Community chest: Acquiring varieties of literacy from Kiwi communities

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Abstract

Despite its richness, the community remains an underutilised resource for migrant and international students of EAL. This paper reports on a three-year study investigating and evaluating the cultural and linguistic value of volunteering in community placements to degree-level EAL learners. Using open-coded data from reflective journals, this paper discusses the range of literacies that 60 second-year degree-level EAL learners describe having demonstrated during placements. The study is framed within social identity theory and constructionist conceptualisations of communities of practice. For this paper, more recent real-world emphases of new literacy approaches offer fresh frames for social constructionism. We see our learners, situated within specific literate communities, developing cultural literacies as social practices. Here we discuss six varieties of cultural literacy. We maintain that learning in community contributes not only to increased communicative confidence, but also contributes to learners’ advancing agency through its potential to provide real-world contexts where cultural literacies develop.

Introduction

Learning in community

Community placements afford learners opportunities to observe, record, participate, perform, engage, reflect - and thereby learn. They provide a safe and realistic environment, contain passionate and engaged people and embody the properties of communities of practice (Andrew & Kearney, 2007c, drawing on Lave & Wenger, 1991). These features, too, can characterise work placements (Leontios et al, 2007; Kemmis & Smith, 2008). The authors’ previous studies have shown that, as well as providing contexts for testing and applying content and procedural knowledge (such as communication and listening strategies), community placements facilitate cultural and sociolinguistic learning and promote community engagement (Andrew & Kearney, 2006; 2007a; 2007b). This paper aims to extend these findings by regrounding the study in a frame of cultural literacy as social practice. It is suggested
that community placements have the capacity to promote multiple literate understandings of the cultural practices of this community, and by extension, of the local, regional or national culture of which the community can be considered a microcosm.

What, then, are community placements, and who are the learners that can benefit from them? A community placement is an organised opportunity for real experience, usually with a defined minimum time commitment. It is a chance for participants to attend the regular, or particular, operations of an established community or volunteer group at their usual, or particular, location or premises. A supervisor/guide/key member is contacted and briefed in advance, and this person introduces the participant to the community, its culture, practices and membership. In educational contexts, placement events occur as part of a particular programme, subject or course of study, so they represent a pedagogical method and can be the basis of assessment tasks. This definition is broad, and again like work placements, has wide applicability for secondary, tertiary or private training establishment EAL educational contexts and migrant, study abroad or international student induction programmes.

**Context of the study**

The learners in this study are participants in a course called *Culture and New Zealand Society* within a Bachelor of Arts degree at a tertiary institute in Auckland, New Zealand. These students are second-year degree students, equivalent approximately to IELTS band 6.0 or more in terms of language proficiency. This means that they have attained a good level of linguistic and communicative competence in controlled educational contexts, but few have had many opportunities to test their language skills beyond the classroom or had the opportunity (and/or the confidence) to talk with local people extensively in English or observe New Zealand culture other than superficially.

Students have identified a lack of opportunity for study beyond the Kiwi classroom as a demotivating factor, and this has been discussed in similar contexts (Wright, 2006). This has been confirmed in the present study, from analyses of student reflections over the past three years. Students regularly report early in their journals, which they must keep as an essential part of the community placement assessment, that there is a lack of access to local communities despite the desire to be part of groups and communities in the medium or long term. Community placements provide that access by effectively providing a bridge from the classroom to the outside world.

This identified lack of access is due in part to the students’ unfamiliarity with methods of approaching groups and communities, and ways of registering interest. Their age, cultural backgrounds, personalities and fear of ‘face’ may be among a number of factors. The students on the course and in our sample are either young (19-23) international students, typically from China or Korea or other Asian nations;
study-abroad students in their early 20s, usually from Sweden or Germany, the
countries with which the institute has the healthiest relations; more mature, often
skilled, educated migrants, again largely from China or Korea or other Asian nations,
seeking confidence and an opportunity to develop their life in New Zealand; or
refugees, of any stage of life, typically from Somalia or Ethiopia, often eager to
develop the skills necessary to make a difference in their own, and wider,
communities. The students are described in more demographic detail below.

Peterson and Coltrane (2003) recommend that cultural instruction should ‘allow
students to observe and explore cultural interactions from their own perspectives to
enable them to find their own voices in the second language speech community’ (p.
2). The idea of staging community placements is partially a response both to this
suggestion and its identification of a gap in culture learning curricula for EAL
learners and to identifiable student needs. In *Culture and New Zealand Society*,
to maximise learner investment in the learning of culture in community, the placement
is part of the assessment structure of the course. The assessment structure makes it
easier for teachers to be directive with clear provisos. Students are advised that
placements have to:

- be ten or more hours in duration
- contain interaction in English among people grounded in local culture
- provide opportunities to listen to Kiwis communicating, watch them interacting,
  experience their joint enterprise, mutual engagement and shared repertoire
- be suitable for gaining insights into the communicative and sociocultural aspects
  of that community
- be approved by the teacher, who judges how the mooted placement meets the
  provisos

In addition to the credit-bearing nature of the community placement, these learners
have a wide range of investments, the term used here following Norton (2000), for
enrolling in *Culture and New Zealand Society* and participating in its community
placement. For a few (perhaps five of 60), it might be perfunctory, compulsory; for
others, an opportunity to create a bridge from the classroom to the community and
explore their own potentials as communicating, participating and even caring
members of communities. They have diverse investments in their language and
culture-learning identities, and these inevitably affect their ability to participate in,
perform (by which we mean be themselves linguistically and communicatively) and
engage.

In 2007, we demonstrated that:

*Community placements provide learners with a safe, supportive and ‘Kiwi’
[community of practice] for negotiating situated sociolinguistic and
sociocultural meanings via observing, re-cognising, practising and*
participating in New Zealand culture, its social practices, values, mores, customs, conventions, laws and principles. (Andrew & Kearney, 2007c, p. 32)

Here we contend that placement in real communities of practice activates what Gee, after Lave and Wenger, recognises as the ‘social mind’ and its awareness of big-D ‘Discourses’ and ‘situated meanings’ (Gee, 1990, 2000a, 2004). These form part of a sociocognitive process that enhances the cultural literacy of adult EAL students. They develop this cultural literacy, and perhaps its accordant effect of supporting individuals’ abilities to act more independently, through invested engagement in experience-based community learning. These claims are based on analysis of our data, 60 learners’ reflective diarised narratives of learning in community. The data collected for this project are considered records of lived experience of local culture, and the rich data are ethnographic narratives of self in miniature, despite many only covering a period of 10 or more hours.

Details of participants

Sixty students from five intakes over three years agreed for their reflective journals to be used for research. In terms of ethnic origin, they comprise: Chinese/Hong Kongese (31), Korean (6), Swedish (6), German (4), Ethiopian (2), Japanese (2), Romanian (1), Indian (1), Iraqi (1), Dutch (1), Kuwaiti (1), Somali (1), Thai (1), Malaysian (1) and Samoan (1). There were 35 females and 25 males. The age range was from 20 to 55, with a mean of 25. The majority (34) identified themselves as migrants, with five refugees, eleven study-abroad students and ten international students.

Literature review

Social identity theory and constructionism

Over a period of three years, the authors have published findings from the community placement project within a variety of critical frames: learning for an unknown future and the ‘ontological turn’ (after Andrew & Kearney, 2006; Barnett, 2004); intercultural competence and cultural autonomy (after Andrew & Kearney, 2006; Byram, 1997; Cortazzi & Jin, 1999; Dlaska, 2000; Fennes & Hapgood, 1997; Palfreyman & Smith, 2003; Sercu, 2002); post structural identity theory and the cultural capital of placements (after Andrew & Kearney, 2007b; Ivanic, 1998; Norton, 1995, 2000, 2001; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Pavlenko, 2001, 2002; Weedon, 1987); reflective learning and identity formation in electronic media (Andrew & Kearney, 2007a); and varieties of learning stimulated through initially peripheral participation in communities of practices (Andrew & Kearney, 2007c; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). These papers have dealt with the classroom pedagogies and scaffolds required in order to prepare students communicatively, bridge them socioculturally
and engage them metacognitively for the experiential learning of community practice. This sets the way for exploring new literacy studies’ idea that literacies can involve the ‘reading’ of ‘Discourses.’ In this framework, literacy can be defined as ‘mastery of a second Discourse’ (Gee, 1990, p. 176). Students access these Discourses in their communities.

Communities of practice

Gee (1990) emphasises that the cultural aspects of Discourse cannot be ‘learned’ in the classroom. Students can, then, be encouraged to learn in community through apprenticeship to a community of practice:

You cannot overtly teach anyone a Discourse, in a classroom or anywhere else. This is not to say that acquisition can’t go in the classroom, but only that if it does, this isn’t because of overt ‘teaching’, but because of a process of ‘apprenticeship’ and social practice (Gee, 1990, p. 171).

Community placements share the properties of communities of practice (COPs) (Andrew & Kearney, 2007c; Barton & Tusting, 2005; Kemmis & Smith, 2008; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). According to this theory, the students might move beyond peripheral participation via apprenticeship into involvement and engagement. In some cases, and this depends on student investment in the placement activity, and their own sociolinguistic learning, participants might become medium- or long-term members of their chosen community. This return on investment can lead to empowered identities (Pittaway, 2004, p. 204).

Literacy, discourse and community

New literacy frameworks provide a fresh window for viewing the emergent literacies of students undertaking community placements. Cho (2006) claims that within a new literacy framework the possibility exists for individuals to ‘participate in specific literate communities for gaining group membership’. But what, in this context is ‘literacy’, and how are communities ‘specifically literate’? Answers can be found in Gee (1990). For Gee, the approach of new literacy studies views ‘literacy in its full range of cognitive, social, interactional, cultural, political, institutional, economic, moral and historical contexts’ (1990, p. 2).

Gee’s concept of ‘Discourses with a capital ‘D’’ provides a fitting description of the cultural and the specific literacies encountered in community placement. Discourses are:

ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities
... by specific groups ... They are ‘ways of being’ in the world; they are ‘forms of life’; they are socially situated identities.

(Gee, 1990, pp. 2, 161)

Discourses are people being themselves, ‘all about “how people get their acts together” to get recognised as a given kind of person at a specific time and place’ (1990, p. 155). In community placement, learners gain privileged access to individuals’ and communities’ ‘ways of being’ as their members get their acts together. This is why it was necessary for the teachers to be prescriptive and directive in describing the provisos for the community placement assessment, as described earlier in the list of directions given to students when they begin the assessment. The second, third and fourth provisos set out above, focus on how people get their acts together in community and volunteer organisations. The students are effectively put on the alert for capital ‘D’ Discourses. For the learners, the Discourses encountered might be ‘secondary Discourses … those to which people are apprenticed as part of their socialisations within various local, state and national groups and institutions’ (Gee, 1990, p. 168) and their emergent literacies consist partly in re-cognising (noticing, making connections cognitively and developing a new understanding) the signs and symptoms of those secondary Discourses and their contexts of use.

Learners’ literacies, then, are clearly situated in society, rather than residing solely in the individual. Within society and its communities ‘discourse patterns are among the strongest expressions of personal and cultural identity’ (Gee, 2000b, p. 82, citing Scollon & Scollon, 1981). Discourse patterns reflect reality sets or worldviews adopted by cultures, and literacy is embedded in them.

An increasing body of research in the wake of Gee views literacy as socially constructed practice and individuals as agential co-constructers of meaning (Carrington & Luke, 1997; Muspratt, Luke, & Freebody, Eds., 1997; Street, Ed., 1993, 2003). ‘Literacy’, writes Purcell-Gates (2007, p. 3), ‘is always embedded within social institutions, and, as such, is only knowable as it is defined and practiced by social and cultural groups’. An emergent body of work into lived literacy practices (and the impact of power on the social relations that inform them) is starting to emerge (e.g. Purcell-Gates, 2007). The new literacies model helps to bridge the gulf between what happens in the classroom and what is applied beyond it. Situated community placements are one way for advanced EAL learners to access the ‘reality sets’, ‘worldviews’ and ‘Discourses’ of the denizens of communities of practice and to develop multiple literacies, identities and even agencies via lived and shared experience, as we will see in our findings.
Methodology

Method

Qualitative, grounded research approaches provide useful reflective and evaluative insights and snapshots of real learner experience. Language learning histories (Murphey, Chen & Chen, 2005) or reflective diaries (Norton, 2000), for instance, represent the genre of the narrative of self. Because ‘diaries give the language teacher access to information about the learners’ opportunities to practice the target language in the wider community, their investments in the target language and their changing identities’ (Norton, 2000, p. 152), they contain ideal qualitative data for discourse analysts, ethnographers and action researchers of literacy in practice. Because grounded approaches allow the students’ own ethnographic voices to be highlighted, it becomes the job of the researcher to seek patterns within the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This approach involves locating recurrent themes and organising data around them to provide a basis for content analysis. One advantage of this approach (Glaser, 1998) is that openness in the data collection task allows participants to write freely. The names of the diary writers are concealed in this article.

Data and analysis

The students partook in and wrote reflective narratives of experience on 10+-hour community placements in communities of their choice that met the provisos defined by the assessment schedule and described above. The students were instructed to write four entries over the time of their placement to provide a broadly longitudinal perspective. They were asked to comment on any aspects of language, communication, socialisation, organisation or attitude that seemed ‘Kiwi’ to them. They were also asked to comment on any differences between institutions or social practices in their own country and those they witnessed in New Zealand. Finally, they were asked to evaluate their cultural learning during their placements. Emergent themes were open-coded and became categories under which two researchers independently listed categories, bridging them together to ensure additional viability. The citations given in our findings emerge from a dynamic central database of open-coded student comments. In order to develop this database ethics approval was obtained from the institution, while each semester students were given a letter which explained the research project and asked them to sign their permission if they wished to allow their reflective journals to be used.

Findings with discussion

Varieties of learning and other multiple literacies

Participants’ reflections testify to a multiplicity of ‘reality sets’, ‘worldviews’ and ‘Discourses’ noticed and applied during placements. Twenty-eight wrote about how
‘surprised’ they were by the extent, depth and reality of their learning in community, particularly in comparison to that of class. A typical comment is Zheng’s: ‘From these three days’ working experiences, I realised that so much new knowledge comes into my head’. Sam, a volunteer for the Heart Foundation expands on this: ‘community placements have boosted my confidence and taught me to be more attentive with instructions, flexible, organised, cooperative and being more responsible with myself and the tasks provided’. These learners are talking about literacy practices and not merely linguistic acquisition or increased cultural knowledge. Others speak of ‘really touching’ New Zealand culture, of gaining a ‘window into New Zealand culture’, of ‘increased depth’, ‘great rewards’, ‘clear vision’ and ‘cultural treasures’, all measures of cultural capital. For Dana, placement in the City Mission was ‘concrete’ not ‘abstract’ like class or the television news, and engendered ‘this unforgettable life experience’. The following four findings illustrate the assertion that literacies are co-constructed in social situations.

**Literacy 1: Applying communicative knowledge**

The most commonly described literacy involves an increase in spoken and communicative confidence due to learners’ communication with native or proficient users. The learners write about applying discourse patterns (such as functional language, tag questions or questioning strategies) they had either learned about in class or had overheard in their placement, and this application turns learning into acquisition. Fifty-five of the sixty make comments classified under this category. For many of these participants, the development of communicative confidence began when they spoke on the telephone or attended face-to-face interviews prior to placements, and continued to greater or lesser extents throughout the placements.

Shirley realised that ‘Besides learning English in the class, we should go out and experience real English so we can build up our confidence gradually’. She describes going about her placement at Eldercare applying such functions as ‘asking for repetition’ (‘I’m sorry. I didn’t catch you. Could you say that again, please?’). Yuriko, working for the Tear Fund, realised that Kiwis make tag questions by adding ‘eh?’ to both positive and negative questions, but that inflection was important. Zheng, in a fast food restaurant, was forced to develop the skill of understanding fast speech while dealing with his Indian supervisor. These are instances of literacy enhanced by the community context but inaccessible in class. As Rebecca writes, ‘By working [in the rest home] I can get a chance to interact with people by the use of knowledge and strategies which I have learned from class.’

Applying communicative knowledge can break barriers and widen social networks, as it was for Radha, an Indian participant placed in a primary school: ‘Through interaction with kids, with staff members and parents, I am overcoming my language barrier and learning some NZ slang. It has widened my circle of knowledge about New Zealand society and its culture’. Dai, another rest home worker, identifies specific learning by applying functional Discourse (expressing
interest in the elderly through questioning) and comments (in an extremely typical and representative response) that ‘it was useful for my communication, and I felt that I gradually became confident, relaxed and fluent when speaking and listening’. Reading learners’ reflections it is clear that their feeling of confidence came, not through learning in the classroom, but through involvement in the community placement; thus it is the real community context that promotes this aspect of cultural literacy. Having the chance to apply communicative strategies theoretically represented in class allows these EAL students to realise, as magazine photographer Anna did, that ‘communication opens doors, and helps me to leave a positive impression’.

**Literacy 2: Negotiating lexical awareness**

Every diary is peppered with lexis and idiomatic phrases (a clear subset of discourse patterns) overheard and learned during the placement. These are the diaries of advanced, aware English language learners, and their reflections often show it, as in Rose’s observation that ‘teachers use delexical verbs such as “take a turn” and “have a night-time”’, that they always praise children ‘fantastic, good try, well done, etc’, and her acquisition of the word trapezoid when helping children with a mathematics game. In a rest home, Shirley describes how she learned the term seeing eye dog and the idiom out of the blue at ElderCare. Meanwhile, Yuriko attributes the enthusiastic adjectives gorgeous and marvellous to older users. She suggests that the fact that they use colloquialisms like I’m knackered shows that they are comfortable having her around. Sophia describes how she updated her understanding of refugee and how she worked out the meaning of tapu, and Les describes how he learned what a hoon was when his supervisor jeered at a boy-racer. Nora, working in a boutique, acquired raincheck and lay-by; Karina, in a Red Cross shop, internalised gummies and the wopwops, and Abdulla, a teacher aide in a high school is amused that teachers call the tuck shop the junk shop. Andy acquired fluent barista-ese: ‘one shot of Black coffee plus half trim milk plus half full blend milk’. Karen is one of ten students who acquired Maori lexis: whare kai for kitchen. ‘I won’t doubt’, she writes, ‘that Maori language is also an official language in New Zealand’. Jean, adopted by the Jehovah’s Witnesses highlighted new words ‘such as Armageddon, fornication, apostasy, etc’. Walter, taken to watch the All Blacks lose at Eden Park wrote: ‘it was so good to get some inside info and of course the lingo’. Hamish, working in a food factory, even includes a glossary of company jargon (e.g. ways of describing shifts: early bird, twilight, middle earth, daylight and graveyard).

The diaries contain rich data about how students learn vocabulary in community. Learners, for instance, fasten on an idiom and use it repeatedly. Hamish writes, ‘it is true that I use put on hold almost every day’. Dany, participating in a police meeting, provides a second instance of lexical acquisition: ‘The first time I heard clear skin I had no idea about the meaning, but when they put it into sentences such as “If you’d
like to be a police officer, you need to have clear skin”, I understood its means “no criminal record.” There is a sense in the data that learners are consciously applying lexical strategies they have learned in class and acquiring Discourse through co-construction. John, stationed at a hostel, described how he learned the meaning of *worthless* when his colleague corrected his lexical use in the context ‘I am worthless at chess’. He goes on to articulate this conscious process:

During my community placement I found myself in situations where I couldn’t find the words and expressions I was looking for, but I managed to explain what I meant anyway. To talk around words you don’t have in your vocabulary is a very effective method.

He might not have the words *paraphrasing* and *periphrasis* the way that Rose has *delexical verb*, but his comment evidences a sociocognitive process demonstrating a good grasp of lexical literacy.

**Literacy 3: Acquiring job-specific procedural knowledge**

Six of the participants undertook placements in communities they were already working in as volunteers, part-timers or aides (early childhood education centres; primary and secondary schools). Here, they develop the literacies they will need for their future jobs. Meanwhile, thirty-two other learners report additional and incidental skills they learned ‘how to’ do during their placements. In describing skills that will be useful in their futures, they identify their exposure not merely to language, but to literacy practices which are part of Gee’s ‘ways of being’ in the world’ (1990, p. 155), involving the interplay of activity and communication that is situated learning. Interview and telephone skills have already been mentioned. The reflections detail a range of practices and skills from the ability to use tills, EFTPOS, photocopiers and computer programmes and the chance to undertake GST accounting and banking duties, to the ability to man a yacht, make a cappuccino, tan leather or carry out CPR. Zheng worked at McDonalds and reports picking up ‘management skills and services skill, because the employees need to provide a fast, friendly and courteous experience to the customers … and very important rule – keep smile all the time in front of your customers.’ Beth learned ‘the needs and characteristics of elderly people’ and ‘how to handle an emergency’, while Radha observed ‘how children learn by self-discovery’ and ‘how important it is for parents to talk about their children’s progress’.

Such skills also fall under the umbrella of multiple literacies since they are strategies or skills related to coping within a particular context. Karen’s experience of a one-hour pre-placement interview and of the complex and formal process of initiation into volunteer work is a case in point. ‘In addition’, she writes, ‘I was informed to behave strictly according to the Volunteer Behaviour Code, which is a list of Dos and Don’ts’. Tim, from Ethiopia, is one of six students who became a
permanent Citizen’s Advice Bureau volunteer after 12 weeks of training, stationed in the Multilingual Information Centre. His reflective log bullet points indicates the multiplicity of literacies involved:

- Responding to all incoming telephone calls, faxes, emails
- Face to face interviews
- Recording enquiries and demographics
- Reception duties
- Making appointments with other Auckland Regional Migrant Services staff
- Attending seminars and workshops
- Assisting with administrative tasks, e.g. data entry
- Assisting in submitting relevant case studies
- Promoting service in community networks

The project’s data contains many other such descriptions of literacy practices identified/ applied and skills gained through on-the-job tasks. The common factor in the journals is that all writers feel proud, privileged and glad to be of service. They consistently report positive literacy events that enhance their sense of belonging both to the COP and to New Zealand.

**Literacy 4: Situated discourses**

All 60 of the participants report on the Discourse that they encountered during their placement, and more than half of them (35) show a strong awareness that the language they witness is part of the shared repertoire of their COP. Most of the 60 initially both focus on register and politeness, and provide examples of functional and situational language in use. The 15 students placed in either rest homes, playcentres or primary schools, for instance, all notice changes in register between staffroom talk and communications with rest home citizens and their families, or the children and their parents. Hina, an early childcare specialist from Ethiopia, observes:

> Morning teas and lunchtimes are very important for me to observe and engage with the spoken language because this is the only time when the staff come together and have chit chat and share their experiences. Throughout this time, the nature of communication is both semi-formal and semi-informal depending on how well the staff know each other.

She describes the Discourse of the staff describing the children in remembered soundbites: ‘hard to focus on task, no attention to what he/she is doing, very disruptive in class, memory problems, no response to questions, off task, no respect
for others, unfriendly to peers'. The 35 who identify features of their COP’s Discourse also usually instance vocabulary or idioms.

The data is filled with examples of Discourses identified. Dana, placed in the City Mission noticed markers of local friendliness as well as Kiwi high rising terminal:

> It was very interesting to notice the way Mike talked with the Kiwi family in a very Kiwi style. They shook hands: ‘So you reckon … cheers mate … sweet as’ was very frequently used between their talking. They usually raised their tone in every last word of sentence casually no matter asking or answering.

Beth, in a retirement home, is even more perceptive in her observation of elderly Kiwis’ Discourse: ‘Older people are more likely to pronounce words like ‘grown, thrown’ with one syllable, and younger people … with two syllables (‘growen, throwen’). Such comments testify to a developing cultural literacy – recognising the phonetic and lexical symptoms of Kiwiness.

The Discourses students encounter can be life-changing. Dana, a volunteer for the City Mission, spoke with a homeless woman and was touched:

> My second conversation was with a Maori elder and her family had gone. She told this to a complete stranger who served her a cup of coffee – me. I felt Maori people’s kindness through her trusted eyes: they love to talk to people, they love to share their stories, and they love to smile. They trust people, they stick together and care about each other even though they are in extreme life situation.

Ivor, stationed at an aquarium, writes on one day of a Maori volunteer and hopes to have a chance to meet him again. This desire has all the qualities of an imagined community. His day two entry describes the meeting:

> He was funny. He said chaofan (fried rice) to me because he knows I am a Chinese. I was surprised. Then we started a conversation. I really wanted to have a good start, so I showed him my knowledge of Maori with asking his iwi’s name. Then we talked about the Maori tikanga. I could feel his happiness about my knowledge of Maori because it is not common that an international student especially a Chinese student knows so much about Maori. I realized that understanding a culture could help me to integrate into a society easily.

Once again, the student’s learning goes beyond Discourse and cultural literacy into both a humane learning and the realisation that such transactions can create a bridge between people and lead to acceptance and even what is obviously his desire: ‘integration’.
Conclusion

Even as the findings itemise some of the cultural capital learners gain from engaged, situated, sociocultural learning in community placement, they also exemplify the process of how Discourses are acquired in community. Gee may be right to say that ‘you cannot overtly teach anyone a Discourse, in a classroom or anywhere else’ (Gee, 1990, p. 171) but you do have the power to create contexts in which Discourses occur and to place learners within them. As we have seen, one such context is the specific literate communities of placements. It can be concluded that community placements offer value beyond opportunities to practise communicative strategies to observe local culture in two main ways. First, learning in community has the potential to activate the social mind, promote language socialisation and develop participation in Discourses and ‘situated meanings’ (Gee, 1990, 2000a, 2000b, 2004). Second, there is its ability to promote multiple literacies.

Community placement, then, provides a context for learners to engage in and with New Zealand culture and society. Their reflective diaries give them a chance to unpack the literacies they have seen embedded in their cultural groups, and participate in a process that promotes cultural literacies through engagement. The task of community placement recognises that Gee’s ‘changing patterns of participation’ are central to efficacious pedagogies focussing on cultural literacy in either a new literacies or a sociocultural approach to language learning. Finally, it confirms that community placement is an educationally effective and identity-affirmative vehicle for authentic cultural learning and engaging (and engaged) language socialisation.

References


