant workers, we would probably have heard about this, and we did not.

(6) **How is the culture of the plant changing as a result of the ethnic mix?** Because our study was a "snapshot" in time of the plants rather than a longitudinal look at plant culture, we cannot adequately respond to this question. However, it appears that Edmonton has stabilized with a certain kind of ethnic mix; that Stoney Creek is experiencing staff changes that do not seem to be particularly disruptive, and that the mix between Canadian-born and immigrants in Brantford may be a source of some tension. Since we have not had the opportunity to study the labor market in the communities in which these plants exist, we cannot offer an opinion about the effects of job competition among various groups. However, it is our view that the communication patterns in the plants, while a challenge, are not a primary source of tension.

(7) **What is the level of literacy among the immigrant population of the plants?** There are two questions here. One concerns the numbers of immigrant workers who are not literate in any language. Such people will probably have difficulty in learning in the ESL classes unless special provisions are made for them, as they are in the Edmonton plant. It is unlikely that they will ever develop sophisticated literacy skills in English unless they are very young. However, they can certainly be expected to learn practical English literacy skills if they get the right kind of support. For those immigrants who are literate in their first language, the chances that they will be able to transfer much of that basic skill to literacy in English are high. They are more likely to want to have the English classes include a fair amount of reading and writing as well as oral language development. There is a continuum between those immigrant workers who have no literacy skills at all in any language and those who are highly literate in another language. Although we did not press our interviewees to talk about their level of literacy in other languages, it is our impression that there are a number of immigrant workers in each of the plants who have low levels of literacy skills in their first languages as well as many who are highly literate.

(8) We tend to forget how women live at home. We may believe that women are equal to men, but 99 percent are controlled by their husbands. How does this affect their ability to speak out in class or to management? Because most of the English classes are filled and taught entirely by women, we are not particularly concerned about gender constraints on women to speak out in class, although there are sometimes status problems that arise given participants' experience with the student/teacher relationship in their home countries. However, the question about women employees' attitudes to speaking up to management is one for the company to consider seriously, particularly given that many of the members of higher levels of management are males. We believe that this is a significant factor for women of certain cultures. Also, of course, anyone who feels insecure about his or her command of English will be hesitant about speaking up. This issue may relate closely to the answer to question (1) above.

Role of Language, Literacy, and Ethnic Issues in Planned Employee Development

We have grouped together seven of the managers' questions that seemed to us to reflect their interests in future developments in the work force. They are:

- (1) How can we move from tolerance to trust and respect (related to mission, vision, and values training)?
- (2) What is the effect of ESL on recruitment and retention?
- (3) Relation of ESL to empowerment — skills such as problem solving, teamwork?
- (4) Are we making the best use of ESL as a vehicle for internal communication?
- (5) How can we make the work meaningful? What kinds of skills do we need to develop for self-managed work groups? Can ESL help?
- (6) Many of the immigrants are extraordinary — look what they've been able to do — how can we tap into their talent and potential?
- (7) What are our requirements for the future work force — for supervisors? What is the workplace going to look like three years down the road? The supervisor is the most important link between corporate vision and the employee.

In the view of the OISE team, ESL, even viewed strictly as language skills training, is a critical factor in the company's plans to involve all employees in its mission, vision, and values development, to elicit employees' views on production-related and structural problems, to create self-managed work groups, to make best use of the talents of all employees, to promote the best people to the supervisory level, and so on. First, people who cannot express themselves well in the dominant language of the company cannot communicate their concerns and ideas and thus cannot contribute to the development of the company. Second, until all employees can express themselves in English, management is not in a good position to learn the extent of their talents. Third, fluency in oral and written English is a necessary condition for supervisory or higher positions in a company that expects to have self-managed work groups. Fourth, employees who do not understand English well will have a great deal of difficulty in understanding the concepts about the culture of the company that management is trying to promote. Fifth, employee training in problem solving and new teamwork relationships will be hard to implement with workers who do not understand English well. As long as employees at the lowest levels work in essential isolation on one operation, then abstract, interpersonal communication is not needed. But if our understanding is correct about the company's vision to create work situations in which workers co-operate to make group

decisions on a daily basis, then a strong common language base will be necessary. The question of the value of the creation of work groups organized on the basis of a common language other than English as the *lingua franca* deserves some consideration.

For immigrant workers who do not speak English well, acquisition of English language skills *per se* gives them a voice in the workplace to express their ideas, articulate their concerns, and understand what is going on around them. This is to the immigrants' and the company's benefit. We saw virtually no evidence that workers whose English language skills were enhanced by ESL classes were likely to leave the company or become disruptive.

The ESL classes can be useful in other ways to the extent that other content than specific language skills is included in the curriculum. All language learning needs to involve a certain amount of learning about Canadian culture as well. Through the mediation of the teacher, the content of the ESL classes can be negotiated between the company and the learners with respect to what each group thinks is important. To a certain extent this is being done now, but this relationship could be much better developed in some plants. One can also look at this potential in another way and consider all relationships between English-speaking and non-English-speaking employees as an opportunity for language teaching and learning as well as communication on other topics. Again, this is being done now, to some extent, by some instructors, supervisors, and human resources personnel, but it could be extended much further.

In sum then, we see the development of the English language skills of immigrant workers as critical to future developments that the company is trying to promote. These skills are valuable to the immigrants themselves and to the company. ESL classes can be further enhanced in their capacity to teach workers about the culture of the plant as well as that of the community at large. Finally, English-speaking employees in many positions can learn to understand their role, in communicating with immigrant workers, to include language teaching.

Issues Specifically Related to the English Language Classes

We understood the rest of the managers' questions to refer directly to the ESL classes. We have grouped them into five categories below.

The first group of questions relate to access or barriers to participation in ESL classes.

(1) **To what extent does prejudice interfere with participation in ESL?** In our study we were not in contact with the work sites for long, nor were we able to get comprehensive, in-depth data on complex issues such as ethnic relations. It does not appear to us that would-be learners are prevented or discouraged from taking part in the classes on the basis of negative factors from their peers. To the extent that supervisors control access to the classes, there might be a discriminatory element, but we only got hints of this, at Brantford in particular. Also, there may be certain interethnic factors that would influence an individual's willingness to join a particular class. Our data are not strong enough to allow us to draw definite conclusions about these questions. We can say that issues of this sort were only mentioned to us indirectly.

(2) **To what extent is the production-oriented focus of the plant having an impact on support for the program?** From the point of view of the participants in the classes, some workers in the Stoney Creek plant, usually those who were not yet working up to the 100 percent level, felt that they were making less money by attending the classes paid at their quarterly average than if they had been working at their machines. Supervisors of Brantford said that they have to work harder to adjust their lines in order to release workers to go to class.

Production problems were cited as so great in the wash area at Brantford that operators are never released to attend class. Also, supervisors at Brantford noted that the time taken by workers to attend class might affect the overall production of the plant and, in turn, the bonuses they receive. In Edmonton, classes are held outside of work hours, so the production factor is not an issue. On the positive side, management and some supervisors are optimistic about the outcomes of the program in terms of improved communications, which would presumably affect production levels in the long run.

(3) Why do some people drop out or refuse to go? Factors that may affect immigrants' confidence in attempting formal language learning or their success in classes are discussed in the introduction. Some find the classes too difficult and others too easy, based on the background they bring with them to class. Other factors such as fatigue, lack of available time, and priority on improving their skills on their machines may enter into the question. Better screening, needs assessment, and on-going evaluation would help.

(4) We tend to forget how these women live at home. We may believe that women are equal to men, but 99 percent are controlled by their husbands. How does this affect their ability to speak out in class or to management? As noted above, women participants are not likely to be inhibited about speaking out in class for gender reasons when the class and teacher are all female. On the other hand, class and ethnic factors may be involved. Male workers may be inhibited from taking part in all female classes, and their presence in a class may negatively affect the patterns of women's communication. It is possible that some women would not be permitted by their families to leave the home in the evening to attend language classes offered in the community, but attendance at such classes at work is condoned by the family or can be concealed from them. Further study is needed to appreciate why the after-hours and weekend classes work well in Edmonton.

(5) Some of our employees may have been shot at just last year. How difficult is it to make major changes and adjustments for them? Do we expect too much, too soon? Emotional disturbance over traumatic experiences, guilt that they got out and others didn't, and worry about family and friends at home may dominate the attention of some refugees and immigrants for years (Beiser, 1991). Specific counselling for such people is available in larger cities (Heipel, 1991). Workers affected should be made aware of these services and treated sensitively in the plant. This group may well contain many members who are highly educated and/or skilled in occupations in their home countries but who are working hard at one (and often two) low-paying jobs in Canada which do not require English proficiency in order to make money to send back to their families abroad. We interviewed a few people in this category. English language learning and personal integration into Canadian life is not a priority to a number of these individuals, although they would like it if other more pressing needs were met.

The second group of questions refers to the basic structure of the classes themselves.

(1) Would like to know some practical things like:

- is 3 hours a week sufficient?
- is lunchtime the most appropriate time?
- is the class size sufficient—should it be larger, smaller?

(2) What is the adequacy of ESL training?

The answer to these questions is "it depends." Three hours a week is not an insignificant

amount of time, but its sufficiency depends on the goals and the urgency of the training. We suspect that the three-hour program at Stoney Creek and Brantford was set up to balance the amount of time that could practically be taken from the production schedule with the fact that most of the workers would not be able to attend classes outside of work hours. It might be interesting to offer additional classes after work hours as well to see if some workers would take part, as in the Saturday and after hours classes in Edmonton. Surveys of immigrant workers on this from time to time would be helpful. Similarly, lunchtime is the best time for those workers who could not attend class before or after work hours because of other responsibilities or transportation problems. It is also possible that some people attend classes during work hours unbeknownst to other family members who might disapprove of their learning English. With respect to class size, large classes are acceptable if the learners are fairly homogeneous and do not have special learning needs. If screening and streaming of learners into suitable classes can be conducted by a trained person, class sizes can be determined individually on the basis of learners' skills. However, numbers of learners in the program, flexibility of class times, and the numbers of sections possible influence the degree to which learners can be placed in optimal classes.

The next set of questions concerns the teachers.

(1) How important is the quality of the teacher, not just technically, but inter-personally? I think our best teachers are the ones who get involved — go on field trips — even dance together, and are able to tailor the program to the individuals.

(2) Do we give enough feedback to the teachers? Do we get enough feedback from them?

We believe that the personal commitment of the teacher to the needs and interests of the learners is just as important as technical skills in ESL teaching. Our views on criteria for hiring teachers are influenced by the amount of support teachers have available to them in terms of understanding how to set up and manage a workplace language program and in terms of general ESL technical support. In other words, we would think it reasonable to hire teachers with no formal qualification in ESL if they were to be closely supervised by people with experience in English in the workplace (EWP) and supported by specially designed ESL methods and materials. If such support is not available, then it is greatly preferable to hire someone with formal qualifications and suitable EWP experience. Not all educational institutions (school boards or community colleges) have people on staff who could provide the necessary support or programs of professional development for teachers placed in workplace settings. An important aspect of good EWP teaching is initial and maintained contact with relevant staff members in the workplace. In all three plants, the need was expressed for more contact between the teachers and the supervisors. We would encourage such contact because both groups stand to gain a great deal. Supervisors can tell teachers about the kinds of language needs that should be addressed and report on the progress of individual learners outside of class. In return, the teachers can help the supervisors with ways in which they can support the learning that is going on in class and can explain aspects of the performance of individual learners to the supervisors.

The following set of questions are about the content and scope of the program.

(1) At what point do we consider someone "Graduated"?

(2) Should we continue reimbursing or paying half the time of training — are there alternatives to that? Is this on-the-job training or personal development?

(3) We need to look at the relationship between what language is needed and is useful and what is taught. One of the reasons our employees wouldn't go to night school (in the

community) was that the language they learned wasn't relevant to their daily life.

(4) How do we evaluate students' progress. How do we decide when they go to another level? Do we have multi-levels in all our programs?

We noted in the introduction that the company does not have a firm policy on the program and that the program seems to be in a pilot or experimental stage. The answers to the questions above can only be found through the development of policy on the role and purpose of the program and the extent of the company's need and responsibility for supporting it. Some of the relevant issues were discussed above under the role of language, literacy, and ethnic issues in planned employee development in this context. We would like to emphasize here that there is very little difference between on-the-job ESL training for better communication in the workplace and ESL for personal development for Levi Strauss hourly paid employees. The language skills are virtually the same and the content diverges only slightly. Learners' improved abilities to manage in their lives (for example, using the telephone and public transportation, getting access to health care, and so on) have important implications for their work lives as well. It is also important to note that since individuals come to language training with differing characteristics, skills, and experience, they will progress through the training at varying speeds. To be more specific about the current program, Edmonton has two streams and four levels within each stream. Students are formally evaluated regularly there. In the Brantford plant, the teaching is structured into sessions several months long, presumably with evaluation at some points along the way. In Stoney Creek, two levels are offered, but the teacher permits continuous intake of learners, making it difficult to evaluate groups.

Questions were also raised concerning the relationship between the program in the plants and resources for language training in the community.

- (1) What community options are available to back up/extend ESL training?
- (2) How well do we communicate benefits such as tuition reimbursements?
- (3) Do we effectively utilize outside training resources?
- (4) Should we continue reimbursing or paying half the time of training — are there alternatives to that? Is this on-the-job training or personal development?

Clearly, there must be some rationale to distinguish the support provided for the ESL program for immigrant workers and the tuition reimbursement benefit offered to all employees. The ESL program is costly to the company and it is understandable why some English-speaking employees think that the immigrants are receiving special treatment. A policy on the content and scope of the ESL program would help to resolve this issue. The cut-off point suggested by the English Language Professionals in Edmonton was when the learner could participate in outside training at the level of grade 10 English. We note from our data that most immigrant workers would not participate in programs outside of the plant because of time pressures and probably their lack of knowledge of what is available. Most current participants in the program in Edmonton said that they would continue to take part even if the stipends were removed. However, we suspect that participants in Stoney Creek and Brantford would be more likely to drop out if paid release time during work hours were not available because they have more family responsibilities and are less financially established in Canada.

There are a number of ways in which training resources in the community could be tapped, regardless of the status of the ESL program in the plants. For example, settlement workers could be brought in to inform workers about facilities and services available that might be of interest to them. Immigrant workers with low levels of literacy in their first language who could not be accommodated in the classes might be supplied with tutors from local community agencies serving immigrants. For that matter, tutors might be made available for

upgrading of any workers whose literacy skills are such that they do not have access to regular training programs in educational institutions. The Hamilton area is well served by a coalition of agencies aimed at meeting the educational needs of a wide variety of learners. The company could work out ways of assisting agencies and worker-learners to arrange times and places where they could work together.

The final question to be addressed is **What's next from the participants' point of view?** We were not surprised that the data we got from participants about suggested changes to the program were not at all specific. Most of those who did not find the program too hard or too easy like the program as it is. Some at each plant asked for more reading and writing. We suggest that the learners' enthusiasm for the program be taken as genuine. We further suggest that, once policy for the program comes under consideration by the company, a variety of options be developed for the relevant workers to discuss. If they felt confident about the alternatives that the company would be prepared to provide, we feel certain that they would be specific about their preferences.

Comments on This Section

Simply put, our impressions from the questions generated by the managers was that they were very interested in the welfare of their workers but were uncertain about (1) how best to help them in terms of language training in general; (2) how best to deal with gender and cultural understandings between the company and immigrant workers; and (3) how to treat workers who have recently suffered severe trauma. On the other hand, they were concerned about the extent to which the company could and should extend help. A corollary to this last point has to do with relationships between immigrant and Canadian-born workers in the plants; if special arrangements are made for the immigrants, are resentments going to build up among other workers? Finally, they seemed to want to know about the relationship between the language training and plant productivity, and these questions were mostly directed to issues of plant "culture."

Lessons Learned from This Study for ESL in the Workplace

Applicability from the Levi Strauss Model to Other Workplaces

Levi Strauss has shown leadership in Canada in undertaking ESL programs in its plants. While a few other Canadian companies have demonstrated the same initiative, most of those which now have programs in place did so because of pressure either from government or unions. Government has dominated the field of official language training since the early 1960s. Such training has reached an increasing number of potential learners over the years through the expansion of programming from an initial emphasis on delivery by colleges and school boards to that provided by a variety of stakeholders, including ethnic and community agencies, refugee support groups, unions, private educational interests, and so on. However, it is still the case that most support for ESL programs comes from government even though it is administered through various non-governmental organizations. In the current economic climate, the role of private business in official language training must be emphasized. It is likely that governmental support for official language training will not be increased even

though, for demographic reasons, the level of immigration is projected to rise considerably. The private sector must inevitably be involved in taking more responsibility for official language training unless it is totally blind to the economic and social consequences of not doing so. Indeed, the federal government, in position papers on the competitiveness of the Canadian economy circulated in 1991 (Canada 1991a and 1991b), has suggested a need for a significant increase in employer responsibility for workplace training of all sorts.

The Levi Strauss ESL classes are a model for private sector support for official language training, but only to a certain extent. First of all, their programs are suited to their particular circumstances. As indicated above, there are problems endemic and unique to their situation. Nevertheless, their initiative has provided an example of what can be undertaken. Levi Strauss (Canada) must be understood in its context as a company that has taken a specific management direction to flatten its hierarchy of levels of authority and to move toward a work-team strategy for production. The parent company in the United States has had a great deal of influence in this initiative. Canadian or international companies which are not inclined to take such a management direction, externally motivated or not, are not necessarily likely to view their immigrant employees in the same light as Levi Strauss has.

Also, Levi Strauss is a large corporation. Economies of scale have a great deal to do with the kinds of initiatives that companies can have in responding to the needs of their immigrant workers. A great many immigrant workers have found employment in small enterprises which would find it difficult, for one reason or another, to attend to the official language learning needs of their immigrant employees. Levi Strauss has a manufacturing operation that involves hiring its line workers to do work that can be accomplished with virtually no verbal communication. In fact, the noise levels in the plants are such that ear protectors are mandatory in some locations, further reducing the potential for verbal communication. The need for literate communication has also been reduced to a minimum. This circumstance results in Levi Strauss being able to hire immigrants who speak no English and who can continue to speak or read very little at work. Many other corporate operations (such as banks, insurance companies, or high-technology manufacturing) cannot employ workers who do not speak English and need to consider other kinds of pre-service or in-service official language training for immigrant employees. The three Levi Strauss plants in this study are located in areas in which there are a great many immigrants from non-English-/French-speaking countries. Companies located in other parts of Canada have to consider how they will deal with lower numbers of (potential) immigrant employees.

Finally, one has to consider the perceived benefits of language training for a corporation in relation to its profit status. Levi Strauss had to discontinue its in-house operated ESL program in the early 1980s when its profits were down and was able to reinstate these programs when profits rose again in the mid-1980s. In sum, there remains much to be learned about the potential for corporate initiatives in official language training in Canada, but it is clear that such initiatives are critical in the future of the national approach to the settlement of immigrants and refugees in the near future.

Corporate and National Need to Clarify a Rationale for Official Language Training

Our main suggestion to Levi Strauss is that the company develop a policy on ESL training in its relevant plants. There is a lack of clarity and some conflicting views about the purpose of ESL programs on the part of many employers. The most important consideration for any

company offering ESL in its workplace is the purpose of the program in light of the needs and principles of the company. Indeed, there is a strong need for a national consensus on the value of official language training for adult immigrants as a whole, since federal legislation is silent on national responsibility for official language training to those residents in Canada who do not speak either of the official languages. Is ESL provided for altruistic reasons, to promote equity in the labor force and/or the community, or is it there to improve productivity? None of these alternative views are mutually exclusive and might all be met through similar initiatives. However, many of the questions raised in this study can only be responded to once the purpose of the program is decided on. For example, we would assume that such a policy would clarify questions such as: how the disparity in company support for ESL learners' training time compared with that for other workers who take courses could be reconciled; when could an ESL learner be considered to have graduated; which workers should be excused from production duties for language training; or what the content of the classes should focus on.

If a company decided that its motives for providing the classes were entirely altruistic, then the content of the classes would be centred on the learners' interests, whether work related or not. The learners might have a strong say in choosing the teacher. A company might prefer to move all classes to outside of working hours and not provide any compensation for time spent in class. If a company values equity, offering ESL classes to assist immigrant employees to participate in the life of the plant on an equal linguistic footing with Canadian-born employees, then the objectives for the ESL curriculum would be long-range, involving a number of levels, some of which fairly fluent operators, supervisors, office workers (including some English-speaking employees), might want to take part in. The content of the classes would have to be considerably learner-centred and would include teaching employees how to stand up for their rights and opinions in a variety of circumstances. Rather than being seen as an entirely ESL program for immigrant workers, it might be conceived as a series of courses starting from ESL and literacy for immigrant workers who are not literate in their mother tongue and do not speak English up to courses in memo writing, office procedures, and minute taking for any employees wishing to be promoted from lower levels to middle management. The line between ESL classes, in which workers are compensated for their time, and other training, in which workers are compensated for their tuition only, would have to be reconsidered.

Finally, if productivity were the main focus of the program, then decisions would have to be made about the extent to which worker participation in various aspects of the activities of the plants (for example, health and safety committees, social activities, union work) is relevant to actual productivity. At the present time, if basic productivity were the only motivation for an ESL program in a company like Levi Strauss, the program would logically have to be discontinued since virtually none of the operators need to speak or write English to do their jobs. However, if a company values teamwork, the promotion of workers from the lower levels, and an integrated company culture, then it is critical that immigrant workers learn enough English to take an active part in communication. This means not only their understanding what is said to them but also expressing their views with confidence. The achievement of this goal is a long-range one, involving various levels of employees and including training in relatively advanced literacy as well as oral language skills. In a productivity-oriented program, a company would have considerable say in the content of classes and the kinds of classes offered, depending on company assessed needs for employees with specific skills in various facets of the operation. As noted above, the choice among altruism, equality, and productivity does not necessarily result in programs that are much

different in quality or quantity. We expect that companies would want to develop policy that combines aspects of all three of these principles. Critically, a company must decide where it stands, delineate the practical implications, and make those decisions known to all employees.

Specific Points Regarding Implementation of ESL Workplace Programs

We include here suggestions for more specific and shorter-term action on ESL in the workplace programs that arise from the Levi Strauss study. It seems to be a need that there be good communication established between the teachers and the direct supervisors of the learners in the ESL program. It would be productive if teachers were regularly invited to a variety of plant meetings and functions, keeping in mind that teachers should be compensated for their time in attending. In addition, the profile of the ESL program could be raised through articles in the company newsletter, bulletin board displays, and the like. It would be helpful if one person, such as the human resources manager or the ESL teacher, were identified as specifically responsible for the ESL program so that matters such as the promotion of the program in the plant and liaison between teachers and supervisors were monitored regularly. Consideration should be given to the qualifications of and professional support available to the teachers hired or offered from outside agencies such as school boards or colleges. In addition to having suitable ESL training and knowledge of how to set up and run an EWP program, teachers must be able to assess learners' special needs and to provide suitable programs and referrals for them. There are workers with special needs who would do well in ESL if they were placed in a learning situation, inside or outside of a company program, that suited their characteristics. In this and other regards, a company might receive support from various community agencies that specialize in immigrant settlement and literacy training. For those workers whose oral English is good and who would be interested in being promoted, a company might offer short voluntary classes in skills such as note taking, report writing, record keeping, and so on. It is expected that such courses would be useful for other employees, fluent in English, who have not had much experience with these specific uses of English literacy or certain kinds of business procedures.

Implications for Further Research

From the perspective of learning more about the private sector role and experience of official language training in the workplace, this study has been instructive, but much more needs to be done. We suggest further research in three areas. First is the need for more study in companies whose managements display a variety of approaches to their labor force recruitment and development. Although we are not experts in corporate dynamics, we have the impression that most companies that employ large numbers of immigrants who do not speak the local official language do not have the same orientation that Levi Strauss has to helping employees learn English (Gannagé, 1986). What are the factors behind such differences? How can and should corporate bodies be involved in strategies to incorporate immigrants fully into our labor force? Also, there is the question of what official language training efforts are and should be made in large and smaller companies that have a lower density of (recent) immigrant employees and/or those that are involved in work that requires much more verbal communication than that of garment manufacturing (for example, banks, insurance companies, and so on).

A second avenue of research that arises from this study is the fit between the kind of language training program offered in the workplace and the characteristics of the target labor force. In our study it is clear that both the classes and the plants had significant differences, but we were not in a position to separate the effects of the history of the program and the labor force, corporate and ethnic climate in the plants, and many other factors in order to make judgements about the ultimate suitability of the classes currently offered to the clientele. Would the Edmonton model transported to Brantford have worked better than the current Brantford program? Further study into the effectiveness of various types of programs with different learner groups is needed.

Our final suggestion for areas of further research is really a list of details that fall out of the previous two points. Questions that arise include the following. What factors influence participation in language-training programs for immigrants who are employed as opposed to those who are not employed or are pre-employment? How do relationships between workers who do not speak an official language proficiently and fluent speakers of official languages, regardless of ethnicity, work in employment of various sorts? How are illiterates who are not mother tongue speakers of official languages treated by employers relative to illiterates who are mother tongue speakers of English or French? What curriculum and format factors, such as continuous intake versus semestered classes, should we be paying attention to? And to what extent should companies that employ a lot of immigrants tolerate/encourage non-official language working groups? The main question that we were asked to address in this study was what social and socializing role do workplace language classes play from the perspective of the personal lives of participants, and what does that mean in terms of the employer's interests. Our work permitted us only the smallest look at this large and important topic. We look forward to the results of further investigation on any or all of these issues.

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