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February 2005
The impact of NCEA through the eyes of secondary level ESL teachers in Dunedin: an exploratory study.

Jeremy Callander

This thesis, prepared under the supervision of Dr Elke Stracke, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Otago for the degree of Masters in Applied Linguistics.

July 2006
Abstract

Since 2002, secondary level English as a Second Language (ESL) education in New Zealand has existed and operated within the assessment framework that is the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA). This thesis examines the impact that this framework has had upon the domain of ESL education from the perspective of nine ESL teachers working at eight secondary schools in Dunedin, New Zealand. A review of current NCEA-related academic literature, as well as of other public sources, reveals the implementation of NCEA to be a highly contentious issue, with far-reaching ramifications.

The data for this thesis was collected via recorded oral interviews where participants were asked a series of open-ended questions. With no literary precedent to provide any specific categories or direction for analysis, transcriptions from these interviews were analysed via a grounded theory approach, whereby categories were built out of the themes of discussion that each of the participants revealed in their responses. Transcripts were then compared to one another so as to determine if any common themes existed. These subsequent dominant categories in turn became the major reference points for discussion and comparison to NCEA-related literature.

The dominant categories that arose were as follows:

- the comparative pros and cons of NCEA and IELTS
- the high cost of NCEA and the question of its international credibility
- co-operation between English and ESL departments
• the status of secondary ESL
• ESL teacher and student workloads
• the impact of NZQA's use of the Internet to update NCEA standards
• assessment under NCEA
• whether or not conditions under NCEA encourage student effort towards academic excellence
• the impact of NCEA upon the practice of teaching ESL.

The findings of this study in many ways echoed those of the literature review that preceded them: NCEA is an extremely contentious issue, with far-reaching ramifications. Some ESL teachers praised NCEA for setting more realistic assessment criteria, providing them with structure and, in part, serving as a catalyst for increased English and ESL departmental co-operation and the raising of the academic status of ESL. Many teachers however, claimed that NCEA has adversely impacted ESL education by lowering standards, failing to adequately prepare ESL students for tertiary education, encouraging students to do less rather than more, and cultivating a logistical quagmire of assessment and record keeping.

This thesis has taken another step forward in illuminating the impact of NCEA upon secondary education in New Zealand, and provides a useful starting point for further research, especially into ESL education at secondary level in New Zealand.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I must thank my esteemed supervisor, Dr Elke Stracke, for her continued encouragement, criticism and patience; the combination of which ultimately rendered the execution and documentation of this study infinitely less unpleasant than it might otherwise have been. I must also express my deep appreciation to the ESL teachers who participated in this study.

In addition I wish to particularly thank Terry Locke, Michael Irwin, Cedric Hall, Kevin Donnelly and Warwick Elley; their advice and assistance throughout the course of this thesis have been invaluable. As much as I can, I want to acknowledge their contribution to education in New Zealand and abroad; with any luck, those charged with running our country might start heeding their words some time before the turn of the next millennium.

Finally I wish to thank my family (Mum, for taking time from her jurisprudence to provide me with fresh vegetables from her garden, and Dad, for Karl Barth’s anthropology and general intelligent conversation), my friends (in particular Mr Tony Zwies, for introducing me to the calming and therapeutic art of rabbit shooting), my colleagues and office-mates (in particular Miss Nick Learmonth, for seemingly boundless belief and enthusiasm) and everyone in, employed by or associated with the Department of Mephymology. Thanks also to Mark and Katie Hayhurst for regular mental health check-ups on most Thursday and Saturdays evenings.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AASCU</td>
<td>American Association of State Colleges and Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFT</td>
<td>American Federation of Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APEC</td>
<td>Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIE</td>
<td>Cambridge International Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESL</td>
<td>English as a Second Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>English for Speakers of Other Languages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSC</td>
<td>Higher School Certificate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IB</td>
<td>International Baccalaureate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISM</td>
<td>Integrated Standards Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCEA</td>
<td>National Certificate of Educational Achievement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>Non-English Speaking Background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NQF</td>
<td>National Qualifications Framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NRA</td>
<td>Norm-Referenced Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZPPTA</td>
<td>New Zealand Post-Primary Teachers Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZQA</td>
<td>New Zealand Qualifications Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OBE</td>
<td>Outcomes-Based Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAT</td>
<td>Scholastic Aptitude Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBA</td>
<td>Standards-Based Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SSM</td>
<td>Separate Standards Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4S</td>
<td>Standards for Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIMSS</td>
<td>Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIMSS-R</td>
<td>Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study - Repeat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOEFL</td>
<td>Test of English as a Foreign Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCE</td>
<td>Victorian Certificate of Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Chapter 1
Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to research and report concerning the impact of NCEA\(^1\) (National Certificate of Educational Achievement) upon the teaching of secondary level ESL\(^2\) (English as a Second Language), as perceived through the eyes of those who teach it. The investigation was carried out in eight secondary schools located in the city of Dunedin in New Zealand.

This chapter seeks to provide a contextual platform from which to view the thesis as a whole. Section 1.1 will set the scene by briefly introducing the educational climate that existed prior to and so led to the development of NCEA. Section 1.2 will describe the nature and workings of NCEA and how it differs from its predecessor. Section 1.3 explains what NCEA achievement and unit standards are, followed by a description of the ESL situation in New Zealand (1.4). Section 1.5 will seek to spell out the importance and purposes of this thesis.

1.1 Setting the Scene

The purpose of this section is to describe for the reader the educational climate of New Zealand prior to NCEA and so illuminate the reasoning behind its development. Since the early 1970s, educators and education experts have worked towards and lobbied for the

\(^1\) It should be noted that throughout this paper, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement will be referred to as 'NCEA', as opposed to 'the NCEA'.

\(^2\) It should also be noted that throughout this paper, the author will use the acronym 'ESL' to refer to the learning of the English language by non-English speakers. Use of the acronym 'ESOL' will be due to the direct quoting, by the author, of published titles or documents that contained it.
reform of New Zealand's senior secondary level qualifications: School Certificate, Sixth Form Certificate and University Bursary. During this time, driven by a desire to increase the validity and real-world applicability of these qualifications, the New Zealand Post-Primary Teachers Association (NZPPTA), the Secondary Principals Association and other interested bodies and individuals have drafted numerous proposals concerned with "improving assessment coverage, matching methods more closely to what is being assessed, and closing the gap between qualifications and their purposes" (Strachan, 2002: 245). Bones of contention such as the reliability and validity of external exams, the wisdom (or lack thereof) in cohort referential ranking and the usefulness of school qualifications to prospective employers have been chewed over, tossed back and forth and kicked around the room with often little or no apparent ground made (Strachan, 2002). Three decades of increased momentum in the push for change, coupled with comparable increases in resolve on the part of those resistant to change, culminated in a period of intense debate and partition throughout the 1990s (Allen et al., 1997).

During the 1990s a unit standards assessment framework was developed under the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as part of attempts to address some of the difficulties/inadequacies in the New Zealand secondary school qualifications system. This new mixed system of assessment brought with it considerable problems; through the implementation of unit standards, desired educational outcomes were being defined on a microscopic level. The new system was perceived as being generally unmanageable and as creating uncomfortable workloads for teachers and students (Hall, 2000). Moderating standards fairly and appropriately was difficult, as was promoting conceptual learning via

---

3 The comparing and ranking of cohorts, that is, all the students of a particular year (e.g. the class of '96).
the unit standards model. Proper recognition was not being given to students for better-than-average performance and there was increasing discontent amongst the public of New Zealand in regards to the comparability and fairness of internal assessment and the lack of recognition being afforded to traditional external examinations (Hall, 2000). All these factors rendered the system operationally unsustainable, making reform and overhaul inevitable.

New Zealand has not been on its own in its desire and attempts to develop a more cohesive and effective secondary level education and assessment framework. Throughout the past two decades, most countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (e.g. USA, England) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) (e.g. Australia, South Korea) have undergone, and/or are still undergoing, major secondary level curriculum reform (Donnelly, 2000; 2005a). National qualification framework initiatives have been crafted, attempted, and subsequently re-crafted in the hope of better catering to increasing populations of post-compulsory students at senior secondary levels, and better aligning curriculum content and assessment methodology. There has also been a desire to increase the relevance and ‘visibility’ of occupational qualifications, as well as to “render education and training pathways more accessible and more coherent for young people and for adults” (Strachan, 2001: 2).

The designs for a new framework of senior secondary assessment, the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), were announced to the public on 5th of
November 1998, as was the intention to have the new system operational by 2001. For logistical reasons however, this date was later moved back to 2002.

1.2 What is NCEA?

The purpose of this section is to acquaint the reader with the basic fundamental principles behind and workings of NCEA. According to the Ministry of Education and the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), NCEA is “New Zealand’s [new] national secondary qualification” (NZQA, 2002: 2) as a part of the NQF. Founded upon Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) principles (see Chapter 2.1.2), NCEA comprises four levels of secondary level academic achievement: Level 1 (replacing what was School Certificate), Level 2 (replacing what was Sixth Form Certificate) and Level 3 (replacing what was University Bursary). Level 4, otherwise known as ‘New Zealand Scholarship’, is a new addition developed for the purpose of challenging and benefiting outstanding students. NCEA is New Zealand’s new deal4 for secondary education; a new and unified qualifications framework designed with the intention of assessing students in a manner that promotes learning, increasing the coverage of the secondary curriculum, effectively balancing internal and external assessment, and reporting upon what a student has achieved in an explicit and informative fashion (Fancy, 1999a; 1999b; Strachan, 2001; 2002). Under NCEA all learning done by a student at senior secondary level earns credits towards their final qualification. Credits are earned through the completion of unit and achievement standards (see Chapter 1.3).

4 Likening NCEA to American President F. D. Roosevelt’s solution to the Great Depression.
There are three primary differences that set NCEA apart from the previous New Zealand secondary education system (Irwin, 2000). Firstly, under the ‘old system’ for each subject (e.g. Physics) a student would receive a *mark* (e.g. 93%) and a *grade* (e.g. A+). Under NCEA a student receives a report detailing their performance in regards to the separate standards which they have attempted; this is without any form of aggregate mark or grade. The second difference is that while under the old system marks were given out of 100 and/or grades ranging from *A* to *E* (or in some cases 1 to 9), under NCEA there are only four grades; *Non-Achieved, Achieved, Merit* and *Excellence*. It should be noted that a) for *externally assessed* achievement standards, a mark (e.g. 17 out of 20) is given and b) unit standards are still assessed as per the pre-NCEA system on a simple pass/fail basis. Locke (2005) points out that this is due to the fact that the concept of *average* is not consistent with the principles and workings of NCEA. The third point of differentiation is that while under the old system students were ultimately assessed against each other according to a *norm-referenced assessment* (NRA\(^5\)) schema, under NCEA students are assessed against achievement and/or unit standards; “written descriptions of what students must know and be able to do for the award of credit towards the NCEA at the various levels and against criteria for the three\(^6\) grades” (Irwin, 2000: 3).

So under the NCEA framework, rather than study English (for example) as a broad and aggregated *subject* as the word would have been traditionally understood, students choose

---

\(^5\) NRA is “an assessment where student performance or performances are compared to a larger group. Usually the larger group or ‘norm group’ is a national sample representing a wide and diverse cross-section of students. Students, schools, districts, or even states are then compared or rank-ordered in relation to the norm group. The purpose of a norm-referenced assessment is usually to sort students and not to measure achievement toward some criterion of performance” (CRESST, 1996: n.p.).

\(^6\) Here ‘three’ refers to the grades of *Achieved, Merit* and *Excellence*; i.e. the three successful grades.
from a selection of five to eight separate achievement or unit standards that fall within the scope of what would have been traditionally understood as ‘English’. Each unit or achievement standard is worth a set number of credits and upon successful accumulation of 80 credits, students are awarded with a certificate signifying their achievement of NCEA Level 1, 2, or 3 depending on which level-specific criteria have been met (see Appendix B: NCEA Levels).

While the new achievement standards are the primary components of NCEA, some unit standards and other exams or qualifications (e.g. pre-tertiary trade certificates) will also be able to earn credits towards it (Ministry of Education and NZQA, 2002). By allowing students to combine achievement standards, unit standards and non-high school qualifications in their pursuit of NCEA completion, two ends are served: one of practice and one of principle.

The practical end is the creation of a homogenous and monolithic secondary level qualification; “a qualification that the majority of senior secondary students can work towards” (Fancy, 1999b: 1). In other words (in an ideal world) all students leave school and enter the job market with the same qualification; the details of each graduate’s qualification will vary depending on just which route they took to get it (i.e. what combination of standards they completed), but it will be the same qualification. It will be a National Certificate in Educational Achievement.
The principle that is served is that of the effective blurring of the "distinction between academic studies and those associated with vocational education and training" (Donnelly, 2000: 14). One of the primary concerns and driving forces behind the development of NCEA (Donnelly, 2000) has been to see "the difference in esteem between academically and vocationally oriented education......eliminated" (Black, 2000: 1). NCEA is built, in part, upon the belief that this elimination is only really possible if both the academic and vocational aspects of education are assessed under "a unified system where all qualifications are interchangeable and equally valued" (Black, 2000: 1).

The following section will clarify in more detail the basic nature and workings of NCEA achievement and unit standards.

1.3 What exactly are Achievement & Unit Standards?

If a given subject (e.g. Physics) or indeed senior secondary/pre-tertiary education as a whole were a brick wall, achievement and unit standards would be the individual bricks that were stacked on top of each other, ultimately forming that wall. They have been developed by experts (according to the Ministry of Education and NZQA) in all of the different subject areas that are covered in secondary level education. They contain descriptive and prescriptive information concerning the purpose of the unit, the skills that will be covered in the course of the unit and the performance criteria that must be met in order to successfully complete the unit. It should be noted however, that "they don't prescribe content or the full texture of a curriculum (that is done in curriculum
statements) and they don't prescribe exactly how assessments are to be carried out” (QA News, 2001: n.p.).

Study of traditional academic subjects (e.g. Math, English, Biology) is done through a mix of internal and external assessment, via achievement standards. At least half of all the achievement standards completed by a student must be externally assessed and to this end the previous School Certificate and Bursary frameworks remain and act as the external assessment component of NCEA. Non-conventional subjects (e.g. Computing, Drama, Technology) are assessed via unit standards, but earn credits towards the awarding of NCEA in the same manner as achievement standards (Creech, 1998; Hall, 2000; Irwin, 1999).

Achievement standards, while essentially performing the same task as unit standards, differ slightly in that they move “beyond a simple pass/fail model to a more complicated pass/fail model, where each level “has its own set of performance criteria, all of which have to be achieved for the level to be awarded......it should be noted, that the level of performance does not affect the number of credits gained by passing an Achievement Standard” (Locke, 2005: 1). Achievement standards differ from unit standards in that they are developed out of national curriculum statements for secondary schools, whereas unit standards were constructed not only from curriculum statements, but additionally from the expectations of tertiary providers and relevant industries (QA News, 2001). Achievement standards are also generally broader in their scope and leaner in terms of the extent of their criteria than are unit standards.
In the context of the present study, it should be noted that achievement standards for the teaching of ESL, have not been finalized and so are not yet in circulation. As such the only NCEA standards that currently exist for ESL are unit standards (see Appendix C: ESOL Unit Standard 1281). The following chapter will discuss the context of New Zealand ESL in more detail.

1.4 ESL in New Zealand

The purpose of this section is to familiarise the reader with the state of ESL education in New Zealand and how NCEA relates to it. The last 10 years or so have seen a considerable increase in the number of non-native students attending New Zealand secondary schools (Franken & McComish, 2003). Reasons for this include the increasing numbers of foreigners seeking permanent residence and/or work visas (Bolch, 2001; Fifield, 2004; Matthew, 2002), perhaps seeking escape from pressures or troubles in their homelands (Sullivan, 1999) or, due to the global lingua franca status that English currently enjoys (Alptekin, 2002; Crystal, 1997; Graddol, 1997), foreign parents seeking increased future employment opportunities for their children through a secondary level education in New Zealand. The net result of this has been an ever increasing population of foreign ethnicity and linguistic diversity living in New Zealand and their adolescent children attending New Zealand secondary schools.

1.4.1 The State of Play

Population evolution such as this has widespread ramifications, not the least of which concern competence and literacy in the dominant language. Unfortunately this issue has
often been dealt with in an inadequate fashion. The *Changing skills for a changing world* (Johnson, 2000) report exposed the fact that literacy amongst foreign adults in New Zealand suffered from a government lacking in strategic vision and fragmentation throughout its literacy sector. This has ultimately limited a) the coherency and applicability of advice reaching the government and b) the allocation of adequate resources. The report identified the following additional potholes in the road towards the creation of a functional adult literacy system:

- a lack of a coordinated literacy infrastructure (responsibility spread across several departments)
- limited quality assurance processes/accountability (no outcomes reporting system)
- inadequate professional development and career pathway for teachers
- inadequate funding for programs and research
- marginalisation from key policy framework (National Qualifications Framework, industry training strategy standards)
  
  (Johnson, 2000; cited in McKenna & Fitzpatrick, 2004: 22)

In a later report to the Ministry of Education on *Improving English Language Outcomes for Receiving ESOL Services in New Zealand Schools, with a Particular Focus on New Immigrants*, Franken and McComish (2003) highlighted three key areas of ESL education in New Zealand which were in need of attention. Under the heading *systemic needs*, the report called for the development and endorsement of a national language policy. This would provide “consistent links and flows [which] could be maintained throughout the education sector – from early childhood learning to tertiary level, and with employment and national economic, social and cultural development goals” (133). Also called for was the creation and implementation of a national curriculum framework for ESL due to the fact that a) one does not exist and b) curriculum development should not be left up to individual schools as New Zealand’s ESL teachers on the whole “are not skilled enough
to design excellent [ESL] language development syllabuses themselves” (133). Teacher and school expertise stressed the need for increased expertise in ESL management, teaching and teacher aiding, given that “a relatively low proportion of ESOL teachers appear to be qualified” (135). It also called for ESL teachers and teacher aides to be provided with a far greater breadth and depth of specific ESL knowledge and skills from “pre-service teaching qualifications, from ongoing professional development, and in the form of post-graduate qualifications” (134). Finally, Information on NESB (Non-English Speaking Background) student outcomes pointed to the lack of reliable information available concerning the performance of NESB students over time and the fact that without an increased quality and quantity of this information, it is “impossible to assess whether NESB students are achieving as well as they might, whether individual school programmes are effective for these students, and whether provision nationally is effective for them” (135). This is especially true in terms of students being adequately prepared for tertiary level education.

1.4.2 Absentee Curriculum

The absence of a national ESL curriculum, as raised in the previous paragraph, is an issue of crucial importance. Irwin (1999) claims that “explicit reference to, and specification of, suitable content are ..........vital if the moral agency of the school as an educating institution and the professional integrity and disciplinary responsibility of the members of its teaching staff are to have any purpose and point of application to students’ learning” (33). In other words, if teachers and educational institutions are to provide their students with quality education, it is essential that these teachers and educational institutions have
appropriate and expertly developed curricula/syllabi to work through. As NCEA is an assessment framework which describes the skills that are to be assessed rather than a curriculum which prescribes content that is to be taught, unit and achievement standards do not “prescribe content or the full texture of a curriculum (that is done in curriculum statements) and they don’t prescribe exactly how assessments are to be carried out” (QA News, 2001: n.p.). Indeed, “classical OBE" prides itself on being largely syllabus free” (Berlach, 2004: 3). The problem with this however, is that New Zealand has no ESL curriculum (see Chapter 1.4.1).

1.4.3 Implications of Absence

Because the educational world carries on regardless and ESL students continue to require secondary level educations, the curriculum vacuum must be filled. In the absence of a nationwide curriculum, ESL teachers will very likely view and ultimately use NCEA unit standards, achievement standards and their relevant NZQA provided assessment exemplars as the foundation for their own de facto curriculum8 (Irwin, 2005). This is of course thoroughly unfair to both teachers and students.

Unfair for Teachers

It is unfair to teachers because most teachers desire (in addition to simply keeping bread on the table and hot water in the pipes) to find purpose and value in the interactive reality of classroom teaching (Berlach, 2004); not in curriculum development. They do not desire to shoulder the responsibility of curriculum development, or to deal with the

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7 OBE is the acronym for Outcome-Based Education; see Chapter 2 for more in-depth discussion of OBE.
8 See Berlach (2004) and Krashen (2005) for further discussion of de facto curricula.
logistical realities that would result from being a curriculum developer, whilst also being a teacher. They probably do not want to be told how they should teach, but they do want to know what they should teach. Not unlike Frodo Baggins’ responsibility over The One Ring, it is a burden they should never have had to bear (Tolkien, 1964).

Unfair for Students
The unfairness to students stems from the fact that, regardless of the sincerity of their intentions or the extent of their efforts, secondary level teachers do not emerge from university and/or teachers’ college, prepared or qualified for the task of developing curricula (Berlach, 2004). In specific relation to New Zealand’s ESL teachers, they are “not skilled enough to design excellent [ESL] language development syllabuses themselves” (Franken & McComish, 2003: 133). The lack of training in the development of curricula, plus the unwarranted stress that would come from actually doing so, will ultimately result in students receiving a lower quality of education (see Chapter 2.3.2).

A Deeper Problem
There is however, a more fundamental issue. The absence of curricula highlights Berlach’s (2004) questioning of whether there is no “repository of core knowledge, attitudes and values that students are required to cover” (9). Berlach argues that there must surely be “some content knowledge [that] is absolutely mandatory for the maintenance of a civil society” (9). Without a national curriculum, ESL students (and students in general) are left in the precarious position of being taught whatever their individual teachers think that they should be taught. Without a national curriculum there
can be no consistency of content, so no fairness/consistency of inter-school assessment and so no nationwide sense of continuity in terms of post-secondary education or employment. Tertiary institutions and potential employers will be bereft of any objective means of inter-student comparison. To speak of national education ‘standards’ in the absence in a national curriculum is a contradiction in terms.

1.5 The Purpose of this Thesis

As stated at the very beginning of this chapter, the purpose of this thesis was to research and report concerning the impact of NCEA upon the educational domain that is secondary level ESL, as perceived through the eyes of secondary level ESL teachers. That is, to examine any impact this new educational framework has had and/or is having upon, amongst other things, ESL teachers’ work environment, their teaching practices and principles, their sense of status/worth within the education paradigm and their overall experience of teaching secondary level ESL. This section will explain the reasons for conducting this study and justify its specific focus upon secondary level ESL teachers. The first part (1.5.1) will make clear to the reader why this study focuses on secondary level ESL teachers, while the second and final part of this section (1.5.2) will provide the reader with an overview of the thesis as a whole.

1.5.1 Who & Why

What provided the initial impetus and research focus for this study was a set of unexpected findings from an earlier study that the author had conducted into ESL teacher and student perspectives concerning their experience of secondary level ESL education
and the relative comparability of those perspectives (Callander, 2004); this will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3.1.1. Subsequent literary investigation by the author found that the specific impact of NCEA upon ESL education had not yet been investigated. Hence the development and execution of this present study.

**A Unique Position**

Teachers are particularly interesting in terms of their position in the great scheme that is secondary level education. Students will probably always sit in classrooms and principles and policy makers will most likely always sit in offices. As practitioners rather than authorities or policy makers however, teachers move freely between the spare room and Lantern Waste (Lewis, 1950). Teachers in a sense, hold both ends of the proverbial sword. At one end they plan lessons, prepare assessments and attend staff meetings, while at the more executive end of things, teachers engage as participants alongside their students in the classroom (Walker, 2001). Though teachers are obviously quite different from their students, like their students but unlike principles and other educational authorities, teachers perform and interact in the dynamic environment that is the classroom and carry out a pre-determined series of tasks (Callander, 2004). That teachers, relative to educational authorities and students, hold what might be described as a more *central* position in the education paradigm, must surely allow them a perspective scope (in regards to the influence of NCEA) that is, while perhaps not more objective, at least broader and more holistic than would be that of educational authorities and students. It is for these reasons that this study focuses upon secondary level ESL teachers.
In Dreams Begin Responsibilities

Berlach (2004) states that teachers want to believe and to feel that society has charged them with the privilege and responsibility of passing on its fundamental values, attitudes and attributes to the generations that follow them. It is this belief that motivates them, that at times sustains them and that “gives teachers their mandate, their professional raison d’être” (6). To teach, as The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (1990) defines teaching, is to provide systematic information to a person or persons, about a subject or skill. Berlach (2004) however, claims that OBE undoes the idea of the systematic provision of the traditional disciplines of knowledge and in doing so, significantly alters teachers’ purpose and function. No longer teachers, they are now “educational technicians……..facilitators, guides, curriculum developers, child-minders – in short – bureaucrats” (6). But as Michael Fielding points out, “good teaching [is] not simply reducible to a series of tasks or items on a checklist that [can] be written down and followed” (Fielding, 2006; cited in Gerritsen, J., 2006: n.p.). Part of the purpose of this study then, is to determine if (and if so, how) the opinions of ESL teachers validate such a claim; i.e. has NCEA influenced the beliefs of teachers’ regarding teaching as a mandate and as a profession?

Practice & Principle

As a result of teachers’ background knowledge, teaching experience and perhaps also their own experiences as learners, Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver and Thwaite (2001) believe that ESL teachers construct a personal configuration of pedagogic principles. These principles manifest themselves via various favoured practices. It is likely that the
relationship between individual teachers’ favoured practices and the principles that
govern them is a highly interactive relationship, with not only principles influencing
practice, but practice in turn influencing principle. Breen et al. (2001) claim that:

Experienced teachers appear to differ from each other in the principles
they currently hold and the priorities that they attribute to them. Similarly
they appear to develop a personal repertoire of tried and favoured
practices. Both are personal constructions of their role as a teacher. The
relationship between the two thereby evolves, for the individual, as
seemingly idiosyncratic as compared to that of another teacher.

Another aspect of the purpose of this study then, is to elicit from ESL teachers just how
the implementation of NCEA may have influenced the pedagogic idiosyncrasies that
constitute their teaching practices. If working under NCEA has effected changes in a
teacher’s practices, has this in turn influenced their principles? Has working under NCEA
altered the manner in which ESL teachers engage and participate with their students in
the classroom? Has it drawn them away from the classroom or has it facilitated the
opposite?

The purpose of this section was to explain the reasoning behind the conducting of this
study and to justify the specific focus of this study upon secondary level ESL teachers.
The following part of this section will provide the reader with an overview of the thesis
as a whole.

1.5.2 An Overview

By briefly describing the educational climate that existed prior to the development of
NCEA (1.1), explaining the fundamental nature and workings of NCEA in contrast to
that of its predecessor (1.2), clarifying what NCEA achievement and unit standards are (1.3), outlining the state of ESL education in New Zealand (1.4), and explaining the purpose of and reasoning behind this thesis (1.5.1), Chapter 1 has provided a platform from which to read and understand this thesis. Chapter 2 will provide a theoretical framework for this study by examining Standards-Based Assessment and Outcomes-Based Education (2.1), Internal and External Assessment (2.2) and by describing the recent related experiences of the Australian state of Victoria and the USA (2.3). Chapter 2 will also discuss the significant pros and cons of NCEA that have been put forward by proponents of NCEA (2.4), made public in the media and critiqued by academic commentators (2.5). Chapter 3 lays out the theoretical and physical logistics of this study: the significant issues relating to the design and development of the research methodology (3.1) and the step by step process of gathering and analysing data (3.2). Chapter 4 presents the views of each of the participants on a case by case basis, while Chapter 5 details the results of the cross-case analysis and subsequently discusses these results in light of the literature examined in Chapter 2. Chapter 6 shares the author’s retrospective insights regarding the strengths and limitations of the study and Chapter 7 concludes.

Now with the stage so set, let the revels begin.
Chapter 2
Theoretical Framework & Literature Review

This chapter seeks to provide a theoretical framework within which to consider this study; i.e. where does this piece of research and the issues concerning it sit within the bigger picture? It discusses Standards-Based Assessment and Outcomes-Based Education (2.1), Internal and External Assessment (2.2) and considers NCEA in light of the recent education experiences of the Australian state of Victoria and the USA (2.3). This chapter also highlights and discusses the significant pros and cons of NCEA, as they have been put forward by the developers and supporters of NCEA, publicised in the media and critiqued by academic writers. Section 2.4 reports upon the claims and arguments that have been made in support of NCEA, while 2.5 concerns the criticisms that have been levelled at it.

2.1 Standards-Based or Outcomes-Based?

The purpose of this section is to compare and contrast NCEA with the principles and workings of SBA and OBE, thus clarifying for the reader which of the two models NCEA more closely resembles. In the related literature coming out of New Zealand NCEA is predominantly discussed in terms of it being a standards-based assessment (SBA) system. Donnelly (2000; 2005) however describes NCEA as being indicative of outcomes-based education (OBE). Indeed in the USA, SBA and OBE are often confused with one another because “OBE is often presented to parents in a disguised form, under a variety of names, such as ‘Standards-based’ education” (Williams, Ledeman & Tancredo, 1994: 1). This section seeks to provide some clarity on the issue.
2.1.1 Standards-Based Assessment

Effective employment and execution of SBA is built upon the “construction of clear and unambiguous standards against which students can be assessed” (Irwin 2005: 1). Under SBA, student performance is assessed via direct comparison with written criteria; i.e. does what the student has produced match up to the standard that is outlined in the criteria? The SBA model employs two main methodological streams: competency-based assessment and grade-based assessment. Competency-based assessment works according to the pass/fail model exemplified under NCEA by unit standards; it is really a case of SBA being reduced to a basic measurement of competent or not competent (Maxwell, 1997). Grade-based assessment outlines varying levels of criteria (i.e. credit, merit and excellence in the specific case of NCEA) against which student performance can be measured, as exemplified under NCEA achievement standards (Hall, 2004).

Around these two methodological streams are evolving/appearing two models of SBA: a separate standards model (SSM) and an integrated standards model (ISM). NCEA unit and achievement standards resemble SSM, while ISM is the model which most university and polytechnic programmes follow (Hall, 2004). The key features of these two models can be seen as follows:

Separate Standards Model
- Domain of learning is divided into a number of assessment areas; each specifies the outcomes to be achieved along with their associated criteria.
- Each standard has its own credit weighting; each is usually assessed independently of other standards.
- The nature of the construction of the standards, at least in practice, gives primacy to the parts of a course rather than any notion of performance in the course overall.
• The model is generally suitable for assessing knowledge and skills that are relatively closed in nature and which are able to be prescribed with some precision in writing.

Integrated Standards Model
• Emphasis is given to overall course coherence and not just the assessment of the parts.
• The course typically specifies: learning outcomes for the course as a whole; the content of the course; assessment tasks which integrate outcomes and content; grade and task related criteria.
• The focus is on both foundational and higher level knowledge and skills.
• Higher level processes emphasise problem-solving, creativity and the integration and transfer of knowledge from one part of a course to another.
• The knowledge base of a course or subject can be open-ended, contestable and subject to frequent change.

(Hall, 2004: 3)

If the features of these two models are compared with the principles and workings of NCEA, it becomes clear that NCEA contains all the features indicative of SSM; it does not contain all the features of ISM. It does not emphasise overall course coherence and not just the assessment of the parts, nor is the knowledge base of a course or subject open-ended [and] contestable. Moreover it is unlikely that critics would accept that NCEA focuses on both foundational and higher level knowledge and skills or that it emphasises problem-solving, creativity and the integration and transfer of knowledge from one part of a course to another (see Chapter 2.5.2). In light of this then, NCEA’s position in the bigger theoretical picture could appear to be that of a SBA framework which operates via a separate standards model, employing both competency-based assessment (unit standards) and grade-based assessment (achievement standards) methodological streams in its execution. Donnelly however, argues otherwise.
2.1.2 Outcomes-Based Education

In his comparison of curriculum approaches, syllabus, outcomes and standards (see Appendix A: Comparing Curricula), Donnelly (2000), according to categories developed from analysing and identifying the unique characteristics of various education systems around the world, classes NCEA (as it was originally envisaged) as an outcomes-based education (OBE) system. According to one of its staunchest and most influential advocates, there are three categories of OBE: traditional, transitional and transformational (Spady, 1993; cited in Donnelly, 2005: 34). Traditional OBE takes what would be considered a traditional approach to education, with traditional academic disciplines and a primary focus on course content. Transitional OBE shifts away from traditional teaching and focuses on the cultivation of higher order competencies: i.e. critical thinking, problem solving and communication skills. Transformational OBE, rather than focusing upon specific educational outcomes within traditional disciplines, focuses on “the broad role performance capabilities of young people and their ability to do complex tasks in real settings, in real situations, relating more directly to life” (Spady, 1993; cited in Donnelly, 2005: 34).

The table below (pg. 23) provides a direct comparison of SBA and OBE assessment descriptors; it should be noted that these example descriptors were developed for use in the USA. If Donnelly’s categories are to be adhered to, then a comparison of the following descriptive statements leads to the conclusion that NCEA is not a form of SBA, but rather of OBE.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>SBA</strong></th>
<th><strong>OBE</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
<td>Students should be able to develop a descriptive essay that depicts an object or event, maintains a consistent focus, uses a logical sequence, and elaborates each idea with specific details and vivid vocabulary. Grade 5</td>
<td>Students should be able to construct meaning through experiences with literature, cultural events and philosophical discussion. No grade level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>History</strong></td>
<td>Students should be able to describe how United States federalism was transformed during the Great Depression by the policies of the New Deal and how that transformation continues to affect United States society today. Grade 9-12</td>
<td>Students should be able to understand, analyze and interpret historical events, conditions, trends, and issues to develop historical perspective. No grade level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Math</strong></td>
<td>The student will differentiate between area and perimeter and identify whether the application of the concept or perimeter or area is appropriate for a given situation. Grade 5</td>
<td>Students should become mathematical problem solvers. To develop these abilities, students need the experience of working with diverse problem solving situations. No Grade level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Science</strong></td>
<td>Students should be able to describe the basic processes of photosynthesis and respiration and their importance to life. Grade 5</td>
<td>Students should be able to use basic science concepts to help understand various kinds of scientific information. Upper elementary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1:** (AFT, 2000: cited in Donnelly, 2005: 35)

Donnelly’s (2000) categories indicate that NCEA cannot be a form of SBA because it does not “identify what students should know and be able to do” (16), but rather allows them to choose which unit or achievement standards they wish to do. NCEA does not “focus on specific year levels” (16), nor are the curriculum descriptors specific, easily understood, concise and measurable, for indeed, there is no common curriculum. NCEA is not “based on established disciplines/categories of knowledge” (16) and the emphasis
is not on "formal teaching and learning" (17), rather it is "a constructivist, child-centered approach to teaching and learning" (17)⁹.

So which one is it then?

Chapter 2.1.1 begins with the assumption that NCEA is a form of SBA and then goes on from there to deduce exactly what sort of SBA it is. Chapter 2.1.2 however, makes no such assumption, but rather compares SBA and OBE descriptors with one another and from this comparison, concludes that NCEA is a form of OBE rather than of SBA. Indeed, any reservations in regard to this conclusion should be considered in light of the opening passage of Chapter 2.1.1: ‘effective employment and execution of SBA is built upon the "construction of clear and unambiguous standards against which students can be assessed" (Irwin 2005: 1)’. As Chapter 2.1.2 shows, NCEA has no such foundation and as such, despite the fact that NCEA is often described in New Zealand literature as a standards-based assessment model, it can and should be described as a form of OBE.

2.2 Internal & External Assessment

The purpose of this section is to examine the comparative benefits of internal and external assessment and so provide the reader with some additional relevant light with which to consider the contents of this thesis.

External assessment is logistically advantageous in that each and every student has to do the same exam; an exam which is written and marked by an external marker (i.e. not a teacher from within the students’ own school) and all students undergo the exam in an identical setting. As a consequence, there is increased reliability, cheating is a less viable option and the potential for teacher bias is taken out of the equation (Irwin, 2001a). In addition, analysis of TIMSS\textsuperscript{10} and TIMSS-R\textsuperscript{11} results has revealed that students from countries who have centralised examination systems and who put less emphasis on internal assessment\textsuperscript{12}, perform better (at Mathematics and Science specifically) than do students from countries who place primary emphasis on internal assessment (Bishop, 1999; Fuchs & Woessmann, 2004; Jurgess, Schneider & Buchel, 2003; Woessmann, 2000; 2002; all cited in Donnelly, 2005: 26). With external assessment there is a common basis upon which to compare all students and a lessened assessment weight for teachers to have to shoulder, thus leaving more time for classroom teaching. There is also the added bonus of external assessment being able to act as a means of moderating internal assessments nationwide.

On the other hand, ongoing use of “external written assessments inhibits the effective pursuit of skills and competencies not suitable to such assessment” (Broadfoot: BERA Task Group on Assessment, 1994; cited in Strachan, 2001: 7). There is also the fact that only a relatively small portion of the whole curriculum can ever be covered in an external exam; “because it is frequent and varied, classroom assessment can tell far more about

\textsuperscript{10} Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
\textsuperscript{11} Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study - Repeat
\textsuperscript{12} These countries also tend to favour a more traditional syllabus approach to the development and execution of curricula (Donnelly, 2005).
what a student knows and has learned than any single test......‘using one assessment procedure is like using a hammer to do everything from brain surgery to pile-driving’” (Ontario Royal Commission, 1994; cited in Strachan, 2001: 7). Internal assessment allows for assessment coverage of a much broader range of knowledge and skills than will ever be possible in a one-off external exam. There is the increased reliability that comes from being able to carry out multiple assessments of a student’s work over an extended period of time (Hall, 2005). Assessment frameworks or subject areas within which there is a predominance of external assessment can lead to a situation where what is taught is only what will be externally assessed (Strachan, 2001). Ultimately this can lead to a reduction in the “breadth of the curriculum, turns senior schools into agencies of certification rather than education and may compromise the preparation of students for further education and employment” (Strachan, 2001: 6). However, as will be discussed in Chapter 2.5, this can be equally true of internal assessment frameworks.

There is, however, the ability for “formative and summative assessment to be linked in a way that [allows] an ongoing dialogue between teacher and student” (Hall, 2005: 18). While internal assessment can provide insight into how students are faring in regards to a given course of study, problems arise if too few or too many students are found to be reaching the standard. In these situations a measuring stick is needed in order to determine whether a given standard has properly fulfilled its job of assessing student performance; i.e. the problem may be with the students or it may be with the assessment form (Hall, 2004). It would appear not unreasonable then to suppose that the most
effective, most valid and most reliable assessment frameworks would be those that draw their strength from both sides of the fence (Morris, 2005).

2.3 **Australian & American Endeavours**

According to the Ministry of Education, “NCEA combines the best assessment practices, here and overseas, of the last 20 years” (NZQA, 2000; cited in Donnelly, 2000: vii). This belief sits in contrast to Donnelly’s (2000) claim that no other education system “has implemented a so-called ‘standards’ system across the whole post-compulsory level” (18), nor so “uncritically promotes a so-called ‘standards’ approach to assessment that ignores international experience and ‘best practice’” (viii). However, Strachan (2001) claims that there is really no such thing as standard practice in regards to how secondary certificate results are used for tertiary admission and selection; each country develops its own system for its own purposes and subsequently “New Zealand should not be concerned about international acceptance of its model” (5).

The following sub-sections briefly discuss the employment of OBE in the Australian state of Victoria (2.3.1) and SBA in the USA (2.3.2). Their inclusion in this thesis comes from their being, like New Zealand, modern, Western and predominantly English speaking contemporaries with significant proportions of their population being of non-English speaking origin and/or descent. Consequently, they are both confronted by similar education issues. Also, as elder colonial brothers and countries with whom New Zealand has close international ties, their respective experience and educational history serve (or
should serve) as an invaluable and readily available resource in regards to the evolution and improvement of education within New Zealand.

2.3.1 Victoria

Over the years of 1990-1991, the government of the Australian state of Victoria introduced an OBE modelled assessment framework entitled the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE). This was in response to mounting criticism that its norm-referenced predecessor, the Higher School Certificate (HSC), “advantaged particular groups of students and promoted an elitist, academic view of the curriculum” (Donnelly, 2000: 14). Like NCEA, the VCE was very quickly attacked for being “ideologically driven and substandard” (Donnelly, 2004: 72) and for not properly catering to more academically able students. Detractors felt that in the process of trying to create an education framework which catered to all students, “essential knowledge, understanding and skills were reduced to the lowest common denominator” (Donnelly, 2004: 72). In practice the VCE was found to be “very inefficient, unnecessarily bureaucratic and almost impossible to implement at the school level” (Donnelly, 2004: 75) due to the fact that without a syllabus, it could not facilitate structured and systematic teaching. It also led to high operating costs, high rates of cheating on the part of students and generally unreliable assessment (Irwin, 2000). Academics from all across Australia criticised the VCE, including its English curriculum, for radically altering the “definition of text to include popular culture, ignoring phonics and a structured approach to grammar, spelling and punctuation and for arguing that how one interprets a text is both relative and subjective” (Donnelly, 2004: 74). All told, the VCE, as it was initially conceived, was thoroughly
unsuccessful, so much so that subsequent alterations made to it through the late 1990s ultimately saw the reinstatement of norm-referenced assessment and statistical moderation (Donnelly, 2000). Strachan (2001) claims that there is no such thing as standard practice and that New Zealand should not be concerned with achieving international acceptance. In spite of this however, given the close geographical and historical relationship between Australia to New Zealand, as well as their societal similarities, it is nonetheless somewhat “astonishing” (Donnelly, 2000: 16) that New Zealand authorities would choose to introduce a system so similar to the VCE; i.e. a system that had already been found to be quite inadequate.

2.3.2 United States of America

Secondary level OBE curriculums in the United States of America have been described as being ‘a mile wide and an inch deep’ (Schmidt, McKnight & Raizen, 1997), with teachers encountering the same problems as did their Australian counterparts (Donnelly, 2004). By 1995 the OBE reform movement had come to a halt and “there has been virtually no research or reference to it in the US educational literature since then” (Blyth, 2002: 14; 2005: cited in Donnelly, 2005: 38). In recent years education reform has moved away from OBE and towards SBA (Donnelly, 2002a). Unfortunately, due to the majority of these reforms stemming (in much the same way as in New Zealand) from legislative action in the states rather than the result of collaboration with higher education providers, the net result has been an increased “gap between the knowledge and skills assessed at
the K-12\(^{13}\) level and those needed for success in college" (AASCU, 2005: 5). So while there are 49 US states that have in place subject-based standards which define “the knowledge and skills needed at each grade level in specific subject areas” (AASCU, 2005: 5) as determined by each state, there remains a considerable degree of ambiguity in terms of just which specific skills and competencies are necessary for success at the post-secondary level (AASCU, 2005). As a result, the late 1990s saw secondary level education in the US being severely criticized for fostering school graduation requirements that were insufficiently resilient to ensure tertiary and workplace readiness, that did not instill in students an understanding of the nature of cause and effect concerning their individual achievement and failure, and that contained weak external assessment components (AASCU, 2005).

As mentioned in Chapter 2.1, NCEA has often been described in New Zealand literature as a SBA model; despite that it is in fact an OBE model. If one were to pretend for a moment that NCEA was in fact a form of SBA, and in consideration of the fact that this thesis concerns secondary level ESL and the impact of NCEA upon it, it is particularly interesting to reflect upon the US College Board's adoption of Standards for Success (S4S), a system of assessment standards issued by the University of Oregon's Center for Education Policy Research. While the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) considers this a positive move forward (AASCU, 2005), Krashen (2005) claims that the majority of the standards contained within the S4S document promote pedagogy that “conflicts with research and theory published in professional

\(^{13}\) K-12 refers to the range of years in which children attend school in the USA, from Kindergarten (K) through to Year 12 (12).
journals over the last thirty years [and] promotes pedagogy that is the mirror-image of what research says should be going on in foreign language classes" (n.p.). Krashen explains that while current theories pertaining to foreign and/or second language teaching emphasise the importance of input over grammar, S4S pedagogy emphasises “grammar, output, and an explicit reliance on the first language” (n.p.). Subsequently, this encourages “a curriculum and methodology that is inappropriate for any use of the foreign language, for literature, science, business, or simply getting to know people from other countries and of other cultures” (n.p.). The upshot of the implementation of the S4S standards is that many secondary teachers will use them not simply as goals in terms of student competency, but in fact as guides to their pedagogical approach and parameters for the curricula which they will be left to develop (Krashen, 2005). This stands in sharp contrast to the fact that “one of the defining characteristics of those education systems considered the strongest is that teachers are not expected to be curriculum experts and made to design their own course outlines” (Donnelly, 2004: 75). Why then is the US College Board’s adoption of Standards for Success (S4S) particularly interesting to consider? For the reason that if SBA is, as Krashen believes, likely to be detrimental to secondary level ESL education, how much more so OBE, which Donnelly shows to be considerably less explicit and so considerably less measurable?

2.4 What’s so good about NCEA?

An immediate problem that one encounters when attempting to examine and discuss the literature supporting NCEA, is the distinct lack of it. The vast majority of literature concerning NCEA has been written and published for the purpose of partial or wholesale
condemnation. Academic advocates of NCEA are few and far between, and so much of the literature supporting NCEA has been published solely by the Ministry of Education and NZQA; i.e. the developers, implementers and guardians of NCEA. As such, this section (2.4), while being an honest attempt to present the positive aspects of NCEA, is extremely brief when compared to the section (2.5) concerning criticism of NCEA.

Throughout this section (2.4) and the following section (2.5), the reader will note the lack of references to literature pertaining to the relationship between NCEA and ESL. This is due to the fact that, unfortunately, the author was simply unable to locate any.

2.4.1 Desirable Characteristics

With the development and implementation of NCEA, the Ministry of Education and NZQA have essentially endeavoured to create an inclusive, unified, flexible and useful, nation-wide senior secondary level qualification. Inclusive in that it seeks to cater to and benefit what is becoming a “progressively more diverse senior school population” (Fancy, 1999: 1), assisting in the disestablishment of the allegedly “academic, elitist subject-based curriculum of secondary schooling which has been and continues to be one of the greatest sources of educational and social inequality in the developed world” (Hargraves, 2000: 30). Unified in that it seeks to bring the academic and vocational sides of the educational coin into a state where both are held in equal esteem by ‘the system’ and in time, by the population at large. Flexible in that there exists within each student’s experience of completing the qualification, scope and opportunity for learning in a variety of educational fields and settings. And useful in that when the time comes for
students to move into tertiary education and especially the job market, they will be able to present their prospective employers with what they want (Strachan, 2002): a certificate that not only indicates that the student has successfully completed their senior secondary education, but one that also provides “far richer diagnostic assessment information than the old School Certificate system could” (NZPPTA, 2004: n.p.). These are by all means truly excellent and noble heights to aspire to and it is the likes of these that Strachan (2002) refers to when he describes NCEA as “a good start with many good features” (258) and that causes Black (2000) to judge that “New Zealand will be one of the leading countries in the world, if not the leading country, if this approach can succeed” (1).

2.4.2 Sound Principles

Black (2000: 2-3) identifies the foundational principles of NCEA as being the following:

a) all approaches to assessment, both internal and external, can and should be applied when and where appropriate.

b) the decision as to when and where a given approach to assessment should be employed, should and will be based upon “their fitness for the purpose and by issues of teachers’ burdens, cost and public confidence”.

c) the use of external assessment as a basis for the moderation of internal assessments is educationally unsound.

d) the certification of academic subjects should and will be rendered more informative to the reader, via the disaggregation of singular marks and/or grades into “a profile of grades for component aspects”.

33
e) assessment should be flexible in that credit should be attainable via “a variety of types, styles, and extents of students’ work”.

f) all young people need to be provided with the “knowledge, skills and personal qualities which will enable them to take on new learning and changes of occupation throughout their lifetime”.

The purpose behind these principles is to empower students and to render them capable of functioning successfully in what is a dynamic learning and occupational world.

These foundational principles stem from what Black (2000) considers to be four (of five) primary areas of concern confronting NCEA:

a) resolution of the disparity of esteem that exists between the traditional academic areas of education, and the more vocational areas through the assessing of students via a “unified system where all qualifications are interchangeable and equally valued” (1).

b) ensuring that the future needs of New Zealand society will be met by enabling and promoting a secondary education that combines both the academic and vocational orientations.

c) increasing the proportion of secondary students who, when they leave school, have a qualification that allows and encourages them to engage in higher education and more extensive training.

d) raising education standards and subsequent skill levels by developing “more explicit formulations of the standards expected” (1).
2.4.3 Excellent Intentions

Ultimately, NCEA has been designed with the intention of addressing several universal education issues. NCEA seeks to incorporate academic and vocational learning, to assess across a wide and varied range of outcomes via a variety of external and (especially) internal assessment vehicles, to assess against industry applicable standards, to report student strengths, knowledge and skills in a user-friendly fashion, and to grade student achievement in a valid and accurate manner (Strachan, 2001).

Fair Assessment

One particularly significant difference between NCEA and the School Certificate/Bursary system has been NCEA’s shift in emphasis away from external assessment; a move that is not without literary support. Nuttal (1987; cited in Satterly, 1994) claims that due to the very controlled conditions under which they are performed, external assessments are quite limited as a source of generalisation in terms of their value and validity, and as Satterly (1994) points out, “fail to represent pretty well every other context in which what has been learnt can be demonstrated or applied” (54). Strachan (2002) claims that research both in New Zealand and overseas has “questioned the pre-eminent position traditionally accorded to external examinations”, that external assessment prior to the end of the final year of secondary level education is a highly questionable practice and one that “is not widely adopted in comparable jurisdictions” (257). According to this school of thought then, NCEA would and should be seen as an improvement over its predecessor.
Professional Support

The New Zealand University Vice-Chancellors’ Committee have given their support to NCEA; specifically in their approval of NCEA Level 2 Literacy as the benchmark for university entrance (Elley, 2004). NCEA also has the backing of the New Zealand Principals’ Council, with Chairperson Don McLeod stating that “the high level of trust in the professionalism and expertise of those in schools is very well placed - the overwhelming majority of students are being well prepared and well taught in secondary schools everywhere in New Zealand, and they can have absolute faith in their qualifications” (NZPPTA Media Release, 2004). Principal Brian O’Connell of Otahuhu College has no qualms with NCEA as it appears to suit both staff and students. He believes it to be an excellent system and claims:

The argument against NCEA can only be done on a philosophical basis. Basically, you're saying that the purpose of education is to compare students with students and, even more bizarrely I think, schools with schools. You're saying that's the purpose of an education system. And if you philosophically believe in that, you would find NCEA a demanding and challenging and probably, ultimately, a frightening exercise.

Dr Paul Baker, Rector of Waitaki Boys High School, claims that “NCEA is good for boys as it breaks things down into bite-sized chunks” (2005; cited in Fox, 2005). Cambridge High School principal Alison Annan was exceptionally proud of her school’s 100% pass rate under NCEA14; NCEA she believed “assessed what her students are good at, rewarded them accordingly and enabled them to leave school with a national qualification instead of winding up as ‘just a big fat fail’” (2004; cited in Welch, 2004: n.p.).

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14 Annan later resigned from her position amid allegations she had manipulated students’ exam results and bullied staff members (ONE News, 2005).
All Said & Done

As mentioned earlier, there is no perfect system. That aside, Strachan (2002) believes NCEA to be significantly superior to its predecessors and cites Tognolini et al’s claim that “when you go through the best practice indicators I think the model put up by New Zealand has all those features” (Tognolini, Andrich & Ball, 2001; cited in Strachan, 2002: 258). If this is truly the case, then NCEA and its principles must be seen to carry considerable merit; this should be kept in mind as one reads the following section of this chapter.

2.5 What’s so bad about NCEA?

If the most pressing difficulty in seeking to examine literature concerning the positive attributes of NCEA is that of simply finding enough of it, perhaps the opposite is true when it comes to examining the more negative characteristics of NCEA. So much academic (and non-academic) criticism has been directed at NCEA that it would be very easy to take an antagonistic position towards it solely on the basis of volume; because ‘everybody’s doing it’. Of course, what is more important than the quantity of the criticism is the quality of the criticism. The following sections, while being by no means exhaustive, examine some of the key failings of NCEA, as alleged by its critics.

2.5.1 Assessment Reliability

Elley (2004) claims that “there is no consistency from year to year in the NCEA standards in any academic subject” (1). If an assessment system (or indeed any sort of system) is not consistent in the results that it produces, then it is not reliable and it is this
lack of reliability on the part of NCEA that has been so widely criticised (2.5.1.1). There is no single reason for assessment results under NCEA being unreliable; there are a number of factors in the equation: the issue of how external assessment works under NCEA (2.5.1.2), the quality of the standards, the interpretation of those standards (2.5.1.3) and the question of whether or not NCEA is an appropriate model via which to teach and assess some (or many) subjects (2.5.1.4). Each of these issues will be examined in the following sections.

2.5.1.1 Cohort & Subject Variation

One of the most consistent criticisms levelled at NCEA concerns the degree of variation in pass/fail rates that has been observed between cohorts and between standards since its implementation. In a letter to the Chair of the Vice-Chancellors’ Committee, Elley (2004) states that even “a cursory glance at the statistics for NCEA results in the past two years will show that the different standards vary in difficulty in an arbitrary fashion” (1), while Elley, Hall and Marsh (2005) described NCEA as “a big lottery” (6).

Staff at MacLeans College in Auckland conducted a nationwide analysis of student results under NCEA. The study found that in 2004, external achievement standards failure rates for Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 ranged between 74.5% to 3.1%, 74.6% to 17.9%, and 86.6% to 10.6% respectively. When failure rates for the 151 external achievement standards in Levels 1 and Level 2 were compared for 2003 and 2004, the failure rate “increased by as much as 37% for approximately half of the standards, and decreased by up to 31% for the other half” (MacLeans, 2005: 2) from one year to the
next. In relation to this, it should be noted that from 2003 to 2004, only 33% of the external standards sampled at Level 1 and Level 2 varied by less than 5% in their pass rates; that is, within the acceptable range of variation according to the NZPPTA (Education Review February 17-23, 2005: 5).

The following is a selection of standard-specific examples\textsuperscript{15} taken from the MacLeans College (2005) study:

- **English 1.6:** \textit{Not Achieved} rates rose from 11.2% in 2002 to 46.1% in 2004 (a 411% increase on the 2002 figure).
- **Biology 1.6:** \textit{Not Achieved} rates fell from 40.4% in 2002 to 24.9% in 2003, then doubled to 48.5% in 2004.
- **Biology 2.8:** \textit{Not Achieved} rates almost doubled between 2003 and 2004; from 33.6% to 62.8%.
- **Graphics 2.1:** \textit{Not Achieved} rates more than doubled from 20.1% in 2003 to 47% in 2004.
- **Physics 2.4:** \textit{Not Achieved} rates rose from 13.6% in 2003 to 46.9 in 2004 (a 344% increase on the 2003 figure).
- **Science 2.6:** \textit{Not Achieved} rates almost halved between 2003 and 2004; from 62% to 33%.
- **Accounting 2.6:** \textit{Not Achieved} rates fell from 49.72% in 2003 to 29.7% in 2004.

\textsuperscript{15} All of these statistics were found amongst or calculated from data presented in the MacLeans College study (MacLeans, 2005).
In seemingly direct contradiction to what has consistently been NZQA's position – that New Zealand has always experienced some degree of cohort variation and that in terms of fairness, NCEA is much fairer for a greater number of people than was the old system (Richardson, 2005) – the MacLeans (2005) study found that “variation occurs in nearly every subject with little pattern between subject or year to account for it” (4). It also found that “a student’s chance of success in the NCEA can be determined more by the year in which they sat and the subjects they took than by their ability” (7).

In putting all of these figures and percentages into some sort of useful perspective, it must be remembered that under a system such as NCEA – that is, a system that purportedly allows students a much greater flexibility to move between subjects and levels than under more traditional systems – there will doubtless be some degree of cohort variation; perhaps more so than in the past. In an hypothetical (and very extreme) case, in a given year, 1,000 potentially failing students within a given cohort might choose to avoid taking a particular Level 1 Math standard. These 1,000 ‘poor’ students might happen to be replaced by 1,000 ‘good’ students. Given that Math cohorts regularly consist of around 40,000 students, this would result in a pass rate increase of 2.5%; perhaps from 55% one year to 57.5% the next (Elley et al., 2005). Prior to NZQA’s abolishing of scaling in School Certificate in 1992\textsuperscript{16}, cohort variation has consistently never been more than 2% (Elley, 2004) amongst any of the major subjects (usually closer to 1%), and so it would appear that NZQA’s position is not entirely correct; New Zealand has not always experienced some degree of cohort variation (certainly not of this scale) and that in terms

\textsuperscript{16} From 1992 onwards, there were some aberrations that went unadjusted, but “it is not a defence to say that variations existed before – NZQA should have acted on these as well” (Elley et al., 2005: 5).
of fairness, NCEA is *not* much fairer for a greater number of people than was the old system. The numbers (e.g. non-achievement rates for English 1.6 doubling with each successive year; from 11.2% to 23.7% to 46.9% through 2002-2004) suggest that in fact quite the opposite is true and if this is the case, it is for one of three possible reasons: a) the assessment process and methodology are flawed in that assessments are varying significantly in their difficulty from one year to the next, b) the education system is flawed having failed to adequately educate students to the required level, or c) as former Minister of Education Bill English puts it: “our kids have suddenly got dumber” (2005; cited in Clifton, 2005: 2).

### 2.5.1.2 External Assessment and NCEA

Prior to NCEA, external assessment for traditional senior secondary subjects consisted of a three hour exam for each subject. If a 7th Form student was studying four 7th Form subjects such as English, Statistics, Calculus and Chemistry, that student would have four three hour exams at the end of the year. Elley (2005) and Hall (2000) claim that under these conditions, a student who received a score of 70% for his or her English exam could be confident that their real ability lay somewhere within the range of 60% - 80%. Of course, a more narrow range (e.g. 65% - 75%) would have been more desirable, but such was simply not the case.

Under NCEA however, a three hour exam might cover the external assessment for four separate standards, so allowing approximately 45 minutes for each standard. Elley (2005) and Hall (2000) claim that the less time that is taken to assess a student’s ability in a
given area (indeed, to assess anything of any nature), the less confidence can be placed in the reliability of the assessment and that under NCEA conditions, a student who receives a score of 70% for his or her English exam can only really be confident that their real ability lies somewhere within the range of 50% - 90%. If this understanding is then “translated to the NCEA four point scale (Not achieved, Achieved, Merit and Excellence), it can be seen that the only safe conclusions are that students who ‘fail’ are probably not ‘excellent’, and vice versa” (Elley et al., 2005: 8).

It is vital that education professionals, the general public and prospective employers be able to have confidence in the reliability of NCEA (Fancy, 1999a); but it would appear that they cannot. Of course, it may be that many teachers, prospective employers and the wider public are not aware of the unreliable nature of external assessments under NCEA. But this certainly does not rectify the situation; ignorance of serious fundamental flaws within a system (i.e. its unreliability) on the part of those seeking to use the system, does not excuse those flaws.

2.5.1.3 Quality & Interpretation of Standards

Under an assessment framework such as NCEA, the need for assessment standards to be of a high quality is paramount. One of the key factors in determining whether or not a given standard can be considered to be of an acceptable quality (along with other factors such as relevance of content and age/level-appropriateness) is the degree to which that standard can be said to have been made ‘explicit’. A fundamental obstacle in achieving this explicitness is that regardless of how it is outlined, a standard “lies not only in the
words that are specified, but in the mind of the marker, the representation of the standard in each student's work, and the interaction of the student's representation and the marker's interpretation" (Hall, 2000: 7). While the Ministry of Education and NZQA stand by the explicitness of the achievement and unit standards developed for NCEA, others do not (Donnelly, 2000; Irwin, 1999; Locke, 1999a). NCEA standards and curricula have been described as vacuous, lacking in content, "generally poor...... ranging in quality from 'could do better' to downright appalling" (Irwin, 1999: 23), "nebulous, hard to measure and [focusing] on affective matters ... values, beliefs, and emotions rather than academic achievement" (Manno, 1994; cited in Donnelly, 2000: 17) and "so compromising of sound......classroom practice that I would prefer to see them simply disposed of" (Locke, 1999a: 7). Are such disparaging judgements justified?

For example, in order to complete ESOL unit standard 128217 (version 7), students are required to 'complete practical transactions using a small number of learnt language patterns, using ESOL'. Under the heading special notes are stated the following assessment guidelines:

5. Candidate's speech may be hesitant with long pauses, and may comprise one word and short phrase utterances. It may include grammatical errors but these must not interfere with meaning.
6. Articulation, intonation, stress and rhythm may often be unconventional but meaning must be clear to the listener.
7. To make themselves understood, candidate may rely on gesture and listener assistance.

The content of these guidelines raises a number of questions. How long is a long pause?

At what point does a long pause become an unacceptably long pause? In regard to

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17 This and other Level 1 ESOL unit standards can be viewed at: http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment/search.do?query=English+For+Speakers+Of+Other+Languages&view=all&level=01
meaning being *clear to the listener*, is a student’s success not dependent upon the personal listening and general communicative skills of the assessor? An utterance which one person is unable to understand might well be understood by others, simply due to experience, knowledge, intellect and/or comprehension skills. In his own personal experience, the author has often been in situations where, while he could understand the utterances of an ESL student, other native speakers who were privy to the utterance could not. And if to *make themselves understood* [a] *candidate may rely on gesture and listener assistance*, to what degree may they do so? How much *gesture and assistance* from the listener is too much gesture and assistance? Will assessing teachers surely not draw their demarcation lines in different and quite arbitrary places? One teacher may allow 30 seconds for a *long pause*, while another allows 60 seconds. The same teacher may understand where another teacher would not have. Some teachers will allow more gestures than others and some will assist their students more than others. And of course there will be differences from one student to the next.

Perhaps the definitive difficulty in the creation of assessment standards is that, whether they are contained in the assessment outline itself or solely in the mind of the marker, the words used to judge and describe performance are qualitative words. When a value judgement is made regarding a student’s academic performance, the sorts of words that tend to be used are words such as ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘satisfactory’ and the like. And rightly so, for a value judgement is being made and so words that carry value are the only words suitable for use in the communication of that judgement. A serious problem arises, however, when an achievement or unit standard is drafted using these qualitative terms,
as it is essentially a contradiction ‘in terms’ (no pun intended). Words that communicate degrees of quality are governed much of the time by relativity and as such, words like ‘thorough’, ‘suitable’, ‘satisfactory’ and ‘acceptable’ are wide open to the interpretation of individuals (Irwin, 1999). To refer to them as standards is misleading at best and at worst is thoroughly irresponsible in light of the potential impact upon students’ futures; Donnelly (2000) claims that there are numerous examples in which achievement standards developed for 16 year old students, could just as readily have been developed for 11-year-olds – which is of course quite “ludicrous” (21).

Because a standard does not exist in stasis, but “is an act or exercise of judgement......it therefore can (and usually does) vary every time a judgement is made” (Hall, 2004: 1). It seems most unlikely then that even the most explicit and well-worded achievement or unit standard could make the journey from conception in the mind of the developer, to being drawn up in a written document, to being read, interpreted and executed by hundreds if not thousands of teachers, without suffering ill along the way. Even if NCEA standards are as precise as NZQA claim they are, it would seem that a standard would need to play only a very short game of Chinese Whispers before the standard of conception and the standard of execution were not the same thing. But if the wording of standards is vague and subjective from the beginning, then by the time the stages of interpretation and implementation are reached, it is really anyone’s guess as to how a given standard will finally manifest itself. As to the implications of such instability, Principal of Wellington College Roger Moses rightly points out that “if an Excellence in Eketahuna is not the same as an Excellence in Epsom, then it means nothing at all”
(Welch, 2004a: n.p.), while Hall (2000) observes that “variations in the interpretation of a standard and inconsistency in student behaviour, will place a ceiling on reliability which no assessment system will overcome” (9).

2.5.1.4 Assessment Model Suitability

If senior secondary education in New Zealand were a ditch that needed digging, then NCEA might be thought of as the industrial hardware that would be employed to carry out the task. Common sense dictates that when selecting the tools with which to do a task, one should first carefully consider the nature and purpose of said task. NCEA has been subject to significant comment and criticism concerning the issue of whether or not it is at all a suitable assessment model for senior secondary level students to have to learn and perform under.

Morris (2005) believes that NCEA is “blatantly unfair to students”, describing it as “a fundamentally flawed assessment system that is neither valid, reliable nor manageable” (2). Richardson (2005) quotes Geoff Austin as stating that “breaking the material up into a plethora of little boxes and testing each one in a pass/fail manner makes sense for drivers' permits, but not to a discipline like physics that involves intellectual thinking about many interlinking ideas” (year unknown; cited in Richardson, 2005: 2), echoing Holt’s (1994) claim that “OBE advocates misunderstand education.........education is not a product defined by specific output measurers; it’s a process, the development of the mind” (85). And perhaps this is the crux of the matter.
The primary cause of variation in senior secondary level pass rates is that, despite what NZQA continues to claim, neither the essence or the scope of an entire year’s worth of holistic and integrated study of a subject can be properly contained in seven or eight unit or achievement standards. Unlike some vocational or sporting skills (e.g. carpentry or athletics) which could hypothetically be broken down into itemised achievement outcomes (e.g. ‘Can safely operate a drop-saw’ or ‘Can long-jump 3 metres’), “subjects which have a large complex knowledge base cannot be summed up this way” (Elley et al., 2005: 6). The vagueness of so many of NCEA’s standards (e.g. ‘Can produce formal writing’, ‘Can describe a geographic issue’) means that “almost anything a child does can be manipulated to suit one or other outcome” (Berlach, 2004: 3). Given this, it is entirely possible that NZQA and those others involved in the development of standards were well aware of (at least some of) the difficulties inherent in the reduction of academic subjects into itemised standards and in an attempt to avoid or counter this itemisation (see Chapter 2.5.2 for further discussion), deliberately made the standards to be as vague as they are.

Irwin (2005) perhaps gets to the heart of the issue when he says that:

Generally, the larger the ‘size’ of the standard against which assessment is to be made the less the atomisation (decomposing the curriculum into small, disaggregated ‘bits’ with all its attendant problems). BUT, the larger the standard the less precise it is and the less suitable a standards-based assessment methodology becomes – there’s the rub!

(1)

It would seem then that the ideology and principles that govern NCEA are now, due to the manner of their implementation (i.e. the vagueness of the standards), almost at odds with themselves. While assessment is arguably something of an inexact science, the “exercise of trained professional judgement is not” (Locke, 1999a: 12). It seems that in
seeking to replace teachers’ trained professional judgement with assessment against ‘standards’, the vague nature of the standards may create (or may have already created) a vacuum-like situation where neither practice is really possible to any valid and/or reliable degree.

2.5.2 Disintegration of Knowledge

In Chapter 1.3, achievement and unit standards were described as the individual bricks that are stacked on top of each other, forming the wall that is a ‘subject’ (e.g. English) and ultimately leading to the construction of the far larger and greater wall that is senior secondary/pre-tertiary education and knowledge as a whole. A sound and sturdy brick wall is not of course simply loose bricks stacked one on top of the other; the bricks that make up brick walls have traditionally been adhered to one another through the application of mortar. In education, the ‘mortar’ that holds the bricks together is “the particular knowledge and skills which connect standards and provide the integration and transfer of knowledge from one part of the course to another” (Hall, 2000: 12). Of course, the building of a good wall is not simply an equation of ‘bricks + mortar = wall’; structural excellence and integrity are also required, for as Meichenbaum and Beimiller (1992) point out, the “difference between the ‘novice’ and the ‘expert’ is not merely the amount of knowledge they relatively possess, but in how that knowledge is structured” (cited in Breen et al., 2001: 498). It is the alleged lack of mortar and proper structuring of knowledge being provided to senior secondary level students that has been the source of much criticism of NCEA.
In recent times, New Zealand governments have desired to cultivate an education system that fosters and nurtures life-long learning and enables New Zealanders to contribute to the growth and change of the pool of knowledge; a ‘Knowledge Economy’. Such a goal requires the possession and application of particular intellectual and practical skills on the part of New Zealanders (indeed, people of any nationality). Individuals must possess a certain degree of understanding and intellectual fortitude if they are to integrate knowledge from across a variety of areas of learning. They require mental skills that will enable them to appropriately and effectively move concepts between disciplines and circumstances and so ultimately to create and develop new ideas and methodologies (Elley et al., 2005; Hall, 2004). According to many writers however, senior secondary education under NCEA has exactly the opposite effect (Donnelly, 2000; Elley et al., 2005; Hall, 2000; 2004; Irwin, 2000; 2005; Lee, 2004; Morris, 2001).

Critics of NCEA claim that it treats the ‘bits and pieces’ that together make up subjects and knowledge in general, as if they were exactly that: just bits and pieces. NCEA does not treat knowledge with the reverence that it deserves. The breaking down of subjects into standards has been likened to dismantling a car engine, identifying and perhaps labelling with pretty name tags all the different components, only to then find one’s self bereft of the knowledge which would allow one to re-assemble the engine (Lee, 2004). Rather than promote the exploration and understanding of a unified and inter-related field of knowledge, NCEA takes and encourages students to take a post-modern/relativist position whereby knowledge is essentially whatever they choose to make it; i.e. whatever achievement or unit standards they choose to study. This is further compounded by the
fact that with “teaching and learning translated into performance indicators and measurable outcomes, it becomes easy to assume that what is measured is important while what cannot be measured appears to be of less value” (Gale & Densmore, 2003: 27). In this, NCEA fails to acknowledge the fact that knowledge is by its very nature a gestalt and as such, its components exist in an inextricable symbiotic relationship with one another.

Throughout the history of mankind, knowledge has tended to be divided into broad disciplines; e.g. science, mathematics and the arts. These disciplines have in turn been divided into more specific disciplines (e.g. science into biology, chemistry and physics) and again within these disciplines there are even more specific divisions and disciplines (e.g. biology into micro-biology, genetics, etc). The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) states that:

> Each discipline represents a body of knowledge and a ‘disciplined’ way of thinking that evolved over centuries. To be complete, a set of standards must embody the knowledge and habits of mind essential to each of the core subjects, and in our opinion, this cannot be accomplished by trying to fit disciplinary knowledge into broad over-arching categories such as ‘critical thinking’ and ‘problem solving’. If standards setters ignore or significantly blur disciplinary boundaries, there is a real danger that the integrity of the disciplines – the essential knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that make each subject unique – will get lost. (AFT, 1999; cited in Donnelly, 2000: 20)

NCEA does not follow or foster the disciplinary approach. Rather it atomizes the disciplines (Donnelly, 2000; Locke, 2004), dismantling subjects into five to eight ‘bits and pieces’ which teachers must teach, assess and report upon independently of one another, so subverting course coherence and the integration of students’ understanding of

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18 The term gestalt refers to an integrated phenomena possessing properties that are greater than the simple sum of its parts.
the different elements that serve (rightly or wrongly) to make up their course (Irwin, 2000; 2005; Hall, 2004).

NCEA Level 1 ESOL, for example, is made up of the following unit standards:

- Unit Standards:
  - 1281: Begin to communicate orally, using ESOL.
  - 1282: Complete practical transactions using a small number of learnt language patterns, using ESOL.
  - 1289: Participate in a conversation using a small number of learnt language patterns, using ESOL.
  - 2967: Begin to read, using ESOL.
  - 2968: Read with assistance simple accounts of life experiences, using ESOL.
  - 2974: Read with assistance simple texts to obtain practical information, using ESOL.
  - 2980: Read with assistance simple texts giving instructions, using ESOL.
  - 2985: Read with assistance simple texts to gain knowledge, using ESOL.
  - 3473: Begin to write with assistance, using ESOL.
  - 3481: Complete simple predictable forms, using ESOL.
  - 15006: Understand simple spoken information and instructions, using ESOL.
  - 17139: Write with assistance simple descriptions on familiar topics, using ESOL.
  - 17358: Talk about self and family using a small number of learnt language patterns, using ESOL.
  - 17366: Write with assistance simple recounts of personal experiences, using ESOL.

As Elley (2005) points out, a serious educational course of any nature and at any level of study cannot consist simply of a personalised “collection of achievement or unit standards: it must be a coherent whole which provides genuine integration of the parts” (9). Prior to NCEA, senior secondary students would have (ideally at least) studied an integrated ESL course. Within the course of their learning they would have no doubt covered the various aspects of ESL that are encapsulated in the previously presented unit standards.

19 These Level 1 ESOL unit standards can be viewed at: http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/assessment/search.do?query=English+for+Speakers+of+Other+Languages&view=all&level=01
ESOL unit standards. The key difference however, is that a) students would have studied and learned these skills within the context of one another and b) they would have studied in the context of a holistic course framework; not a personalised collection of standards.

Life-long learning (and indeed virtually all learning that is of any long term value) is born out of and in turn gives birth to what is often termed as ‘higher order thinking’. For students to develop and practice higher order thinking, the education system under which they study and are assessed must actively encourage the integration of knowledge and where possible, the fluid shift of ideas and principles from one section of a course to another, one course to another and indeed from one discipline to another (Hall, 2004; 2005). While “it is these activities that are most likely to foster the skills and attitudes for knowledge creation and change that the government is seeking from its education system” (Hall, 2005: 9), NCEA and the conditions that it cultivates, do not encourage them. NCEA’s cafeteria approach to course selection (Irwin, 2000; Donnelly, 2000) serves only to strengthen the partitioning of course content. This in turn reduces the potential for knowledge integration and so results “in the loss of any concept of a unified structure for the various disciplines and of the importance of an overall understanding of the ways in which aspects of a subject cohere” (Donnelly, 2000: 9).

Thus the traditional concept of a coherent course of study may eventually be lost (Locke, 2001b). Indeed the fact that individual students can select which ‘bits’ they want and when they want them, may well result in a situation where the educational incoherence stemming from NCEA’s deconstructivist ideology is further augmented and amplified
depending on which specific collection of bits a given student selects (Donnelly, 2000). The result of this, if taken through to its logical conclusion, will be (amongst other things) a “totally fragmented educational experience for students” (Hall, 2005: 16), one that will cause them to “emerge from secondary schooling with academic anorexia and worthless qualifications” (Morris, 2001: 2); a result perhaps somewhat at odds with NZPPTA’s (2004) claim that “the overwhelming majority of students are being well prepared and well taught in secondary schools everywhere in New Zealand, and they can have absolute faith in their qualifications” (n.p.).

2.5.3 System Manageability

The idea of a unified and systematic national qualifications framework has a great deal of appeal to educational policy makers and does, in theory at least, appear to be plausible. The turning of this theory into a manageable reality however, is another achievement entirely; one which has thus far remained somewhat elusive (Irwin, 1999). Arguments as to its educational soundness aside, NCEA and other OBE frameworks place upon schools very large administrative loads; loads stemming directly from OBE’s “obsess[ion] with accountability, or more accurately, hyper-accountability, with everything requiring proof and an adiposity of evidence” (Berlach, 2004: 3). Ironically, NCEA fails to meet the apparent criteria of its own ideology as a) “conclusive research evidence supporting the notion that mountain-sized portfolios assess learning any more effectively than do time-efficient, teacher-made, pen-and-paper tests, is difficult to find” (Berlach, 2004: 9) and b) NCEA has no successful international precedent, research or local trialing to provide evidence as to its suitability (Bentley, 2005; Donnelly, 2000; Irwin, 1999). The result is
that time and resources that would/should have been otherwise put into teaching, must instead be put into doing paper work (Hall, 2005; Irwin, 2000). In this sense at least, NCEA is an “enormously costly system, too costly to operate properly” (Locke, 2004); one whose inadequacies have only been exacerbated by holes in the management of it and by holes in the system itself (MacLeans, 2005).

Elley et al (2005) summed up considerations of the manageability of NCEA as follows:

The system is unmanageable: there are too many standards; too much assessment needed to support the standards; too many difficulties with setting examinations and tasks to meet vague, pre-defined standards; too much time spent on cumbersome moderation procedures which do not work properly; too many difficulties in communicating clearly with teachers, students and other stakeholders; and too many manageability issues that require attention to detail beyond the capacity of NZQA to handle.

It is not only academic experts of secondary education who consider NCEA to be less than acceptable in regards its manageability; many practitioners are unhappy with the situation. In 2002, secondary teacher David Newton of Shirley Boys High School in Christchurch conducted an independent survey of secondary school teachers concerning their thoughts about NCEA. In the survey, 71% of teachers (1076 out of 1512) indicated that they were seriously considering leaving the teaching profession due to the workload that was resulting from setting assessments and marking them under NCEA. In addition, 77% of teachers (1183 out of 1539) stated that they did not believe that they had been provided with sufficient physical resources and training to assist them in the teaching and assessing under NCEA (Newton, 2002). Sadly, it would appear that in the search for a system that was “understandable, manageable and within the capability of the average school or average teacher” (Fancy, 1999: 3), NZQA and the Ministry opted for what they
thought would be “a neat, tidy bureaucratic solution” (Irwin, 2000: 5) for them, but got what has turned out to be “a manageability nightmare for schools” (Hall, 2005: 16).

2.5.4 Ideologically Driven

Another criticism of NCEA has been the allegedly ‘ideological’ manner in which it has been implemented and operated. Elley et al (2005) have accused NZQA and the Ministry of Education of ignoring “international standards, experience and literature, as well as those people with relevant experience in New Zealand” and of failing to “monitor properly the results of the first years of NCEA and make appropriate adjustments to both NCEA and the design of the Scholarship system” (1). They claim that this is strongly indicative of ‘the powers that be’ having taken an ideological position and choosing the defence of that position over the development and critical execution of sound assessment practices; assessment practices that might conflict with their ideological position. This sentiment has been echoed by other writers, who point out that “our educational bureaucracy didn’t consult when developing the basic design, didn’t do any written research, didn’t seek expert advice and is now impervious to the increasing concern of teachers and to analyses by independent local and overseas experts” (Irwin, 2001a: 1). It would appear that the Ministry of Education simply does not want to know (Irwin, 2005; Locke, 1999b; Morris, 2005).

While the question of whether it is the cause or result is up for debate, NCEA and the determination with which NZQA and the Ministry hold on to and defend it, are all indicative of what Irwin (1999) refers to as *hubris*:
...the mentality that places us over nature and seeks to reduce all knowledge, understandings and skills to numbers, to levels, to credit values and so on, and which appears to deny the mystery, the uncertainty and the qualitative aspects of our human existence and of our search for the truth about ourselves and the rest of the physical world.

(9)

NCEA appears symptomatic of a mentality that focuses its energies on the packaging and achievement of idealised educational outcomes, while at the same time failing to identify and foster the practices and processes that are the foundation of effective teaching and learning (Lee, 2004). In attempting to create a unified, flexible and useful secondary level assessment framework, the pre-eminent importance of subject coherence and course coherence has been usurped by what is essentially administrative coherence (Donnelly, 2000; Irwin, 2000). Perhaps the idealism that gives NZQA and the Ministry of Education the immovable strength with which they so resolutely defend NCEA, is the same idealism that drove their initial endeavours so hard that they failed to heed the words of Karl Stead (1992):

You cannot create equality by legislation; you can only create opportunity and let time and individuals do their work. Equality of opportunity is the moral principle. Inequality of talent, energy, commitment, intelligence, strength of purpose and will is the fact of life.
(cited in Morris, 2005: 2)

But then perhaps it is not belief in the ‘ideals’ of NCEA that has been behind its implementation and defence. Perhaps it is, as Morris (2001) suggests, simply the fact that such vast amounts of time, money and energy were invested in the development of NCEA by so many people, that once a critical period had passed, it was inevitable; NCEA would have to be implemented in order to justify the huge investment in it, regardless of its likely suitability and regardless of what ill-effects it might have upon the education and lives of New Zealand children. Add to this the fact that both major political
parties, National and Labour, were instrumental in the development of NCEA and that it received the approval of the NZPPTA; in hindsight it is really rather predictable that NCEA was implemented and is still defended by the groups that conceived and gave birth to it (Irwin, 2005).

This conclusion is certainly supported by statements such as that made by former National Party Minister of Education, Wyatt Creech (1998), that “the new system is very similar to that in tertiary education, where students can achieve on a range of fronts at different levels, and be recognised for that achievement” (2). The weakness in Creech’s statement lies in his assumption that a) the tertiary system is a good system and especially b) that the similarities between it and NCEA are proof of NCEA’s quality. If the similarity being drawn between NCEA and tertiary education was that under both systems students can choose to study a variety of different standards (or papers in the case of university), then it could be conceded that NCEA is very similar to tertiary education. But if NCEA is similar to tertiary education for this reason (and so presumably then, an improvement in secondary education), then so too was NCEA’s predecessor; a student was free to choose to study Biology, Drama and Metal Technology if they so desired and if their school’s timetable structure allowed them to do so. So perhaps then the emphasis of Creech’s statement lies more with the fact that under NCEA and in tertiary education, students will be recognised for their achievement. Tertiary students are certainly recognised for their efforts/achievement in their respective papers. So again in this respect, NCEA and tertiary education are similar to one another. However, New

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20 It is not the author’s intention to at all suggest or imply that tertiary education in New Zealand is second-rate. Rather it is to highlight an unqualified assumption on the part of Creech.
Zealand tertiary education providers award students with both marks and grades. Completion of a tertiary paper is recognised as such, perhaps with a grade of C+ (60-64%) or B- (65-69%), while the completion of a paper to a very high standard might warrant the awarding of an A- (80-84%). Failure to complete a paper is recognised as exactly that: failure. But even in the failing of a paper, unlike under NCEA, university students are still made privy to their marks and grades; perhaps a D or an E and its corresponding mark. Indeed, prior to the introduction of NCEA, secondary level education followed the same system. While ‘the new system’ and the tertiary education sector do appear to share some common characteristics, to describe them as being very similar is surely overstating the significance of the matter.

More evidence to back the conclusion that NCEA has been and is being driven by ideology, rather than sound research, can be found in claims made by former Minister of Education, Trevor Mallard, concerning the Cambridge International Exam (CIE). The CIE (much like the International Baccalaureate (IB), another increasingly popular alternative to NCEA) is an assessment system developed at the University of Cambridge in England, that has been imported and implemented in over thirty (and that number is rising) New Zealand secondary schools as an alternative to NCEA (Richardson, 2005). Although marketed to the world as “challenging, robust, internationally recognised and perfect for high-achieving students striving for excellence” (Richardson, 2005), Minister Mallard described the CIE as a “Third World examination model” (28). This is a substantial claim given that Cambridge is one of the oldest and most respected...

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21 These are the grade/mark correlations such as they are in use at the University of Otago.
22 There may have been some variation between universities and high schools in terms of their mark-to-grade relationships.
universities in Europe (and indeed, the world) and is currently ranked third in the world (Top 500 World Universities, 2004). The transparency of this sort of political-speak is so obvious as to be self-evident and certainly evidence enough that:

At a time when education authorities around the world are seeking to strengthen their systems by identifying and drawing on international ‘best practice’………those responsible for the NCEA have concluded that there is little or nothing to be gained either from New Zealand’s own recent and continuing experience of Unit Standards or from other educational jurisdictions. (Donnelly, 2000: 25).

While NCEA may well be on one hand “one of the silliest educational policies yet dreamed up” (Irwin, 2001a: 1), the zealous nature of its implementation and defence may also be indicative of an ideology that, rather than viewing education as free and open, where children are taught how to think and where the summative results of the matter are unpredictable, instead view the purpose of education as a closed system where children are taught what to think and where the results are orchestrated (Irwin, 1999). If this is indeed the case, then education is in fact being placed “at the mercy of the social engineers; we have moved from education to indoctrination” (Irwin, 1999: 9).

Through its examination/comparison of SBA and OBE (2.1), Internal and External Assessment (2.2) and by considering NCEA in light of the recent education experiences of the Australian state of Victoria and the USA (2.3), this chapter has hopefully constructed for the reader a theoretical framework from within which to consider and interpret the research documented in this thesis, with the discussion of NCEA’s pros and cons providing some tangible content to be housed within the framework; flesh to its
bones as it were. Chapter 3 will discuss the mental and physical workings of the collection and analysis of data, upon which this thesis is built.
Chapter 3
Methodology

This chapter concerns the theoretical and practical logistics surrounding this study. The first section will discuss the various issues that were of central concern during the design and development of the research methodology of this study (3.1). The following section will describe the actual process of data gathering as it occurred, along with the ideas and processes involved in the analysis of the gathered data (3.2).

3.1 Pre-Investigative Considerations

This section of the chapter is divided into five subsections. Chapter 3.1.1 explains the origins of this investigation; the research, questions and findings which led to it. Chapter 3.1.2 discusses the questions and considerations which helped determine its research field parameters. Chapter 3.1.3 explains the choice of data gathering method; an oral interview. Chapter 3.1.4 discusses the ideas and issues behind the development of the interview guidelines; i.e. the questions. Finally, Chapter 3.1.5 lays out the thinking behind the approach taken in the analysis of the data once it had been gathered.

3.1.1 Origin of the Study

The focus and impetus for this study came initially as the result of some unexpected findings in an earlier study of the author's into ESL teacher and student perspectives regarding secondary level ESL education and the comparability thereof (Callander, 2004). The aim of the earlier study was to examine and compare the respective opinions of ESL staff and students in relation to a variety of ESL education issues (e.g. use of
textbooks, teacher's role, student enjoyment and parental participation). The study was conducted at four secondary schools situated in the city of Dunedin, New Zealand. A written questionnaire was developed and given to secondary level ESL teachers and their students, comprising primarily of YES/NO questions, but also containing some multiple choice questions, as well as several more open-ended questions. While both the YES/NO and multiple choice questions were useful in their own right, it was the open-ended questions that saw the most descriptive, most interesting and the most varied responses (see Chapter 3.1.3). Amongst many other questions, the teachers were asked the following:

- “Are you teaching/learning via the methods that you think are the most effective and/or appropriate?” (Callander, 2004: 31)
- “If not, why not?” (Callander, 2004: 32)

In their responses to the second question, four out of the seven teachers (only five of the seven teachers actually answered the question) made “direct mention of NCEA requirements and claim[ed] (or implied) that some of the time spent on assisting students in achieving these requirements would be better spent on ensuring that students acquire basic English literary skills” (Callander, 2004: 32). What was so unexpected about this set of responses and what provided the focus and impetus for this study, was the fact that neither in the questionnaire itself nor in any prior conversations with the participating teachers was NCEA ever mentioned or otherwise made reference to by the author.
3.1.2 Defining the Field

As NCEA has been in operation for only four years, the field of research that concerns the relationship and interaction between NCEA and ESL is a relatively new one. Because “the most important questions researchers must confront at the beginning of their research……. [are] to what extent should I attempt to pre-specify the phenomena under investigation and to what extent should I isolate and control the phenomena under investigation?” (Nunan, 1992: 8), the intention with this study was from its early stages to take as broad a snapshot of the field as possible and ask questions that were very exploratory in their nature, rather than hone in on selected specifics. To have selected for investigation a narrowly defined issue from within the field of NCEA and ESL would have been premature, in that the current absence of literature on the subject would have meant that any decision to examine a specific aspect of the NCEA and ESL relationship would ultimately have been a rather arbitrary one; it would lack any sort of literary precedent. This lack of literary precedent for a narrowly defined focus of research was considered pertinent because of the newness of the field in which the research would be conducted. In light of the fact that “anyone can find an unanswered, empirically answerable question for which the answer isn’t worth knowing; as Thoreau said, it is not worthwhile to go around the world to count the cats in Zanzibar” (Maxwell, 2005: 15), the author was wary of determining and diving into a prematurely defined aspect of the field and coming out with data and conclusions that would ultimately be of little real interest or practical use to anyone.
3.1.3 The Research Vehicle

Rather than employing a written questionnaire or taking notes during an oral interview, the decision was made to employ an oral interviewing technique, to record the interviews, and then later transcribe them, taking into account the fact that “interviews, questionnaires and documents are all vulnerable to self-report bias” (Fielding & Fielding, 1986; cited in Maxwell, 2005: 112). This decision was made for several reasons.

The first is that the context of an oral interview affords the interviewee infinitely more scope to explore tangents, to think aloud and ultimately to express themselves than does a written questionnaire (see Chapter 3.1.1). Secondly, the fact that the entire interview is recorded means that any number of thoughts and comments that might not have otherwise have been expressed in a written context are voiced by the interviewee, captured by on the recording and so are made available to the interviewer. Thirdly, “audiotapes add the nuances of a person’s voice to the words that the print provides” (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner & McCormack-Steinmetz, 1991: 82). Being able to listen back to the interview repeatedly and at one’s leisure, provides one with a much more accurate reproduction of what originally took place and does not rely upon the interviewer to be an adept multi-tasker, capable of listening closely, discerning wisely and taking excellent notes all at the same time. Last, but perhaps most fundamental of all, is the fact that “open-ended questioning can unearth valuable information that tight questions do not allow” (Ely et al., 1991: 66); when a person is asked an open-ended question, the exact nature and/or content of their response is quite unpredictable. If ten individuals are asked the same open-ended question, not only is the actual content of their
answers likely to differ, but also the social, educational and cultural positions from which they understand and answer the question, as well as the manner in which they answer it. Of course, a person’s social, educational and cultural background is going to influence the answer that they give to any question, open or closed. The advantage in open-ended questions is that these factors tend to be made more visible.

3.1.4 Conceptual Framework

The Ideal: No Presuppositions

"Even carefully collected results can be misleading if the underlying context of assumptions is wrong" (Heinrich, 1984; cited in Maxwell, 2005: 33) and so for this reason, “the conceptual framework of your study – the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that supports and informs your research – is a key part of your design" (Robson, 2002, cited in Maxwell, 2005: 33). The author’s desire and intention was to approach the practical research aspect of this study, specifically the development of the questions and the asking of them, without a conceptual framework; at least insofar as it concerned the actual content of the data to be collected. In other words: no assumptions, no expectations, no beliefs, and no theories.

The Reality: Presuppositions are Inescapable

This is in fact of course quite impossible, seeing as “the scientific mind is no more an empty bucket into which observations pour than are the minds of non-scientists” (Shipman, 1988: 12). In addition to this, it is an inescapable reality of life that the things with which we feed our minds (in the case of research, the literature that we read)
influence the way in which we think; regardless of whether we like it or admit it. Given
the somewhat absoluteness of these facts, the next best intention available was that of
determining to word questions in such a way that, while being very open-ended, they
might also challenge teachers to consider NCEA and ESL from new angles, without
reflecting overtly or covertly the author’s personal opinions concerning the matter(s) in
question. While “your research questions [which are influenced by one’s expeditions into
literature] formulate what you want to understand, your interview questions are what you
ask people in order to gain that understanding” (Maxwell, 2005: 92), it would seem
sensible to seek to maximise one’s understanding by minimising the extent to which
one’s own opinions and proclivities are able to limit interviewee response potential (see
Appendix D: Interview Questions). For these reasons then, the questions which
constituted the interview were crafted so as to be as open and as non-leading as possible.

Painting a Picture

If the interview were to be likened to painting, rather than place an apple upon a table and
instruct the participants to paint a picture of the apple, the author tried to ask questions
which would simply provide the participants with a canvas upon which to paint whatever
the apple caused them to think of or feel. This is exemplified by the following two
questions (see Appendix D: Interview Questions - NCEA & ESL):

4. What are your thoughts and feelings about NCEA in general?
5. Are there any aspects of NCEA that you think are particularly good or particularly
   bad?

Question 4 assumes nothing of the participant other than that they do in fact have some
thoughts and feelings in regards to NCEA. Question 5 provides the participant with the
opportunity to refine their previous response, but does not assume that they will want or be able to do so.

3.1.5 Grounded in Data

Having determined to gather data with a mindset of ‘no assumptions, no expectations, no beliefs and no theories’ (as much as would be humanly possible), it would have been methodologically inconsistent to not continue through with that same mindset when it came to analysing the data. As the process of data analysis was going to involve reading the interview transcripts and making sense of them, methodological integrity demanded that whatever categories or sets of categories were used in order to filter and encode the data, these should be categories that had arisen from and made sense of this specific collection of data (Ely et al., 1991). This approach to theory development falls under the umbrella heading of what is known as grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1998) state that through the employment of grounded theory:

...data collection, analysis, and eventual theory stand in close relationship to one another. A researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind (unless his or her purpose is to elaborate and extend existing theory). Rather, the researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data. Theory derived from data is more likely to resemble the “reality” than is theory derived from putting together a series of concepts based on experience or solely through speculation (how things ought to work). Grounded theories, because they are drawn from data, are likely to offer insight, enhance understanding, and provide a meaningful guide to action.

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A data-driven approach was inherently suited to this study in that the author did not begin with a preconceived theory in mind, but rather began simply with an area of study, as to have investigated a theory or set of theories “derived from putting together a series of
concepts based on experience or solely through speculation” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 12) would have been quite inappropriate, as a) the author had no experience upon which to base anything and b) the author lacked any sort of literary precedent upon which to speculate (Chapter 3.1.2). This study does not investigate a theory, nor does it seek to develop one; it will however, hopefully provide both theoretical insight into the field and render some relevant and applicable commendations.

3.2 Research Design & Execution

This section of the chapter is divided into five subsections. Chapter 3.2.1 discusses the initial pilot study which was conducted prior to the main data gathering effort. Chapter 3.2.2 describes the participants and the context(s) in which the interviews took place. Chapter 3.2.3 explains the makeup and structure of the interviews themselves. Chapter 3.2.4 describes the manner in which the raw interview data was managed and transcribed, while Chapter 3.2.5 details the process of analysing the transcribed data.

3.2.1 Pilot Study

Prior to the development of the interview questions that were used in the data gathering stage of this study, two pilot interviews containing questions inspired by the author’s reading of the literature regarding NCEA were conducted at two secondary schools. These were oral interviews that were recorded and the data resulting from them used to assist in the development of the questions for the final interview. The pilot study contained nine questions (see Appendix E: Pilot Study Questions), five of which were
included, with some cosmetic alterations, in the final interview. For example, the following question appeared in the pilot study:

2. Would you say that teaching ESL under NCEA differs from the manner in which you taught prior to the introduction of NCEA and if so, how?

In the final interview however, it appeared as follows:

8. Has the way in which you teach ESL changed in any practical and/or fundamental sense since the introduction of NCEA?

This example is typical of the questions that survived the pilot study; the author was happy with the essential content of the question, but felt that the wording of the question may have caused it to sound somewhat suggestive and/or assuming in its original form.

3.2.2 Context & Participants

The author’s initial hope was to interview at least one ESL teacher (most of the schools have in fact only one ESL teacher) from each of the twelve secondary schools in the South Island city of Dunedin. This proved however to be impossible as several schools, for a variety of reasons, were unable or unwilling to be involved in the study. When the interviews were being arranged, participants were given free reign over the time and location of the interview in order to ensure that participants would feel comfortable with the surroundings in which their interview was taking place. As it turned out, the majority of participants (see Appendix F: Participant Bio Data) chose to be interviewed in their office or in some other indoor facility located in the grounds of their school. All told, nine teachers from eight secondary schools chose to participate in the study, with each of them signing consent forms (see Appendix G: Ethical Approval Form) indicating their understanding of the nature, workings and purpose of the study, and their desire to
participate in it. All but one of the participants were female and most of them appeared to be in their 50s or 60s; two teachers appeared to be in their 40s and another in their 30s (participants were not asked to state their age). Only one participant stated explicitly that she had undergone specialist ESL teacher training; the rest were former (or concurrent) mainstream secondary or primary teachers, several of whom had taught overseas. All but one of the participants had at least five years experience teaching secondary ESL. Throughout the course of this paper they will be identified by the pseudonyms Anna, Claire, Katie, Louise, Malcolm, Rachel, Sarah, Stacey, and Vania.

3.2.3 The Interview

The interviews began with several ‘warm-up’ questions, pertaining to the participants’ history and experience of ESL teaching, along with their reasons for enjoying (or not enjoying) teaching and, in particular, ESL teaching (see Appendix D: Interview Questions - Introduction, 1-3). The subsequent set of questions concerned the participants’ thoughts and feelings in relation to NCEA in general and more specifically. Questions were also asked concerning the treatment of ESL as a subject under NCEA, along with specific problems or bonuses which may have surfaced since the introduction of NCEA that participants believed were unique to ESL (see Appendix D: Interview Questions - NCEA & ESL, 4-7). The third set of questions examined the influence of NCEA upon areas such as teaching methodology, enjoyment of ESL teaching, overall job satisfaction, the encouragement of professional and/or personal development as it relates to ESL teaching. Participants were also questioned regarding the influence of NCEA upon their sense of personal/professional validation or sense of self-worth as ESL
teachers and upon their relationships with fellow staff or students (see Appendix D: Interview Questions - In the Real World, 8-12). Finally, participants were questioned concerning their thoughts regarding the causes behind the successes and failings of NCEA and any improvements which they felt could be made to NCEA (see Appendix D: Interview Questions - Looking to the Future, 13-14). Throughout the course of the interviews, the author for the most part did not speak, except in order to ask the next question or to provide affirmation and indication of understanding to the participants. The author tried to restrict any intervention (Maxwell, 2005: 111) to no more than that of seeking clarification regarding statements made by the participants.

It should be noted at this point, that when the time came to arrange interviews with the two teachers who had been involved in the original pilot interviews, it was discovered that while one of them was available for re-interviewing, the other had resigned from his position. Given the limited number of teachers who had agreed to be involved and also the fact that the pilot interview conducted with this particular teacher had yielded a relatively rich harvest of data, it was decided that the audio recording of this teacher's pilot interview would be transcribed and the data gathered from it included in this study. Given the particularly strong-minded nature and the opinions of the teacher concerned, the author considered it unlikely that the data gathered from this participant would have been significantly influenced by the fact that it was gathered during the pilot study rather than the final interview. While as stated in Chapter 3.2.1, the interview outline of the pilot study was different from that of the final interview, the author did not believe that
this would undermine the ideal of “no assumptions, no expectations, no beliefs and no theories”.

### 3.2.4 Data Management & Transcription

Verbatim transcripts of interviews “counter the twin dangers of respondent duplicity and observer bias by making it difficult for respondents to produce data that uniformly support[s] a mistaken conclusion, just as they make it difficult for the observer to restrict his observations so that he sees only what supports his prejudices and expectations” (Becker, 1970: 53). For these reasons the interviews were recorded and then what might be termed *quasi-verbatim* transcripts were created from the recordings (see Appendix H: Example of an Interview Transcript). The transcripts were *quasi-verbatim* as opposed to *verbatim* in the sense that the author was interested in the information which was being communicated, rather than how many times a participant said ‘umm’ or ‘hmm’, coughed, paused for an unexpectedly long time or pronounced a word incorrectly. The purpose of the transcripts was to facilitate the analysis of semantic content, not that of the participants’ capacity to articulate fluently when employing the oral medium. Instances of ‘hmm’, ‘umm’ and other similar content-lacking vocalisations were not included in the transcripts, neither were instances of coughing, pausing or laughter denoted or otherwise included. These omissions aside, the interviews were transcribed verbatim.

Two other issues concerning the collection of data need also be acknowledged at this point. Due to the quality of some of the audio recordings, some (small) sections of several of the interviews could not be transcribed. In these instances, what could not be
accurately discerned was simply excluded from the transcript without acknowledgement. In hindsight, these exclusions should perhaps have been indicated in the transcripts; due most likely to frustration at the time on the part of the author, they were not. Secondly, two of the teachers, Stacey and Vania, determined that for them to meet with the author and carry out oral interviews would not be convenient for them; it was a busy time of the year and their schedules did not really allow it. They were very keen to participate nonetheless and requested that they be provided with hard copies of the interview questions and be allowed to answer them in written form, in their own time. Given that having some of one’s data provided via a different medium to that of the rest is a lot better than not having any data at all, this was agreed to. Allowing for this variation has two immediate implications: a) these two teachers had considerably more time to consider and word their answers and b) the physical appearance of their answers (their transcripts so to speak) was different to those of the teachers who participated in the oral interview. It should be noted that both of the participants provided hard copies only of their responses; Stacey’s was typed and Vania’s was hand-written. Both sets of responses were reproduced in a digital format (by the author) and then analysed in the same fashion as those of the other participants (see Chapter 3.2.5).

3.2.5 Data Analysis: Getting off the Ground

This section of the chapter explains the steps that were involved in the analysis of the interviews once they had been transcribed. The analysis process was made up of two separate levels of analysis: Case-by-case Analysis (see Chapter 3.2.5.1) and Cross-case Analysis (see Chapter 3.2.5.2).
3.2.5.1 Level 1: Case-by-case Analysis

Step 1: Separating Trains of Thought

Initially, what might be termed a *surface analysis* was carried out, whereby paragraphs were physically broken down (where applicable) into separate topical sentences and/or passages; i.e. the end of each train of thought was identified and separated from the beginning of the following train of thought (see Appendix I: Level 1 – Step 1: Separate Trains of Thought). This allowed for different parts of the transcripts to be spaced apart, cut and pasted, colour-coded or otherwise separated from one another when and where it was deemed appropriate. It should be noted that this separation of trains of thought did not involve any changes in regards to their chronology. The following passage is taken from the transcript of one of the participants, Katie (see Appendix H: Example of an Interview Transcript):

*What are your thoughts and feelings about NCEA in general?*

In general it’s fine as far as those who probably wouldn’t have achieved at anything under School Certificate achieving something; going away with credits to her name, like the young girl I taught last year. She walked out of this school with some credits next to her name, which meant that she could get a position at the polytechnic and allows a lot more doors for them. It has its advantages. Then there’s the children from the other side of spectrum. I’ve got a son who is academically inclined; why bother with Excellence when Achievement is all you need? There’s nothing there for them. So they really need to sort that out as far those limits are concerned, so as to get a better balance. As far as ESL is concerned, a lot of international students like to come back to NZ for tertiary. NZ has woken up; we’ve go this, why not utilize it for our international students and I think Otago has set the ball rolling by accepting the literacy requirements at Level 2 and 3 for our international students to go into tertiary courses and it’s opened a lot more doors. Takes that pressure off from IELTS, because IELTS is very hard. Again it opens up doors for them in terms of where they can go after school. And it also gives them the sense of being of totally immersed into our school, into our system, because they know that the qualifications which they get here, can get them positions in Otago. So it coes have its advantages.
According to the steps just described, this excerpt of transcript would appear as follows

(see Appendix I: Level 1 – Step 1: Separate Trains of Thought):

In general it's fine as far as those who probably wouldn't have achieved at anything under School Certificate achieving something; going away with credits to her name, like the young girl I taught last year. She walked out of this school with some credits next to her name, which meant that she could get a position at the polytechnic and allows a lot more doors for them. It has its advantages.

Then there's the children from the other side of spectrum. I've got a son who is academically inclined; why bother with Excellence when Achievement: is all you need? There's nothing there for them. So they really need to sort that out as far those limits are concerned, so as to get a better balance.

As far as ESL is concerned, a lot of international students like to come back to NZ for tertiary. NZ has woken up; we've got this, why not utilize it for our international students and I think Otago has set the ball rolling by accepting the literacy requirements at Level 2 and 3 for our international students to go into tertiary courses and it's opened a lot more doors.

Takes that pressure off from IELTS, because IELTS is very hard. Again it opens up doors for them in terms of where they can go after school.

And it also gives them the sense of being of totally immersed into our school, into our system, because they know that the qualifications which they get here, can get them positions in Otago (i.e. a university with a good reputation). So it does have its advantages.

This process of distinguishing and separating the different trains of thought within each transcript simplified the next task: the identifying and building of categories.

It should be noted that to aid in keeping with the mindset of 'no assumptions, no expectations, no beliefs and no theories', immediately prior to identifying and building the categories, the interview questions which had up until this time provided a physical and perhaps even mental framework within and around the interviews, were removed; i.e.
deleted from each transcript. It was thought that if the interview questions were to remain part of the transcripts during this stage of the analysis, they might in some conscious or unconscious manner influence proceedings. It should be noted however, that the author would at times refer back to the original transcripts to aid in ensuring that given passages were not mistakenly being taken out of context, and also to ensure that the author had not influenced the participant responses in any way.

**Step 2: Creating Categories**

This second step in the analysis was carried out by approaching the data in a fashion somewhat similar to that of the *keyword analysis* described by Nunan (1992), whereby categories are generated “from the statements made by the respondents” (146) (see Appendix J: Level 1 – Step 2: In-case Categories). This was however more of a *key theme* analysis than a *keyword* analysis, in that categories were created based upon the existence and gathering together of trains of thought that followed the same or similar themes, rather than upon the presence or not of specific words or phrases. For example, the following passages all contain/refer to a common theme: *workload*.

I think the only bugbear I’ve really got is the paperwork that goes along with it. I mark the papers then I’ve got to have them reassessed to make sure, moderated within the school and you’ve got this timeframe; I’ve actually got a situation where I’m sitting on another teacher’s standards that haven’t been moderated because the teacher I’m working with had holidays, so there’s all those little problems. It cuts into your preparation time. (ex. #923)

I think it cuts into our teaching time a bit too much and I’d actually like to see that cut down a bit, simplified so that we’ve got more time to spend with the students and teach. And that’s across the board; across all subjects. It really pushes you for time. (ex. #11)

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23 Refers to the question to which the response was given.
I think if we can simplify the system and simplify how we can utilize NCEA, it'll allow us more time with the kids. (ex. #11)

Everything that you do in class has to be recorded: little tests, the results of the tests; it all has to go on the computer. (ex. #11)

They keep going on about how they're going to introduce this and that. They keep changing the way that we assess things and all these assessment requirements and all this record keeping; you've got to have it on computer, you've got to have it on paper and pardon the expression but we just say “when the hell are we meant to bloody teach?” (ex. #11)

I've got new students on exchange and their English is not so good, so I've really got to balance things: get their Standards out, work with these kids, plus try to allow time for the kids who have just arrived. (ex. #11)

**Step 3: Organisation & Presentation**

Following the completion of Step 2, rather than bring to the readers’ attention every single little detail of every comment made by each participant, efforts were made to “reduce and reorganize and combine [the data] so that the readers [would] share the researcher’s findings in the most economical [and] interesting fashion” (Ely et al., 1991: 140). The net results of this analysis are presented on a case by case basis in Chapter 4.

**3.2.5.2 Level 2: Cross-case Analysis**

At the conclusion of this initial level of analysis, a second stage of analysis was conducted. Having identified and built up categories from within each of the interviews, the interviews were then compared with one another; the results of this comparison can be viewed in the form of a table in Appendix K: Cross-case Comparison. The purpose of this was to determine whether or not there existed any dominant categories; i.e. categories which were discussed by more than one participant (Nunan, 1992: 147-149).
As they eventuated, these dominant categories were individually compiled, condensed and in instances where one or more dominant categories appeared to be related to one another, grouped together into what might be referred to (so as to distinguish them from dominant categories) as *meta-categories*. For example, the dominant categories *workload, internet updating* and *assessment*, can clearly be seen to be quite closely related to one another. Thus they are grouped together to form the meta-category *Working For 'The Man'* (see Chapter 5.3).

This chapter has described the theoretical and physical logistics surrounding this study. First were explained the areas constituting the study’s pre-investigative considerations: the origins of the study, defining the field of research, the determining of a research vehicle, the conceptual framework and the theoretical foundation upon which the data was analysed. Secondly, the research design was explained: the pilot study, the participants and the context in which they were interviewed, the interview itself and the management and transcription of the data gathered via the interviews. Finally the analysis of the data was described.
Chapter 4
Results of the In-Case Analysis

This chapter considers the responses of each of the participants in turn. Of course, each of the participants said much more than is actually covered here; this chapter contains the categories that the author built up out of each participant’s responses (see Chapter 3.2.5.3, Appendix J: In-case Categories, and Appendix K: Cross-case Comparison). It should be noted that as this chapter is purely descriptive in nature, no connections will be made nor comparisons drawn between the different participants in regards to the content of their responses; such analysis will be documented in Chapter 5. It should also be noted that a) the categories contained within this chapter are not listed in a prioritised order (they are listed simply in the order that they occurred) and b) throughout the entirety of this chapter, quotes taken directly from participants will be indicated via the use of italics.

4.1 Anna

Anna spoke of the differences between NCEA and IELTS, her use of film as a medium for teaching ESL, her thoughts concerning the status of ESL teaching, her co-operation with the English Department, and her use of public speaking as a teaching tool.

NCEA vs IELTS

Anna felt that NCEA was very well suited to ESL students, as there was not the examination hell stress that you put kids through with trying to pass an exam like IELTS. She also favoured and enjoyed the fact that so much of NCEA assessment is formative,
meaning that you can really gauge where they’re at before you go ahead and assess them in terms of getting them to write the assessment and you don’t over-place them; that is, to have students undergo assessments that are beyond their current level of competency. Anna contrasted this with IELTS which she claimed was renowned for over-placement, often resulting in ESL students scoring badly, students losing their confidence and teachers losing the ability to jump past together and keep on teaching because [the students] had been so focused. Anna felt that IELTS was far too generalised, whereas NCEA was just an extension of...... the English curriculum, which I like.

Anna felt that under NCEA her ESL students were achieving, feeling good about themselves, and that they were much more positive than any of the children that I ever taught with IELTS as the exam.........and that’s because they are able to achieve. Anna felt that NCEA was much fairer than IELTS and that to achieve success under IELTS required cognitive skills and a level of maturity that was quite beyond many ESL students. The following passage perhaps captures the spirit of Anna’s dissatisfaction with IELTS:

I mean honestly, it’s just a joke. I remember when I was at teachers’ college I was tutoring a girl for IELTS and I had never seen IELTS before and she showed me what she wanted me to help her with and she had this text and it was some scientific process. And the questions were tough; I would never in my life want to read or make sense of but I had to. I was interpreting this text for her and she desperately believed that this was what she had to understand in order to pass IELTS. Whereas it was just one exam question amongst the thousands that they produce and she was never likely to get that same one again but we had to go through every part of that text in detail and it really misled them into thinking that this was how you prepare for IELTS. So it just really wasn’t ideal.
Anna also preferred NCEA over IELTS due to NCEA providing ESL teachers with a structure that she felt IELTS did not.

**ESL & Film**

Anna said that working under NCEA had made her *feel a lot more creative* and had enabled her to realise a great deal of creative potential in her students. Fundamentally her teaching had not changed, but practically it had in that she no longer *felt guilty for putting kids in front of a film* [with a set of conscious, essay driven objectives] and saying ‘watch this’. In addition to having a personal passion for film, Anna had chosen it as the primary vehicle for teaching ESL because *it’s a visual and digital world that we live in and kids unfortunately spend so much time in front of visual stimulus* that novels are *just beyond them*. Anna felt that rather than *waste a lot of valuable teaching time* trying to get her students through a book, she was better off to use films because *kids re-watch them and they latch on immediately to the visuals and the sound*. Anna talked of films providing her ESL students with a *meta-language* and summarised her thinking as follows:

> Once you’ve taught the kids the language of discussing films, it enables them to have real opinions on something that they’ve read, or viewed or experienced and so you develop that language and you develop the language of communication, of the expressing of their own opinions which is one of the really difficult things to get Asian kids to do. When you’ve got a film and it’s in their face, they’re forced to respond initially; well, you start off with something more subtle obviously, but you teach them how to express their own points of view and their own opinions and then you’ve got a language there for that and you can push them harder and harder and harder. Just gently, but push them into areas that they would never normally go to until they’re volunteering it and coming to you with these thoughts.

Anna felt that NCEA had *really given a kind of form* to her use of film in ESL and that this had had an very positive impact upon her students because they were now beginning
to talk about real things. Rather than bringing in diaries that consisted of superficial writings of 'in the weekend I did this and I did that', Anna’s students were bringing her film reviews from the notes in their diaries, films that they’ve seen and they’ll talk about them and they’ll say well 'I thought this and I thought that'; they now had a vehicle with which to travel to a much deeper level. Anna pointed out that because she was so passionate about film herself, it was easy to inspire her students and that teaching ESL now, under NCEA, was more satisfying now than ever.

Status of ESL Teaching

Anna indicated that she was fully aware of the fact that she was not a mainstream teacher and that she did not expect to be treated like a mainstream teacher; if she had wanted to teach social studies or history, she would have done so. Anna did not feel that ESL was a forgotten subject and thought it odd for ESL teachers to be upset about not being treated like a mainstream subject. It should be noted that Anna did not clarify what she thought being treated like a mainstream subject would look like.

Inter-departmental Co-operation

Anna felt that the implementation of NCEA had enabled her relationship with the English Department to formally prosper. Teaching under the close supervision of the English Head of Department had provided continual encouragement and support, and had gone a long way to ensuring that marking standards throughout the ESL and English departments were consistent.
Speeches

An aspect of NCEA that Anna was particularly happy with was the achievement standards dealing with public speaking that native students do at Year 11. Anna felt that for her to be able to use them in her ESL classes was brilliant, in that while not all her students were capable of performing at that level, there were plenty that could and it was valuable for them to be able to show on their record of achievement that they had passed a speech achievement standard for English. Anna said that some of her ESL students were capable of that because they are so motivated and they are so able to structure a speech, prepare and it’s just a matter of working on tone and volume and those areas of language that you need to work on in ESL anyway. Anna believed that the learning outcomes of the speech achievement standards tied in really well with specific ESL learning outcomes and that the achievement of them opened up room for achievement in other areas that would have been otherwise unavailable to ESL students.

4.2 Claire

Claire managed to cover a considerable amount of ground during her interview. She spoke of the heavy workload that NCEA brought to students and teachers, the phenomenon of credit cramming, the differences between NCEA and IELTS, and issues of fairness relating to NCEA. Claire also talked about inter-departmental co-operation between the ESL and English departments, the role of ESL in secondary level education, the effect that foreign students were having on native students, NZQA’s use of the Internet to update NCEA standards, and the cost of NCEA for ESL students.
Teacher & Student Workload

Claire felt that the most negative aspect of NCEA was the constant pressure that it placed on ESL students; *it's just continually assess, assess, assess, assess.* Claire indicated that she would like to see the rate and volume of assessment slowed down somewhat, as ESL students were *not preparing themselves as well as they could.* Claire pointed out that if for example an ESL student was doing five units, this meant that the student had five separate pieces of assessment, which were invariably all due at the same time. As a result of having so much assessment due at once and it all having to be done in a language which was not their own, ESL students would *just really start to freak out.* Claire claimed to have seen ESL students be physically sick as a result of the pressure on them.

Claire also felt that the amount of paperwork that was required of teachers was huge and that this was probably her *biggest moan about it.* Records (multiple copies of) had to be kept of everything that went on in the classroom; Claire said that *it would be nice just to be able to teach and not do all the paper work.* Claire indicated that where this problem particularly affected ESL was in the fact that ESL students simply did not understand this aspect of the equation, nor did they really comprehend all the paperwork that had to be done (or the purpose of it) and that as a result it was *a constant battle to get [students] to fill in and sign off and do things like that.*

Encouraging Excellence

Claire believed that some of her students had worked out that only so many credits were required of them in order to move on to the next level of NCEA and as a result had
developed a mentality whereby they were not pushing themselves enough to get Excellences.........a pass is okay. Claire admitted however that this may not be entirely (or at all) the fault of NCEA, but rather could very well be simply a reflection of New Zealand culture in general.

**NCEA vs IELTS**

Claire had concerns about NCEA in regards to university entrance, as she felt that we are setting kids up to fail. Claire had worked with IELTS for a long time and believed that her international students who were successfully entering university via IELTS were not at the same benchmark as kids who’ve been doing unit standards, but that they were of a higher skill standard to those who entered university via NCEA Level 2 literacy. She felt that New Zealand universities had lowered the standard to get students into university and that as a result of this ESL students that entered university via NCEA would not cope with the essays, they would fail and that ESL students were better prepared under IELTS.

**Fairness**

Claire felt that there were some benefits for ESL students in the fact that they could have several attempts at unit standards; this allowed them to achieve on their second or third attempt, instead of simply failing in their first attempt and that being the end of the matter. Claire pointed out however, that while students are allowed several attempts at unit standards, they are only allowed one attempt at achievement standards, thus raising the question of equality between unit and achievement standards. Claire admitted that while there was arguably a certain degree of benefit in ESL students being allowed more
than one attempt at a given unit standard, it can give a false idea of where they’re at, coz you don’t get two or three chances when you’re doing university exams; Claire felt that perhaps the system was giving them false hope.

**Inter-Departmental Co-operation**

Claire claimed that ESL teaching could be very lonely, but that NCEA had allowed her to personally be more involved in our English department here; the ESL and English departments were working together far more than in pre-NCEA times and that there had been real benefits from being able to share together with other teachers. Claire also indicated that working under NCEA had perhaps given ESL teachers a bit of direction in their teaching of ESL.

**The Role of ESL**

Claire stated that until we have a curriculum for ESL, I don’t feel that it’s being treated as a subject. She saw ESL’s current position and purpose under NCEA as a pathway rather than a subject in itself and said that while she was happy to support and help students through NCEA Level 1 and Level 2, when it came to Level 3 ESL she did not feel it was appropriate to take her students through ESL unit standards. Claire stated that she was happy to teach IELTS, TOEFL (Test Of English as a Foreign Language); not a problem, coz those students are going to use it in other countries. But NCEA Level 3 was not what she felt she should be doing. Further to this, Claire indicated that she still saw one of the primary purposes of secondary level ESL as being a place where students can get a bit of cultural sensitivity to Kiwi land and where they could receive support for their
mainstream classes. Claire pointed out that it was known to her ESL students that there was time set aside in their ESL class where she would provide them with resources, support and assistance concerning their mainstream subjects. Claire said that when her ESL students had an assignment that they were struggling with she would go to their mainstream teacher and they'll give me the permission and the guidelines as to how I can help them. Claire also felt that there was still plenty of room for improvement within this aspect of ESL.

**Foreign Students' Effect on Native Students**

Claire believed that one very positive spin-off of NCEA was the fact that some of her ESL students were beginning to challenge and at times surpass their native counterparts in the mainstream classes. She felt that domestic students don't always acknowledge why international students are here (i.e. to excel in mainstream education and at university; not just learn English) and that NCEA had been very good for native students because it had shown them the capabilities and potential of ESL students and had challenged their perceptions of themselves and their own work. Claire gave the following account as an example of this:

_We had one example of a student that I had in my class. She was a young Chinese student and she just worked so hard at her English and all of a sudden one of our domestic students who was on top of her English class and “there’s no way I’m getting pushed off my pedestal, so I don’t have to work too hard”; all of a sudden they saw this young girl coming up (there was a German girl as well) and just pushed the domestic students away. They laughed about it and they said we thought we were going to be beaten at the post by this international student and we had one international student, a German girl, who took out 3 literacy prizes in Year 13 and that was a rude awakening for some of our domestic kids. That this girl had this second language stuff and there she was._

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Claire believed that the simple determination and drive of some ESL students had been rendered more publicly obvious by NCEA and that this had gone a long way towards accelerating domestic students.

**Internet Updating**

Claire claimed that NZQA’s employment of the Internet as the standard means of keeping teachers updated with the latest adjustments or changes to NCEA was problematic and a hassle for teachers; *they’re using the Net all the time to update and they say there’ll be more updates on the Net by........and they’re never there*. Claire said that updates often arriving later than teachers had been told they would, had a considerable impact upon their planning; teachers have to send stuff away all the time for moderation and you find that there’s been an update and you weren’t aware of it; especially with unit standards. Claire indicated that the changes were often quite minimal, but this nonetheless rendered their work unacceptable and required teachers to go back through and change everything.

**Cost**

Claire was very unhappy with the cost of NCEA and thought it was disgusting that international students were required to pay several times more for NCEA than native students. Claire claimed that changes in fees for international students were often made without any warning and that the government were pocketing large portions of these fees. Further to this issue, Claire pointed out that due to their unhappiness with the high cost of NCEA, many international students were going home and then refusing to pay the fee to
get their results. As a result, when they enrolled at universities outside of New Zealand, they were unable to produce the official documentation required by these universities; this was a particular problem for Thai students. Claire mentioned a Thai student who had studied under her for two years and then had not paid the fee required in order for him to be sent his certificate. He had then studied in Australia and that was fine but now he wants to go to university in his own country and of course they want his certificate and it’s really difficult trying to find his results. Claire felt that lowering the cost of NCEA would be much fairer to international students.

4.3 Katie

In her interview Katie cast doubt upon whether or not NCEA encouraged more capable students to push themselves, compared NCEA and IELTS, and discussed the impact of NCEA upon how she taught and upon her workload. She also spoke of the co-operation between ESL and English that NCEA had helped to facilitate, the structure that NCEA had provided ESL teachers with, the teacher/teacher and teacher/student relational climate at her school and her unhappiness with the concept of Non-Achievement.

Encouraging Excellence

Katie claimed that NCEA did not encourage more capable students to want to achieve; sometimes students who were very capable of getting Excellence, were only doing enough to get Achieved, because they know that’s all they need. Katie felt that NCEA needed to be adjusted in such a way that it provided more inherent motivation for those students who were really capable of more than just scraping through.
NCEA vs IELTS

Katie believed that having ESL students working towards NCEA requirements took the pressure off from IELTS, because IELTS is very hard. Katie felt that NCEA opened up doors for ESL students in terms of where they could go once they finished secondary school. She thought that NCEA allowed them more opportunities to achieve and that the standard of 6.0\textsuperscript{24} required under IELTS for university entrance was ridiculous. Katie felt that NCEA allowed ESL students who were good but not quite with elite status, to go on to further achievement where IELTS did not.

Teaching Practice

Katie did not believe that working under NCEA had caused her teaching style to be altered in any fundamental sense; she still used a lot of humour, still employed the same grammar exercises and still moved around the classroom a lot, trying to engage her students. Katie said that she had simply had to absorb the standards in and around her teaching of ESL and impose a tighter timeframe for each section; where once she would have drawn something out, she now had to work a bit quicker. Katie indicated that she had really rather enjoyed NCEA more than anything and that it had provided her with a lot more scope to teach.

Teacher Workload

Katie indicated that the only bugbear she really had with NCEA was all the paperwork that came along with it, specifically the fact that it cut considerably into her preparation.

\textsuperscript{24} IELTS scoring ranges from 1-9. Students who sit the IELTS exam are required to achieve a score of 6.0 in order to gain university entrance in New Zealand.
time. She claimed that it also cut into her teaching time too much and that she would like to see things simplified in order to allow for *more time to spend with the students and teach*. Katie’s feelings on the matter were perhaps summed up by the following statement:

*They keep going on about how they’re going to introduce this and that......they keep changing the way that we assess things and all these assessment requirements and all this record keeping; you’ve got to have it on computer, you’ve got to have it on paper and pardon the expression but we just say “when the hell are we meant to bloody teach?”*

### Inter-Departmental Co-operation

Katie indicated that NCEA had served as a catalyst in bringing the ESL and English departments together into a very supportive and co-operative relationship; the ESL department would often borrow resources from the English department and vice versa.

### Structure

Katie felt that NCEA had provided a *lot of structure within the ESL Department*. She had found this to be very beneficial, as had her students, many of whom were from educational backgrounds where the English language was taught in a very structured fashion. Katie said that this had given her and the other ESL teachers more confidence when it came time to teach classes; ESL students *know what to expect, they know where they stand*. ESL teachers were able to provide their students with NCEA criteria *very early and go over it thoroughly* with them.
Workplace Relationships

Katie said that amongst the staff at her school there was *a great support network*. Katie indicated that she and other teachers were *really snowed under* by all the paperwork that NCEA required of them and as a result, could often get *quite depressed*. However, she felt very comfortable and safe in that she could *throw things around about NCEA and bitch over the whole thing and know that you've got that support network* because *everyone backs each other up and supports each other and it's the same with the students*. Katie pointed out that her ESL students could *get very frustrated with it as well*, but that they understood the challenge that it was for their teachers and that ultimately, working under NCEA had actually served to help cultivate really *good relationships between teachers and students*.

Achievement vs Non-Achievement

Katie felt that NCEA could be improved in terms of the way that it was marked. She did not believe that the *Not Achieved should be in there at all........I don't agree with that*. Katie claimed that the School Certificate/Bursary system *showed that you had strengths in one area but not in another part*, but that under NCEA a potential employer would be unable to discern to what extent a student had not achieved. Katie said that *a lot of kids just miss and no more with achievement standards and it just doesn't show*; it simply shows that they had Non-Achieve. Katie wanted to see a system implemented whereby information concerning a student's strengths could be more effectively communicated.
4.4 Louise

Louise discussed internal and external assessment, university entrance via NCEA and IELTS, NCEA’s relationship with the expectations of ESL students and NCEA’s impact upon her teaching of ESL. She also gave her thoughts on the ideology behind NCEA and the inequity that she perceived between ESL standards and English standards.

Assessment

Louise approved of the division of internal and external assessment under NCEA. She pointed out that in ESL under the pre-NCEA system, students were really only tested on their writing ability and given that if you’re testing someone’s ability to give a speech; you’re assessing their ability to actually give the speech, not just having them write about it, this was extremely limited in its applicability. Louise felt that NCEA was good in the way that it broke subjects down so that you can really assess the things that you want to assess, thus enabling teachers to provide students with more detailed feedback and so allowing students to know what areas they have achieved in, as well as those which they haven’t.

NCEA vs IELTS

Louise thought that to some extent under NCEA, it was more challenging for ESL students to get their 80 credits to get into university; particularly in regards to credits that concerned writing skills. She was unsure however, as to whether that was positive or negative. Louise felt that it was perhaps somewhat unfair that secondary ESL students were required to achieve NCEA Level 2 literacy to attain university entrance, while ESL
students who attended language centres could obtain university entrance via IELTS. She believed IELTS to be easier than NCEA Level 2, particularly in regards to the transactional writing component. Louise did point out however, that she suspected the reason for this apparent discrepancy was to *keep international students from believing that they can just come here for a year and then go to university; it’s a very unrealistic expectation.*

### Student Expectation

Louise felt that, while probably not intentionally, NCEA had rendered more transparent the fact that *the concentration of many students, particularly Asian students, is on getting to university.* Perhaps due to the disaggregated and short-term goal nature of NCEA, the fact that very often *international students were trying to work at a level where they couldn’t move forward as fast as they wanted and trying to hasten the whole process and to get through the school system, get New Zealand qualifications and gone to university* [sic], had become more obvious to ESL teachers. Louise felt that this had been a real service to ESL teachers, as it had enabled them to assist their students in taking a *more realistic and more weathered view* of where they were at, how they were progressing and what they could realistically hope to achieve. ESL teachers were now in a better position to encourage students to *work a little more slowly in their attempts* to get to where they were trying to go. Louise pointed out that alongside this, the ESL Department was also trying to communicate to their students the reality of that fact that *there were more paths to careers and life than just going to university* (e.g. polytechnic, trades apprenticeships).
Teaching Practice

Louise indicated that she still enjoyed her job as an ESL teacher and that while there was certainly more pressure to get more done under NCEA than had been previously, she was still trying to prepare these students and still constantly aware of their problems. Louise felt that despite the professional frustration of sometimes ending up working in isolation from other teachers and other departments, ESL teaching was still the challenge of trying to get these kids where they want to go and to work out interesting and effective ways of doing so. In aid of this Louise mentioned the need for intra and inter school co-operation and stressed the fact that in any system you need to be liaising with other schools, especially when you’re probably doing the same things at the same time.

Ideology

Louise thought the ideology behind NCEA to be pretty sound, although she did not expound upon what she meant by ideology. She felt that the problems she and other ESL teachers (and teachers in general) had come across were more concerned with logistical realities than ideology. It seemed to Louise that NCEA had been given to teachers to see what they [would] make of it and she felt that teachers were making a good go of trying to get it underway. While the future was obviously unknown, Louise thought that NCEA could be made to work, as long as it’s realized that it is an ongoing process. She admitted that she could really only speak in regards to the subject area within which she worked and that it may be that the ideology works very well in some areas and not in others.
ESL Standards vs English Standards

Louise stated that she would like to see this whole messy business of ESL unit standards versus the English unit standards sorted out; whether they need to exist together or not. She was not convinced that there needed to exist separate ESL and English standards and felt that she would need to have it explained to her why we need to have separate systems when they're doing the same thing. In relation to this, Louise also believed that the existence of separate ESL and English standards was very misleading for potential employers, as it meant that they could read on a student’s report that they had NCEA Level 3 ESL, while being entirely unaware that ESL standards are not of the same difficulty level as English standards.

4.5 Malcolm

In the course of his interview Malcolm spoke of increased student workloads, internal and external assessment, the impact of NCEA upon his teaching practices and the weaknesses of NCEA as opposed to IELTS. He also spoke of the difficulties of international credibility that ESL students encountered under NCEA, inconsistent moderation, credit cramming, Internet updating, the status of ESL teaching relative to other educational fields and the disadvantages position in which NCEA placed boys.

Student Workload

Malcolm claimed that NCEA requires a lot more documentation and that, due to their physical volume, a whole industry has been developed based around the production of units. Malcolm described the workload under NCEA as stiff and stated several times that
it’s a big ask for the majority of natural English speaking students to get through the workload. For an international student it’s an enormous task. Malcolm described the completion of an ESL unit standard like this:

With the writing requirements what we’ve tended to do is we’ve gone to ESOL Online for resources and we’ve accessed the most recent units and downloaded them; student instructions, teacher instructions, exercises, specific articles on topics and in some cases breaking it down even more. And we work through that unit with the students, usually over a 6-8 week period. It’s only in the last 2 weeks of that 8 week block that they’re at the stage when they can sit down and write the first draft. That first draft we look at, we make suggestions to them and the reality is that despite the fact that we’re not allowed to actually correct them, we do. It’s the only way they learn. They then go away and re-write their first draft and we check it again; if there are any glaring errors we make suggestions to them and they can go away and work on it again. The third time if the draft is okay, we give them a computer disk and they go and type it up on a computer and save it to the disk. They print off a good copy that goes into a folder which we use for moderation. That’s 8-9 weeks.

As a result of the amount of time and effort involved in the completion of NCEA standards, Malcolm’s ESL department had spread the achievement of NCEA Level 2 across two years instead of one.

Assessment

Malcolm felt that NCEA had been beneficial in that it provided much more regular internal assessment. That said, he did not believe that internal assessment on its own was sufficient and still felt that particularly in regards to international students, there is still value in having at least a 40-50% external examination.
Teaching Practice

Malcolm indicated that since the implementation of NCEA, there had been a definite change in terms of which English skills ESL teachers were focusing on in their classes. Malcolm said that prior to NCEA, ESL teachers taught the basics of reading, writing, listening and speaking, based on either IELTS or TOEFL, but that with the introduction of NCEA, our focus has increasingly become that of getting them through the units and on reading and writing. As a result there was much less time for ESL teachers to engage their students and assist them in the development of the essential skills of listening and speaking.

NCEA vs IELTS

Malcolm felt that because of the requirements of the curriculum under NCEA, there was less opportunity to teach ESL students the rudiments of English and that this flowed through to their core subjects. Malcolm said that he and other teachers had noticed that over the past two or three years, ESL students were struggling with Computing, Physics, Math, traditionally strong subjects, because they were struggling with English. As a result, alongside pursuing the curriculum for NCEA Level 1 and NCEA Level 2, Malcolm also had to do a lot of work with his ESL students in regards to their individual subjects; he believed that going back 4-5 years ago, the students coming through had far superior skills in terms of reading and writing and speech. Malcolm indicated that, partially due to his experience lecturing in universities, he still considered IELTS to be the benchmark in terms of entry to university and that he still put his students through
IELTS as it was the only way that I can make sure that their speaking and listening skills are up to scratch.

International Credibility

To illustrate his thoughts on the international usefulness and credibility of NCEA, Malcolm gave the two following accounts:

Two of our students, top students who were actually given scholarships, they achieved Level 1, they achieved Level 2, they achieved Level 3 with distinction. In order to assist them in their applications to go to university in their own countries, which they wanted to do, we supplied them with a referenced form from NZQA; NZQA release an interim result around about January. In one case three copies were sent overseas to the university; each one was rejected. We’re currently sending a 4th copy which has been stamped with the school stamp, signed by the Principal, with a covering statement that the interim result is an official result from NZQA. The problem is that those universities overseas will not accept an interim result as an official final result. NZQA don’t issue final results for students who sat NCEA until July. It’s incredible.

I’ve got a guy who spent 6 weeks at university in Thailand and a week ago he was forcibly removed from his class because the university hadn’t received the right pieces of paper; they’d been waiting for the final result which isn’t due out until July and so he was actually removed from class. So he’s had to go back to his village. We’re trying our best to get the university to change its mind. But it’s because of our lack of ability in New Zealand to do the job right.

Further to these accounts, Malcolm described his dealings with NZQA as an exercise in frustration.

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25 Here the interviewee stated the name of the university in Thailand at which one of his former students was enrolled; the author has hidden the name of the university so as to protect its anonymity.
**Inconsistent Moderation**

Malcolm felt that there had not been sufficient quality control in regards to the development and moderation of NCEA standards, resulting in *wide variation of moderation across the country* and citing Cambridge High School as an example of this. Malcolm claimed that there had been several occasions where the English department had *sent away samples of students’ work for moderation using exactly the same assessment criteria that we’ve used previously*; the school had determined that these students had met the standard, but *because it was a different moderator, they were failed*. Malcolm said that many ESL teachers were *throwing their hands up in the air saying ‘how can we work in a system where there is such variation between one year and another, just because of a change in the person moderating?’*

**Encouraging Excellence**

Malcolm claimed to have discerned a trend amongst students, not just at his own school but also at others, of taking an approach of *‘as long as I achieve the minimum standard, that’s good enough, I can move on to the next task’*. Malcolm felt that many students were operating in *survival mode* and were becoming very astute at coping with the *sheer workload involved* by simply doing enough to get by and no more. Malcolm pointed out that *although you’re getting a reasonable percentage overall achieving their units, very few are getting Excellences........by far the greatest number are just Achieving; they’re getting by, they’re getting a pass.*
Internet Updating

Malcolm found keeping up to date with the latest versions of NCEA standards very frustrating. Due to NZQA constantly updating standards, a student could have done all the work, but because it wasn't according to the latest version of the standard, they're failed. Malcolm felt that this was indicative of NCEA being more process driven than education driven. He described NCEA as all consuming and felt that NZQA had lost sight of the point of NCEA, claiming that they don't know what they're trying to achieve.

Cost & the Status of ESL Teaching

Malcolm felt that even at a national level, ESL was a forgotten subject and was particularly unhappy about this in light of the amount of money that the government is taking out of international students and what he saw as just straight revenue gathering.

Boys & Girls

Malcolm believed that there had been a feminization of New Zealand’s education system and that being very specific to details, NCEA was well suited to girls but not so suited to boys, who tended to be more holistically minded in their approach to learning. Malcolm felt that NCEA failed to take into account differences in male and female learning and that this failure was causing many boys to lag behind.

4.6 Rachel

Rachel spoke of increases in both teachers' and students' workloads, her belief that NCEA created an encouraging climate for students to work within and NCEA’s being
more difficult for ESL students than IELTS. She also talked about NCEA’s impact upon
the practicalities of her teaching and the NCEA training courses that she had attended.

**Teacher & Student Workload**

Rachel claimed that the internal assessment was a lot of work. She felt that unless ESL
students had already spent considerable time in an English speaking country and had an
intensive English background, coming into the New Zealand secondary school system
and doing NCEA was incredibly difficult. Rachel felt that this was particularly true in
regards to the requirement that ESL students achieve NCEA Level 2 English literacy in
order to attend a New Zealand university. She pointed out that this is also true in areas
such as math and the sciences, where the language becomes progressively more difficult
as they go further along. Rachel also indicated that another source of pressure for ESL
students came from the fact that, on top of the work in their ESL classes, they are
required to do a considerable amount of research for all their mainstream courses of
study. All the Humanities areas have a research requirement; research, research,
research.......it is hard and they do get tired of it. Rachel felt that getting rid of some (or
perhaps even all) of the research requirements for ESL students would be a good step
forward in improving NCEA. Rachel also felt that under NCEA there was a great deal of
work for teachers to do, but that this workload would be significantly lowered if teachers
were provided with more exemplars.
Encouraging Excellence

Rachel suggested that NCEA’s breaking down of subjects into two and three credit units may have served to provide ESL students (and of course students in general) with a more readily tangible sense of achievement. The ongoing accumulation of credits throughout the year of two credits in this subject and three credits in that subject was very encouraging for them.

NCEA vs IELTS

Rachel claimed that it’s very difficult for our students to get Level 2 English achievement standards. She felt that the insistence that ESL students achieve the eight credits for NCEA Level 2 literacy was perhaps making it more difficult for them to go to university than in the old bursary days. Rachel mentioned a particular ESL student who had chosen to attend an Australian university purely for the fact that the student only requires IELTS rather than Level 2 English because he couldn’t get Level 2 English but he could get IELTS. Rachel felt that a significant improvement in streamlining ESL and NCEA literacy would be to develop and introduce ESL achievement standards and have them tied directly into the literacy requirements.

Teaching Practice

Rachel indicated that she was very aware of the need for her to teach to the standard required and to ensure that her students achieved their required standards. In working towards this end, she admitted that she probably was teaching towards that standard
rather than broadening their knowledge. Rachel felt that in this respect NCEA had imposed restraints upon teaching.

**NCEA Training**

Rachel pointed out that she had attended some NCEA training sessions, but due to the exemplars available to her and the various other materials that she had chosen to employ, these training sessions hadn’t been all that useful.

**4.7 Sarah**

Sarah discussed the pressure that NCEA brought to ESL teachers and students, the unsuitability of NCEA when compared with IELTS and the lack of international credibility that NCEA possessed. She also discussed the status of ESL teaching, the effect of NCEA upon ESL teaching practices, and the unsuitability of NCEA for ESL students.

**Teacher & Student Workload**

Sarah felt that NCEA was a huge amount of work for the teachers and the students and that she had worked incredibly hard since NCEA started and had been subject to huge stress. Factors that she indicated as being the causes of this stress included a lack of resources and the fact that the paperwork is enormous. However, Sarah said that the biggest problem was that there seemed to be too many assessments across the board and that teachers were constantly under pressure pressure pressure to mark mark mark. Sarah did acknowledge that some people did excel in these conditions, but she believed that ultimately the pressure was unrealistic. She described her feelings as follows:
I feel that my students have all these other NCEA standards being forced upon them, so they're trying to achieve credits in all their other subjects and ESL is just another thing and they do get swamped, they do get completely confused and they're very lucky that they do get as much support as they do generally from the teachers in the school.

Sarah also indicated that the continual pressure of NCEA had killed a lot of the creative aspects of school......because the students simply can't cope with doing those more creative things along with their regular work. Sarah wanted to see fewer assessments and more fun.

NCEA vs IELTS

Sarah believed that NCEA Level 2 literacy was not a suitable substitute for IELTS. She felt that IELTS was much better preparation, ESL students were much better off with IELTS, and that if ESL teachers could teach it as a part of their course, we could teach in a way that would be much more helpful to them than NCEA.

International Credibility

Sarah pointed out that unlike IELTS and other internationally recognised certificates, NCEA was not recognised in ESL students’ countries of origin and so it was not a valuable achievement. The upshot of this was that the ESL department at Sarah’s school were taking it upon themselves to investigate and determine just what the needs of their ESL students were and would be in the future.

So what we're doing is trying to look at what their needs are. We're asking ourselves do they need IELTS, do they need TOEFL? And in some cases they need other exams like SAT, so there are totally different needs according to what their futures hold.
Sarah said that she had to be very careful in order to ensure that she did not focus on things that were not useful to her ESL students because she knew that if she did, the students would stop coming.

**Status of ESL Teaching**

Sarah claimed that at some schools, ESL teachers were *not allowed to teach NCEA because there is a belief that ESL teachers don't really make the grade.* She also acknowledged that this belief that ESL teachers were below par was not necessarily unfounded.

**Teaching Practice**

Sarah felt that prior to NCEA *teachers were able to develop their own courses, courses that were appropriate to the students they were teaching;* she felt that under NCEA there was less scope for this. Sarah also believed that NCEA was more geared towards providing for the needs of individual students than whole classes and that under NCEA, ESL classes focused *much more heavily on literature, lots of tasks and writing.* Sarah felt that the result of this was that ESL teachers were *not giving them enough grammar and other skills that we know they need* and that NCEA made it very difficult to include these.

**Suitability**

Sarah believed that ESL students struggled under NCEA because it was a fundamentally different system to those which they had been brought up under; *they want to be able to regurgitate answers . . . . . . . critical thinking is a skill that they're learning.* Sarah raised
the question of whether a fundamental weakness in regards to ESL under NCEA was that it was not designed with ESL students in mind; it was designed for New Zealanders and the ESL students just happened to be there.

4.8 Stacey

Stacey was one of the teachers who chose to submit her response in writing. Presumably as a direct result of her having a considerable amount of time which with to consider each question and fine tune its answer, Stacey’s answers were very succinct, causing her ‘transcript’ to be significantly smaller than those of the other participants. She discussed NCEA’s allowing ESL teachers to develop curricula and its acting as a catalyst in cultivating increased co-operation between the ESL and English departments. Stacy also said that NCEA was an improvement over IELTS, that it was getting easier to work under as time went on and that NCEA was assisting in the raising of the status of ESL.

ESL Curriculum Development

Stacey claimed that NCEA has finally given ESL departments a chance to develop a well rounded curriculum. The considerable number and variety of ESL unit standards available under NCEA had enabled Stacey to create a balanced programme, one that more effectively catered to the wide range of needs our students present us with.

Inter-Departmental Co-operation

Stacey also believed that NCEA had worked as a catalyst in the ESL department being included in the English department. This had enabled the two departments to share
resources and also moderation duties with one another. The net result of this cross-fertilization has been that of the wider school seeing what goes on in ESL and in turn acknowledging (for the first time in mainstream) the work that takes place in the ESL department. Amongst non-ESL staff and native students there now exists a much more accurate understanding of the purpose and workings of ESL; staff and students now realise that ESL students aren't here to learn 'how to have a conversation'.

**NCEA vs IELTS**

Stacey was very happy about the changes that have been brought about under NCEA concerning the requirements for university entrance. She felt that these requirements are now more realistic and achievable than ever before and have paved the way for more ESL students to be able to enter New Zealand universities. Stacey also felt that the eight credits required for NCEA Level 2 literacy covered a wide range of skills (e.g. critical thinking (reading), creative and transactional writing, literary essay writing skills for a range of genres) and that these skills will hold them in good stead once they reach university. In relation to this, Stacey also believed that NCEA assessed a broader range of English language skills than did the IELTS system.

**Getting Comfortable with NCEA**

In regards to the logistics of working under NCEA, Stacey indicated that at least for herself, each year it has become increasingly easier to work with, through becoming familiar with the procedures and jargon involved in the moderation processes.
**Status of ESL Teaching**

Stacey saw NCEA as being continually developed and adjusted and that this was serving to *ensure ESL is being acknowledged as a subject along with mainstream subjects.* Stacey felt that this ongoing fine-tuning would help to maintain the validity of ESL in the eyes of the wider school community.

4.9 **Vania**

Like Stacey, Vania was another teacher who requested to submit her response in writing; her answers were also very concise and to the point. Vania spoke of NCEA assessment in comparison with its predecessor, NCEA’s impact upon her classroom teaching, students credit cramming, and inter-departmental co-operation. She also spoke briefly on teachers’ workloads, NCEA related bureaucracy, and her belief that NCEA helped to increase students’ motivation.

**Assessment**

Vania found NCEA to be a *much preferable form of assessment* when compared to the old School Certificate and Bursary system, where *an entire year’s work was assessed in a 3 hour exam which would be scaled anyway.* Vania also felt that under NCEA, teachers were far more involved in the assessment of their students and that this increased involvement was an improvement. Vania also believed *English NCEA standards encourage critical thinking* and that because subjects have been broken down into separate units rather than being treated as a whole, students’ *strengths within subject*
areas are recognised where before they were not. Perhaps as a result of this, Vania claimed that the word ‘FAIL’ has become obsolete.

**Teaching Practice**

On a less positive note, Vania stated that working under NCEA resulted in her having less time available for communicative teaching/learning. Prior to NCEA she had sought a balance between functional/communicative/genre-based and academic English, but now felt that since the introduction of the new system that balance had shifted away from functional/communicative. Along with this had also come less time to engage in pair work, group work, co-operative learning and ‘fun’ activities with vocabulary and grammar. Vania suspected that her more capable students probably felt that such activities were a bit frivolous and wasting precious NCEA-driven time.

**Encouraging Excellence**

Vania felt that under NCEA, some of her students had developed what she termed a credit-cramming attitude towards their studies and that they put this ‘number’ before the learning process. She observed that often the focus of her students was more on the achievement of standards, rather than actual learning. As a result, a student’s accumulating of credits could become more important than the quality of their work and so striving for a ‘merit’ or ‘excellence’ is not so important for some students.
Inter-Departmental Co-operation

Vania indicated that as a result of working under NCEA and trying to ensure that it was effective, the ESL department now had a much closer working relationship with the English department in terms of the moderation and cohesion of English programmes the international students are involved in. Vania felt that this had allowed non-ESL teachers a greater understanding of the nature of secondary level ESL. She noted that some staff still express incredulity when they catch a glimpse of the material we use. They have had the impression we teach students how to order an espresso or catch the bus effectively.

Teacher Workload

Vania claimed that since the introduction of NCEA, the amount of paperwork required of teachers to get through had increased significantly.

Student Motivation

Vania felt that under NCEA teachers were supported by excellent web resources and that her students seemed to be much more focused and motivated now that they were working towards short term goals; that 2-3 week programmes with an assessment at the end were more motivating than long term projects.

This chapter has presented the categorised responses of the study’s participants. While this chapter was purely descriptive in its nature, Chapter 5 will seek to draw connections and comparisons between the different participants in terms of the content of their
responses. It will also discuss the results of this study in light of the literature examined in Chapter 2.
Chapter 5
Cross-case Analysis & Discussion

This thesis has described an explorative piece of research in which nine ESL teachers from eight Dunedin secondary schools, individually participating in an oral interview, gave an account of their experience teaching ESL under NCEA, their thoughts regarding those experiences, and their thoughts regarding NCEA itself. The grounded approach taken to the analysis of data yielded various categories of teacher interest/concern. This chapter presents the dominant and meta-categories drawn from the repeating trains of thought found in Chapter 4. This is the net result of the second level of analysis described in Chapter 3.2.5.2 and comprises five meta-categories, with each meta-category being composed of varying numbers of dominant categories. Chapter 5.1 compares differing opinions concerning NCEA and IELTS, the international credibility of NCEA as opposed to IELTS and the relationship between this issue and the financial cost of being an ESL student. Chapter 5.2 examines the co-operation between English and ESL departments that has been born out of working under NCEA and the resulting shift in status that this co-operation has brought about for ESL. Chapter 5.3 discusses ESL teacher and student workloads, the impact of NZQA's use of the Internet to update NCEA standards and the relationship between internal assessment and overall workload. Chapter 5.4 considers the practice by students of credit cramming and the issue of whether or not conditions under NCEA encourage student effort towards academic excellence. Chapter 5.5 concerns the impact of NCEA upon the practice of teaching ESL. Chapter 5.6 summarises the chapter as a whole. The overall goal of this chapter is to distil and summarise these meta-
categories and the dominant categories within them, to discuss them in greater depth and, where possible, to consider them in light of the literature discussed in Chapter 2.

5.1 NCEA: What’s It All Worth?

Of all the issues raised or alluded to by participants, the question of NCEA’s suitability as an assessment framework system for ESL students was by far the most contentious. Key elements of this issue included the relative merits of NCEA and IELTS (5.1.1), NCEA’s credibility on the international stage, and whether or not NCEA provided ESL students with a qualification that would prove to be useful to them in the future; i.e. value for money (5.1.2).

5.1.1 NCEA & IELTS: Pros & Cons

Eight of the nine participants raised the issue of whether NCEA or IELTS was the more appropriate and useful system of assessment for ESL students (see Appendix K: Cross-case Comparison). Participants’ comments fell into two opposing categories: those that were pro-NCEA/anti-IELTS and those that were pro-IELTS/anti-NCEA. It should be noted at this point that at no time in the course of the interview did the author make mention of, reference to or comparison between NCEA and IELTS.

All Those In Favour

Anna’s, Katie’s and Stacey’s comments on this issue placed them on the pro-NCEA/anti-IELTS side of the board. Anna and Katie both felt that IELTS was very hard; Anna believed that the cognitive skills and level of maturity required for success in IELTS were
quite beyond many ESL students, while Katie described the standard of 6.0 required under IELTS for university entrance as *ridiculous*. Anna stated that IELTS was very generalised and that it was *renowned for over-placement*, while Stacey believed that NCEA assessed a much broader range of English language skills than did IELTS. Anna, Katie and Stacey also felt that NCEA was much fairer than IELTS in that it provided ESL students with *more opportunities to achieve*. They felt that NCEA requirements were *more realistic and achievable than ever before* and that as a result, there was room for ESL students who were *good but not quite with elite status*. Anna also felt that NCEA had provided ESL teachers with a structure around which to work, while Stacey believed that NCEA had enabled ESL teachers to build a well-rounded curriculum.

**Those Opposed**

Claire, Louise, Malcolm, Rachel and Sarah all positioned themselves in the anti-NCEA/pro-IELTS camp. Claire felt that NCEA had essentially lowered the standard in order to get students into university. Malcolm claimed that going back 4-5 years ago, the students coming through had far superior skills in terms of reading and writing and speech and saw IELTS as the *only way that [he] can make sure that their speaking and listening skills are up to scratch*. Sarah echoed this sentiment, saying that NCEA Level 2 literacy was *not a suitable substitute for IELTS*; both Claire and Sarah stated that ESL students were *much better off with IELTS*. Claire also felt that with NCEA being of a lower standard (in her opinion) than IELTS, allowing ESL students into New Zealand universities on the basis of NCEA Level 2 Literacy was essentially *setting kids up to fail*. Interestingly in contrast to this, Louise and Rachel both felt that NCEA standards were in
fact more difficult that IELTS and so subsequently made it more difficult for [ESL students] to go to university than in the old bursary days.

Tertiary Education

Though contradicted by Louise and Rachel, the claim that the requirements for university entrance are, under NCEA, more realistic and achievable than ever before raises an interesting question: is the fact that NCEA allegedly allows (where IELTS allegedly did not) for capable but not ‘elite’ ESL students to enter university an inherently good thing? To claim that this is inherently good and desirable assumes that it is in the best interests of a country (and its individual citizens) for as many people as possible to acquire a university education. But this is not a given and so cannot simply be assumed to be true. New Zealand has many university graduates; it also has over $8,000,000,000 in tertiary student debt (Scoop, 2005) and a serious lack of certified tradesmen (GANZ, 2005). This is not to suggest that university education is not beneficial; it is simply to make a point of questioning whether or not the wholesale enabling of more students (including ESL students) to enter university by making university entrance more achievable than ever before is a desirable socio-economic practice. University degrees are not some sort of universal panacea. Louise’s admission that she and other teachers were trying to open their ESL students’ minds to alternative educational possibilities and career avenues outside of university is interesting and encouraging, in that it reflects an appreciation of how difficult it must be for ESL students to come and study under New Zealand’s education system with the mindset that university is the way, the truth and the life and that no one comes into a state of personal and professional enjoyment but by it.
University is not the be all and end all and it would appear that some ESL teachers realise this and are trying to open their students’ minds and broaden their horizons by exploring different educational and training possibilities.

**ESL Students & NCEA**

The previous passage gives rise to some other questions. Were foreign students, their needs and their educational backgrounds taken into account during the development of NCEA? Is NCEA in fact a useful qualification for ESL students? These question must be asked not simply in terms of whether or not NCEA carries any credibility with overseas universities or prospective employers (within or without New Zealand), but also in terms of whether or not the content taught under NCEA and/or the pedagogical practices which NCEA encourages are of any true and tangible benefit to ESL students. It cannot simply be assumed that NCEA is an inherently suitable qualification for ESL students.

**Concluding Thoughts**

Those teachers who favoured NCEA over IELTS, did so on the grounds that NCEA placed more realistic expectations upon ESL students and so was more achievable, while three of the five teachers who stood opposed to NCEA did so because they believed that NCEA had lowered the standard. This of course raises the question of whether or not ‘more realistic’ and ‘more achievable’ are in reality just ‘easier’. If NCEA is easier than IELTS, then the upshot of this is that the standard of English required of foreign students for them to gain entrance to New Zealand universities has been lowered. The question that must be asked then is not whether the lowering of standards is a good thing, but a)
whether or not the score of 6.0 required of foreign students under IELTS was fair and justifiable, and b) regardless of the comparative levels of difficulty of NCEA and IELTS, which of the two assessment systems is the most appropriate?

In answer to the question of whether or not the score of 6.0 required of foreign students under IELTS is fair and justifiable, Elley (2005) is hesitant to say for two reasons. Firstly, the IELTS levels were not established in New Zealand, but rather in England, Canada and Australia. Secondly, there has not been “any follow-up research on whether the cut-off is reasonable or not……there is a need to follow up a large sample of students who have taken IELTS and see how well they performed at university” (n.p.).

In answer to the second question, Elley (2004) states that because many foreign students improve in their English ability as they progress through their tertiary courses and go on to achieve very high levels of tertiary success, “a strict entrance test requiring knowledge of the idiosyncrasies of English spelling, irregular verbs and other such conventions, [is] difficult to justify” (2); particularly in the case of disciplines such as Engineering, Science and Commerce (Elley, 2005). Elley (2004) claims that “it is surely unfair to require the same standard of mastery of such skills amongst [ESL] students as amongst New Zealand students, who have studied the English language all their lives” (2).

Further to this, Elley (2004) compares NCEA and IELTS directly, stating that as IELTS tests have been specifically designed to set a strict standard, the tests are pre-tested and regularly revised. IELTS focuses on skills that directly assist in tertiary level learning and
has the backing of reliability and validity figures to prove that tests are fair. NCEA outcomes, on the other hand, are not aimed at skills that will assist students in achieving the specific requirements of university learning. NCEA results are thoroughly unreliable (see Chapter 2.5.1) and have no predictive figures regarding validity. Additionally, IELTS standards are consistent, while NCEA’s standards vary in their difficulty on an annual basis.

In light of Elley’s claims it is entirely possible that Anna, Louise, Katie and Rachel are quite justified in believing that IELTS is very hard, and that the standard of 6.0 required under IELTS for university entrance is ridiculous. The answer to the question asked earlier of whether or not the score of 6.0 required under IELTS was fair and justifiable, may well be “No, it isn’t”. Then again, it could just as well be “Yes, actually it is”; there is not yet sufficient evidence to support either conclusion. The question of whether NCEA or IELTS is the more appropriate system of assessment is however, a separate issue altogether; Elley (2004) considers IELTS superior to NCEA for reasons of reliability, while Claire, Malcolm and Sarah, consider IELTS superior to NCEA on the grounds that NCEA fails to facilitate adequate cultivation of the language skills required for tertiary level study. If NCEA is as unreliable as Elley (2004) and others (Elley et al, 2005) claim, and if Claire, Malcolm and Stacey are justified in believing that NCEA is not a suitable substitute for IELTS and that going back 4-5 years ago, the students coming through had far superior skills in terms of reading and writing and speech, then it would appear that the answer is somewhat academic; ESL students are much better off with IELTS.
5.1.2 Cost & Credibility

Both Malcolm and Sarah expressed a lack of faith in NCEA as an internationally credible qualification on the basis that a) the bureaucracy surrounding NCEA was greatly disadvantageous to ESL students, b) NCEA was not a valuable qualification for ESL students, as it lacked the international recognition that other certificates possessed (e.g. IELTS, TOEFL and SAT), and c) the high financial cost involved for ESL students to complete their secondary level education in New Zealand and the disparity between NCEA fees for domestic students and ESL students was unfair and unjustified.

Bureaucracy

The issue of NCEA bureaucracy impacting ESL students is not specifically mentioned in any literature that the author has encountered. NCEA has been described as a “manageability nightmare” (Hall, 2005: 16), but this is in a general sense (see Chapter 2.2.7), rather than in a specifically ESL-related sense. The issue of NCEA’s value as a qualification in the eyes of the world on the other hand, has been discussed (or alluded to) at length (Donnelly, 2000; Elley, 2004; Irwin, 1999; 2000; 2001; Locke, 2004).

This raises two issues. The first is that of NZQA and NCEA appearing to be preoccupied with process over product; is there simply too much bureaucracy? If, as Malcolm’s two accounts suggest, serving the process of NCEA is more important than serving the people of NCEA, then the answer must be yes. The second is that of NCEA’s conduciveness to the fulfilment of ESL students’ future scholastic and vocational intentions; i.e. where do they want to go, what do they want to be able to do and how likely is NCEA to assist
them in getting there? If New Zealand offers foreign students a qualification that is not going to facilitate them achieving the things that they wish to achieve, inside or outside New Zealand, ESL students will simply look elsewhere.

**International Credibility**

While NCEA’s lack of international credibility may to some extent be due to its relative newness, or perhaps its similarities to the failed Victorian Certificate of Education, a more crucial influence is likely to be its lack of statistical reliability (see Chapter 2.5.1). For while Elley (2004) claims that “there is plenty of hard evidence to show that the actual achievement levels of large cohorts do not differ in adjacent years by more than 2-3% in New Zealand, or any other OECD country” (Elley, 2004: 1), the MacLeans College (2005) study found that failure rates for NCEA achievement standards varied by up as much as 37% from 2003 to 2004 (see Chapter 2.5.1.1). The authors of the study could discern little pattern in the variations and concluded that a student’s success under NCEA had less to do with their personal ability or effort than with the particular year within which that student happened to sit the standards (MacLeans, 2005). Such problems and their ensuing consequences should come as no surprise given that systems like NCEA have been proven overseas to be unsuitable for traditional academic subjects; with NCEA’s implementation “the whole credibility of [New Zealand’s] previously well-regarded qualifications system [has been] put in doubt” (Morris, 2005: 1).

Another piece of evidence supporting the belief that NCEA is not a valuable achievement and lacks international credibility is the number of secondary schools adopting the
Cambridge International Exam or the International Baccalaureate exam systems. In 2003 twenty two schools (Auckland Grammar for one) had implemented the CIE system; in 2004 that number had risen to thirty two. Only five secondary schools (e.g. St Margaret's College) have adopted the IB, but at an additional annual cost of approximately $200,000 NZD for materials and additional staff to teach the course, it is a rather damning indictment of NCEA and its proponents. Further to this, NCEA’s credibility on the international stage, and indeed that of New Zealand’s education system as a whole, is surely not assisted by the Minister of Education publicly describing Cambridge’s examination system as a Third World model of assessment (Richardson, 2005).

Cost

When discussing the financial cost of NCEA in relation to ESL students, Malcolm described it as just straight revenue gathering. It is important to recognize at this point, that the core issue here is not the precise quantities of money required of foreign parents in order for their children to receive their secondary education in New Zealand. The core issue is the question of whether or not ESL students are receiving, regardless of how much they are required to pay for it, a secondary level qualification that will a) provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to progress beyond secondary school and b) carry weight and credibility with overseas tertiary education providers and prospective employers. Only if NCEA is a valuable qualification that carries weight and credibility need the question be asked as whether or not the specific pricing arrangements related to NCEA are fair and just. But if NCEA is not a valuable qualification carrying weight and

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26 At the time that the cited article was published.
credibility with overseas tertiary education providers and prospective employers, then the specifics of pricing are moot and a more serious question must be asked: are ESL students seen by the New Zealand government as being simply a cash cow? What checks are in place to measure whether or not ESL students are getting value for their money?

As Walker (2001) points out, it is an economic reality that in respect to the ESL programmes within New Zealand secondary schools, “although inherently educational in character, [they] are essentially service operations” (187). Given that the quality of ‘service’ provided in the classroom will likely have significant influence in terms of determining a given student’s educational, social and economic success (Flores, 2001), it is utterly imperative that foreign students seeking education in New Zealand receive value for money and good customer service. If these are not forthcoming, ESL students will simply stop coming. Indeed, in terms of its potential economic impact upon New Zealand’s educational coffers, not only is NCEA likely to staunch the flow of revenue coming in, but it is also entirely possible that it will increase the volume of expenses flowing out, through NCEA becoming “a valuable source of income to lawyers, as aggrieved students and parents seek redress through the courts” (Hames, 2002: 128).

The ESL market is a very lucrative one, so it would be unfortunate if New Zealand were to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. If ESL students (or more importantly their fee-paying parents) come to the conclusion that they are not receiving value for their money, they will simply take their business elsewhere. If nothing else, it will certainly do little to cultivate feelings of gratitude and
patriotism amongst ESL students who chose to make New Zealand their long term home. But the ripple effect of this has the potential to go much further. Some of today’s ESL students will be tomorrow’s presidents, prime ministers, ministers of trade and ministers of foreign affairs. It would be most unfortunate (though not at all unwarranted) if today’s short-sightedness and greed were to translate into tomorrow’s inability to secure profitable trade deals in Asia and the Middle East.

5.2 ESL & English: Sharing The Love

The second most frequently referred to issue during the interviews was that of the increased co-operation between ESL and English departments. This co-operation appears to have been facilitated (if not directly caused) by conditions resulting from working under NCEA. An immediate result of some ESL and English departments working more closely together appears to have been a rise in the perceived academic status of ESL as an educational domain.

5.2.1 Inter-departmental Co-operation

Anna, Claire, Katie, Stacey and Vania all believed that the implementation of NCEA had helped facilitate much closer working ties between their ESL and English departments, resulting in a supportive and mutually beneficial relationship. ESL teachers being able to share together with other teachers from their respective English departments, especially in terms of teaching resources and moderation duties, had allowed for improved
streamlining in regards to moderation and cohesion of English programmes [that] international students are involved in.

Stacey and Vania also claimed that a positive spin-off stemming from this relationship was that of their English departments and the wider school, seeing what goes on in ESL, so affording those outside ESL a better understanding of just what secondary level ESL is all about, and in turn facilitating the acknowledging [of] the work that takes place in the ESL arena.

This raises the question of the actual purpose of ESL in New Zealand secondary schools. Presumably the essential purpose of ESL is to serve and assist towards the mastering of the English language in all its various forms. If this is the case, it makes absolute sense that ESL and English departments should be significantly integrated with one another; respecting of course, the specialist nature of ESL. What is to be gained by them existing as segregated entities? And why, when IELTS has been replaced with NCEA, are there no ESL achievement standards? Why are ESL unit standards not tied into NCEA Level 2 literacy? What is the point of having ESL standards (of any kind) that are not related to the achievement of literacy and the subsequent recognition of that literacy?

Anna in particular spoke of the value of inter-departmental interaction in assisting with the maintenance of consistent standards:

I know that what we’ve talked about in the staffroom here at school has been the inconsistent marking under NCEA and you have to be really clear within your department with what the standard is and that’s why I’ve worked so closely with [the Head of the English Department], because she’s been there from the outset.......But I think an ESL teacher working
on their own; I wonder how they know what the standard is? And I know that there are some ESL teachers out there who are on their own. So I guess the requirement then is that ESL teachers work with and are supported by English teachers if they are not trained English teachers like me.

While co-operation between ESL and English departments is undoubtedly a good thing, if it is necessary for this co-operation to exist in order to ensure that ESL teachers *know what the standard is*, then NCEA standards are not of a sufficient quality. As Hall (2000) points out, a standard exists “not only in the words that are specified, but in the mind of the marker, the representation of the standard in each student’s work, and the interaction of the student’s representation and the marker’s interpretation” (7). If this is true, then ensuring that teachers *know what the standard is* via inter-teacher and inter-departmental negotiations is a case of too many cooks spoiling the broth. If NCEA standards are not transparent and clear to all teachers, but require inter-departmental discussion, how can they be called standards? Standards are surely not so negotiable. The upshot is that the *standard* will vary from school to school and if the *standard* varies from school to school, NCEA “will fail to provide consistent, nationwide assessment [and this] will lead to employers giving increased consideration to the school a person attended, further entrenching the status of the good schools and reinforcing social differences” (Hames, 2002: 128). But this should not come as a surprise in light of the criticisms made of NCEA (see Chapter 2.2.4).

5.2.2 Status of ESL Teaching

Anna, Malcolm, Sarah and Stacey all mentioned or alluded to the status of ESL relative to other more mainstream subjects. Anna indicated that she was very comfortable not
being a mainstream teacher and did not expect to be treated like a mainstream teacher. Malcolm described ESL as a forgotten subject, but Anna and Stacey disagreed. Sarah acknowledged that in some schools, ESL teachers were not allowed to teach NCEA because there was a belief that ESL teachers don’t really make the grade and that this belief was not entirely unjustified. This perhaps re-emphasises the issue raised by Franken and McComish (2003) that while “most schools with numbers of NESB students have at least one teacher qualified, to some extent, in an area related to [ESL] provision……… the qualifications are variable, and some may need up-dating……… some teaching staff involved in [ESL] provision have little or no training in the area” (164). Of all the participants involved in this study, only Claire stated explicitly that she had engaged in any specialist ESL teacher training. For ESL teachers to enjoy the same status as mainstream teachers and, more importantly, for ESL students to enjoy the quality of education that they a) need and b) are paying for, ESL teacher qualifications and training must be up-to-date and of a professional standard.

The literature discussed in Chapter 1.5 would suggest that the (relatively) low status of secondary level ESL was rather predictable. The core factor in the equation must surely be the absence of a) a national language policy and b) a national ESL curriculum (Franken & McComish, 2003). These are the basis of language learning and literacy in any country and the absence of them is simply unjustifiable. Further to this are the weaknesses set out by Johnson (2000), in particular the “lack of a coordinated literacy infrastructure……limited quality assurance processes/accountability [and] inadequate professional development and career pathway for teachers” (Johnson, 2000; cited in
McKenna & Fitzpatrick, 2004: 22). Franken and McComish (2003) also express similar concerns. As long as ESL lacks a) sufficient backing from the Ministry of Education and b) the proper educational infrastructure, it will neither flourish nor enjoy the appropriate educational status that it should.

5.3 Working For ‘The Man’

The third most commonly discussed issue amongst participants was the physical logistics of being an ESL teacher under NCEA. Increased record keeping, the practical reality of keeping in tune with the regular updating of NCEA standards and increased assessment, have all led to significantly increased workloads for teachers and students.

5.3.1 Workload

Teacher Workload

Claire, Katie, Malcolm, Rachel, Sarah and Vania all stated that the amount of paper work that NCEA required them to get through was enormous; for Claire and Katie, this was their primary bugbear about NCEA. Claire and Katie both mentioned the impact of so much paperwork on the amount of time that teachers were able to spend preparing and in the classroom. Claire said that it would be nice just to be able to teach and not do all the paper work, while Katie asked: when the hell are we meant to bloody teach? Sarah claimed to have worked incredibly hard since NCEA started, resulting in huge stress on her part.
Student Workload

Claire, Malcolm, Rachel and Sarah cited the fact that the workload was also huge for ESL students. It is a big ask for the majority of natural English speaking students to get through... for an international student it’s an enormous task. Sarah said that the ongoing pressure of NCEA left little room for a lot of the creative aspects of school... because the students simply can’t cope with doing those more creative things along with their regular work. Malcolm had tried to lighten the load of ESL students by diluting the achievement of NCEA Level 2 into two years of study instead of one year, while Claire had witnessed some of her ESL students becoming physically ill as a result of the pressure of their workload.

Following the Paper Trail

The increase in teacher and student workloads is a direct result of NCEA significantly increasing internal assessment across the board (Morris, 2005); the specific increase in paperwork for teachers stems inherently from OBE’s penchant for accountability and evidence (Berlach, 2004). With so many standards for teachers to work with and so much assessment required to support the standards (Elley et al., 2005), time and resources that teachers need/would prefer to invest supporting their classroom teaching must instead be channelled into shuffling paperwork (Hall, 2005; Hames, 2002; Irwin, 2000; 2001a). Indeed, the situation as it stands was predicted quite accurately by Irwin (2001a):

Under the NCEA system, with ‘high stakes’ assessment in all three senior years, students will face relentless pressure of internal assessment, in addition to end-of-year exams. Instead of being a necessary but limited distraction, gaining qualifications will become the all-consuming preoccupation sidelining the essential business of teaching and learning. (1)
From the very beginning, secondary level teachers have been concerned about working conditions under NCEA; Newton’s (2002) Nationwide Teaching Staff Survey found that 71%\(^{27}\) of New Zealand secondary teachers surveyed were seriously considering leaving the teaching profession due to their present and prospective workloads; more support for the claim that NCEA is far too expensive to be properly operated (Locke, 2004).

As it concerns ESL, the amount of paperwork that teachers are required to stay on top of represents a fundamental flaw in New Zealand’s secondary education system. A teacher’s job is not to sift through mountains of paperwork and record keeping; a teacher’s job is to teach. Surely the cultivation of a teaching culture where the ESL teachers are continually overworked, stressed, quite depressed and where they ask “when the hell are we meant to bloody teach?” cannot be a good thing. Should teachers have to work so much? Should teachers have to be in charge of so many students? Does New Zealand’s approach to secondary education require re-evaluation in this respect? As Malcolm pointed out, ESL teachers currently have less time than they would like with which to properly teach the rudiments of the English language, causing a negative ripple effect into not only students’ learning of English, but also into other core subjects, ultimately undermining the quality of education that ESL students are receiving. The same will be true of native students.

It is interesting to note that there is little (if any) literature concerning the impact of NCEA upon ESL students’ workloads; is this another reflection of the comparatively low status of ESL?

\(^{27}\) 71% (1076) of a sample of 1512 secondary level teachers.
5.3.2 Internet Updating

Claire and Malcolm expressed considerable dissatisfaction with NZQA’s use of the Internet as the principle method for keeping teachers up to date with the latest fine-tunings of NCEA standards. Both participants indicated that they would regularly send stuff away for moderation and find that there had been an update that they weren’t aware of. As a result, a student could have done all the work, but because it wasn’t according to the latest version of the standard, they were failed, leaving the ESL teacher to have to go back through and change everything.

Aside from the obvious logistical inefficiency (and downright unfairness) of teachers issuing assessments, students completing them and then the teachers discovering that in the time since they issued the assessment the standard has been updated, there is the question of why NZQA has been updating standards during the school term. This leads to the next question: why does this practice continue? Surely teachers must have complained about it. Teachers are struggling to keep up and consequently students are failing; has the purpose been lost in the process?

While not discussed explicitly in the literature, the problems mentioned by two of the teachers regarding NZQA’s use of the Internet to update NCEA standards may simply be symptomatic of a system that was rushed into existence and execution. NCEA was developed and implemented in a very short space of time, and prior to its implementation no pre-trialling of unit or achievement standards was carried out (Irwin, 1999). Certainly in industries where the related technology is constantly evolving, regular revision and
updating of production designs and standards make perfect sense and are more or less essential to product excellence and overall organisational success. But it is difficult to believe that the core elements of the English language (or any educational discipline for that matter) are evolving so rapidly as to necessitate the adoption of such a production-line mentality (Berlach, 2004) towards secondary level ESL education. The logistical problems encountered by ESL teachers as a result of Internet updating are indicative of a very cumbersome and ineffective system; a system where there are “too many manageability issues that require [an] attention to detail [that is] beyond the capacity of NZQA to handle” (Elley et al., 2005: 2).

5.3.3 Assessment

Louise, Malcolm and Vania all approved of the fact that under NCEA internal assessment was more regular than under the School Certificate/Bursary system. Louise enjoyed being able to really assess the things that [she wanted] to assess and being able to let students really know what areas they have achieved in, as well as those which they haven’t. Vania described NCEA as a much preferable form of assessment which allowed for teachers to be more involved in the assessment of their own students. While being happy with more regular internal assessment, Malcolm felt that particularly in regards to international students, there [was] still value in having at least a 40-50% external examination.

This highlights several questions. Most obviously, what is the best balance, specifically as it concerns ESL, of internal and external assessment at secondary level and how can this best be achieved? Secondly, under a nationwide system, just how much should
teachers be involved in the assessment of their own students? Considered in light of participants’ comments concerning internet updating (see Chapter 5.3.2) and the broader discussion of workload in general (see Chapter 5.3.1), an obvious progression emerges: increased internal assessment leads to increased marking and general paperwork which amounts to an increased workload. Add to this equation the variable of the ongoing evolution (via internet updating) of the standards to which teachers are required to grade their students’ work and the sum of the parts is a situation where, regardless of the arguable benefits, teachers are required to work a lot more (outside of regular teaching hours) than they were previously.

There is also a third question. Prior to NCEA, was it really so incredibly difficult to assess students and their strengths and then effectively communicate these to potential employers and/or higher educators (NZQA, 2002: 4)? Does not the belief that each and every one of a student’s supposed skills and capabilities should be made plainly visible to prospective employers, higher educators and themselves (along with the parallel belief that it is a great injustice not to do so) rest upon the presupposition that educational disciplines are not integrated wholes, but rather collections of individual skills and pieces of knowledge that can and should be measured independent of one another? This may be the position of NZQA and the Ministry of Education, but the American Federation of Teachers (1999) would strongly disagree (see Chapter 2.5.2).

According to Spady (1982), OBE is built to a large extent on the premise that “illiteracy and failure are neither inevitable nor acceptable consequences of schooling for anyone”
It is on this basis that OBE systems place so much emphasis on internal assessment; this and the belief that schooling is the primary factor in determining students’ success (Spady, 1988; cited in Berlach, 2004: 4). According to Berlach (2004) however, believing that continual internal assessment will bring about students’ success is extremely naïve, as factors such as parental support, personal motivation and socio-economic positioning have a far greater influence on academic success than does the general experience of going to school (Ball, 2000; Berlach, 2004).

5.4 To Achieve Or Not To Achieve?

Another issue that arose frequently during the interviews was that of whether or not NCEA and conditions fostered under NCEA encourage students to challenge themselves and to strive after Excellence, rather than to simply Achieve. Within this issue was the specific practice of students credit cramming; students working out just how many credits are required of them to continue and then putting in just enough effort to achieve those specific credits.

5.4.1 Encouraging Excellence

Claire, Katie, Malcolm, Rachel and Vania all expressed views on the influence of NCEA upon their students’ sense of motivation and subsequently their desire/drive to excel in their academic work. But while Rachel believed that NCEA had an inherently positive influence upon students, Claire, Katie, Malcolm and Vania did not.
Rachel claimed that because NCEA broke subjects down and enabled students to accumulate two credits in this subject and three credits in that subject was very encouraging for students. Katie, however, felt that NCEA did not encourage students who were very capable of getting Excellence to push themselves and so achieve beyond what was immediately required of them. Claire, Malcolm and Vania echoed Katie’s concern, speaking of a common practice amongst students of credit-cramming; a utilitarian school of thought that says ’as long as I achieve the minimum standard, that’s good enough; I can move on to the next task’. They claimed that students were not pushing themselves enough to get Excellences, but rather had developed a survival mode and so while many students were completing their standards, by far the greatest number [were] just Achieving; they’re getting by, they’re getting a pass.

If NCEA does not push Katie’s capable students to excel, then what sort of students is Rachel referring to when she says that NCEA’s breaking down of subjects results in her students being very encouraged? Are these also capable students? Who does NCEA encourage and who does it not? And to what useful end are they being encouraged? The appearance of the practice of credit cramming would tend to suggest that, on the whole, NCEA encourages students to do less rather than to do more.

This focusing on the accumulation of NCEA credits rather than on the acquisition of real learning spells what Berlach (2004) terms “The Death of Knowledge........when evidence of learning becomes more important than learning itself” (11). Hall (2000) asks “to what extent is [NCEA] likely to foster a ‘bricks without mortar’ approach to teaching
and learning?” (12). If the practice of credit-cramming is any indication, then the answer is probably ‘to quite a considerable extent’. As discussed in Chapter 2.5.2, the embracing of such a mentality will certainly do little to foster mental skills that will enable students to cross-pollinate the varying sets of knowledge that they will acquire in the course of their academic and professional lives (Elley et al., 2005; Hall, 2004); it will do little to cultivate a knowledge economy (Donnelly, 2000; Elley et al., 2005; Hall, 2000; 2004; Irwin, 2000; 2005; Lee, 2004; Morris, 2001).

If credit-cramming is considered in light of the considerable increases in teacher and student workload that have been brought about as a result of NCEA (see Chapter 5.3), the following questions need to be asked: a) are secondary level students in New Zealand simply under too much pressure and b) is the practice of credit-cramming a direct result of this pressure? There is little that materialises within a vacuum or continues to exist in one, and credit-cramming is unlikely to be the exception that disproves this rule. If students are doing just enough to get by and no more, there will be a very real reason as to why this is the case.

The specific practice of credit cramming also raises another issue: if NCEA does encourage what is essentially a very survivalist and utilitarian mode of thinking, how and to what extent will this mode of thinking regarding education spill over into other areas of students’ lives? How will it influence the manner in which these students (who will soon be adults) approach areas of life such as personal relationships, raising children, working for an employer or following the laws of their society?
5.5 ESL Teaching: How Do You Do It?

This section examines the effect of NCEA upon the actual teaching of secondary level ESL. While it is last, it is by no means least, as this issue draws upon and is related to most if not all of the issues discussed in the preceding sections of this chapter. The first part of the section (5.5.1) looks into the logistics of classroom practice and the focus which ESL lessons tend or tend not to take, while the second part (5.5.2) discusses Anna’s comments regarding her use of film and speech writing and delivery in her ESL classes.

5.5.1 Classroom Practice & Lesson Focus

Katie, Louise, Malcolm, Rachel, Sarah and Vania all made mention of the impact of NCEA upon the teaching of their ESL classes. Louise felt that working under NCEA had not really altered the practicalities of her job. Malcolm however, claimed that with the introduction of NCEA, [ESL teachers’] focus [had] increasingly become that of getting [the students] through the units and on reading and writing and that as a result of this, speaking, listening and other important skills were being neglected. Sarah echoed this concern, stating that because of the heavy focus on literature required under NCEA ESL, ESL teachers were unable to give their students enough grammar and other skills that [teachers] know they need. Vania said that under NCEA her focus in ESL had shifted away from functional/communicative skills and that she felt less able to involve her students in more social and co-operative activities, as she suspected that her more able students would feel it was a bit frivolous and wasting precious NCEA-driven time. Rachel believed that in her attempts to ensure that her students successfully completed the
necessary standards, she was probably teaching towards [the] standards rather than broadening their knowledge. Katie on the other hand said that while she had been required to absorb the Standards in and around her teaching of ESL and work a bit quicker, she said that her teaching style had not changed in any essential fashion and that she enjoyed NCEA, in part because it had given her a lot more scope to teach.

Such comments echo the issues discussed in Chapter 1.5 and suggest that, at least to some extent, the restricting conditions that NCEA is fostering are taking away from teachers the essence of their role, rendering them less teachers and more educational facilitators (Berlach, 2004). While it is difficult to determine purely from the data, if teaching practices do influence individual teachers’ pedagogic principles, then it is difficult to accept that working under NCEA has not influenced ESL teachers’ beliefs in some fashion (Breen et al., 2001); for evidently it has affected the focus and content of their teaching.

This again raises the issue of whether or not NCEA encourages a holistic approach to the teaching and so the learning of ESL? If it is true that ESL under NCEA focuses primarily upon reading and writing to the detriment of listening and speaking, but at the same time current ESL students’ reading and writing skills are below those of students four to five years ago, what then is the relationship between these two sub-sets of language skills and why are competency levels regarding reading and writing lower now than in the past, when it is reading and writing that are being focused upon by ESL teachers? Does this
suggest/confirm anything significant about the nature of language and the acquisition of it?

**De Facto Curriculum**

Most of the teachers indicated in one way or another that NCEA standards were serving as the basis/framework for the content of their teaching (i.e. their curriculum). Two teachers in particular stated that NCEA had allowed them to develop what they considered to be a *well-rounded curriculum*. Hall (2000), Irwin (2005) and Krashen (2005) however, would likely not share these teachers’ enthusiasm for their *well-rounded curriculum*, for fear that their inexperience in curriculum development would lead to “inappropriate modularisation” (12) and weak education all-round (see Chapter 2.3.2).

Another question that must be asked is whether or not NCEA encourages ESL teachers to focus on the completion of specific standards, rather than on the fostering of communication skills. In spite of the earlier mentioned fact that most of the ESL teachers interviewed implied or stated explicitly that they were essentially using ESL unit and/or English achievement standards as a de facto curriculum, Katie’s statement that her teaching style had not changed, but that she had simply absorbed the standards *in and around her teaching of ESL*, suggests that she has not taken this approach. The significance of this issue lies in the fact that NCEA is not a curriculum; it is an assessment framework. Perhaps in an ideal world, teachers could carry on teaching according to their curriculum, could assess their students under any given assessment framework and every student would get full marks because regardless of the emphasis of
the assessment framework, the curriculum would have comprehensively covered all the necessary skills and points of knowledge. Unfortunately, as has also been pointed out (see Chapter 1.4), New Zealand has no ESL curriculum (Franken & McComish, 2003). Thus the problem is in the hands of individual teachers and so it is not at all surprising to find that ESL teachers have (consciously or otherwise) adopted NCEA standards as their curriculum. This is far from ideal, but it does highlight the fact that there is much work to be done in the secondary ESL arena. Secondary ESL is developing and needs to continue doing so; if the presence of NCEA will prove to be a catalyst in this development, then the rain cloud will perhaps at least have a silver lining.

5.5.2 NCEA Opens Some Doors

ESL & Film

Anna spoke of her use of films in her ESL classes, the creative outlet that it gave to her and the fact that the critical viewing, discussion and analysis of films had ultimately provided her ESL students with a veritable meta-language. This is significant in that it exemplifies an ESL teacher consciously identifying and employing a vehicle that students can relate to and that is within the scope of their experience and capabilities. It would seem that via Anna’s use of film, ESL students have been empowered with communicative tools for comprehension, analysis, and personal expression. It is also possible that had Anna insisted upon the reading and studying of traditional literature along traditional lines, she may have met with very limited success due to her students having grown up in a visual media-saturated/literature-starved culture and so perhaps not
possessing the skills to deal with traditional literature that previous generations of students may have had.

Public Speaking

Anna’s use of English Speech achievement standards exemplifies a particularly positive application of NCEA. By engaging her ESL students in specific achievement standards that concern the writing and presenting of speeches (i.e. public speaking), Anna kills several birds with one stone. From a purely utilitarian point of view, Anna’s ESL students’ efforts and credit accumulation contribute directly to the achievement of NCEA Level 2 literacy necessary for university entrance (as opposed to ESL unit standards which do not). More importantly however, the challenge and execution of speech preparation and public speaking empowers ESL students (and students in general) with a) increased self-confidence and b) a skill that will prove to be very valuable in the tertiary and employment arenas.

5.6 Summary Remarks

The purpose of this section is to summarise Chapter 5 as a whole and to briefly take stock of what it has achieved; how do the findings of this study relate/compare to the literature?

NCEA: What’s It All Worth?

Chapter 5.1 showed that, while not unanimous in their voting, the majority of ESL teachers believed that, at least insofar as it concerned ESL students, NCEA was an unsuitable framework of assessment; a belief that echoes the criticisms made by
numerous authors (Berlach, 2004; Elley et al., 2005; Holt, 1994; Irwin, 2005; Locke, 1999a; Morris, 2005). Some teachers also had serious reservations concerning the international credibility of NCEA and the financial cost of it. While NCEA’s value in the international arena has been frequently questioned (Donnelly, 2000; Elley, 2004; Irwin, 1999; 2000; 2001; Locke, 2004; Morris, 2005), the issue of its financial cost to ESL students has not been explicitly dealt with in any literature that this author is aware of.

**ESL & English: Sharing The Love**

Chapter 5.2 highlighted one of the more interesting and unexpected findings of this study; the increased co-operation and integration of ESL and English departments under NCEA, and the various benefits that this integration has given rise to; specifically a rise in the status of ESL, and the determining and maintaining of standards across and within departments. The issue of ESL/English co-operation is one that has not yet been discussed in the literature concerning NCEA, and while raising the status of ESL should be welcomed and fostered, some writers (Donnelly, 2000; Hall, 2000; 2004; Irwin, 1999; Locke, 1999a) might well claim that the need for ESL and English departments to co-operate in order to ensure the streamlining of NCEA standards was simply further proof of the inadequacy of those standards. Chapter 5.2 also considered the status of ESL within the educational paradigm. While there was disagreement regarding ESL’s status under NCEA (putting aside for a moment ESL’s alleged rise in status as a result of inter-departmental co-operation), teachers’ comments highlighted the concerns of Franken & McComish (2003) and McKenna & Fitzpatrick (2004) regarding the flaws of ESL infrastructure in New Zealand.
Working For ‘The Man’

Chapter 5.3 collated teachers’ thoughts on teacher/student workloads under NCEA, standards updating via the Internet, and internal assessment. The majority of teachers complained of the enormous amount of paper work that NCEA required of them and the toll that it had taken on them and on their teaching; similar feelings were expressed concerning the heavy workload that NCEA put on ESL students. These sentiments and those expressed in regards to the practice of updating standards via the Internet (though it is not an issue that is explicitly dealt with in the literature), serve only to echo the criticisms already made in respect to the manageability of NCEA; or lack thereof (Berlach, 2004; Elley et al., 2005; Hall, 2005; Hames, 2002; Irwin, 1999; 2000; 2001a; Locke, 2004; Morris, 2005; Newton, 2002). The three teachers who commented on the increase of internal assessment under NCEA all approved of it in principle (Strachan, 2001); the actual practice and resulting workload was obviously another matter altogether. One teacher however, stood by external assessment (Bishop, 1999; Donnelly, 2005; Fuchs & Woesssman, 2004; Irwin, 2001a; Jurgess, Schneider & Buchel, 2003; Woessmann, 2000; 2002), claiming that particularly in regards to international students, there was value in employing both forms of assessment (Hall, 2004; 2005; Morris, 2005).

To Achieve Or Not To Achieve?

Chapter 5.4 discussed the influence of NCEA upon ESL students’ motivation and their efforts to excel in their studies. Of the teachers who commented upon it, the vast majority believed that NCEA had influenced students negatively, encouraging a mentality whereby students were settling for less than what they were really capable of achieving.
The most apparent manifestation of this mentality was what some teachers referred to as *credit-cramming*, a phenomenon fostered by a) the fragmentary and cafeteria-like nature of NCEA, and b) the workload that NCEA puts upon students, the potential long-term effects of which have received no shortage of literary attention (Berlach, 2004; Donnelly, 2000; Elley et al., 2005; Hall, 2000; 2004; Irwin, 2000; 2005; Lee, 2004; Morris, 2001).

**ESL Teaching: How Do You Do It?**

Chapter 5.5 looked at the impact of NCEA upon the actual teaching of ESL classes. While some teachers felt that working under NCEA had not really altered the physical workings of their job, there were more that believed that NCEA had caused a) a shift in teaching focus away from speaking and listening (Krashen, 2005), and b) teachers to focus more on the completion of specific standards, rather than on the mastery of essential language skills (Berlach, 2004). The bricks are being laid upon one another, but without the mortar with which to hold them together (Irwin, 2005; Hall, 2000), nor the foundations (no pun intended) upon which to build (Franken & McComish, 2003). Chapter 5.5 also examined the comments of one particular teacher regarding her successful employment of film and speech writing/delivery in her ESL classes.

The final two chapters will wrap up and round out this thesis. Chapter 6 will explore its weaknesses and limitations, its achievements/significance, and what further research might be conducted from this point on. Chapter 7 will conclude.
Chapter 6
Post-Study Reflections

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. Chapter 6.1 points out certain weaknesses and limitations of this study such as they have been identified and are understood by the author. Chapter 6.2 explains the significance of this study; limitations aside, what has the execution and documentation of this study achieved? Chapter 6.3 considers where further research might usefully build upon this initial study.

6.1 Weaknesses & Limitations

This section outlines some of the weaknesses and limitations of this study. Chapter 6.1.1 examines the issues of data and method triangulation, the absence of them in this study and some consequences of this. Chapter 6.1.2 briefly discusses the omission of any direct questioning of the participants’ ESL qualifications. Chapter 6.1.3 highlights the inherent difficulty that comes with seeking to identify dominant themes within an open question approach.

6.1.1 Triangulation & Related Issues

Crano (1981) correctly states that “no single measure is, or can be, a perfect indication of the hypothetical construct of interest” (321), thus highlighting the primary weakness of this study: the absence of either data or method triangulation. A more holistic and complete study of the impact of NCEA upon secondary level ESL would contain data elicited from several perspectives; e.g. ESL students, the parents of ESL students, secondary school principals. For the author however, this would have been logistically
unmanageable and would have required the investment of more time than was available. As a result, a single perspective was selected for examination: ESL teachers (see Chapter 1.5.1).

In terms of methodology, a more complete study would have contained not only a qualitative element, but also a quantitative one, whereby the social world would be separated “into empirical components called variables which [could] be represented numerically” (Payne & Payne, 2004: 180). Unfortunately, as explained in Chapter 3.1.2, there was no literary precedent for such empirical separation and as such, a quantitative approach was not viable or justified. As a result then, because the data yielded in this study is entirely qualitative in nature, it cannot be considered to be representative of all ESL teachers.

Not so much a fault, but certainly a limitation stemming directly from the previously alluded to logistical realities confronting the author, was the small number of participants (nine) involved in this study and the fact that all but one of the participants were female. While a larger sample of ESL teachers would have enabled a larger pool of data from which to draw, the effect that an increased proportion of male participants would have had upon the data pool is indeterminable, and therefore interesting to consider.

6.1.2 Nothing Ventured, Nothing Gained

One particularly unfortunate oversight on the part of the author was that of not explicitly asking the ESL teachers to state their specific ESL qualifications. Had this been done,
more useful discussion would have been possible in regards to this and related issues (see Chapter 5.5.1). Further to this, the author failed to elicit any form of participant bio data during the pilot studies, resulting in a total lack of bio data concerning Malcolm (see Appendix F: Participant Bio Data).

6.1.3 Open Questions & the Search for Dominant Categories

An inherent difficulty with this study is that, due to the questions being so open and broad in their focus, very often the responses to given question were wildly different, not only in terms of their position within the continuum of opinion regarding a given issue, but in terms of the issues themselves; three different teachers would give (for whatever reasons) three completely different answers to the same question (see Chapter 3.1.3). As a result, it is entirely possible that in real life there existed considerably more thematic cross-over between ESL teachers than actually appears on paper; nerves, workplace pressure, problems at home, the war in Iraq and/or any number of other conscious or unconscious factors could have led to participants not mentioning certain concerns, not because they did not have them, but simply because it did not occur to them to do so at the time.

6.2 The Significance of this Study

In spite of the weaknesses outlined in the preceding sections of this chapter, the research documented in this thesis is by no means devoid of significance or applicability. In examining the state of ESL under NCEA and the impact of the latter upon the former, it provides an in-depth study into this relational paradigm and so provides some initial
understanding of it. In doing so, this thesis builds particularly upon the work of Franken & McComish (2003) and McKenna & Fitzpatrick (2004), who have highlighted some serious weaknesses within the infrastructure of New Zealand ESL; this thesis presents some of the fruit born of those weaknesses. It also provides some additional data and insight with which to evaluate the general executive and logistical success of NCEA. Specific to the relationship of ESL and NCEA, this thesis has highlighted some of the difficulties that ESL teachers and students face under NCEA, particularly the heavy workload and the stresses that result from that, and the compounding effect that NCEA and ESL can have upon one another; generic difficulties that ESL students encounter are made worse by the conditions fostered under NCEA and vice versa. It has also introduced the phenomenon of credit-cramming, as well as highlighting the focus upon the completion of standards and the accumulation of credits over the acquisition of knowledge and skills. On a more positive note, this thesis has revealed the benefits, including the rise in status of ESL, that have resulted from increased co-operation between ESL and English departments.

6.3 Where to from here?

As pointed out at the beginning of Chapter 3.1.2, NCEA has been in operation for only four years. Subsequently, the relationship and interaction between NCEA and ESL is a new and unexplored field of research. This thesis, in many respects, provides merely a point of reference; a launching point for future, more in-depth research.
Elley (2005) believes, in the context of whether NCEA or IELTS is the more appropriate assessment system for ESL students, that “there is a need to follow up a large sample of students who have taken IELTS and see how well they performed at university” (2005; n.p.). Concurrent longitudinal studies of ESL students working under NCEA and IELTS would provide insight into ESL students’ respective developmental tendencies under the two systems. While studies of this nature would involve countless variables, many of which would have nothing to do with academic education (students’ home lives, parental support, personal health and motivation), the insights into the ESL/NCEA relationship that would result would be much greater than the snapshot that this thesis offers.

Further research into the ESL/NCEA relationship could employ a more triangular fashion of data collection (see Chapter 6.1.1). By exploring the views of ESL students, the parents of ESL students, and those of other ESL education stakeholders (e.g. secondary school principals, teachers from within the English department, prospective employers of current ESL students, and current employers of former ESL students) in addition to the teachers’ views that constituted the topic and substance of this thesis, a much more holistic view of the ESL/NCEA relationship would be possible.

Further studies could also adopt a more quantitative orientation regarding their data collection, could target more specific issues and ask more specific questions (now that this thesis has provided some literary precedent from which to do so), and could employ much larger samples of participants. Such approaches to data collection could also allow
for the employment of statistical procedures in data analysis, and would lend more significance to variables such as gender, age, and teaching experience.

Chapter 5.5.2 raised the question of whether Anna’s students would have met with less success had Anna insisted upon the reading and studying of traditional literature along traditional lines, rather than using films as she chose to. Perhaps further research could explore the question of whether film and other non-textual forms of artistic communication provide a suitable academic basis for secondary level literary study and the successful acquisition of the English language.

This chapter has provided this thesis with a post-operative diagnostic. First, by pointing out some of the weaknesses and limitations of this study such as they have been identified and are understood by the author. Secondly, by summarising the overall significance of the study, and finally by suggesting where further research might be conducted so as to usefully build upon the achievements of this initial study.
Chapter 7
Conclusion

At the very beginning of this thesis, it was stated that its purpose was to research and report regarding the impact of NCEA upon secondary level ESL education, as perceived through the eyes of secondary level ESL teachers. Chapter 1 provided a contextual platform from which to read and understand this thesis, by describing the educational climate that existed prior to the development of NCEA (1.1), explaining the fundamentals of NCEA in contrast to those of its predecessor (1.2), giving clarification concerning NCEA achievement and unit standards (1.3), outlining the state of ESL education in New Zealand (1.4), and stating clearly the purpose of and reasoning behind the undertaking of this research (1.5.1). Chapter 2 provided a theoretical framework through an examination of Standards-Based Assessment and Outcomes-Based Education (2.1), Internal and External Assessment (2.2), and by describing the past experiences of the Australian state of Victoria and the USA (2.3). Chapter 2 also discussed some of the key pros and cons of NCEA, as they have been put forward by proponents of NCEA (2.4), publicised in the media, and critiqued by academic commentators (2.5). Chapter 3 laid out the theoretical and physical logistics of this study: the significant issues relating to the design and development of the research methodology (3.1), and the step by step process of gathering and analysing data (3.2). Chapter 4 presented the views of each of the participants on a case by case basis. Chapter 5 detailed the results of the cross-case analysis and then discussed these results in light of the literature examined in Chapter 2. Chapter 6 shared the author’s retrospective insights regarding the strengths and limitations of the study. The purpose of this chapter, Chapter 7, is to bring this thesis to an appropriate conclusion.
Conducting the research which this thesis documents, has required, in terms of context, a drawing together of the secondary and ESL education paradigms. New Zealand secondary students were introduced to NCEA in 2002; NCEA having been created with a view to strengthening and streamlining post-compulsory secondary level education and so too the resulting student qualifications (see Chapter 1.1). Despite such timely and worthy intentions however (see Chapter 2.4), NCEA has borne the brunt of heavy criticism since long before it was even implemented (see Chapter 2.5). And while the proportion of New Zealand’s population that is made up of immigrants and foreign students only continues to grow, efforts to cultivate high levels of English literacy amongst this facet of the populace, NCEA aside, have ultimately been found wanting (see Chapter 1.4).

7.1 Popular Opinion

What then is the response of senior secondary level ESL teachers in regards to NCEA? What impact, if any, do ESL teachers believe this new assessment framework has had upon the various experiential realms of their occupation: their work environment, their teaching practices, their sense of status/worth within the education paradigm and their overall experience of teaching secondary level ESL? Somewhat predictably, the dominant themes raised by participants fell into three categories: those where a given attribute of NCEA was predominantly approved of by ESL teachers, those where there was predominantly disapproval, and those where opinions came from both sides of the fence.
7.1.1 Mixed Reviews

Some ESL teachers praised NCEA for being more realistic in its expectations than were the IELTS exams, for allowing more opportunities for students to achieve and providing ESL teachers with a structure around which to work, while others criticised it for lowering standards and setting a benchmark that misled students and would result in their failure at tertiary level.

7.1.2 Poor Ratings

While some teachers were positive about the increase in internal assessment, the majority had little to say that was positive in regards to the considerable increase in their workload that went along with it and the effect that this had upon their class preparation. The increase in workload had also made life particularly unpleasant for ESL students, compounding their existing communicative and cultural limitations.

Considerable discontent was communicated concerning NZQA’s use of the Internet to update NCEA standards and the logistical quagmire that this created for teachers as they assessed their students. Similarly, some teachers were unhappy with the high financial cost of NCEA for ESL students, relative to native students, and what they perceived as NCEA’s lacking in international credibility and value as a qualification.

While at least one teacher believed that the NCEA system of unit and achievement standards was an encouraging framework for students to work within, several others disagreed with this. They believed that NCEA did little to challenge academically
capable students, but rather encouraged a *credit cramming* mentality, whereby students did just enough to get by and no more. There was also considerable indication that NCEA encouraged a similar utilitarian mentality amongst teachers; a number of teachers found themselves focusing their time and energy towards the completion of standards, rather than upon the growth and cultivation of students’ knowledge. Some teachers had also noticed the focus of their teaching shifting away from more functional/communicative skills (i.e. listening and speaking), through working with predominantly reading and writing based standards.

### 7.1.3 But It’s Not All Bad

But there is good news also. A large proportion of ESL teachers have found that working under NCEA has brought themselves and their respective English departments into a much closer working relationship. The sharing of resources, moderation duties and increased inter-departmental communication has resulted in greater English/ESL course cohesion. A significant additional benefit subsequently born out of this closer inter-departmental relationship has been an improved perception of ESL in the eyes of non-ESL teachers, students and the wider school community. The ultimate upshot of this has been a rise in the status of ESL as an educational domain. There have also been instances where individual teachers have found specific facets of the NCEA system to work in well with their own personal teaching style, or indeed, to open up and facilitate new and beneficial opportunities that had been previously considered unavailable to them.
It is perhaps interesting to note that, throughout the entirety of this study, none of the teachers made any mention of the parents of their ESL students and/or their feelings or reactions in regards to NCEA.

Chapter 1.5.1 made the assertion that teachers occupy a unique position in the education paradigm, and so may provide a broader and more holistic view of the relationship between NCEA and ESL than could educational authorities and/or students. In light of the findings documented here, the author is confident that this thesis has a) provided further evidence as to the truth of this assertion, and b) highlighted the crucial importance not just of listening to teachers’ opinions, but of actively and regularly seeking those opinions out. Chapter 1.5.1 also put forward Berlach’s (2004) claim that NCEA undermines the idea of the systematic provision of traditional disciplines of knowledge and that subsequently the mandate of teaching is becoming less about being teachers, and more about being educational technicians. It is the belief of the author that while this is by no means ubiquitously the case, this thesis has certainly revealed some tendencies in that direction, at least in terms of teachers’ practices (see Chapter 5.5.1), echoing, to some extent at least, the concerns of Berlach (2004) and Fielding (2006; cited in Gerritsen, J., 2006). Whether or not teachers’ actual teaching principles have changed is another matter, and one that the author does not believe can be answered from the findings of this thesis.
7.2 Final Thoughts

Secondary level education in New Zealand, ESL education in New Zealand, and the inevitable interaction that will and must occur between these two realms, together form a vast and complex landscape; a landscape of which studies such as this one are but tiny snapshots. Tiny as they are, the continuing growth of New Zealand’s non-English speaking population ensures that many more such snapshots need to be taken. The future of NCEA is, like most things in life, uncertain. What is not uncertain (short of New Zealand’s entire non-Caucasian population vanishing overnight), is the need for New Zealand’s ESL students to be properly educated at secondary level, that they might be in position to further train and properly educate themselves. This may require a total rethink of New Zealand’s secondary education system; equally it may not. What it will require is for ESL teachers (and teachers in general) to be provided with adequate training, resources and support. It will require that ESL education be afforded the same respect and ministerial backing as mainstream subjects and it will require that those responsible for education in New Zealand be held to a high moral and pedagogical standard (pun intended). Anything less is just straight revenue gathering.

Hopefully this thesis has provided some degree of useful insight into the impact that NCEA has had and is having upon secondary level ESL education. While it is really little more than a stepping stone to much deeper and more profound research, it is hopefully a solid and wisely placed stepping stone.
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# Appendix A
## Comparing Curricula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syllabus</th>
<th>Outcomes (OBE)</th>
<th>Standards (SBA)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>detail what students should be taught/expected to learn</td>
<td>focus on what students should achieve or be able to do</td>
<td>identify what students should know and be able to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>relate to specific year levels</td>
<td>address levels which incorporate a number of grades/year levels</td>
<td>focus on specific year levels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>based on established disciplines/categories of knowledge</td>
<td>mixture of established disciplines and a multidisciplinary approach</td>
<td>based on established disciplines/categories of knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>expectation that essential knowledge, understanding and skills are mastered at key stages (high risk tests and streaming)</td>
<td>developmental approach to learning</td>
<td>expectation that essential knowledge, understanding and skills are mastered at key stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emphasis on formal teaching and learning</td>
<td>constructivist, child-centred approach to teaching and learning</td>
<td>emphasis on formal teaching and learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>common curriculum or within distinct and separate curricular pathways based on a core plus electives where a pathways approach is employed</td>
<td>common curriculum</td>
<td>core/elective curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discrete areas of study and topics</td>
<td>particular topics (such as literature or geometry) often dispersed across strands</td>
<td>discrete topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mandated number of hours</td>
<td>number of hours not stipulated</td>
<td>number of hours not stipulated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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28 This table can be found in Donnelly (2005: 16-17).
29 Parenthesis added by the author for clarification purposes.
30 Parenthesis added by the author for clarification purposes.
Appendix B
NCEA Levels

NCEA Level 1

- Achievement of 80 credits
- 8 out of the 80 credits must be in literacy standards (i.e. English)
- 8 out of the 80 credits in numeracy standards (i.e. Math)

NCEA Level 2

- Achievement of 80 credits
- 60 (minimum) out of the 80 credits must be at Level 2 or above and can be taken from anywhere within the NQF
- There are no literacy or numeracy requirements for this qualification

NCEA Level 3

- Achievement of 80 credits
- 60 (minimum) out of the 80 credits must be at Level 3 or above and can be taken from anywhere within the NQF
- 20 (minimum) out of the 80 credits must be at Level 2 or above and can be taken from anywhere within the NQF
- There are no literacy or numeracy requirements for this qualification

This information was retrieved from: http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/ncea/questions/index.html
Appendix C

ESOL Unit Standard 1281

Level: 1
Credit: 2
Final date for comment: July 2007
Expiry date: December 2008
Sub-field: Languages
Purpose: People credited with this unit standard are able, using ESOL, to: convey personal information using isolated words in familiar contexts; recognise time and currency; and convey personal greetings.
Entry information: Open.
Accreditation option: Evaluation of documentation by NZQA.
Moderation option: A centrally established and directed national moderation system has been set up by NZQA.

Special notes:

1. *English for Speakers of Other Languages* (ESOL) refers to the acquisition of English as an additional language by people from non-English-speaking backgrounds.
2. All assessment activities shall be conducted in the target language, English, which for the candidate is not their first language.
3. It is intended that this unit standard is an introductory unit standard in speaking in ESOL, leading to unit standards 1282, 1289, and 17358, but it is not a prerequisite for these unit standards.
4. Spoken material may be repeated twice on request.
5. Candidate may be assessed on an actual exchange or in a simulated activity. For the purposes of moderation, the assessment will be recorded. Recording media may include but are not limited to – audio tape, video tape and DVD.
6. Language patterns may be limited to a small number, and may follow learnt formulas.
7. Definition: *Familiar contexts* refer to everyday, predictable situations.

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*The content and chronology of the text of Appendix C is identical to that of the original document. The precise format (fonts, spacing, etc.) however has been adapted by the author.*
• Elements and Performance Criteria

  o Element #1

    • “Convey personal information using isolated words in familiar contexts, using ESOL.”

  o Performance Criteria #1.1

    • “Answers to short questions convey personal information.”
    • Range: personal information may include but is not limited to – first name, surname, address, telephone number, nationality/country of origin/ethnic group, marital status.

  o Performance Criteria #1.2

    • “Answers to short questions include identification of immediate family members.”
    • Range: name, relationship.

  o Element #2

    • “Recognise time and currency, using ESOL.”

  o Performance Criteria #2.1

    • “Communication regarding time shows recognition of time elements.”
    • Range: days, months, hours, _ hours, _ hours, morning, afternoon, night.
Performance Criteria #2.2

- "Communication regarding prices shows recognition of currency."
- Range: prices up to $999.99.

Element #3

- "Convey personal greetings using ESOL."
- Range: greeting, response to greeting.

Performance Criteria #3.1

- "Greeting and response are appropriate to the purpose, context, and parties involved."
- Range: verbal, non-verbal.

Performance Criteria #3.2

- "Greetings include forms of address appropriate to the purpose, context, and parties involved."
- Range: use of – surname, first name.

Additional Information

The original document, unit standard 1281, can be viewed at:

At the time of writing there are a total of 50 ESL unit standards:
- 14 Level 1
- 11 Level 2
- 14 Level 3
- 11 Level 4

These can be viewed at:
Appendix D
Interview Questions

Introduction
1. How long have you been teaching secondary level ESL?
2. Could you perhaps give me a brief history of your teaching experience?
   • Schools or institutions
   • Countries
   • Age groups taught
3. What is it about teaching and specifically ESL teaching, that you enjoy?
   • Is there anything that you have traditionally not enjoyed?

NCEA & ESL
4. What are your thoughts and feelings about NCEA in general?
5. Are there any aspects of NCEA that you think are particularly good or particularly bad?
6. Do you have any thoughts regarding ESL’s treatment as a ‘subject’ under NCEA?
7. In your mind, are there any specific problems or bonuses which have surfaced since the introduction of NCEA that you believe are unique to ESL?

In the Real World
8. Has the way in which you teach ESL changed in any practical and/or fundamental sense since the introduction of NCEA?
9. Has the implementation of NCEA affected your enjoyment of ESL teaching in any way, both in terms of time spent in the classroom and your ‘job satisfaction’ overall?
10. Do you have any thoughts or feelings regarding NCEA in terms of the encouragement of professional and/or personal development in regards to ESL teaching?
11. In terms of personal/professional validation or your sense of self-worth as an ESL teacher and/or as a person, how do you FEEL working under NCEA?
12. Has working under NCEA affected in any way your relationships with your fellow staff and/or with your students?

Looking to the Future
13. In terms of any success or failings on the part of NCEA, what do you think that these are/have been due to?
14. Could you offer any suggestions in terms of steps that could be taken to improve NCEA?
Appendix E
Pilot Study Questions

1. What are your thoughts on NCEA in general?

2. Would you say that teaching ESL under NCEA differs from the manner in which you taught prior to the introduction of NCEA and if so, how?

3. Have you noticed any specific or overall changes in the achievement levels of ESL students since the introduction of NCEA?

4. What are your thoughts regarding ESL assessment under NCEA?

5. What are your thoughts in general, on the relationship between the assessment framework that is NCEA and ESL lesson planning?

6. Do there exist, in your own mind, any problems that have been brought about by NCEA that you believe are unique to ESL?

7. Do you have any thoughts regarding ESL’s treatment as a subject under NCEA?

8. How strictly do ESL teachers follow the unit and achievement standards when planning their lessons?

9. In terms of classroom teaching experience, has NCEA had any impact upon your enjoyment of teaching ESL and your overall job satisfaction?
Appendix F
Participant Bio Data

Name: Anna
Sex: Female
Age: 30s
Teacher Training & Experience:
  • Honours Degree in Political Science.
    o Japanese politics and society
    o Asian politics and history
  • 3 years teaching English language in Japan.
    o All ages
  • Re-trained as a primary teacher.
  • Taught at primary level for 18 months.
  • 3 years teaching secondary level ESL.

Name: Claire
Sex: Female
Age: 50-60s
Teacher Training & Experience:
  • Taught at primary level for several years.
  • 10 years teaching sewing in high schools and evening classes.
  • Teacher Aiding and Special Education experience
  • Re-trained as an ESL teacher.
  • 5 years teaching secondary level ESL.

Name: Louise
Sex: Female
Age: 50-60s
Teacher Training & Experience:
  • BA in Latin.
  • Taught Latin, English, French and Social Studies at secondary level.
    o School had large Chinese and Maori populations
  • Accepted position as Head of the International Department.
  • 7 years teaching secondary level ESL.

Name: Katie
Sex: Female
Age: 50s
Teacher Training & Experience:
  • Taught pre-school children at Play Centre.
  • Completed 4 year course at Teachers’ College.
  • 5 years teaching secondary level ESL.

Name: Malcolm
Name: Rachel
Sex: Female
Age: 50-60s
Teacher Training & Experience:
- Long career of primary and then secondary teaching.
- Teaches secondary level Classics.
- 14 years teaching secondary level ESL.

Name: Sarah
Sex: Female
Age: 50-60s
Teacher Training & Experience:
- Taught at secondary level in England, Tonga and the Cook Islands.
- Taught at secondary level in many parts of New Zealand.
- 5 years teaching secondary level ESL.

Name: Stacey
Sex: Female
Age: 40s
Teacher Training & Experience:
- 5 years primary teaching.
- 2 years teaching English language in Japan.
  - Adults
- 8 years teaching remedial reading in Australia.
  - Primary age
- 5 years teaching secondary level ESL.

Name: Vania
Sex: Female
Age: 40s
Teacher Training & Experience:
- Taught in Australia, England and Turkey.
- 5 years of primary school teaching.
- 10 years of English language teaching.
  - All ages
- 1 year of Special Needs teaching.
- 5 years teaching secondary level ESL.
Appendix G
Ethical Approval Form

The impact of NCEA through the eyes of secondary level ESL teachers in Dunedin: an exploratory study.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR TEACHERS

Thank you for showing an interest in this project. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate we thank you. If you decide not to take part there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the Aim of the Project?
The purpose of this paper is to research and report upon the impact that NCEA (National Certificate of Educational Assessment) has had upon the domain that is secondary level ESL (English as a Second Language), as seen through the eyes of ESL teachers. The investigation will be carried out in a number of high schools throughout the city of Dunedin in New Zealand.

What type of participants are being sought?
The participants being sought for this project are high school ESL teachers.

What will participants be asked to do?
Should you agree to take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in a recorded oral interview, where you will be asked questions concerning the prescriptions and workings of NCEA and its relationship to ESL learning and teaching, as well as more peripheral issues. Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

Can participants change their mind and withdraw from the project?
You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?
The information will concern the participants’ perceptions of the impact of NCEA upon the domain of secondary level ESL. This project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops. Consequently, although the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee is aware of the general areas to be explored in the interview, the Committee has not been able to review the precise questions to be used. In the event that the line of questioning does develop in such a way that you feel hesitant or
uncomfortable you are reminded of your right to decline to answer any particular question(s) and also that you may withdraw from the project at any stage without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

This data/information collected will make up a significant part of research element of a Masters level thesis. This data will be analysed by the researcher and conclusions drawn from that analysis will make up a significant part of the body of text that will be the thesis. The data will only be accessed by the researcher and (possibly) the researcher's supervisor. The results of the project may be published and will be available in the library but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish. The data collected will be securely stored in such a way that only those mentioned above will be able to gain access to it. At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University's research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.

What if Participants have any Questions?
If you have any questions about our project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:-

Jeremy Callander or Dr Elke Stracke  
Linguistics Programme Linguistics Programme  
Cellphone Number:- 027 329 0279 University Number:- 03 479 8637
The impact of NCEA through the eyes of secondary level ESL teachers in Dunedin: an exploratory study.

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

I have read the Information Sheet concerning this project and understand what it is about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

I know that:-
1. my participation in the project is entirely voluntary;
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without any disadvantage;
3. the data (audio-tapes) will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project but any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed;
4. this project involves an open-questioning technique where the precise nature of the questions which will be asked have not been determined in advance, but will depend on the way in which the interview develops and that in the event that the line of questioning develops in such a way that I feel hesitant or uncomfortable I may decline to answer any particular question(s) and/or may withdraw from the project without any disadvantage of any kind.
5. I may choose not to participate in the project without fear of any disadvantage to myself and that during the course of the interview, should I for any reason feel uncomfortable and wish to leave, I am free to do so at no cost or disadvantage to myself.
6. participation in this project will not entitle me to any form financial remuneration or compensation.
7. the results of the project may be published and available in the library but every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity.

I agree to take part in this project.

.................................................................
(Signature of participant) .................................

(Date)

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Appendix H
Example of an Interview Transcript

Katie

What are your thoughts and feelings about NCEA in general?33
In general it’s fine as far as those who probably wouldn’t have achieved at anything under School Certificate achieving something; going away with credits to her name, like the young girl I taught last year. She walked out of this school with some credits next to her name, which meant that she could get a position at the polytechnic and allows a lot more doors for them. It has its advantages. Then there’s the children from the other side of spectrum. I’ve got a son who is academically inclined; why bother with Excellence when Achievement is all you need? There’s nothing there for them. So they really need to sort that out as far as those limits are concerned, so as to get a better balance. As far as ESL is concerned, a lot of international students like to come back to NZ for tertiary. NZ has woken up; we’ve got this, why not utilize it for our international students and I think Otago has set the ball rolling by accepting the literacy requirements at Level 2 and 3 for our international students to go into tertiary courses and it’s opened a lot more doors. Takes that pressure off from IELTS, because IELTS is very hard. Again it opens up doors for them in terms of where they can go after school. And it also gives them the sense of being of totally immersed into our school, into our system, because they know that the qualifications which they get here, can get them positions in Otago. So it does have its advantages. NCEA allows them more opportunities to achieve. When I say that IELTS is harder I mean that the standard which is set for them to achieve is harder, because they sat a standard of 6.5, which personally I think is ridiculous; it’s far too high. If you’re an academic student, but not quite with elite status, NCEA allows those students to go on.

Are there any aspects of NCEA that you think are particularly good or particularly bad?
I don’t think it allows for more highly academic students; it doesn’t help them to want to achieve. We see it sometimes with students who are very capable of getting Excellence; they’re doing enough to get Achieved, because they know that’s all they need. So this is something to look at: making a situation where Excellence does mean slightly more than just a straight Achieved, allowing those academic students across the board to actually want to achieve more highly.

Do you have any thoughts regarding ESL’s treatment as a ‘subject’ under NCEA?
We’re part of the English Department so we don’t have any problems. We’re doing Unit Standards as well as Achievement Standards with our international students. We don’t do the ESL Unit Standards. We do occasionally the odd one if we feel that we need it, but we find that the English Unit Standards, our students are more than capable of doing those and we’ve had a very good record so far of what we’ve done. We’re right now in the middle of doing our 1.7 Speech Achievement Standard with them and we actually do

33 Bold indicates the interviewer’s questions.
New Zealand Speech board as well and it is brilliant. \[34\] were raving about it, so we went along to a meeting and found it was great.

**In your mind, are there any specific problems or bonuses which have surfaced since the introduction of NCEA, that you believe are unique to ESL?**

I think it’s a bonus because it allows a student who would have struggled with School Certificate, which was only one end of year examination; it means that we can send our international students away with some credits at each level. For instance a lot of our Japanese students don’t actually need an NCEA qualification for university entry; they have their own university entrance exams. But this gives them the confidence and the ability to be able to study and to work towards a certain goal. Because they’ve got set time limits for each Achievement Standard so when it comes to the university entrance exams, they usually just study towards a set period of time because this is what they’re going to have and this is what is required at the end of it. So that’s a bonus. The drawback I see is that some of it, even with the Unit Standards, may be just a bit difficult as far as the English language side of it is concerned. But that’s something that we as teachers are overcoming and working around.

**Has the way in which you teach ESL changed in any practical and/or fundamental sense since the introduction of NCEA?**

No. I still teach the same; I use a lot of humour, still use the same grammar work, moving around it. I’ve just had to adapt to absorb the Standards in and around it and I’ve got a tighter timeframe for each section. Where once I might have drawn something out, now I’ve got to work a bit quicker. But no, I still teach the same. I’ve actually quite enjoyed it.

**Has the implementation of NCEA affected your enjoyment of ESL teaching in any way, both in terms of time spent in the classroom and your ‘job satisfaction’ overall?**

I think the only bugbear I’ve really got is the paperwork that goes along with it. I mark the papers then I’ve got to have them reassessed to make sure, moderated within the school and you’ve got this timeframe; I’ve actually got a situation where I’m sitting on another teacher’s standards that haven’t been moderated because the teacher I’m working with had holidays, so there’s all those little problems. It cuts into your preparation time.

**Do you have any thoughts or feelings regarding NCEA in terms of the encouragement of professional and/or personal development in regards to ESL teaching?**

Personally I’ve found that NCEA has given me a lot more scope to teach. I’ve actually enjoyed it, but ask me after I taught Math; I might change my mind yet. But I’ve found that it’s given us a lot of structure within the ESL Department and we’ve found the English Department has been very supportive. We’ve got resources to borrow off them, plus what we’ve already got; we’ve often swapped resources which is good. So it’s allowed that interaction between departments. I’ve found that the structure is good and it’s good for the kids too. Especially the international students who want a lot more

\[34\] Here the interviewee stated the name of another Dunedin secondary school; the author has hidden the name of the school so as to protect its anonymity.
structure because its structure that they’ve been brought up with. So it’s allowed us to have that confidence when we go in to teach; they know what to expect, they know where they stand. We give them the criteria very early and go over it thoroughly and they know they’ve got that support system there with the ESL Department. So if they make mistakes they can go back.

**In terms of personal/professional validation or your sense of self-worth as an ESL teacher and/or as a person, how do you FEEL working under NCEA?**

As a teacher I find NCEA is very time consuming. They keep going on about how they’re going to introduce this and that. They keep changing the way that we assess things and all these assessment requirements and all this record keeping; you’ve got to have it on computer, you’ve got to have it on paper and pardon the expression but we just say “when the hell are we meant to bloody teach?” I think it cuts into our teaching time a bit too much and I’d actually like to see that cut down a bit, simplified so that we’ve got more time to spend with the students and teach. And that’s across the board; across all subjects. It really pushes you for time. I got new students on exchange and their English is not so good, so I’ve really got to balance things: get their Standards out, work with these kids, plus try to allow time for the kids who have just arrived. I think if we can simplify the system and simplify how we can utilize NCEA, it’ll allow us more time with the kids. Everything that you do in class has to be recorded. Little tests, the results of the tests; it all has to go on the computer.

**Has working under NCEA affected in any way your relationships with your fellow staff and/or with your students?**

Probably. We support each other as a staff. I can’t speak for other schools, but at we’ve got a great support network. You throw things around about NCEA and bitch over the whole thing and know that you’ve got that support network. Because you can get quite depressed about all the paperwork; we’re really snowed under. But everyone backs each other up and supports each other and it’s the same with the students. They can get very frustrated with it as well and we just do the best that we can; they understand that we get frustrated with it as well and it actually creates good relationships between teachers and students.

**In terms of any success or failings on the part of NCEA, what do you think that these are/have been due to?**

To me the ideology behind it was good. We needed to do something about School Certificate; it was archaic, it was out of date and it was not allowing students who were average to slightly under average to achieve anything. They’d come out of school with nothing, they were struggling to get into apprenticeships and something needed to be done. But I think they went overboard and have gone to the other extreme and I think NCEA at the moment, while there are some good things about it, needs to be pulled up, hauled back a bit, have a bit of the School Certificate type system implemented into it to refine it so that everyone can achieve: where there’s something for the academics as well as those who are less academic and those with disabilities.

35 Here the interviewee stated the name of her school; the author has hidden the name of the school so as to protect its anonymity.
Could you offer any suggestions in terms of steps that could be taken to improve NCEA?

In the sense that the way we mark. This Achieved, Not Achieved; maybe we need to tighten it up a bit. I don’t believe that the Not Achieved should be in there at all. I don’t agree with that. I think it’s important that an employer be able to see where the strengths and weaknesses in a child are. Under School Certificate if you did Math showed that you had strengths in one area but not in another part; when you look at NCEA and you see that a student got Not Achieved, to what extent did they not achieve. So we need to bring in a marking system where we if we don’t give an Achievement, we can show just where their strengths are. So employers can see that a student did well in Chemistry, did well in Biology, but struggled in Physics because they struggled in Math. So that allows the employer to think “well, we’re going to be working with chemicals and that’s fine”. Because a lot of kids just miss and no more with Achievement Standards; and it just doesn’t show. It just showed Not Achieved. So what does that tell the kid? Oh they Not Achieved so they’re no good. That kid could have just missed and no more. So we need to implement a system whereby we can communicate this information.
Appendix I
Level 1 – Step 1 Analysis: Separate Trains of Thought

Katie

In general it’s fine as far as those who probably wouldn’t have achieved at anything under School Certificate achieving something; going away with credits to her name, like the young girl I taught last year. She walked out of this school with some credits next to her name, which meant that she could get a position at the polytechnic and allows a lot more doors for them. It has its advantages.

Then there’s the children from the other side of spectrum. I’ve got a son who is academically inclined; why bother with Excellence when Achievement is all you need? There’s nothing there for them. So they really need to sort that out as far those limits are concerned, so as to get a better balance.

As far as ESL is concerned, a lot of international students like to come back to NZ for tertiary. NZ has woken up; we’ve got this, why not utilize it for our international students and I think Otago has set the ball rolling by accepting the literacy requirements at Level 2 and 3 for our international students to go into tertiary courses and it’s opened a lot more doors.

Takes that pressure off from IELTS, because IELTS is very hard. Again it opens up doors for them in terms of where they can go after school.

And it also gives them the sense of being of totally immersed into our school, into our system, because they know that the qualifications which they get here, can get them positions in Otago (i.e. a university with a good reputation). So it does have its advantages.

NCEA allows them more opportunities to achieve. When I say that IELTS is harder I mean that the standard which is set for them to achieve is harder, because they sat a standard of 6.5, which personally I think is ridiculous; it’s far too high. If you’re an academic student, but not quite with elite status, NCEA allows those students to go on.

I don’t think it allows for more highly academic students; it doesn’t help them to want to achieve. We see it sometimes with students who are very capable of getting Excellence; they’re doing enough to get Achieved, because they know that’s all they need. So this is something to look at: making a situation where Excellence does mean slightly more than just a straight Achieved, allowing those academic students across the board to actually want to achieve more highly.

We’re part of the English Department so we don’t have any problems. We’re doing Unit Standards as well as Achievement Standards with our international students. We don’t do the ESL Unit Standards. We do occasionally the odd one if we feel that we need it, but
we find that the English Unit Standards, our students are more than capable of doing those and we’ve had a very good record so far of what we’ve done. We’re right now in the middle of doing our 1.7 Speech Achievement Standard with them and we actually do New Zealand Speech board as well and it is brilliant. __________ were raving about it, so we went along to a meeting and found it was great.

I think it’s a bonus because it allows a student who would have struggled with School Certificate, which was only one end of year examination; it means that we can send our international students away with some credits at each level. For instance a lot of our Japanese students don’t actually need an NCEA qualification for university entry; they have their own university entrance exams. But this gives them the confidence and the ability to be able to study and to work towards a certain goal. Because they’ve got set time limits for each Achievement Standard so when it comes to the university entrance exams, they usually just study towards a set period of time because this is what they’re going to have and this is what is required at the end of it. So that’s a bonus.

The drawback I see is that some of it, even with the Unit Standards, may be just a bit difficult as far as the English language side of it is concerned. But that’s something that we as teachers are overcoming and working around.

No. I still teach the same; I use a lot of humour, still use the same grammar work, moving around it. I’ve just had to adapt to absorb the Standards in and around it and I’ve got a tighter time frame for each section. Where once I might have drawn something out, now I’ve got to work a bit quicker. But no, I still teach the same. I’ve actually quite enjoyed it.

I think the only bugbear I’ve really got is the paperwork that goes along with it. I mark the papers then I’ve got to have them reassessed to make sure, moderated within the school and you’ve got this timeframe; I’ve actually got a situation where I’m sitting on another teacher’s standards that haven’t been moderated because the teacher I’m working with had holidays, so there’s all those little problems. It cuts into your preparation time.

Personally I’ve found that NCEA has given me a lot more scope to teach. I’ve actually enjoyed it, but ask me after I taught Math; I might change my mind yet.

But I’ve found that it’s given us a lot of structure within the ESL Department and we’ve found the English Department has been very supportive. We’ve got resources to borrow off them, plus what we’ve already got; we’ve often swapped resources which is good. So it’s allowed that interaction between departments. I’ve found that the structure is good and it’s good for the kids too. Especially the international students who want a lot more structure because its structure that they’ve been brought up with. So it’s allowed us to have that confidence when we go in to teach; they know what to expect, they know where they stand. We give them the criteria very early and go over it thoroughly and they know they’ve got that support system there with the ESL Department. So if they make mistakes they can go back.
As a teacher I find NCEA is very time consuming. They keep going on about how they’re going to introduce this and that. They keep changing the way that we assess things and all these assessment requirements and all this record keeping; you’ve got to have it on computer, you’ve got to have it on paper and pardon the expression but we just say “when the hell are we meant to bloody teach?” I think it cuts into our teaching time a bit too much and I’d actually like to see that cut down a bit, simplified so that we’ve got more time to spend with the students and teach. And that’s across the board; across all subjects. It really pushes you for time.

I got new students on exchange and their English is not so good, so I’ve really got to balance things: get their Standards out, work with these kids, plus try to allow time for the kids who have just arrived. I think if we can simplify the system and simplify how we can utilize NCEA, it’ll allow us more time with the kids. Everything that you do in class has to be recorded. Little tests, the results of the tests; it all has to go on the computer.

Probably. We support each other as a staff. I can’t speak for other schools, but at ________ we’ve got a great support network. You throw things around about NCEA and bitch over the whole thing and know that you’ve got that support network. Because you can get quite depressed about all the paperwork; we’re really snowed under. But everyone backs each other up and supports each other and it’s the same with the students. They can get very frustrated with it as well and we just do the best that we can; they understand that we get frustrated with it as well and it actually creates good relationships between teachers and students.

To me the ideology behind it was good. We needed to do something about School Certificate; it was archaic, it was out of date and it was not allowing students who were average to slightly under average to achieve anything. They’d come out of school with nothing, they were struggling to get into apprenticeships and something needed to be done.

But I think they went overboard and have gone to the other extreme and I think NCEA at the moment, while there are some good things about it, needs to be pulled up, hauled back a bit, have a bit of the School Certificate type system implemented into it to refine it so that everyone can achieve: where there’s something for the academics as well as those who are less academic and those with disabilities.

In the sense that the way we mark. This Achieved, Not Achieved; maybe we need to tighten it up a bit. I don’t believe that the Not Achieved should be in there at all. I don’t agree with that. I think it’s important that an employer be able to see where the strengths and weaknesses in a child are. Under School Certificate if you did Math showed that you had strengths in one area but not in another part; when you look at NCEA and you see that a student got Not Achieved, to what extent did they not achieve. So we need to bring in a marking system where we if we don’t give an Achievement, we can show just where their strengths are. So employers can see that a student did well in Chemistry, did well in Biology, but struggled in Physics because they struggled in Math. So that allows the employer to think “well, we’re going to be working with chemicals and that’s fine”.

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Because a lot of kids just miss and no more with Achievement Standards; and it just doesn’t show. It just showed Not Achieved. So what does that tell the kid? Oh they Not Achieved so they’re no good. That kid could have just missed and no more. So we need to implement a system whereby we can communicate this information.
Appendix J
Level 1 – Step 2: In-case Categories

Katie

General Positives
It allows a student who would have struggled with School Certificate, which was only one end of year examination; it means that we can send our international students away with some credits at each level. For instance a lot of our Japanese students don’t actually need an NCEA qualification for university entry; they have their own university entrance exams. But this gives them the confidence and the ability to be able to study and to work towards a certain goal. Because they’ve got set time limits for each Achievement Standard so when it comes to the university entrance exams, they usually just study towards a set period of time because this is what they’re going to have and this is what is required at the end of it.

In general it’s fine as far as those who probably wouldn’t have achieved at anything under School Certificate achieving something; going away with credits to her name, like the young girl I taught last year. She walked out of this school with some credits next to her name, which meant that she could get a position at the polytechnic and allows a lot more doors for them. It has its advantages.

General Negatives
Then there’s the children from the other side of spectrum. I’ve got a son who is academically inclined; why bother with Excellence when Achievement is all you need? There’s nothing there for them. So they really need to sort that out as far those limits are concerned, so as to get a better balance.

I don’t think it allows for more highly academic students; it doesn’t help them to want to achieve. We see it sometimes with students who are very capable of getting Excellence; they’re doing enough to get Achieved, because they know that’s all they need. So this is something to look at: making a situation where Excellence does mean slightly more than just a straight Achieved, allowing those academic students across the board to actually want to achieve more highly.

NCEA vs IELTS
Takes that pressure off from IELTS, because IELTS is very hard. Again it opens up doors for them in terms of where they can go after school.
NCEA allows them more opportunities to achieve. When I say that IELTS is harder I mean that the standard which is set for them to achieve is harder, because they sat a standard of 6.5, which personally I think is ridiculous; it’s far too high. If you’re an academic student, but not quite with elite status, NCEA allows those students to go on.
Teaching Practice
No. I still teach the same; I use a lot of humour, still use the same grammar work, moving around it. I’ve just had to adapt to absorb the Standards in and around it and I’ve got a tighter timeframe for each section. Where once I might have drawn something out, now I’ve got to work a bit quicker. But no, I still teach the same. I’ve actually quite enjoyed it.

Personally I’ve found that NCEA has given me a lot more scope to teach. I’ve actually enjoyed it, but asked me after I taught Math; I might change my mind yet.

Workload
I think the only bugbear I’ve really got is the paperwork that goes along with it. I mark the papers then I’ve got to have them reassessed to make sure, moderated within the school and you’ve got this timeframe; I’ve actually got a situation where I’m sitting on another teacher’s standards that haven’t been moderated because the teacher I’m working with had holidays, so there’s all those little problems. It cuts into your preparation time.

I think it cuts into our teaching time a bit too much and I’d actually like to see that cut down a bit, simplified so that we’ve got more time to spend with the students and teach. And that’s across the board; across all subjects. It really pushes you for time.

I think if we can simplify the system and simplify how we can utilize NCEA, it’ll allow us more time with the kids.

Everything that you do in class has to be recorded: little tests, the results of the tests; it all has to go on the computer.

They keep going on about how they’re going to introduce this and that. They keep changing the way that we assess things and all these assessment requirements and all this record keeping; you’ve got to have it on computer, you’ve got to have it on paper and pardon the expression but we just say “when the hell are we meant to bloody teach?”

I’ve got new students on exchange and their English is not so good, so I’ve really got to balance things: get their Standards out, work with these kids, plus try to allow time for the kids who have just arrived.

Structure & Support
But I’ve found that it’s given us a lot of structure within the ESL Department and we’ve found the English Department has been very supportive. We’ve got resources to borrow off them, plus what we’ve already got; we’ve often swapped resources which is good. So it’s allowed that interaction between departments. I’ve found that the structure is good and it’s good for the kids too. Especially the international students who want a lot more structure because it’s structure that they’ve been brought up with. So it’s allowed us to have that confidence when we go in to teach; they know what to expect, they know where they stand. We give them the criteria very early and go over it thoroughly and they know they’ve got that support system there with the ESL Department. So if they make mistakes they can go back.
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But everyone backs each other up and supports each other and it’s the same with the students.

They can get very frustrated with it as well and we just do the best that we can; they understand that we get frustrated with it as well and it actually creates good relationships between teachers and students.

**Implementation**

To me the ideology behind it was good. We needed to do something about School Certificate; it was archaic, it was out of date and it was not allowing students who were average to slightly under average to achieve anything. They’d come out of school with nothing, they were struggling to get into apprenticeships and something needed to be done.

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**Improvements**

In the sense that the way we mark. This Achieved, Not Achieved; maybe we need to tighten it up a bit. I don’t believe that the Not Achieved should be in there at all. I don’t agree with that. I think it’s important that an employer be able to see where the strengths and weaknesses in a child are. Under School Certificate if you did Math it showed that you had strengths in one area but not in another part; when you look at NCEA and you see that a student got Not Achieved, to what extent did they not achieve. So we need to bring in a marking system where we if we don’t give an Achievement, we can show just where their strengths are. So employers can see that a student did well in Chemistry, did well in Biology, but struggled in Physics because they struggled in Math. So that allows the employer to think “well, we’re going to be working with chemicals and that’s fine”. Because a lot of kids just miss and no more with Achievement Standards; and it just doesn’t show. It just showed Not Achieved. So what does that tell the kid? Oh they Not Achieved so they’re no good. That kid could have just missed and no more. So we need to implement a system whereby we can communicate this information.

**Miscellaneous**

And it also gives them the sense of being of totally immersed into our school, into our system, because they know that the qualifications which they get here, can get them positions in Otago (i.e. a university with a good reputation).
We’re part of the English Department so we don’t have any problems. We’re doing Unit Standards as well as Achievement Standards with our international students. We don’t do the ESL Unit Standards. We do occasionally the odd one if we feel that we need it, but we find that the English Unit Standards, our students are more than capable of doing those and we’ve had a very good record so far of what we’ve done.

The drawback I see is that some of it, even with the Unit Standards, may be just a bit difficult as far as the English language side of it is concerned. But that’s something that we as teachers are overcoming and working around.
## Appendix K
### Level 2: Cross-case Comparison

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36 These letters represent each of the participants: A for Anna, C for Claire, K for Katie, and so.