

Using Diaries in Second Language Research and Teaching

Bonny Norton Peirce



IN THIS ARTICLE I describe and analyze my use of diaries in a recent research project (Peirce, 1993) in which I sought to investigate the language learning experiences of adult immigrants in Canada. My diary study invited participants to reflect on their language learning experiences, not only in the classroom, but in the home, the workplace, and the community. An important emphasis of the study was on how participants responded to social interaction with anglophone Canadians. In this article I first give the background to the study, comparing it to other diary studies in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). Second, I give a detailed description of the methodology I used and how it influenced the progress of the study. Third, I provide an analysis of the diary study in which I address the progress, outcomes, and limitations of the study. Finally, I examine the implications of the study for classroom teaching.

Background to the Diary Study

In the field of SLA research, a number of researchers have made use of diary studies to explore the process of language learning. One such type of study are introspective accounts of the learning of a foreign language (see for example Bailey, 1980, 1983; Bell, 1992; C. Brown, 1984; Cooke, 1986; Schumann & Schumann, 1977; Schumann 1980). In these studies, none of

the diarists in question was learning the language for the purposes of remaining in the target language country for an extended period of time; most of the accounts were written by the researchers themselves in the process of language learning; and all the accounts were written in the mother tongue. Another type of diary study, which is becoming more common, are studies of the use of second language student journals (see for example Hingle, 1993; Savage & Whisenand, 1993; Spack & Sadow, 1983; Winer, 1992). One of the aims of these latter studies is to encourage participants to make use of journals to promote second language writing skills. Spack & Sadow, for example, argue that ungraded, uncorrected journals can provide a non-threatening way for students to express themselves in written English. Savage & Whisenand are interested not only in their students' writing progress, but also in the students' use of journals (or what they called "logbooks") for the purposes of program evaluation. Hingle focuses her research on the changing role of the teacher in dialogue journal writing, while Winer examines how journals can help to change negative attitudes amongst student ESL teachers towards the teaching of writing.

My diary study shares a number of characteristics with the two types of diary studies outlined above, but has its own distinctive purpose and outcomes. One of the main purposes of my study was to investigate what opportunities adult immigrant language learners in Canada have to practice speaking English outside the classroom. My research was premised on the assumption that language learning is enhanced if learners have regular opportunities to practice the target language in "natural" or informal contexts such as the home, workplace, and community (Spolsky, 1989). Furthermore, I took the position that one of the purposes of learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in the classroom is to enhance its use outside the classroom. For this reason, I wanted to investigate how opportunities to

speak are socially structured in the different domains of an adult immigrant's life, and to what extent an immigrant language learner's social identity influences the extent to which the learner creates, responds to, or possibly resists opportunities to speak the target language.

It was through the use of diaries that I encouraged the kind of introspection about language learning characteristic of the first type of diary study described above, while simultaneously providing participants with a non-threatening way of recording their ideas in the second language, a characteristic of the second type of study outlined. Although I had asked the participants if they would prefer to use their mother tongues for their diaries, which would then be translated, they were adamant that they wanted practice in writing in English, and asked for regular feedback on their writing progress.

The distinctive aspect of my study was my interest in using diaries to explore the relationship between social identity and second language learning. I use the term "social identity" to reference how a person understands his or her relationship to the social world, how that relationship is socially constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future. Following West (1992, p. 20), I also take the position that social identity references desire—the desire for recognition, the desire for affiliation, and the desire for security and safety. Such desire, West argues, cannot be separated from the distribution of material resources in a particular society. People who have access to a wide range of resources in a society will have access to power and privilege, which will in turn influence how they understand their relationship to the social world and their possibilities for the future. In this view, a person's social identity will shift in accordance with changing social and economic relations across time and space and will be constantly renegotiated within everyday social interactions. The use of diaries proved to be a particularly powerful tool in helping the participants to analyze their encounters with anglophone Canadians, and to reflect on the extent to which such encounters promoted or inhibited opportunities to speak English. In my study I used such data to critique current conceptions of the individual in SLA research, and to argue for a conception of social identity as non-unitary, a site of struggle, and subject to change.

Methodology of the Study

After teaching a 6-month ESL course to a group of newly-arrived adult immigrants in Newtown (a pseudonym), Ontario, from January to June 1990, I invited the students in the class to participate in my research project. I indicated that an important part of the methodology was a "Diary Study," which I described in a letter to them as follows:

I would like to understand exactly how, when, and where you use English; who you speak English to; what happens when you speak English. The best way to examine this is to ask you to keep a diary (a notebook) in which you regularly make comments about your experiences in learning English. I know that keeping a diary can take a lot of time. For this reason, there will be no rules about what you should write in your diaries or how much you should write. This will depend on what you are interested in and how much time you have. I hope that the project will run for 8 weeks. In addition, I think it will be useful for the people in the project to get together once a week or once every two weeks while the project is in progress. This will give you time to discuss the comments you have made in your diaries. I hope it will also give you the chance to improve your writing and speaking skills. We can meet at my house, which is in a convenient place for many of you. In addition, if you would like to meet individually at another place, this can be arranged. This part of the project will begin in the middle of January 1991.

Of the 16 students in the course (9 women and 7 men), 5 women agreed to participate in the diary study. Because the diary study was to be a major source of data for my research, I decided at that point to focus my data analysis on the five women (Eva and Martina from Poland, Mai from Vietnam, Martina from Czechoslovakia, and Felicia from Peru) who agreed to be part of the diary study. This approach gave me the opportunity to concentrate my attention on a subset of language learners—immigrant women—who are, as Boyd (1992) notes, "triplely disadvantaged" by their gender, ethnicity, and foreign status, and whose experience, Ng (1981, p. 98) argues, has been largely unaccounted for because of their silence.

It is difficult to determine with confidence how the five women who chose to take part in the diary study differed from the other students in the ESL course, both male and female. It is possible that the women in the course were more attracted to the writing of a diary on personal experience than the men were—an observation that is supported by much feminist research (Van Daele, 1990). Bell Hooks (1990, p. 338), for example, describes how writing is paradoxically both a form of resistance and a form of submission for women who have few means to make their voices heard:

Writing was a way to capture speech, to hold onto it, to keep it close. And so I wrote down bits and pieces of conversations, confessing in cheap diaries that soon fell apart from too much handling, expressing the intensity of my sorrow, the anguish of speech—for I was always saying the wrong thing, asking the wrong questions. I could not confine my speech to the necessary corners and concerns of my life.

An important aspect of the diary study were the meetings that were held in my home on a regular basis. The initial meetings were scheduled as a weekly event for a total of 8 weeks. The sessions took place in the evening—Friday nights and Sunday nights were considered the most suitable—and lasted approximately three hours. The participants were encouraged to share extracts from their diaries at these meetings, so that the audience for their writing included other participants as well as me. I hoped that the opportunity to write for an authentic and interested audience would be a motivating factor for the participants in the study. This group approach to writing has proved to be highly successful in other Canadian contexts (see Obah, 1993), and Zamel (1987, p. 707) has written persuasively about the importance of social context in writing development:

This research has revealed what can happen to students when they are acknowledged, given numerous opportunities to write, and become participants in a community of writers. In classrooms in which risk taking is encouraged, trust is established, choice and authority are shared, and writing is viewed as a meaning-making event, students change as writers, adopt positive attitudes toward written work, and demonstrate real growth in writing performance.

After nine weekly meetings were over, (held between January 27 and March 24) there was general consensus that the meetings should continue, but that we should schedule the meetings on a monthly basis. We met once a month for the next three months. There were thus a total of 12 group meetings between January and June 1991. The discussions that arose from the extracts that the women chose to read to the group were a rich complement to the written diary entries. During the course of the study, I also kept a journal of my reflections on the project. Establishing a venue, schedule, and transportation for the diary study proved simpler than deciding on a format for the diaries themselves. Although all the women had asked me what was expected of them in the diaries, I did not want to prescribe a "right" and "wrong" way of approaching the task. However, given my own research questions, I did wish to provide some guidance as to how they might proceed. I did this by articulating my objectives in written form and by responding to the diary entries that the women made.

At the initial diary study meeting on Sunday, January 27, 1991, I gave the women an introductory "letter" which outlined my interest in the project, and provided each woman with a chart on which she could record day-to-day activities that were conducted in English. I indicated that the chart might provide a starting point for further reflections that could be recorded in the diaries. (An updated chart was given to each woman at each meeting.) After we had discussed the contents of the letter, I asked the women to consider under what conditions they had used English in the course of that particular day. Martina volunteered to share her experiences. She focused on her experiences of attending Church, listening to the sermon, and singing hymns in English. She discussed how strange it was to perform such intimate functions in a second language. I used her discussion as an example of how the diary entries might be made, and I elaborated on this in my letters to the participants in the subsequent two weeks.

During the course of the study, I gave the women regular feedback on their diary entries. Sometimes I asked them to clarify or expand on issues that had been raised. For example, one of my comments to Katarina was as follows: "Very interesting, Katarina! It would be nice to know more about some of the conversations you mention. For example, how did you find out about the Community Service job? Could

you give more details about the interview? Who did most of the talking? What precisely did you talk about?" Similarly, a comment to Eva read as follows: "Very interesting Eva! Please explain why you feel better when you don't have to do the heavy jobs and why this makes you want to talk more." However, my comments requested not only clarification or amplification. I would often give words of comfort and support—like those I gave Mai: "These are all very interesting Mai! Life is full of ups and downs. Congratulations on getting your drivers' licence!—I'm very sorry that life was uncomfortable this week at work. What has been happening?" Similarly, "You're doing a FANTASTIC job, Mai! Don't let your brother tell you otherwise!" I would comment on the quality of the women's writing and there were times when I would ask the women to give me feedback on my comments. For example, a note to Mai was as follows: "Your comments are very interesting Mai. Is it useful for me to correct your writing as much as I have? Let me know." Within two to three weeks, each woman had developed a method of communication with which she felt most comfortable.

In some respects, defining my own relationship to the women was even more complex than helping the women develop a format for their diaries. I wanted to create a supportive and intimate environment in which the women would feel sufficiently comfortable to discuss their desires, fears, joys, and frustrations. This was one of the main reasons why the meetings were held in my home. I hoped that my home, as a "private" sphere, would facilitate the expression and analysis of personal/private experiences. At one level, I wanted the participants to relate to me as a "woman," functioning as a mother, wife, and housekeeper. I did not want my role as researcher to dominate my relationship to the women as I thought this might create too much distance between us—positioning me as a "public" person in a private space. It was for this reason that I did not use a tape recorder at our meetings; I already had sufficient experience with the use of a tape recorder to know that some of the women felt uncomfortable discussing personal issues in their lives in the presence of a tape recorder. However, I occasionally took notes at the meetings when I wanted to remember direct quotes from the women.

Although I wished to avoid relating to the women as a teacher within the context of the diary study, it was a relationship that

could not easily be displaced since our initial relationship had been structured in an educational setting. Furthermore, I understood that one of the reasons why the women took part in the study was to take the opportunity to improve their oral and written English in a supportive environment. For this reason, I encouraged the women to read some of their diary entries to the group each week. This gave them the opportunity to develop their oral skills, and it gave the group the opportunity to examine and discuss the issues that had been raised. Sometimes, during the course of our meetings, I would discuss vocabulary and grammatical issues with the women when they asked me for comments, or when they were struggling to express themselves. I also undertook to make suggestions as to how they might improve their written expression.

I do not know how well I succeeded in maintaining a balance between my diverse positions as friend, teacher, and researcher. I wanted to apologize on those rare occasions when I corrected the women's pronunciation—although I knew that pronunciation training was what they had requested. Sometimes, when I picked up my notepad in a meeting to record a comment that a woman had made, I almost felt as though I was undermining a friendship—betraying a confidence. Occasionally I felt that my comments on the women's writing of their sometimes distressing stories were inadequate and trivial. I found myself trying to compensate for what Britzman (1990) calls "guilty readings" by helping the women to find employment, prepare resumes, and deal with immigration officials.

ANALYSIS

Progress of the Diary Study

The diary study was framed as a project about the learning of English as a second language in Canada. The way that it proceeded however, was a project about the complexities of living as a woman in a new and often threatening society, coping with the daily demands of family, work, schooling, housing, unemployment—much of which was conducted in a language that was only just beginning to make sense. It took place at a time when the women were beginning to question the usefulness of formal ESL classes, and were confronting the lack of congruence between their understanding of the world and their experience of it in

Canada. It was a time when they saw the need for what Felicia called "practice, practice, practice" in the second language, but also a time when they were beginning to understand that their access to anglophone social networks was compromised by their position as "immigrant" in Canadian society. It was a time when they had a lot to ask, much to say, and a great deal to resist.

Though scarcely articulated at the time, the model of the diary study that was used in my research had its origins in the consciousness raising groups associated with "the second wave of feminism" that Weiler (1991) describes in her work. Through the collective exploration of personal experiences of language learning and social interaction with members of the target language group, I hoped that the participants would come to a better understanding of language learning possibilities and constraints in Canadian society. While my role within the group remained that of teacher/researcher, my authority was not derived from hierarchical educational structures, but rather from my command of the target language and my history as the former teacher of the participants in the study. It may also have been derived from my position as a professional, white, middle-class member of the dominant anglophone community—a woman with access to symbolic and material resources. However, partly because I had come to know and understand some aspects of the respective histories of each of the women—the talent and resources they had brought with them to Canada—I believe the women felt comfortable in my presence. Certainly, whatever authority I may have been perceived to have did not silence them.

It is possible that the very "architecture" of the diary study meetings helped to reduce the power differentials associated with the more formal ESL classroom. We were all located in the private sphere of a home, where the domestic position of a woman as homemaker is more foregrounded than her professional position as teacher/researcher. We sat in a circle—the configuration of which changed each week. The only blackboard was a child's blackboard which was used on rare occasions. As Lavery & Watson (1993) have found in their research, changing the configuration of a classroom not only reduces the power differentials between teachers and students, but reframes the students' expectations of whose knowledge and experience is most valuable. In the diary study, not only was my status as "teacher"

reframed, but so was the status of the "students." In this context, I was not the guardian of a finite body of knowledge to which the students had access only through me. Nor were the women "students" who vied with each other for access to my closely guarded resources. This had, I believe, a significant impact on the comfort levels in the group. Given the non-stop discussion that characterized our meetings, I think that the setting was a relatively egalitarian one.

Though one woman's knowledge was not considered more valuable than another's, their experiences as immigrant women were differently constructed across time and space. A fundamental premise of the diary study, reinforced by the architecture of the setting, was that each woman was an expert on her own life. Through the use of the weekly charts, the diary entries, and the feedback to the women, I tried to help each woman explore and articulate in written English her personal experiences of language learning in the home, the workplace, the school, and the community. This approach was a radical departure from the pedagogy that had been used in the 6-month ESL course, where writing was primarily confined to filling in blanks and writing decontextualized sentences.

Outcomes of the Diary Study

During the course of the diary study, the participants made great progress in their writing and appeared to gain confidence in their social interactions with anglophone Canadians. While such positive outcomes cannot be attributed to the diary study alone, it is possible that the study made a contribution to this progress. The quality and quantity of writing that the women produced, and the range of issues that we discussed in the meetings were remarkable. Auerbach (1989) has similarly noted significant writing progress in what she calls a "social-contextual" approach to ESL literacy for adult immigrants.

Writing topics included children's schooling, workplace conflict, popular television programs, stories from the women's native countries, the weather, the recession, and the Gulf War. After scarcely a year-and-a-half in Canada, the women were able to make themselves understood in both spoken and written English. This is not to say that their grammar was flawless, their pronunciation perfect, and their vocabulary extensive; rather, they were able to give voice to the complexity of their experience.

Of particular significance to my research were those diary entries that highlighted the relationship between social interaction and social identity. Consider, for example, Extract 1 taken from Eva's diary entry on February 21, 1991 and Extract 2, taken from Mai's diary entry of February 8, 1991.[1]

Extract 1

Situation at work is surprising me, specially today. Usually the manager at the morning tells us, what we have to do. Then the girls (which I wrote about her) pretends, that she is busy all the time. This way I have to do everything. Today the manager gave us the list what we have to do (each of us separately). I was surprised, but the girl was more then me. After that, when I had done everything, she (the manager) asked me to do the order of vegetables, which we needed. Always I had to do the heavy job, this time was different. It made me feel better. When I feel well, than I can talk to the others. Today I was talking more than usually.

Extract 2

Something's happen at work. it made me felt sad and uncomfortable. Today, after we have lunch, Emelia asked two ladies to stay home tomorrow. because there isn't has enough job for everybody. Now my boss decides that he can keep only people who know how to make everything from top to bottom. It doesn't matter how long have they been working here. everyone in that factory are all have been working there at less 8 months. I'm the only one have been there not so long. then my supervisor keeps me to stay. I know some one else doesn't like that way. But I cannot say anything it is not my fault, even those ladies are very upset. They told in front of me with each other. One said "that's not fair, how come I am stay here longer, now she lays me off the other one says. Some one else can't does everything why don't lay them off too. then they started to speak they own language Italian or Portuguese by the way they look at some one who is still working it was very strange looking, they said a lot of things I couldn't understand. I don't know what do they think about me. I just have to according to my supervisor.



In Extract 1, Eva describes how she is able to talk with greater ease and comfort because she has been given greater responsibility in her workplace (a restaurant), and is no longer simply relegated the “heavy” and undesirable jobs. This increases her self confidence. The better she feels about herself, the more she can talk to and interact with her fellow workers. Extract 1 stands in stark contrast to Mai’s extract in which Mai describes the marginalization she experiences in her workplace (a garment factory) as a result of the preferential treatment she has received from the management. Not only do Mai’s coworkers refuse to speak to her, but they speak to one another in languages that are unfamiliar to Mai. Mai has little opportunity to interact socially with her coworkers and remains silenced in the workplace. As Bourdieu (1977, p. 648) argues, “the most radical, surest, and best hidden censorships are those which exclude certain individuals from communication.” However, although Mai was silenced in the workplace, she was able to use her diary to articulate her thoughts and experiences, and develop strategies to resist her marginalization.

Limitations of the Diary Study

Notwithstanding these stories, however, I think the focus of the diaries and our meetings was more on the expression of ex-

perience than the analysis of experience. While there was much discussion on how being positioned as an immigrant constrained the opportunities for the women to interact with anglophone Canadians, there was little reflection on the ways in which gender, ethnicity, and class were implicated in larger, inequitable social structures. Consider the following three examples:

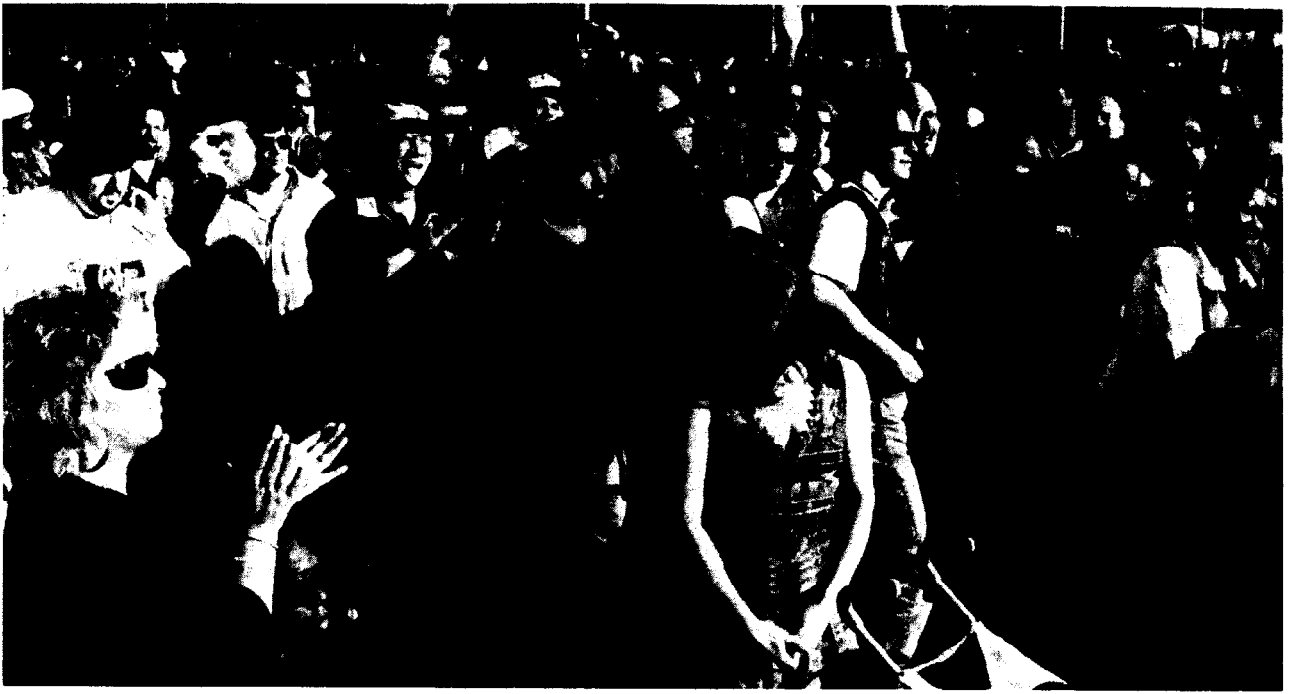
First, at our diary study meeting of March 1, 1991, Felicia was expressing concern at her husband’s unemployed status, saying “I pity him.” Katarina expressed her sympathy for Felicia’s plight by saying: “Women can always clean the house, but men must do something.” There was general agreement with the sexist assumptions underlying this statement: That the work women do in the home is not classified as “doing something”; and that employment is a right for men—and by extension only a privilege for women.

Second, when I was taking Mai home from a diary study meeting on March 1, 1991, Mai was describing the alienation that her nephews experienced as Chinese/Vietnamese people in Canada. The eldest child, Trong, for example, had chosen to change his name from a Vietnamese one to an anglicized one. Mai told me that she said to her nephews that they should not reject their heritage, explaining “With your hair, your nose, your skin, you will never be perfect

Canadians.” Mai had internalized the racist belief that perfect Canadians exist, and that perfect Canadians are white.

Third, in an interview I had with Eva on January 23, 1991, just before our first diary study meeting, Eva was explaining why her coworkers did not talk to her: “I think because when I didn’t talk to them, and they didn’t ask me, maybe they think I’m just like — because I had to do the worst type of work there. It’s normal.” Eva said that it was understandable—“normal”—that a person who has a job with little status should be marginalized by coworkers. Eva never challenged the elitist assumptions underlying this statement.

I did not take up these issues with the women, but let them pass. During the course of the diary study I did not know how and to what extent I should disorganize and challenge the commonsense understandings of gender, race, and class that the women expressed. My desire to maintain solidarity with the women, to create a comfortable space where they could write and talk about their confusion, their anger, and their joy, kept me silent. I could affirm, but not negate. The danger of remaining silent on such issues, however, became apparent to me in a phone call I had with Katarina in January 1993, long after the diary study was over. She was telling me that she had moved from her old apart-



ment block to a new one. It was with pride that she said, "There are very few immigrants here. It's mainly old people." It became immediately apparent to me that she was implicated in reinforcing and reproducing the marginalizing discourse on "immigrants" in Canadian society.

Harper, Peirce, and Burnaby (in press) make the point that attempts to incorporate women's experience in the ESL classroom may paradoxically serve to maintain the present status and conditions that women face at work and in society at large. Accommodating women's experience, rather than problematizing it may not ultimately work in the best interests of women. They stress the importance of identifying and intensifying the moments where an opening is created for critical reflection on issues of gender and race.

Implications of the Diary Study for Pedagogy

While recognizing some of the limitations of the diary study, as noted above, I believe that my research has important implications for the use of diaries in the multilingual, multicultural classroom. While the use of diaries and journals in the language classroom is a classic method in communicative language teaching, students are sometimes discouraged from writing about issues that directly engage their sense of who they are and how they relate to the

social world. Thus Peyton and Reed's (1990) handbook, *Dialogue Journal Writing With Nonnative English Speakers*, while claiming to "individualize language and content learning" (p. 18) simultaneously offers advice on how the teacher can prevent writing from becoming "too personal":

Some teachers are afraid that leaving the choice of topics entirely open to students encourages them to write about very personal topics or family matters that the teacher is not prepared to deal with, and that the writing can turn into a counseling session. This does occur at times. However, it need not continue. Teachers can gently point out that they are not comfortable discussing that topic and introduce another one.
(p. 67)

If language teachers wish to take seriously Dillon's (1993) point that teachers need to use the resources students bring to class "as a base for their new learning" (p. 3), then teachers need to create possibilities for students to describe and analyze their relationship to the social world. Social interaction, both inside and outside the classroom, impacts on the social identities of all students, whether anglophone or ESL. And these social identities are inextricably linked to the goals of independ-

ence, creativity, and critical thinking that Dillon advocates in student-centered learning. Unequal relations of power between interlocutors are not only a function of the relationship between target language speakers and language learners—they are also a function of the unequal relationship between women and men, blacks and whites, rich and poor. Through the process of social interaction both inside and outside the classroom, students of different genders, races, classes and languages are constantly negotiating their social identities, their expectations, and their hopes for the future. If students are encouraged to use diaries to interrogate such social interaction, reflect on and critique their experiences, and perhaps share some of their insights with fellow students, they will develop rich resources as a base for new learning about their schooling, their communities, and themselves. And in this process they may become enthusiastic writers.

Three ways in which the participants in my study used their diaries to reflect on social interaction have direct relevance for classroom teaching. First, the participants used their diaries to reflect on ways in which social interaction in the classroom impacts on the social identities of students. In Extract 3, for example, Mai describes some of the potential problems with peer evaluation.

Extract 3

Sit beside me in class are a couple Mary and John. They came from England. Tonight they have to speak with class to introduce their product. John was talking about his camera. Mary had the little box hand made. it use for to put money for save. By the way they speak were slow and very clearly understood everything even the instruction says that they do a good job. every time when someone speak someone else have to mark in the evaluation form for speech to persuade and we have to give some idea, how good the speaker is. the results Mary got from suggestions of someone wasn't very nice. it makes she feels unhappy. She gave to me read that form and I got confused too. one of class mate write. "Mary! your speech is good, but you look like tired and fall asleep" Also John he got the same person write some bad thing too. I'm going to speak in class on next Monday, I know for sure I can't avoid someone will does the same thing to me like they did before, I don't think it is nice person to be that with classmate.

Second, the participants used their diaries to reflect on ways in which social interaction leads to self-assessment of language learning. In Extract 4, for example, written on February 8, 1991, Felicia reflects on the fact that she doesn't like to participate in conversations, particularly with strangers, for fear of being positioned as an "uninteresting" person. In contrast, in Extract 5, written on February 17, 1991, Katarina reflects on her progress in language learning by comparing two interviews she has had over a 6-month period.

Extract 4

I listen more English at my work than I have to talk. Sometimes the ladies ask me something about my country or my family, but I think that I'm not an interesting person because my English is limited and I have to think before talking. I feel confidence with them because it is about 8 months that we worked together and I see them every day. They are very nice and patient with my English. I understand almost that they talk, but I sometimes have to guess something. I avoid talking with the children's mothers, because my English is too poor and I don't feel well

talking with strangers. I would like to tell the mothers many things about their babies but I prefer to be silent. I only tell what it is necessary.

Extract 5

On Wednesday I had interview in Ontario College in Newtown. I am going to take after [skills course], Computer Programmer Course. I don't have to pass an examination of mathematics. I only have to pass an exam of English. I can compare this interview with another which I have had six months ago. The first interview took place in the Community Service. I wasn't able to tell a lot about myself after ESL course during that interview. On Wednesday I was able to ask and understand about my course, about another course and requirement to these courses.

Third, the participants used their diaries to reflect on the discrepancies that existed between what they learnt about social interaction in the classroom, and what they experienced in the world outside it. In Extract 6, for example, taken on February 17, 1991, Martina explains that her interest in Canadian soap operas grew because she felt that they were a more accurate reflection of Canadian society than that portrayed in the classroom context (my emphasis).

Extract 6

First month in Canada was very difficult, because we weren't able to communicate and understand. When we bought the refrigerator—it didn't work, it warm up. Every second week a repairman came and after one week it stopped to work again. Then we decided to return it and we asked for a small freezer but they didn't have one. The manager told my daughter that she must wait and call every month. I was very disappointed and I wanted to know something about Canadians. First time we watch "Who's the boss?" or "The Cosby show"—it was funny, but I was looking for something else. After the ESL course when I had the interview, they asked me very different questions, the ones that we didn't study in school and I was very surprised. Then I started to watch "All my children"—not every day and "One life to live." In both soap operas there are stories from actual people's experiences

and very few from work. There are different personalities. The life is full of love, hate, danger, and lies. When I told these stories to my children I use some English phrases—leave me alone; what's going on, etc. These phrases sound better in English.

Student reflection on social interaction inside and outside the classroom is highly instructive for teachers. It gives the teacher insight into the effect of classroom pedagogy on the social identities of students, and possible reasons for different levels of student participation. It provides insight into student engagement in the learning process, and the extent to which a student's social identity is implicated in the kind of learning and interaction that takes place outside the classroom. It highlights discrepancies between formal sites of learning and personal experiences in the wider community. These insights can help the teacher revise and adapt classroom teaching and course curricula in ways that are directly relevant to student needs.

My study suggests that the teacher's role is crucial in creating conditions that will promote the use of diaries for introspection and critique as well as the communal sharing of ideas. First, teachers need to provide guidance as to the many forms a diary can take and it should be clear that there is no "right" or "wrong" way of recording experiences. The teacher might show students how experiences have been recorded in the mother tongue (for example, Bell, 1992) as well as the target language (for example, Yu, 1992). Second, the teacher might take the opportunity to keep his or her own diary or teacher journal and share extracts with the class (see for example Spack & Sadow, 1983). Such extracts might include samples from the student's diaries, if prior permission has been obtained. Third, the teacher could help students develop their ideas as well as their expository writing skills by asking them to clarify or extend particular extracts from their diaries. For example, they could encourage students to explore analytically an experience that has been recorded in a descriptive manner. Fourth, while some researchers advocate that diaries be uncorrected and ungraded (Spack & Sadow, 1983), my participants asked me to provide feedback on their grammar and expression. Errors common to a number of students could be used as the basis for a grammar workshop. Finally, the teacher needs to help create a classroom atmosphere that will encourage the sharing of ideas. The careful

organization of small groups might enhance intimacy, and a circular arrangement of desks might help to reduce the power differentials between teacher and student. If teachers create the conditions that will give students an investment in what they write, the encouragement to write it, and the opportunity to share it, they may be as surprised as Martina's children at what the students produce. It is therefore appropriate that Martina should have the final word:

The first time I was very nervous and afraid to talk on the phone. When the phone rang, everybody in my family was busy, and my daughter had to answer it. After ESL course when we moved and our landlords tried to persuade me that we have to pay for whole year, I got upset and I talked with him on the phone over one hour and I didn't think about the tenses rules. I had known that I couldn't give up. My children were very surprised when they heard me.

Endnotes

1. The only changes that have been made to these diary entries are spelling corrections.

References

Auerbach, E.R. (1989). Toward a social-contextual approach to family literacy. *Harvard Educational Review*, 59, 165-181.

Bailey, K.M. (1980). An introspective analysis of an individual's language learning experience. In R. Scarcella and S. Krashen (Eds.), *Research in Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Bailey, K.M. (1983). Competitiveness and anxiety in adult second language learning: Looking at and through the diary studies. In H.D. Seliger and M.H. Long (Eds.), *Classroom oriented research in second language acquisition*. Rowley, MA.: Newbury House.

Bell, J. (1991). Becoming aware of literacy. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, Toronto.

Bourdieu, P. (1977). The economics of linguistic exchanges. *Social Science Information*, 16(6), 645-668.

Boyd, M. (1992). Immigrant women: Language, socio-economic inequalities, and policy issues. In B. Burnaby & A. Cumming (Eds.), *Socio-political aspects*

of ESL in Canada. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Britzman, D. (1990, October). Could this be your story? Guilty readings and other ethnographic dramas. Paper presented at the Bergamo Conference, Dayton, OH.

Brown, C. (1984). Two Windows on the classroom world: Diary studies and participant observation differences. In P. Larson, E. Judd, & D. Messerschmitt (Eds.), *On TESOL '84*. Washington, DC: TESOL.

Cooke, D. (1986). Learning the language of your students. *TESL Talk*, 16(1), 5-13.

Dillon, D. (1993). Editorial. *English Quarterly*, 25(1), 3.

Harper, H., Peirce, B., & Burnaby, B. (in press). EWP for garment workers: A feminist project? *Gender and Education*.

Hingle, I. (1993). The role of the teacher as interlocutor in dialogue journal writing. In *Proceedings of the 12th annual SAALA conference*, Part 2. Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

hooks, b. (1990) Talking Back. In R. Ferguson, M. Gever, T. Minh-Ha, & C. West (Eds.), *Out there: Marginalization in contemporary cultures*. Boston: MIT Press.

Lavery, R.H. & Watson, M. (1993). Shifting perspectives/Shifting practices. *English Quarterly*, 25(1), 4-7.

Ng, R. (1981). Constituting Ethnic phenomenon: An account from the perspective of immigrant women. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 13, 97-108.

Obah, T.Y. (1993). Learning from others in the ESL writing class. *English Quarterly*, 25(1), 8-13.

Peirce, B.N. (1993). Language learning, social identity, and immigrant women. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Ontario Institute for Studies in Education/University of Toronto.

Peyton, J.K. & Reed, L. (1990). *Dialogue journal writing with nonnative English speakers: A handbook for teachers*. Alexandria, VA: TESOL.

Rossiter, A. B. (1986). In private: An inquiry into the construction of women's experience of early motherhood. Unpublished Doctor of Education thesis. University of Toronto, Toronto.

Savage, W., & Whisenand, R. (1993). Logbooks and language learning objectives in an intensive ESP

workshop. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(4), 741-746.

Schumann, J.H., & Schumann, F. (1977). Diary of a language learner: An introspective study of second language learning. In H.D. Brown, C. Yorio, & R. Crymes (Eds.), *On TESOL '77: Teaching and learning English as a second language: Trends and Practice*. Washington, DC: TESOL.

Schumann, F. (1980). Diary of a language learner: a further analysis. In R. Scarcella and S. Krashen (Eds.) *Research in second language acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.

Spack, R. & Sadow, C. (1983). Student-teacher working journals in ESL freshman composition. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17(4), 575-593.

Spolsky, B. (1989). *Conditions for second language learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van Daele, C. (1990). Making words count: The experience and meaning of the diary in women's lives. Unpublished Doctor of Education thesis. University of Toronto, Toronto.

Weiler, K. (1991). Freire and a feminist pedagogy of difference. *Harvard Educational Review*, 61(4), 449-474.

West, C. (1992). A matter of life and death. *October*, 61 (summer), 20-23.

Winer, L. (1992). "Spinach to chocolate": Changing awareness and attitudes in ESL writing teachers. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26(1), 57-80.

Yu, L. (1990). The comprehensible output hypothesis and self-directed learning: A learner's perspective. *TESL Canada Journal*, 8(1), 9-26.

Zamel, V. (1987). Recent research on writing pedagogy. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(4), 697-715.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Sue Starfield for her helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. The research on which this article is based was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. This support is gratefully acknowledged.

Bonny Norton Peirce is doing postdoctoral research at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, and the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.