Resolving the culture conundrum:  
A conceptual framework for the management of culture in TESOL

Submitted by


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Abstract

The thesis explores the place of culture in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). The study originally set out to investigate the ways in which teachers understand culture and deal with it in their teaching of English. A survey of teachers found that while the teachers had sophisticated understandings about culture and its relationship with language at a general level, they did not have clear understandings about how cultural teaching can be enacted in the classroom. This conundrum was also evident in the literature on teaching culture in TESOL. An extensive survey of the literature found that while there are a number of different perspectives on how culture can be understood and dealt with in TESOL, none of these provide a comprehensive basis for the understandings teachers need for the practicalities of teaching. The focus of the study shifted from an investigation of professional development to the articulation of a conceptual framework to inform teachers in the way they can manage the teaching of culture. The framework draws on some significant insights of one of the perspectives in the literature, Intercultural Language Teaching, as well as some insights from other perspectives. The framework identifies dimensions in which teachers need to understand how culture can be manifest and managed in TESOL. For each dimension a number of factors on which decisions need to be made are identified. The framework also identifies a number of principles to guide teachers in their decision-making about the teaching culture. The potential of the framework to inform the teaching of English to adult immigrants in Australia, as well as students studying English in a university in Vietnam is explored. The capacity of the framework to inform TESOL teacher education, research and theory building is also evaluated.
Statement of authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

The thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

The research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Graduate School of Education.

Signature:…………………………………………..Date……………………..
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our perceptions and influence our reactions to what we encounter in cross-cultural interaction gave me an initial awareness of many of the issues I have explored in this thesis.

My thinking has also been influenced by the many hundreds of ESL and TESOL teacher education students I have taught. In recent years, many of my students and teachers participating in professional development activities, have given me valuable feedback as my thinking has developed. In particular, the students in La Trobe’s Master of Applied Linguistics programs in Vietnam, and colleagues in La Trobe’s partner universities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City have, with characteristic generosity and warmth, shared a Vietnamese view of the world with me, and stimulated my thinking about the way English operates as an ‘International Language’ in the context of contemporary global politics and economic conditions.

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Chapter 1

Investigating the ‘culture conundrum’ of TESOL

‘Except for ‘language’ and ‘teaching’ there is perhaps no more important concept in the field of TESOL than ‘culture’” (Atkinson 1999).

‘Because something is happening here
But you don't know what it is
Do you, Mister Jones?’
(Bob Dylan (1965) ‘Ballad of a Thin Man’)

1.1 ‘Culture’ and ‘TESOL’

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, ‘communicative’ approaches to language teaching became the prevailing paradigm for Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages (TESOL). Communicative approaches emphasise the learner learning to make meaning, or communicate in the language, rather than focusing on learning the linguistic system of the language. The widespread acceptance of communicative approaches to language teaching in TESOL has meant that ‘culture’ is widely seen as a significant part of TESOL. Atkinson’s (1999) comment above affirms a view that is commonly held in the profession and in its literature. However, as Bob Dylan has pointed out, acknowledging something as important is not the same thing as adequately understanding and addressing it. This thesis explores the ways that TESOL has understood and worked with the concept of ‘culture’, and suggests that ‘culture’ has presented something of a conundrum for the field. While there is widespread acceptance of culture as a significant concept in the profession, ‘culture’ has not been conceptualised or articulated with sufficient clarity to provide a well-informed basis for the treatment of culture by teachers in TESOL classrooms. Nor has there been a clearly articulated theoretical understanding of culture and its place in TESOL, capable of sustaining extensive research on the topic.

1.2 The contexts and nature of TESOL

TESOL is a global activity, which is conducted in many different parts of the world. The nature of the professional discourse of TESOL will be considered below. However, the nature of the practice of TESOL varies according to the place of
English in the society in which it is being taught. Kachru & Neilson have categorised different contexts on the basis of three types of status that English can have in different social contexts. This conceptual framework recognises and accepts as valid the many varieties of English spoken around the world, rather than looking at certain varieties – such as standardised forms of the language (for example, Standard British English with a ‘received pronunciation’ accent) – as a superior form to which all speakers of English either aspire or are to be compared against (Kachru & Neilson 2001). These multiple varieties can be classified into ‘concentric circles’ around the commonalities of differing varieties of English. The Inner Circle includes countries where English is dominant and widely spoken as a native language, such as the United Kingdom, the USA, Canada, Australia and so on. The Outer Circle consists of countries such as India, Pakistan, Singapore and Nigeria, where English has had a historical role and continues to have an important role in many functions, in education, literary and popular cultures, including in some instances as an official language. The Expanding Circle includes countries where English may be used for a narrower range of purposes, such as for business, and for reading in order to obtain scientific and technical knowledge. Countries in the expanding circle include China, Vietnam and Japan. This categorisation will be used in this thesis as convenient shorthand for the different types of context in which English is taught.

The dynamics of TESOL in each of the circles varies not only in relation to the place of English in that society, but also in relation to the nature of the learners and their purposes for learning English. These factors also influence the nature of the cultural learning involved in TESOL in the different ‘Circles’. The ‘Circles of TESOL’, as opposed to the ‘Circles of English’ can be described in the following terms:

1. The Inner Circle, or English-speaking societies, where a native variety of English is the predominant language of the mainstream community. In these contexts learners may be either immigrants, or others (frequently students) temporarily resident in the country, often for purposes of completing formal study or occupational training or experience. These learners are often ‘immersed’ in English, being surrounded by English in daily use, and are living in the midst of an English speaking culture. For many learners there is a
profound encounter with both the language and the culture, although it is also possible that this may be limited, as learners live among sub-communities made up of people of the same or similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds, who venture into the English speaking ‘mainstream’ society to varying extents. There may be a variable sense of investment in English, with some (particularly immigrants) seeking to fully move into the mainstream, while others have more limited aims in terms of being able to live within an immigrant community within the broader society;

2. The Outer circle, made up of English-speaking societies, where English is very widely and competently spoken, but is one of a number of languages spoken. In these societies English is one of a number of nationally significant languages, and it has generally had historical significance as the language of the former colonial rulers. It is often used in specific domains, in relation to government, education, business and technology, or as a lingua franca between people who share no other local language. In these societies there may be some who are native speakers of English, but most speakers have probably learned English as a second or subsequent language. The variety of English spoken is widely recognised by speakers of other varieties of English as a valid variety of English, but which varies in many respects from the varieties spoken by native speakers of English in the predominantly English-speaking societies. In these contexts, learners have wide exposure to English out of the classroom, but the cultural immersion they experience is influenced more by the cultures of other languages widely spoken in the society and perhaps less markedly than an English speaking culture. For learners, the experience of the cultures of English may be influenced by the way that English cultures have interacted historically with other cultures in that context, and with the extent to which English language and culture reflect features and norms of indigenous languages and cultures;

3. The Expanding Circle of non-English-speaking societies, where English is not spoken as a native language, and where English is used in a restricted range of domains. In these contexts, learning English is often regarded as the learning
of a ‘foreign language’, despite it being used in some contexts in those societies. These may include the use of English as an international lingua franca for pursuits such as tourism or business, or in education and training to access disciplinary or technical knowledge. In these contexts, interaction, especially spoken interaction, is very often between a bilingual speaker of English of the expanding circle society, and a speaker of English who is visiting or has an interest such as a business interest, in the expanding circle country. The visiting speakers of English may be speakers of any of a variety from Inner circle, Outer circle or the Expanding circle, and so the cultural norms of spoken interaction are much less founded in native speaking varieties of Inner circle varieties of English, and are often consciously ‘cross cultural’ in that participants are likely to be aware that the norms of the Expanding circle society will influence many aspects of the English being used in interaction. In these contexts, contact with and experience of the culture of English associated with speakers of other varieties of English can be remote. The experience of English in use and the associated cultures may be remote from the experience of learners, who encounter these predominantly in classrooms, although it may also be experienced through exposure to media such as movies, television programs and music from English-speaking countries, and in certain situations where there is interaction with foreign visitors to the country.

While this classification of the use and learning of English around the world into three broad categories is not unproblematic, and inevitably glosses over further variations and distinctions, both between the societies in each category, and within them, it is a useful conceptual framework for acknowledging something of the variable nature of TESOL around the world. This scheme points to diversity within the cultural contexts of TESOL, yet the profession and its literature tend to be concerned with identifying and understanding the universals in the practices and issues of the profession.
1.3 The TESOL profession and its discourses

The global professional identity and discourse of the TESOL profession have been described by Scollon & Wong-Scollon (1995, 2001). They point out that the TESOL profession is widely dispersed. However, a number of professional organisations and publications provide a means of cohesion and discourse. The professional discourse is maintained by the professional socialisation, provided by professional associations, and socialisation into the profession, through TESOL teacher education courses, which draw on the extensive range of TESOL publications, which emanate largely from the Inner Circle countries. There is a tendency in this discourse to adopt a view that there are absolutes in the acquisition and teaching of English that pertain to all contexts in which TESOL is conducted.

Scollon & Wong-Scollon identify a pattern in the growth of this profession, from the mid 1970s with the development of formal TESOL teacher training programs around the world, but especially in Inner Circle countries, and the development of professional associations at a similar period of time. This global development of a TESOL profession is mirrored in Australia, where there has been formal instruction in TESOL since the beginning of the post world War II immigration program. The immigration was supported by the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), which began in 1946, when ship-board English classes were conducted by ship-board tutors during the six-week sea voyage to Australia from Europe (Martin 1999). However, it was not until the 1970s, when the teaching of English as a second language (ESL) to immigrants and the children of immigrants became widespread, that universities began to provide formal qualifications in TESOL, and professional associations were established (Martin 1999). In the period since then, requirements that ESOL teachers have some professional qualifications and training have become more widespread and widely observed. The earlier focus on teaching ESL to immigrants has expanded to include an interest in teaching ‘International students’ who are temporarily resident in Australian, usually to participate in some further course of higher education or training, and as Australian education providers have moved into the delivery of English language and other courses offshore, to the development of a more specific interest in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL).
The discourse of ‘communicative language teaching’ has been a powerful unifying factor in the professional discourse of TESOL since the early 1970s. Communicative language teaching (CLT) has become an orthodoxy, which has replaced earlier grammar translation, behaviourist, and ‘humanistic’ approaches to language teaching (Richards and Rodgers 2001).

1.4 Culture and communicative language teaching

Scollon and Wong-Scollon (1995) describe the communicative discourse in TESOL in the following terms:

There are many historical and cultural reasons for the development of the so-called communicative language teaching methods and approaches of the recent two decades, but it is safe to say that in contemporary English teaching the most central ideological position is that the purpose of teaching and learning English as well as the most effective methods are ‘communicative’. . . . The most important aspect of this array of methods is the emphasis on individual communication. This pedagogical emphasis directly reflects the underlying ideology of individualism and egalitarianism of the people who are ESL professionals. (Scollon & Wong-Scollon1995: 202)

In CLT attention is also paid to factors that contribute to the making and interpreting of meanings in particular social situations. These are often given the label of the ‘sociocultural’ or ‘pragmatic’ aspects of a language, or of language use (Canale & Swain 1980, Bachman 1990, Bachman & Palmer 1996). Communicative approaches also address sociolinguistic factors, patterns of variation within a language, and the ways it is used differently by different groups of its users in different social contexts. Communicative approaches have a broader scope than earlier more structurally-focussed approaches. However, in CLT the point of reference for teaching, and the target that learners should be directed towards, is that of the norms and practices of ‘native speakers’ of the language. In TESOL, this has generally meant that teaching is conducted with reference to the norms and practices of one of the Inner circle ‘standard’ varieties of English, either North American or British ‘received pronunciation’. In recent years, greater consciousness of the nature of English as an International language (EIL), has led to exploration and questioning of the significance of Inner circle norms (see, for example, McKay 2000, 2002). Partly in response to recognition that most teachers of English in Outer and Expanding Circle contexts are not native speakers of an Inner Circle variety of English, there has also
been exploration of the position of such teachers (for example, Rampton 1990, Cook 1999). As the diversity of TESOL and of members of the profession becomes increasingly acknowledged and explored, the assumption that there is a single ‘culture’ of English that needs to be dealt with in teaching becomes more problematic.

1.5 Starting points for the study

Research is necessarily motivated by the personal interests, perceptions and experiences of the researcher. Critical theory and critical perspectives on research have pointed out the myth of the researcher as a ‘disinterested’ and disengaged scholar (Carr 1995: 50). The research presented in this thesis reflects the interests and experiences of the researcher, and in many respects is framed by the societal context in which the research is conducted. Understanding a little of this background assists the reader in understanding the research.

My affiliation with the TESOL profession and my sense of identity as a ‘TESOL professional’ stem from 25 years’ experience in the field. My first work as a teacher of ESL was to recently arrived adolescent immigrant students in Australia, in a program that prepared these students for transition into mainstream secondary schools following an intensive ESL program of 6 to 12 months’ duration following their arrival in Australia. For the last 15 years I have worked in TESOL teacher education, teaching pre-service and in-service students, as well as teaching students working at higher degree level in TESOL and applied linguistics, including the teaching of intensive courses off-shore as part of a Master of Applied Linguistics program for teachers of English in Vietnam. So, while most of my students have been interested in TESOL in the Inner Circle context of Australia, significant numbers have also either had experience in Expanding circle contexts or in some cases aspired to teach in such contexts. There have also been some teachers in my classes with experience in Outer circle contexts.

But TESOL was not the starting point of my professional life. I started teaching as a secondary teacher who had studied in the humanities, majoring in history and
geography with a sub major in political science. But my early experience of teaching in inner suburban schools left me with a sense that the assumptions and preconceptions of the subjects I taught, and the expectations and hidden assumptions of the school in relation to academic and social conventions, were a significant challenge and potential barrier for my predominantly working class and immigrant students. Along with many of my generation, the early years of my teaching career were interrupted by extensive travel in South East Asia and the Indian sub continent, and then in Eastern and Central Europe (briefly) and Western Europe, including an extended period living in the United Kingdom, where I taught mainly immigrant students in a North London secondary school, and undertook a four week certificate in TEFL course, that became my entrée into TESOL upon my return to Australia.

These early career and travel experiences led me to a number of realisations, which I carried into my work in TESOL. First, through my temporary immersion in many different societies (as what would now be described as a ‘backpacker’), I developed understandings about how the cultures of different groups of people assist them in living as groups in the particular social and physical environment in which they exist. Different solutions may fulfil the same needs in different settings, and the demands of meeting physical needs may set up other social imperatives. So the demands of intensive wet rice cultivation on hillsides in parts of Java and Bali, and the irrigation and drainage works that support such farming, require a highly co operative set of social conventions within villages and between different villages on higher and lower ground. Secondly, I realised that the solutions some groups adopted were as successful as others, such as the practice of marriages arranged by the families of a couple, which was as successful in producing loving, caring and cohesive families as Western approaches to marriage based on notions of ‘romantic love’, while noting that both approaches to marriage also failed to be successful in some instances, and at times produce horrific failures. Third, I developed a sense of myself, and through my encounters with ‘otherness’, a stronger sense of myself, and what had shaped me, and continues to shape me, to be the sort of cultural being I am. Along with this realisation about myself was the realisation that while I could appreciate and value other cultural ways, there were things about myself that I could or would never change, and that my appreciation and valuing of myself and my cultural heritage.
meant that something of my cultural origins went with me wherever I went, no matter how much I might identify with those amongst whom I was living. So while I could appreciate Indian approaches to marriage, I could never contemplate such a course of action for myself.

In this self-description there is much that is consistent with the way native speaking TESOL professionals are described by Scollon & Wong-Scollon (see page 4 above). This is true not only with respect to my travel experiences, but also in relation to an egalitarian and individualistic ideology, derived from my socialisation as a male growing up in Australia in the 1950s and 1960s. However, my appreciation of my own culture and society has never been uncritical, and has been influenced by my work in schools that at the time were described as being in ‘underprivileged’ communities, giving me a sense of hypocrisies, inconsistencies and inadequacies in the society and culture in which I was nurtured. For me, such realisations, and the understandings derived from my earlier travel and professional experiences, meant that when I began my career in TESOL, I was conscious of the need to not only assist my learners in becoming familiar with the linguistic code of English, but also to make explicit the expectations that they would be expected to meet in Australian society and particularly their studies in Australian schools. However, it always seemed to me that this encounter with English should empower my students by equipping them to work successfully within the mores of Australian society and their new social and cultural environment, and should not attempt to make my students ‘Australian’ in a way that denied their home culture. It should help them be comfortable in appreciating their own cultural heritage, and make sense of what they encountered in Australia from their own cultural perspectives, enabling them (and their families) to formulate their own responses and adaptations to their lives in Australia.

My first research interest in TESOL was in the area of content-based language teaching. This built on my experience as a ‘mainstream’ teacher and my concern that ESL students be assisted in learning the necessary linguistic and cultural understandings and skills that have potential to lead to academic success in Australian schools. However, my encounter with this part of the professional discourse led me to the realisation that some of this literature was so focussed on the desirability of ESL
learners meeting mainstream academic norms that value the importance and potential of the learners’ own cultural backgrounds were not really appreciated, even though they were discursively acknowledged (for example, Chamot & O’Malley 1994).

During the 1990s I encountered parts of the professional literature that challenged the field to understand and explore the implications of its practices, such as Benesch’s questioning of the pragmatic orientation of English for academic purposes (Benesch 1992), Phillipson’s argument that TESOL was not politically, ideologically and culturally neutral (Phillipson 1992), and Norton-Peirce’s argument that subjective constructs of self and identity and a reaction to aspects of the ‘host’ society were most significant determiners of the process of language acquisition among immigrant learners of English (Norton-Peirce 1995, Norton 2000). These arguments pointed out that many of the conventional practices of the TESOL profession appear in fact to be the source of many of the difficulties faced by learners, such as the orientation to making ESL learners conform to ‘mainstream’ norms helping set up conditions where the learners are not seen as having different cultural identities (Benesch 1992).

However, while the logical implications of such arguments appear to point to dropping practices with potentially negative consequences, it is often these very practices that have the potential for the empowerment of learners that TESOL offers, provided they can be conducted sufficiently clearly and sensitively. My early response to this critical literature was to argue for the need to find sensitive and aware modes of professional practice (Williams 1995), rather than the presentation of false dichotomies which present stark choices based on overgeneralisation such as that presented by Spack (1997) who argues that the practice of identifying ESOL learners by their nationality should cease as it can lead to teachers overlooking other significant qualities and characteristics of their learners. It seemed to me that an insightful understanding of the role of culture in TESOL seems fundamental to the articulation and implementation of sensitive and aware professional practice in relation to potentially harmful professional practices. I believed that teaching a culture was not the same thing as imposing a culture, but it also seemed to me that teachers need to understand the difference between these.
At the same time, it seemed to me that while the professional literature that did address culture contained fascinating exploration and complex conceptualisation (for example Valdes 1987, Damen 1987, Brown 1987), it failed to provide a strong conceptual foundation on which to base the teaching of the culture(s) that interact with English. Nonetheless, there was other work, such as Murray (1992) and Tomalin & Stempleski (1992), which seemed to contain rich and potentially useful ideas and approaches. However, these seemed to exist in isolation from a broader body of literature that developed and explored their theoretical basis or which provided empirical data to support claims that were made. This touches on another aspect of the conundrum; how to express a systematic idea of what culture is and how to teach and learn it? In TESOL such an understanding is taken for granted in relation to language, so why was it there were no such understandings in relation to culture?

These considerations motivated me in a desire to further explore how TESOL dealt with ‘culture’. I wanted to identify research and theorising on culture in TESOL that I could employ in my TESOL education courses, that could respond to the interest my students demonstrated in knowing more about ‘culture’ and its teaching in TESOL. My work in TESOL teacher education suggested to me that my students also shared my interest in the classes that dealt with culture, and displayed very high levels of engagement in discussions and classroom tasks. However, my forays into the professional literature seemed to fail to find strong insights or conclusions that I could use to assist my students to develop informed and effective ways of dealing with culture in their ESOL classrooms.

### 1.6 The possibility of a ‘culture conundrum’

It was puzzling that a profession that gave rhetorical significance to culture in its practices seemed to struggle to clearly articulate clear understandings about culture and how it was dealt with in the classroom. This seemed to present a conundrum with two dimensions.

The first dimension is that during the period in which CLT became the orthodoxy of the professional discourse of TESOL, the topic received relatively little attention in
the professional literature. Atkinson notes that discussion of the concept of ‘culture’ in the prestigious TESOL Quarterly was sparse in the 15 years from 1984 to 1999. He points out that an edition of the journal covering major trends and concepts in the field in 1991 failed to include any explicit discussion of culture, and that in the fifteen years prior to publication of his article less than 10 articles included ‘culture’ or a variant of it in the title (Atkinson 1999:625). Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, & Colby (1999) make a similar comment in their review of culture in the language teaching literature (which included literature on the teaching of languages other than English (LOTE) as well as TESOL). The treatment of the notion of ‘culture’ in the professional literature is explored more extensively in Chapter 3. What is significant here is that while the prevailing orthodoxy of the professional discourse conferred a greater significance on the ordinary everyday lived culture of the speakers of English, (which was in contrast to some earlier approaches to language teaching which emphasised ‘high culture’, that is, the literature and arts of the countries where the language was the dominant or official language), the professional literature had relatively little to say about culture and how it was to be taught.

The second dimension of the conundrum is that the communicatively oriented professional literature has provided only limited guidance to teachers with respect to how culture should be addressed in the ESOL classroom. This is despite the fact that CLT is concerned with the non-linguistic factors that impinge on the making of meaning when English is used in specific social situations, in addition to parts of the linguistic code. In successive editions of one widely-used text book written for pre-service teachers, culture received no explicit exploration (Harmer 1983, 1991, 2001), while in another it was dealt with in broad discussions about the anthropological nature of culture, its relationship with language, sociological factors such as the position of immigrants in a society, or psychological phenomena such as culture shock, but little specific guidance to teachers as to how they should deal with culture in the classroom (Brown 1987,1991). A more detailed analysis of this literature is provided in Chapter 3.

This study was motivated by a desire to explore this conundrum. It was intended to better understand why teachers seemed to be so interested in the topic, yet so unsure
as to exactly what they needed to do in order to teach the culture of English. I wanted to identify the conceptual and theoretical understandings that would assist them in their teaching. I wanted to know more about why the literature that I was aware of provided interesting discussion of general aspects about culture without a clear set of conclusions for classroom practice. I was aware of some literature that provided techniques for teaching about particular aspects about culture, but these seemed fragmentary and unconnected. I wanted to understand how culture could be better integrated into the linguistic and other non-linguistic phenomena teachers deal with in their teaching of ESOL. The study was intended to better understand teachers’ understandings about culture in TESOL, and how teachers could be better assisted in dealing with culture in their teaching.

1.7 The context of the study

This study was undertaken in Australia in the final years of the 20th century, and the early years of the 21st. This was a period of change and even some turmoil at several levels of relevance to the study, including:

- Internationalisation in global trade and communication, and the use of English as a medium of communication in such processes. This has resulted in a renewed interest in the professional literature in the Expanding circle, and interest in exploring the dynamics of English when it is used as a International language (McKay 2000, 2002). Australian TESOL teachers are working increasingly with ‘International students’ as well as immigrants, resulting in views of the TESOL classroom as sites of global intercultural communication (Singh & Doherty 2004);

- Changing patterns in the dynamics of immigration to Australia. Changing patterns of settlement have resulted in ESL teachers in Australia working increasingly with students – such as immigrants from the horn of Africa and Southern Sudan – from linguistic cultural backgrounds which are relatively unfamiliar to teachers. Many of these learners come from cultures with strong oral traditions and low levels of prior experience of schooling and literacy, and teachers are faced with the challenge of helping to prepare and orient these students to highly literate and technologically oriented society (Wigglesworth 2003). Political debate around government policies of ‘multiculturalism’, heated political debate about the social
value of immigration, together with a less welcoming approach taken by the federal government to asylum seekers arriving by boat without prior authority or application, contrasted with the values and attitudes espoused by the TESOL profession, which expressed a valuing of cultural diversity and cultural differences and a supportive and welcoming approach to immigrants (see for example, ACTA Mission statement 2003), which in turn had received bipartisan political support in preceding decades. This created an atmosphere in which ESL teachers felt besieged and under attack for doing work they took to be of unquestioned social value (Williams 1998);

- Changing dynamics in education in Australia, in particular the increasingly mandated use of outcome-based curriculum frameworks in school and adult education sectors, which saw TESOL in school and adult sectors required to work within curriculum frameworks that specified what should be the outcomes or results of teaching (Board of Studies 2000; AMES NSW 1996 and 2003; ARIS 2005). These outcome oriented curriculum and assessment frameworks were framed in terms of targets for learning derived from the native speaker norms or the expectations that applied in mainstream contexts of English language use, compared to earlier frameworks that were structured around the background and circumstances of learners (such as for example McKay & Scarino 1991 and Nunan & Burton 1989, 1989a, 1989b). In the mid to late 1990s ESL teachers in Australia were coming to terms with this adjustment to their practices in course design, assessment and reporting (see for example Bottomley, Dalton & Corbel 1994). This change was occurring within significant organisational changes within education systems, involving either downsizing of public sector education provision, or the adoption of more corporate organisational structures and procedures (Marginson 1993, Williams 1998).

- Changes and challenges in the patterns of prevailing Western intellectual traditions (especially in parts of the humanities and partially in the social sciences), in which the enlightenment view of knowledge as constituting an objective reality susceptible to discovery and description has been challenged by arguments that knowledge is constructed in the mind, that multiple realities are possible and that the constructive processes and nature of subjectivity are worthy of study in order to understand social and individual constructions of reality.
In different ways, each of these factors influenced the nature of the study both through the emergence of issues worthy of exploration, and through the creation of dynamics and insights that have contributed to the findings of the study.

The aim of the study was to explore the culture conundrum. This involved understanding how the field of TESOL, including its literature and teachers, understood culture as a factor on all dimensions of the work of TESOL. This would involve identifying how essential understandings about culture and ways of teaching it could be used as content in TESOL teacher education to effectively give teachers an understanding of concepts and understandings of use to them in their classroom work. This approach sees teachers as the focus of effective teaching, a concept that requires some elaboration as a foundation of the thesis.

1.8 The nature of teaching, teacher education and research in education

Any research intended to inform teaching is based on an understanding of teaching and the relationship between research and teaching. Traditionally in the language teaching literature, the concept of ‘methods’, sets of standard practices derived from particular understandings of language and language teaching, have been prominent (see Richards and Rodgers 2001). However, more recent conceptions of the nature of language teaching see the teacher as an informed decision maker, making informed judgments about the appropriate pedagogy to implement in different classrooms in different teaching contexts, using a variety of concepts, techniques and strategies that have potential in that situation, rather than more fixed sets of practices and procedures. Freeman & Johnson (1998), Freeman & Richards (1993) and Richards (1998) identify three potential conceptions of teaching within this paradigm, a Science-research conception, theory-based conceptions and art-craft conceptions. They tend to present these as alternative conceptions of teaching, each with its own assumptions and imperatives, from which corresponding conceptions of the role of teacher education, and of research follow. However, Edge & Richards (1998) argue that these should not be seen as alternatives, but as different dimensions of the role of the teacher:
Teachers are scientists to the extent that they are involved in the investigation of their teaching contexts, in the careful observation of what is going on, the formation and testing of hypotheses, and the ongoing development of their own teaching. Teachers are technicians to the extent that they are skilled in the use, maintenance, and adaptation of the methods and techniques that they employ with their learners, be they drills, problem-solving tasks, or large-scale simulations. Teachers are also craftspeople to the extent that they acknowledge a tradition of wise and skilled practitioners who have gone before them and from whom they can learn both the lore and the craft of teaching. Finally, teachers are artists to the extent that they illuminate the lives of other people with the expression of their individual creativity.’ (Edge & Richards 1998;396)

This provides a more satisfying view of the nature of teaching in relation to this study. In this view, research involves providing information and insights of an empirical and/or theoretically principled nature which can better inform teachers in their decision making, bearing in mind the findings of research and the particular dynamics of their own classrooms.

**1.9 The nature of the study**

The study began with a desire to understand the extent to which the TESOL professional literature addresses the concerns of teachers in relation to the teaching culture, and a desire to understand what it was that could assist teachers in dealing with culture in their teaching. There was a sense that something was not quite right in the professional literature, that somehow what teachers needed was not there, and that what was there, somehow missed the concerns of teachers. So some general questions were formulated to motivate the study.

The questions the study set out to investigate were:

*How may the place of culture in language teaching (TESOL) best be understood? What does its literature say on the subject?*

*What do Australian TESOL teachers think about the place of culture in language teaching?*

*How might the views of teachers and insights from the literature on culture in TESOL be utilised in TESOL teacher education and professional development, and what may be effective ways of presenting these insights to ESOL teachers?*
I hoped to find some resolution to the culture conundrum. My investigation was targeted on the context in which I work, so that I could respond with an informed approach to my work in TESOL teacher education and professional development. The original plan for the study was for a three-phase investigation, involving the following stages:

**Phase 1**: A survey of a number of teachers in order to find out the nature of the understandings and views held by teachers in relation to aspects of culture in TESOL;

**Phase 2**: The development of a comprehensive professional development package on the teaching of culture, based on a comparison of the data from Phase 1 related to the understandings of teachers with the findings from an extensive review of literature on culture in TESOL;

**Phase 3**: The implementation of this professional development program with a group of teachers, accompanied by qualitative Research into the impact of the program on the teachers. This would provide insights into the provision of effective content and learning processes in relation to issues related to culture in the professional development and teacher education programs for teachers of TESOL.

This conception of the research was originally informed by an empirical research paradigm. There was an expectation that collection and analysis of data would provide insights into the professional development needs of teachers of TESOL and productive ways of meeting those needs. This was in keeping with a tendency for educational research to be based in an empirical approach (Wiersma 1995), in which data about a state of reality form the basis of conclusions, which can then be utilised in developing a better-informed practice. It was anticipated that these data would be related to understandings derived from the literature intended to assist TESOL teachers in their teaching of culture, by giving them insights to enhance their understanding, and in some cases advocating and justifying particular practices. In short, it was anticipated that relating empirical data with professional literature would produce insights that would enable teachers to be more empowered in their teaching of culture, in terms of being aware of and understanding the ‘best practices’, or at least productive and sound practices, as revealed and advocated in the literature, and that the investigation would produce data that would assist TESOL teacher educators in devising effective practices for professional development and teacher education.
programs in relation to the teaching about the place of, and approaches to, the teaching of culture in TESOL.

1.10 The process of the investigation and the structure of the thesis

As is frequently the case in conducting research, things did not go exactly to plan. After the initial review of the literature, analysis of the data from the survey of teachers suggested that while the teachers had quite sophisticated understandings about culture, and they agreed that it was important, they weren’t able to clearly articulate a systematic approach to teaching it. In some respects, their views exemplified the culture conundrum. This is explained in Chapter 2. In addition, the literature reviewed initially provided only limited insight. In the process of further exploration of the literature, it seemed that Atkinson’s bemoaning the lack of attention to culture had stimulated a flow of publications on culture in TESOL. However, the expanding literature revealed not only a plurality of perspectives on the place of culture, but very little explicit dialogue between these perspectives. This part of the research is presented in Chapter 3. It seemed as if the cultural conundrum had intensified, and the development of a coherent professional development package, and investigation of its impact seemed much more problematic. Consequently, the focus of the study shifted away from investigating processes of professional development about culture in TESOL, to addressing how the theoretical understandings available from the literature could be utilised to produce a more coherent and informed means of understanding the place of culture in TESOL, and how ‘culture’ may be dealt with in the course design and teaching. The end result was a study that was as much concerned with the development of a pedagogical understanding of ‘culture’ as with an empirical study of professional development around the topic of ‘culture’. This involved a different ontology and epistemology as bases for the research to the empirical approach originally planned. It was necessary to go beyond a post-positivist research paradigm to a more hermeneutic and constructivist paradigm. Rather than using a conceptual framework to analyse data about teachers and their understandings of culture, the investigation came to be aware of the need for a conceptual framework to inform teachers in the teaching of culture. The need to construct a conceptual framework became evident, as the extent of the
culture conundrum became apparent. It also became clear that the exploration of culture in the different contexts of TESOL not only had the potential to inform my local context, but that failure to understand the significance of the variety of contexts of TESOL was a significant component of the culture conundrum.

This thesis reports on the stages of the research, and explains the shift away from the original plan. Chapter 2 reports the significant findings of the survey of TESOL teachers undertaken late in 1998. The survey instrument is provided in Appendix 1, and the data it elicited are in Appendix 2. This empirical component of the research which identified issues ultimately lead to the shift to a less empirical direction in the study. Chapter 3 provides a description of the way culture is dealt with in the TESOL literature. Rather than identifying a clear solution to the culture conundrum, however, this review found that different perspectives in the literature are limited in the extent to which they can resolve the dilemma. Chapter 4 goes on to identify understandings contained in the literature, which have potential to provide a foundation for an escape from the conundrum. In Chapter 5 these are utilised to develop a conceptual framework that can be used to inform and guide teachers in their treatment of culture in the practice of TESOL. This is the theoretical contribution of the thesis to a better understanding of how TESOL may deal with cultural teaching. In Chapter 6, the practical implications and potential of the framework are explored in relation to an Inner circle and some Expanding circle contexts of TESOL. The potential of the framework for application to TESOL teacher education is also considered, and its potential to inform theory building and research is considered. Some final reflective comments on the research process are made.

The thesis is, in some ways, both an end and a beginning. It is an end in the sense that it brings together work done on culture in TESOL to date, and concludes that no fully satisfactory and explicit resolution of the culture conundrum has yet been provided. It ties together some ‘loose ends’ in that literature, and proposes how these can be utilised in resolving the conundrum. The thesis is a beginning in the sense that it proposes a framework that has potential to be applied and tested, as a way of informing not only teachers but also theorists and researchers of culture in TESOL as
they go on to further understand and refine aspects of how culture is dealt with in TESOL.

Theory and practice have a dialogical relationship. Theory both arises from practice, and informs and extends practice. To understand the nature of the culture conundrum in practice, and the need for conceptual clarification, it is necessary to look at the data provided by the teachers when they talked about the ways they deal with culture in their teaching. The findings of the survey of teachers is reported first in Chapter 2, because it was conducted quite early in the study, and prior to the publication of some significant literature on the topic, which, along with the bulk of the literature is reviewed in Chapter 3.
Chapter 2

Views from TESOL classrooms: the ‘culture conundrum’ at work?

Language can only be taught from a cultural perspective as language is embedded in culture. Without a cultural understanding, the language cannot be fully understood. (Teacher S14 in response to questionnaire Item 2.9 ‘What is the relationship between language and culture?’)

More implicit than explicit (Teacher S14 in response to questionnaire Item 2.8 ‘How do you teach culture?’)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reports the findings of an initial survey of teachers undertaken early in the study. As the responses above from one secondary ESL teacher illustrate, an articulate assertion of the significance of culture is not always matched with explicit practices intended to raise students’ awareness of the culture of English in the TESOL classroom. While the teacher’s rhetoric emphasises the centrality of culture in language learning, she reports that she deals with culture more ‘implicitly’. The survey data reported here suggest that this teacher is not alone in ascribing great importance to culture, while being unsure about what to do about it in the classroom.

The question ‘What do Australian TESOL teachers think about the place of culture in language teaching?’ remains central to the thesis. Initially, the reason for asking this question was to guide the development of a professional development program, in conjunction with a more extensive review of the literature. Such a program would be better informed if it were based on some insight into the views of practitioners. In the reformulated study this survey was the only significant empirical component, and it provided evidence of the extent to which the ‘culture conundrum’ expresses itself in the discourse and practice of the profession.

This investigation was undertaken relatively early in the study. It seemed appropriate to undertake a survey of teachers with a relatively broad focus, in order to get some understanding of the ways that teachers were thinking about culture in their teaching,
so that this could be related to the issues that arose from the literature. While the question as originally asked was in relation to Australian teachers of TESOL, it was deemed most feasible to limit the collection of data to teachers working in Victoria, and hence, largely the capital city, Melbourne and its metropolitan area. This limited the range of variables (for example different patterns of responses from different groups of teachers in different states), but meant that the responses could only be taken as presenting the views of teachers in Victoria. However, while details of the experiences of teachers in the other states and territories were different (for example, differences in the nature of ESL in the school curriculum frameworks utilised in the different states and territories), many of the factors relevant to the study were trends and developments on a national scale. The professional association of Teachers of TESOL in Victoria, VATME (Victorian Association for TESOL and Multicultural Education) is affiliated with ACTA (the Australian Council of TESOL Associations), a national body representing all the state and territory TESOL associations, and TESOL Inc in the USA, an international professional body representing TESOL professionals (VATME 2005). Victorian teachers are involved in the national professional discourses of TESOL, through reading professional literature, their specialist TESOL training and participation in professional development activities and conferences.

The data from this survey cannot be taken as a statistically valid representative sample of the profession. While there is no obvious reason to expect that the patterns of responses from teachers in other states and territories would be significantly different, the data presented here are derived only from teachers of TESOL working in Victoria.

This chapter reports on the investigation of teachers’ attitudes and perceptions undertaken in late 1998. The survey instrument and documents associated with its administration are presented in Appendix 1, and data elicited by the survey, together with interpretation of the data for different items, and groups of items is presented in Appendix 2.
2.2 The context and nature of the survey

The general question motivating the survey was ‘What do Australian TESOL teachers think about the place of culture in language teaching?’ This led to formulation of a more focused question to use as the basis for the design of a survey instrument;

1. What are the beliefs and perceptions of teachers working in TESOL in Australia (Victoria) in relation to their teaching of culture? How do teachers attend to the teaching of culture within a communicative paradigm?

However, in view of the significance and nature of the processes of change and challenge in the educational and societal context in Australia at the time, described in Chapter 1, it was also deemed appropriate to enquire as to how such factors may have changed or influenced the views of teachers. A second question to inform this part of the study was therefore posed:

2. How are these influenced by contextual factors, including the
   • increasing use of centrally-developed curriculum frameworks in many TESOL programs;
   • increasing political debate over the value of immigration and multiculturalism in Australia;
   • TESOL programs that are designed to be supportive of immigrants and international students in their settlement into or sojourn in Australian society?

Because the data were intended to be used to inform the development of a professional development program a third question motivated the design of the questionnaire:

3. What topics related to the teaching of culture are seen as being of value and interest for professional development by TESOL teachers?

2.2.1 The methodology of the study

The questionnaire instrument was designed early in 1998. It was based on a conceptual framework for the study based on a review of the literature that had been
conducted to that point. This review was restricted in view of the more extensive and comprehensive review of the literature undertaken during the course of the study, and reported in Chapter 3.

The literature review on which the conceptualisation of the survey instrument was based was focused largely on what is described in Chapter 3 as the Conventional Perspective in which culture has been conceived in TESOL. This includes work such as Valdes (1987), Damen (1987), Brown (1987), (McLeod 1977), Murray (1992), Brick (1991), and O’Sullivan (1994). This work draws on a conception of culture derived from anthropology, which sees culture as a phenomenon associated with a linguistic group (often, though not exclusively, on a national level). Culture is seen in broad terms as patterns of living, or as O’Sullivan (1994) puts it ‘the way people agree to be’ (O’Sullivan 1994:2). This view sees culture as a system that influences the values, beliefs, attitudes and even the perceptions of individual members of the group, and determines what they see as ‘natural’ or ‘normal’. It also incorporates a view of culture as behaviours, or as ways of acting and behaving, accepting, but also significantly expanding, Lado’s view of culture as behaviours of speakers of the target language (Lado 1957). This view was augmented by some literature that was starting to challenge this view, and present some new ways of understanding culture, including Kramsch (1991), Norton Peirce (1995), and Norton (1998). This literature has a post structuralist perspective (see Chapter 3) and emphasises more subjective aspects of culture, and the notion that the individual projects and defines themself through their use of language. Language learning means negotiating an identity as a user of the new language, and that the way that this is shaped may depend on the attitudes of other speakers of the language to the learners, and the learners’ views of themselves and who they are (Norton Peirce, 1995). In Kramsch (1991), this also involves the notion of bilinguals developing a ‘third place’ a cultural sense, or subjectivity, that is different from the cultural and world-view of monolingual speakers of the languages spoken by a bilingual individual. This provided an understanding of culture that provided the first element of the conceptual framework on which the survey instrument was based.
This understanding saw that language learners needed to understand and develop three ‘layers’ of cultural learning:

- specific cultural knowledge (of particular events, people, places, symbols, artefacts and so on.)
- ability to act and react automatically in ways that are determined by the perceptions and values of a culture
- a sense of belonging with, and acceptance within, a cultural group.

The second element of the theoretical background on which the survey was based was an understanding of the nature of cultural learning within the context of formal language teaching. This focuses largely on the idea that learners can learn about the culture of the language they are learning in two ways, either through explicit attention to aspects of that culture, involving explicit instruction and or analysis within the classroom, or through an immersion-like experience of the culture in some way. The latter may be through living in the target culture community, interaction with individuals, or perhaps through some holistic representation such as a movie used in a classroom. This distinction is based partly on the scheme of Buttjes & Byram (1991), which makes a distinction between cultural learning and cultural experience. Stern (1983, 1991) makes a similar distinction in relation to the elements of the language curriculum, in that language learners learn some elements of the linguistic system though explicit and analytic encounter with them in the language classroom, while other aspects of the language system may be learned through experience in using the language in contexts of language use. In the conceptualisation of the survey this distinction was considered useful in considering how each of the ‘layers’ of culture may potentially or best be encountered and learned within the context of TESOL.

This second conceptual foundation of the survey instruments, distinguishing between teaching and learning of culture that involves explicit and analytical consideration by learners, and learning which is experiential in quality in that learners are involved in some experiences in which aspects of the culture are present, but not explicitly explored, was related to the first conceptual element in considering the possibility that the nature of the teaching and learning of different ‘layers’ of culture could vary in terms of the nature of teaching and learning activities. The literature within the conventional paradigm on culture also refers to explorations of contrast between the
learners’ first culture and the target culture (Damen 1987, O’Sullivan 1994) as an appropriate way of assisting cultural learning, and so some items were also framed to elicit data about whether the teachers used such techniques to assist the cultural learning of their students.

The third conceptual element of the survey instrument was the notion that there are tensions involved in the work of TESOL. This element is derived from literature that is described in Chapter 3 as being part of a body of work in ‘Critical Applied Linguistics’ (see Chapter 3). This includes work by Auerbach and Tollefson (1987), which argued that teaching ‘relevant’ language to newly arrived refugees in the US actually limited their opportunities in American society as they were only linguistically equipped to work in unskilled or semi skilled occupations, rather than in the professions in which many of them worked in their countries of origin, and that explicit teaching of ‘citizenship’ amounted to uncritical presentation of the superiority of American values and culture (Auerbach 1986, Tollefson 1986). Benesch (1992) also argued that a pragmatic orientation in English for Academic purposes had the effect of shaping students from different cultures to conform to mainstream North American academic norms, a process in which their own cultural heritages are effectively denied or suppressed, and in which the ‘mainstream’ has no encounter with the cultures of these learners, and makes no adjustment to the cultural diversity of students (Benesch 1992). Phillipson’s argument that English Language teaching around the world is not a politically or socially neutral enterprise, but one that serves certain interests, including the native speakers of English who can easily travel and find work around the world, is also part of this literature. He argues that the aspects of the professional discourse (such the use of native speaker models and targets for learning, the value of communicative approaches to teaching) contribute to this situation. As a solution to this dilemma I have argued elsewhere that TESOL involves tensions between meeting learning needs, and orienting learners to the norms and expectations associated with the use of English, and appreciating the cultural backgrounds of learners and assisting them to become competent users of English (Williams 1995). As a solution to this dilemma I have argued that teachers need to be aware of these tensions, act self-consciously and in ways that mitigate the potential consequences of conflict with the teacher’s or the profession’s collective value
system. The third conceptual foundation of the survey instrument therefore was that teachers are working within a tension between socialising and inducting their students to the mainstream, and adopting a professional rhetoric that values difference and diverse cultural identities.

A fourth foundation was an assumption that the teachers responding to the survey could be considered to be largely working within and accepting a view of their language teaching as ‘communicative’. This is based on the widespread advocacy of CLT over the decades preceding this study, and that while there might be differences in the precise understandings of what it means to teach communicatively, there was general acceptance of the most significant concepts of communicative language teaching. These are that learners’ purposes for learning a language are to be able to communicate in that language, that this will involve exposure in the classroom to the way English is used to make meanings in specific social contexts of relevance to learners, and opportunities for practice. The acceptance of communicative language teaching as the orthodoxy of Australian TESOL is based partly in Scollon & Scollon’s argument that it is part of the professional discourse of TESOL on a global scale (Scollon & Scollon 1995, 2001), the widespread use of teacher references espousing a communicative approach, such as Harmer (1991) Harmer (2001) and Richards and Rodgers (1986), in TESOL teacher education courses, and publications which acknowledge the long lasting significance of communicative ideas, such as Savignon (1991). The fourth conceptual foundation of the construction of the survey instrument was therefore that TESOL teachers are generally working within a communicative paradigm of language teaching – in which the ability to understand and convey meaning is a central goal of teaching.

2.3.2 The survey instrument

The task of designing a survey instrument to elicit the ideas and understandings of teachers on such complex matters, in a way that would both provide manageable and valid data, and enable respondents to have scope to express their ideas as they wished to express them, was seen as a major challenge. In particular the dilemma of wishing to elicit respondents’ views about specific questions, in order to obtain comparable data, without unduly shaping the respondents’ views, was seen as a major dilemma.
The approach taken was to ask for responses on issues covered in different formats, the first format being open-ended responses. In this way, it was hoped the respondents would be more likely to say it as they see it, before having their ideas ‘shaped’ by the terminology used in dealing with the conceptual content in items they had been asked to respond to previously.

The types of items in the instrument included:

- a request for a short open ended comment in response to the question asked;
- an indication of which of a range of statements on an issue corresponded most closely to the view of the teacher on the issue;
- Likert scale items that reveal the teacher's attitudes to a range of issues;
- a request for respondents to mark a position on an attitudes or values continuum.

The open-ended questions were placed close to the beginning of the survey instrument (after the section in which the respondents were asked to provide some information about their personal and professional backgrounds). In this way, it was hoped the ideas put forward in the other items might have less influence in shaping the teachers’ responses.

As it was envisaged that the study would later involve a professional development program on the place of culture in TESOL, teachers were also asked about their interest in, and perceptions about, the potential value of such an activity.

The survey instrument was trialled with three volunteer respondents. Three individuals were approached and requested to undertake this role. They were selected for this task as they were experienced teachers involved in professional development. One was from the adult sector, and two were from the schools sector, one working in primary schools, the other in post primary schools. They were well known to the researcher and they were regarded as having experience and perspectives that would enable them to provide informed comment as to how teachers may interpret or react to the format and wording of the items on the instrument. They were asked to complete the instrument at a time of their choosing, and then were interviewed by the researcher and asked to discuss their experience of completing the instrument,
including any difficulties they encountered. As a result of this pilot study a small number of amendments were made to the questionnaire.

The final instrument was lengthy, at 18 pages long. It is presented in Appendix 1, along with other documents relevant to the survey. It elicited data in relation to the following:

1. Information about the demographic and professional backgrounds of the respondents;

2. Teachers’ views of:
   - the cultural learning needs of students in TESOL programs;
   - their role in their students’ settlement into Australian society;
   - their view of the relationship between teaching language and teaching culture:
   - teaching approaches utilised in their teaching of culture;
   - the value of immigration and multiculturalism in the development of Australia;
   - the extent to which curriculum frameworks impact on their teaching of culture;
   - the meanings of notions of cultural diversity and multiculturalism
   - areas they would like to see addressed in professional development in relation to cultural learning;

3. Teachers’ willingness and ability to be involved in PD in the area.

Apart from the first section, eliciting personal and background information, and the final section in which teachers were asked to comment on the value of various possible professional development activities, the sections of the instrument were organised according to the response type. Different types of response items covering the different areas of information were grouped together. So section 2 included open ended responses, section 3, indicating a statement (from a range of statements in which different elements were added or changed) closest to the view of the respondent. In section 4 respondents had to indicate a position along a scale between two conflicting statements, and complete Likert scale responses to a range of statements in section 5. The instrument is presented in Appendix 1.
2.3.3 Distribution and Response

The survey was a cross-sectional data collection exercise (Wiersma 1995) intended to get an idea of the views of a sample of TESOL teachers in relation to their teaching culture. The approach to data collection was purposeful sampling (Wiersma 1995: 297-8). Sites where most of the teachers’ teaching load was in TESOL were considered more likely to provide both a number of teachers willing to respond, and more likely to have considered many of the issues on which the survey sought data. The sites were selected to ensure that a range of geographical locations were included. As most TESOL is conducted within the metropolitan area, with some smaller programs in larger provincial cities, the sites to which instruments were distributed included TESOL programs in the different sectors located in all metropolitan regions and some regional centres. Table 2.1 summarises the sites to which survey instruments were distributed.

After approvals were obtained from the relevant Human Research Ethics Committee and external bodies employing teachers, schools and centres were selected to be on the mailing list. Schools and centres providing TESOL were identified through ministry reports, and the researcher’s knowledge of significant providers of TESOL through his work in TESOL teacher education and active involvement in the activities of the state TESOL association in the years preceding the data collection. Single copies of the questionnaire were sent addressed to the ESL coordinator to schools, with an appropriate covering letter requesting the teacher’s cooperation (and requesting they seek approval from the principal). In centres whose sole focus was TESOL, the coordinator, head of department or principal was requested to assist in distributing the instrument to volunteers on the staff who may be willing to be involved, and in collecting completed responses and returning them in a single pre-paid, return postage envelope. Recipients of the mail out were chosen to include a variety of different educational sectors: adult (TAFE language and literacy departments, AMES centres, University language centres), school sector ESL programs, including primary and secondary schools, New Arrivals program English Language schools and centres, and schools in the government and Catholic systems.
and independent schools. They were located in different parts of Melbourne, and in some provincial cities.

Table 2.1: Distribution of survey instrument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Schools sector</th>
<th>Government schools</th>
<th>Specialist English Language Centres and Schools (government sector)</th>
<th>Non government schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Primary:</strong> Criteria for selection: • known to researcher to have large ESL program, or suggested by system ESL advisers • include all metropolitan regions, and some provincial</td>
<td>15 schools Largest ESL programs in the four metropolitan regions. (1 instrument per school) Regional city new arrivals teachers (5 instruments)</td>
<td>4 (of a total of 5). Southern metropolitan region (1), Northern metropolitan region (1), Eastern metropolitan region (1), Western metropolitan region (1) (4 instruments per centre)</td>
<td>Itinerant New Arrivals teachers in catholic system (5 Instruments)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8 Catholic primary schools (1 Instrument per school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4 Independent schools (1 Instrument per school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Secondary:</strong> • known to researcher to have large ESL program, or suggested by system ESL advisers • coverage of a range of school types</td>
<td>10 schools, 9 schools in the 4 metropolitan regions, 1 in a provincial city. (2 instruments to schools with larger ESL programs, 1 instrument to others)</td>
<td>5 (of a total of 9) in each of the metropolitan regions. (4 instruments per centre)</td>
<td>2 Catholic secondary schools (1 Instrument per school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6 independent schools (1 Instrument per school)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adult sector</strong></td>
<td>AMES Centres</td>
<td>TAFE Colleges (Language and Literacy departments)</td>
<td>University English Language Centres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criteria for selection: • known to researcher to have large TESOL programs • coverage of all metropolitan regions</td>
<td>1 Central Business District 2 western region 1 northern region 1 southern region (4 instruments per centre)</td>
<td>2 in northern region, 1 in eastern region, 1 in western region (4 instruments per college)</td>
<td>2 centres (4 instruments per centre)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The instruments were distributed early in term 4 of the school year. Towards the end of term, following the date by which return had been requested, phone calls were made to larger centres from which no response had been received, and this elicited several returns of responses before the end of the school year.

64 responses were received, which included 9 primary ESL teachers, 20 secondary ESL teachers, 28 teachers of ESOL to adults, and 7 responses that did not indicate
which sector they worked in. This was a response rate of 41%. This response rate can be interpreted in two ways. First it may mean that the issues it dealt with were of some interest to many of the teachers who were invited to complete and return it, and that the issues are of interest and concern to teachers. The second interpretation is that in interpreting results, there is a possibility that the data elicited represents the views of those with most interest in the topic, given the time required to complete the instrument.

2.3.4 Data analysis

The survey was designed to elicit data in relation to the particular questions it asked. But it was also framed with an expectation that there would be some regular patterns in responses, reflecting part of the professional discourse of ESOL teachers in Victoria. Therefore the recording and analysis of data were carried out in a way that would enable identification of the nature of such a discourse, and the extent to which it may vary in relation to teachers working in different sectors (although the small numbers of teachers in each of the education sectors meant that such variation could only be indicative, rather than representative). In addition, the use of different item types to elicit data on the same topics was intended to guard against potential effects of the nature of question items affecting responses. The procedures of recording and analysing data were designed with a view to identifying such patterns of response, as well as the particulars of the respondents’ answers to particular items.

Data from the completed instruments were recorded on electronic spreadsheets. The data were analysed to identify:

- the extent to which there were similar responses to items (these are taken to identify areas where there is relative consensus among the respondents);
- items which produced a wide range of responses. These are taken to be topics/areas where there is a spread of opinions among respondents (indicating potential areas of divergent ideas/controversy/lack of clarity among the profession);
- as far as possible, cross checking of items of different types to check for consistency of responses between items (seen as an indication of greater reliability);
• search for significantly different patterns of responses between sectors – to identify potential areas/issues where there may be variations in beliefs/practices between sectors. Sectors were chosen as a the basis for this comparison as this was considered to be different perceptions and attitudes within the cohort;

• the overall pattern of responses to be interpreted as an indication of the range of views that may be present amongst TESOL professionals in Victoria, in relation to the topics covered by the questionnaire.

A brief description of data elicited by the survey is presented in the following sections. A more complete presentation of the survey data, and the interpretation drawn from each Item is presented in Appendix 2.

2.3 Findings of the survey

2.3.1 Characteristics of respondent teachers

Because the method of distribution of the questionnaire was based on distribution through coordinators in specialist TESOL centres and schools with larger ESL programs, the teachers who responded tend to come from larger centres, where intensive programs are taught, or in schools with more substantial ESL programs. In this sense they are the venues in which a higher degree of professional interaction is likely to take place, where there are opportunities for greater professional interaction and where trends within the professional (and among clientele) are often more evident. To some extent, the respondents are teachers who work in some degree of separation from broader educational contexts.

The data reported here are presented in tabular form in Appendix 2, with tables being numbered consecutively beginning with Table A2.1 to A2.103. In the presentation and analysis of these data in the following pages, and in the short comments and discussions in Appendix 2, results are reported as percentages of the total or the sector indicated. Figures 2.1 to 2.11 below present the distribution of responses by sector to selected items. Different colours represent the percentages of teachers responding in certain ways for each sector. The number of respondents in each sector is presented in Table 2.2 below.
The following sections discuss the nature of the significant findings of the survey. Appendix 2 provides a presentation of the data by topic.

**Table 2.2: Number of respondents by sector**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Virtually all the respondents were over 30 years old, with almost two thirds (64.1%) being over 40 years of age (Table A2.1). The vast majority of the respondents (92.2%) were women, with the only male respondents coming from the secondary sector (2 respondents) and the adult Sector (3 respondents) (see Table A2.2). The vast majority (69%) of the teachers identified as ‘Australian’, while 4 (6%) identified as ‘Other English speaking’, and 20% identified as mixed identity Australian (Greek-Australian, Italian-Australian and so on) (see Table A2.3). The respondents were quite experienced in the TESOL field, with 45 (70.3%) of the respondents having more than 6 years experience in the TESOL field, and 14 (21.9%) having more than 15 years experience in TESOL (Table A2.5). All held formal TESOL qualifications of some sort, mostly university awards (Table A2.4). They were evenly distributed between the different parts of Melbourne’s metropolitan area with between 10 and 16 teachers in each of the Inner city, West, North, East, and the South East and Southern suburbs. Two respondents taught in regional cities in Victoria (Table A2.6).

### 2.3.2 The professional discourse of the teachers in relation to the place of culture in TESOL

A clear pattern of consistent results emerged from different item types in relation to most of the issues about which the teachers were asked their opinions. However, there were inconsistent or divergent patterns of responses in some items related to some topics. In this respect, the survey can be considered to have elicited a professional discourse of the ESOL teachers who responded. This involved some issues on which
there were common patterns of responses, and a smaller number of areas in which there were either divergent patterns of responses, or responses that indicated inconsistencies or contradictions with other responses.

The areas of consistency will be considered, before the issues that elicited inconsistent or divergent responses.

2.3.3 Consistent responses from the teachers

There was considerable consistency, and in one instance (the value of immigration), near unanimity, in relation to several issues explored in the survey. These were the role of the teachers (who clearly saw themselves as teachers of more than language alone), the approaches they used in teaching culture (which involved cross cultural comparisons, explicit attention to cultural knowledge and more experiential activities in relation to behavioural and subjective dimensions of culture), the nature and impact of their curriculum frameworks (which, despite some perceived inadequacies, were not seen as having a significant impact on their teaching of culture), and the value of immigration. They also expressed similar areas of interest in relation to the topics they would be interested in exploring in professional development activities. The responses in these areas of agreement will be described before the areas of difference or tension in the responses of the teachers are considered.

2.3.3.1 The role of the teachers

The teachers generally saw their role as broader than language teaching alone. Figure 2.1 shows the distribution of responses to questionnaire Item 4.6, where the teachers were asked to mark a point on a scale which best indicated where their opinion could be located between two contradictory statements ‘I have a role to play in assisting my students in adjusting to Australia, that extends beyond just teaching the language’ (with A being closest to this statement) and ‘I have no role to play in helping my students adjust to life in Australia, other than teaching the language’ (with F being the segment closest to this). ‘NR’ in Figure 2.1 represents the percentage of teachers who provided no response to this Item.
As Figure 2.1 shows, all of the teachers who responded placed themselves on the side of the scale closest to the first statement, and 86% of all the teachers were in the two segments of the scale closest to this statement (the data are presented in Table A2.28 in appendix 2). When this issue was presented in a Likert scale item which said ‘I am only a language teacher and should concentrate on teaching English. My students have access to other support services’, (Item 5.7) only three of them agreed to any extent, and 85.7% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 4.8% of the teachers were ambivalent (Table A2.30, appendix 2). The response to Item 3.2 was consistent with responses to these items (see Table A2.27). Likening the teachers to members of a ‘welcoming committee’ for new members of the community increased ambivalence to 20.7% of the teachers, but produced no disagreement at all (Table A2.29).

The teachers also saw themselves as playing a significant role in the settlement of their students in Australia. However, the teachers expressed the nature of this role in slightly varying terms. When they were asked in an open-ended question to state their role in the settlement process of their students (Item 2.4 Table A2.21, A2.22 and A2.33), although 14.3% responded with a comment that was classified as being restricted to only language, the other responses indicated that the teachers saw themselves as having additional roles. This involved two types of educational roles.
15.9% saw themselves as having a general educational role (as well as language teaching), 14.3% as an important contact or informant about aspects of Australian society, while 42.9% of the teachers saw themselves as playing a role that went beyond education and language teaching (Table A2.23). This included providing pastoral care, or advice in solving problems related to the settlement process the students were undergoing. In another open-ended question, the teachers identified the nature of the support they gave their students (Item 2.5, tables A2.24, A2.25 and A2.26). They couched their answers in terms of language support only (1.6% of the teachers), language support and providing a sense of security (4.8%), language support and providing information about Australia (9.5%), providing information about Australia (without mentioning language) (42.9%) and providing a sense of security (without mentioning language support) (30.2%) (Table A2.26). When the teachers were asked to match a statement closest to their opinion in Item 3.2, none of them selected the statement ‘My role is to teach the English Language only’ (Table A2.27). Instead they chose statements that included: providing a general orientation to Australian society (31.7%), providing direct and indirect cultural orientation to the workplaces and educational institutions they will enter (30.2%), or both of these, plus helping learners to develop an identity as a speaker of English in Australia (28.6%).

In two items the teachers commented about their role in terms of monitoring their students’ adjustment to life in Australia. In items 5.8 this was phrased in terms of a personal role of the teachers, in Item 6.1 as part of the role of ‘TESOL teachers’. In Item 5.8, 87.3% of the teachers either strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that ‘I should be active in monitoring my students’ adjustment into Australia, and assist by sensitively directing them to appropriate support services when necessary’ while 7.9% of the teachers were ambivalent about this statement and only one of the teachers (1.6%) expressed disagreement (Table A2.31). Item 6.1 involved the teachers indicating a point on a scale between two conflicting opinions. The two statements were phrased in terms of whether the teachers should be active or not in helping students to develop their own sense of identity in Australian society. This produced wider spread in the distribution of opinions, with the vast majority (84.2% of all the teachers) positioning themselves in the half of the scale closer to the statement ‘TESOL teachers should play an active role in helping their students to
develop their own sense of identity and place in Australian society’, and 12.5% of all the teachers closer to the statement ‘TESOL teachers should concentrate on language teaching and leave it to students to develop their own sense of identity and place in Australian society’ (Table 2A.32). In this item, the teachers were also asked to indicate how often they thought about this issue, and 43% said they thought about it ‘constantly’ (6%) or ‘frequently’ (37%), while (30%) reported thinking about this ‘sometimes’, while few of the teachers reported that they thought about this issue rarely (5%) or never (2%) (Table A2.33).

The teachers saw the needs of the learners as learning about their new social environment as well as the language (Item 2.1, see Table A2.9). They saw their students’ participation in Australian society as ‘dependent on them understanding the key values and attitudes of Australians’ (Item 5.3 Table A2.17) and that this involves ‘developing a sense of identity and how they relate to other speakers of English in Australia’ (Item 5.2, Table A2.16). Only 23.8% of the teachers saw language factors alone as being the most significant factor to enhance or inhibit the chances of success in Australia, 42.8% saw personal attributes of the learners as being the most significant group of factors and 19.4% saw aspects of Australian society as the significant factors (Item 2.2 Table A2.12). However, 59% of the teachers disagreed with a statement ‘It is possible for my students to participate successfully in Australian society with minimal proficiency in English’ while 25.4% of the teachers agreed and 12.7% were ambivalent (Item 5.4, Table A2.18). The patterns of responses were similar across the three sectors, primary, secondary and adult.

In summary, the teachers clearly saw their role broadly, with a number of dimensions that extend beyond language teaching. To a large extent, there are cultural dimensions to what the teachers see as significant parts of their roles, most notably orienting the students to Australian society and making them aware of the ways that Australians see the world, and particularly in making the students aware of the culture of Australian workplaces and educational institutions. The role of assisting learners by monitoring their adjustment to life in Australia could also be considered to have a cultural dimension.
2.3.3.2 The teachers’ approaches to teaching culture

While there were inconsistencies with regard to the ways that the teachers understood the nature of connections between language and culture, (see below), the teachers reported that they had similar approaches to many aspects of the teaching of culture. The teachers reported in Item 4.8 that they felt culture is not easy to learn and teach. In this Item they supported a view that learning and teaching culture is difficult, and in the eyes of some of them, impossible to learn. In Item 4.8, the respondents had to position themselves along a scale between two statements Culture can be easily learned and taught and It is impossible to ever fully learn another culture. There were no responses in the segment closest to the statement that culture is easily learned and taught, and only 9.5% of the respondents placed themselves in the second segment. Most responses were clustered in the middle segments, segments C (30.2% of respondents) and D (27%) with almost a third of the responses closer to the ‘impossible to learn’ statement than the ‘easy to learn’ (31% of responses were at the ‘impossible to fully learn’ end of the scale. (Table A2.49)).

The way in which the teachers reported connecting the teaching of language and culture included inconsistencies, and will be discussed below, but there was considerable agreement in the techniques they reported that they use for teaching culture in their classes. First the teachers were quite unified in agreeing that the teaching of culture is important, as can be seen in Figure 2.2, which shows their responses to Item 5.10.

As Figure 2.2 illustrates, the teachers expressed high levels of agreement (though with the exception of the secondary teachers, not ‘strong agreement’) with the proposition that My students need to be told about cultural values, perceptions and practices as they are learning the language. A vast majority (82.6%) of the teachers either agreed or strongly agreed, 12.7% were ambivalent, and only two of the 63 teachers disagreed (Table A2.59).
The practice of making explicit contrast between cultures was a classroom practice widely reported by the teachers. Two-thirds of the teachers (66.7%) agreed with the proposition that *My students need to be encouraged to make explicit comparisons between the culture of their first language(s) and the culture of Australian English* (Item 5.11, Table A2.60), while 20.7% were ambivalent and 9.5% disagreed (none ‘disagreed strongly’). The value of such comparison lay in developing better understanding of both Australian culture and their own diverse cultures.

As Figure 2.3 illustrates, there was also considerable agreement with the idea of having the students compare aspects of their different cultures in order to better understand Australian culture in Item 5.12, (Table A2.61). Almost all (92%) of all the respondents agreed that they used such an approach (Table A2.61). Item 5.13 produced an almost identical pattern of responses to using the same technique in order to get the students to better understand each other (Table A2.62).
While 76.2% of the teachers reported agreeing that they *try to present language and social situations which are predictable, typical of what they are likely to encounter* (Item 5.14), they also used less predictable approaches in order to teach about Australian culture. In response to Item 5.15, over three quarters (76.8%) of the teachers agreed that they *Try to expose (their) students to a wide range of possible complications and sources of breakdowns in dialogues and role plays that they encounter in the classroom*, with only a few (4.8%) disagreeing, but 12.7% ambivalent (Table A2.63). In Item 4.5, the teachers reported that they did not shy away from controversial topics. Only one teacher was in the half of the scale closest to the statement *It is not appropriate for me to raise controversial or ‘uncomfortable’ topics in my classroom*, while all the remaining respondents were in the other half of the scale, closest to *I sometimes need to deal with controversial and/or uncomfortable topics e.g. the debates associated with Pauline Hanson, in my classroom*¹. Over three quarters of the teachers (78%) marked the two segments on the scale closest to this statement (Table A2.54).

¹ Pauline Hanson was an independent member of the Federal parliament in the late 1990s, who led a populist party that argued for a cessation of both immigration to Australia and multiculturalism as both a description of Australia and a direction government policy.
In an attempt to elicit data on how the teachers dealt with different aspects of culture, the survey instrument presented the teachers with a multi-layered model of culture and asked them to report on their approaches to teaching each layer of culture in the various parts of Item 4.7 (see Appendix 1). For each ‘layer’ teachers were asked to mark a scale between and ‘explicit, analytical’ approach to teaching, and an approach that was less explicit in which students learned more by experience than analysis. As illustrated in Figures 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6, the teachers reported using more explicit and direct approaches to the teaching of the more factual, knowledge-based dimensions of culture, with some movement towards more experiential and intuitive approaches for teaching about ways of acting and reacting, and the building of a sense of belonging and acceptance. However, there was also a wider spread of approaches in the ‘ways of behaving and reacting’ and to a greater extent, in relation to developing a sense of identity.

**Figure 2.4: Distribution of responses to questionnaire Item 4.7.1**

Segment A is closest to an ‘Explicit’ approach, and segment F is closest to an ‘experiential’ approach.
Segment A is closest to an ‘Explicit’ approach, and segment F is closest to an ‘experiential’ approach.

In dealing with ‘cultural knowledge’ 81% of the teachers placed themselves towards the end of the scale (segments A, B and C) closest to an *Explicit and direct* approach.
presentation of what is to be learned. (Item 4.7.2, Table A2.55), while for ‘ways of acting and reacting’ 90% were spread across the middle segments (B,C,D, and E) with 39% in segment C (Item 4.7.3, Table A2.56). No teachers positioned themselves at the ‘explicit’ end of the scale in relation to ‘building a sense of identity as a member of a group’, and responses were spread across segments B, C, D, E and F, with 56% in the half of the scale closest to more intuitive and experiential approaches (Item 4.7.4, Table A2.57).

While these data are problematic in that they involve self-reporting of teachers’ approaches (rather than specific practices) in general terms, they also raise certain questions. There appears to be greater unanimity between the teachers in the adoption of a fairly explicit approach to teaching cultural knowledge. The approaches reported used for teaching culturally related behaviour seem to be slightly less explicit, and there is a slightly wider spread of responses. In dealing with identity the responses are widely distributed, and present much less agreement on an appropriate approach to use in addressing this aspect of culture in the classroom. Perhaps it is not surprising that more complex aspects of culture are approached in different ways by teachers, but a wider range of approaches (which was common to each education sector) also suggests that there is less agreement within the profession as to how such aspects of culture can be dealt with in the classroom.

In summary, the teachers reported that they believed it was important to deal with cultural factors in the classroom, and that they used explicit comparison between the learners’ home cultures and Australian culture as a way of raising cultural awareness. The teachers tended to use an explicit approach to teaching cultural knowledge, but in dealing with culturally related ways of behaving and acting, they were less explicit, and less unified in the approach they used. In dealing with cultural identity in the classroom, a variety of approaches was used by the teachers.

2.3.3.3 The impact and nature of Curriculum frameworks

The teachers generally saw themselves as having ‘room to move’ in teaching culture while working within their respective curriculum frameworks; however, some considered that their curriculum frameworks were not sufficiently cognisant of
cultural diversity. This view was stronger among adult sector teachers, who were mainly using the Certificates in Spoken and Written English (AMES NSW 1996). When the teachers were asked Does the curriculum and assessment framework that you work with (e.g. CSWE, CSF, CGEA, etc.) guide you in your teaching of culture to your students? If so, how? (Item 2.13) only 5 teachers (7.9%) gave answers that were considered to be shaping teaching ‘a lot’. The responses of 36.5% of the teachers were interpreted as saying their curriculum frameworks shaped their teaching to some extent, while 42.9% of the responding teachers gave responses that were interpreted as saying that heir framework did not shape their teaching of culture (Table A2.67). In Item 2.14 almost two thirds (63.5%) of the teachers said that their framework had not changed the ways in which they taught culture, while 9.5% reported ‘some change’ and 6.3% reported ‘significant change’ (Table A2.70). These patterns of responses were repeated in Item 3.7, when 74.5% of the teachers chose the statement The curriculum framework that I work with allows me to develop my own ideas in relation to cultural teaching as the one that most closely matched their opinion from the range of statements offered (Table A2.72). In Item 4.10 when lack of specification of culture was expressed in negative terms (The curriculum framework I work with is not adequate in its coverage of cultural learning and I need to do extra planning in this aspect of my teaching), the majority of the teachers (61.9%) expressed degrees of agreement with the statement (segments D, E and F) closest to that statement (Table A2.73). However, there were some teachers who felt that their curriculum frameworks had the effect of making them more careful about the teaching of culture. Just over a quarter (27%) of the teachers agreed with the statement The use of a curriculum framework has meant that I have to be more careful to ensure that my students are learning culture as well as language, although a sizeable proportion disagreed (39.7%) and 22.2% were ambivalent about this (Item 5.21, Table A2.76). There was some identification of one way in which the curriculum frameworks might help teachers in their teaching of culture in Item, 5.23. This item put the proposition that The curriculum framework I use in my teaching helps me to teach the language my students need to repair misunderstandings and breakdowns in communication. There was a higher level of agreement with this (36.5% of the teachers) than disagreement (22.3%), although nearly one third of the teachers (31.7%) said they were ambivalent about this statement (Table A2.78). However, the disagreement and
ambivalence were very strong among the adult sector teachers, and much less from school sector teachers, who were using the *ESL Companion to the English CSF* (Board of Studies 1995) as part of the Curriculum and Standards Framework (Board of Studies 1995). This suggests differences between the respective frameworks used in the sectors.

From these responses it would seem that the teachers felt that while the curriculum frameworks did not guide them in the teaching of culture, neither did they inhibit them. Some of the teachers felt that the curriculum frameworks they were working with did not adequately recognise the cultural diversity of their learners or of the Australian population. However, this was only a significant minority, not a majority of the teachers. In Item 4.11 the teachers were asked to place themselves on a scale between the statements *The curriculum framework I work with assumes that all learners are similar* and *The curriculum framework I work with is sensitive to cultural diversity among my students*. The responses were spread along the scale, 41.2% at the ‘similar’ end of the scale (segments A, B, and C) and 46.6% in the segments closest to the ‘sensitive’ end of the scale (segments D, E and F), (Table A2.74). However, again there were differences between the school and adult sector teachers. Two thirds of the primary and secondary teachers were at the ‘sensitive’ end while 66.9% of the adult sector were at the ‘similar’ half of the scale (Table A2.74). There was a similar patterns of results, although with some reduction in levels of agreement among the school sector teachers (both primary and secondary) as ambivalence is more explicitly indicated to Item 5.22, where the teachers were asked to indicate their attitude to the statement *The curriculum framework that I use does not make adequate recognition of diversity in student backgrounds or of the Australian population in general*. (Table A2.77).

In summary, then, the teachers generally saw their respective curriculum frameworks as neither an aide nor a hindrance to their teaching of culture, although teachers in the adult sector were more inclined to regard their curriculum framework as treating all learners as similar, rather than recognising diversity among learners.
2.3.3.4 The value and impact of immigration and the value of multiculturalism

The teachers clearly see immigration as having made a great contribution to Australian society. The unanimity of their responses is evident in Figure 2.7, which presented the distribution of their responses to the statement that *immigration has been a good thing for Australia*.

**Figure 2.7: Distribution of responses to questionnaire Item 5.12**

Their responses to an open-ended item (Item 2.12), which asked them what contribution immigration had made to Australia, were so uniform that they could not be validly classified as responding in different ways. There was a general view that immigration had contributed to nation building in economic, social and cultural ways. Some comments also alluded to the benefits immigration had brought to the lives of immigrants, while one response commented on how it had forced Australians to look more closely at themselves. The only negative impact mentioned was inter-ethnic conflict, in one response. A more structured opinion-matching item (Item 3.3) elicited similar responses from the teachers (Table A2.82). No teachers selected the two most neutral statements about immigration as being close to their opinions. *Immigration is*
useful for individuals, but is a cost to the society as a whole’, ‘Immigration is useful for individuals, and is cost neutral to the society’, or ‘Immigration is not only useful for individuals, it also provides economic benefits to the whole society’. Instead the vast majority of the teachers selected statements that included a wider range of benefits, with two thirds (65%) of the teachers identifying ‘Immigration is not only useful for individuals, it also enriches the society both economically and socially’ as the statement that most closely matched their opinion. Another 20.7% accepted these values, even if it involved some negative economic impact (Table A2.83). Not surprisingly, the teachers disagreed with the proposition that ‘In the current situation, a near cessation of immigration would be in Australia’s interests’ with only one teacher agreeing, five (7.9%) ambivalent and 88.8% of all the teachers disagreeing or strongly disagreeing (Table A2.84). While more of the teachers disagreed than agreed with the proposition that the current debates on immigration had made their work more difficult (Item 5.18, Table A2.85), just over a third (34.9%) of the teachers reported that it had made them more committed to their teaching (Item 2.10, Table A2.79). However, most of the teachers reported that their level of commitment remained about the same. Many of those giving reasons for their commitment remaining about the same stated that their level of commitment to the job and their students was always high, such as ‘I've always had a strong commitment about teaching ESL/ELICOS’ from teacher U62. Many of the teachers giving reasons for increased commitment believed that their students needed stronger support in the environment of a public debate on the value of immigration and who should be allowed into Australia, such as this comment by teacher U59; ‘My students need/may need more support in the environment created by this 'debate' as well as needing a voice through which to be heard’.

In summary, the teachers were very positive about immigration, seeing it as resulting in benefits for both individuals and the society at large. The public debates on immigration of the late 1990’s seem to have had virtually no impact on their attitudes.
2.3.3.5 Attitudes to professional development on issues related to culture

The teachers indicated a high level of agreement about the need for professional development on these issues, and expressed high levels of interest in participation in such activities. They were asked two groups of questions in relation to professional development. The first group asked them to comment on the state of their TESOL colleagues’ state of knowledge, or need for professional development, on a range of issues related to the teaching of culture in TESOL, and the second group asked the teachers to indicate their personal level of interest in participating in professional development activities on these topics.

The teachers generally rated their colleagues’ knowledge favourably, but still indicated a very high level of interest in participation in professional development activities. Almost three-quarters (72%) of the teachers felt that their colleagues knew ‘a lot about culture and cultural diversity’ in Item 6.4.1, (Table A2.91). However, almost one quarter of the teachers (23%) agreed with the proposition that the teachers that they work with did not know enough about culture and cultural diversity (Item 6.4.2) and 23% were ambivalent about this (Table A2.92).

The teachers agreed that there were topics on which their TESOL colleagues needed professional development. The topic ‘How different approaches to language teaching can be productive in terms of cultural learning’ (Item 6.4.6) was the area where more teachers identified a need for professional development than other topics, with 82.5% of the teachers agreeing that this was a topic that would benefit their colleagues (Table A2.96). Next came ‘the cultural backgrounds of learners’ (Item 6.4.4, Table A2.94). Almost three-quarters (72.8%) of the respondents agreed that this was an area of need (Table A2.94). The next highest level of support was for ‘the nature of culture and how it is learned’ with two-thirds (66.7%) of the teachers agreeing that this would be useful (Table A2.95), followed by ‘managing cross cultural communication’ with 65% of the teachers agreeing this was a topic that would be beneficial (Table A2.93).

In expressing their own interests (as opposed to their perceptions of their colleagues’ needs), two topics attracted the greatest expressions of interest. The relationship
between language and culture was a topic of interest for 88.9% of the teachers (Item 6.5.2, Table A2.98), with 87.3% of the teachers expressing some degree of interest in Ways of teaching culture (Item 6.5.3, Table A2.99). Next came exploration of the cultural consequences for students of ESL teaching (79.3% of the teachers expressed interest) and exploration of the values and attitudes that are transmitted (explicitly and implicitly) in ESL teaching which 79.4% of the teachers were interested in (Table A2.102 and A2.103). The roles of ESL teachers in the settlement process, with 73% of teachers expressing interest (Table A2.100), and the nature of culture also attracted high levels of interest, with 73% of teachers expressing interest, (Table A2.97).

However, there was relatively less (though not insubstantial) interest in the meaning of multiculturalism and the nature of multicultural society with 60.4% of the teachers expressing interest in this topic, (Table A2.101). Over two-thirds (68.3%) of the teachers indicated that they would be willing to participate in professional development activities on such topics.

These similar patterns of responses in these areas suggest a degree of consensus in the professional discourse of TESOL teachers in Victoria. The teaching of culture is seen as important, and the use of comparisons between cultures is widely seen as a useful teaching strategy. The teachers also reported using explicit approaches to the teaching of cultural knowledge, were slightly less explicit (and in slightly less agreement) in their teaching of culturally related ways of acting. There was noticeable lack of uniformity in the approaches they used for dealing with cultural identity in the classroom. The teachers didn’t see their curriculum frameworks as having great impact on their teaching of culture. The teachers are virtually unanimous in looking favourably on immigration. The teachers who responded to the questionnaire expressed high levels of interest in a range of topics in professional development activities, including ways of teaching culture, the relationship between language and culture, and the consequences of cultural learning.

The divergence already apparent in the teachers’ approaches to teaching cultural identity emerges in some other parts of the data. It is perhaps not surprising that some of these areas of divergence in the professional discourse are signalled in the topics in which the teachers expressed the highest levels of interest for professional
development activities. These relate to the relationship between language and culture, the formation or development of cultural identities in language teaching, and the ways that cultural diversity impacts on Australian society. The divergent or contradictory patterns of responses to these issues will be described in the following section.

2.3.4 Contradictions or tension in the responses of the teachers

The previous section described the data on issues on which there was generally a high degree of consensus in the views of the teachers. This section deals with issues on which there was either no such widespread consensus, or where different parts of the data present contradictory or conflicting findings. There are three broad areas in which this is the case; the relationship between language and culture, the formation of identities among learners, and the nature of ESL learners’ participation in a multicultural society.

2.3.4.1 The relationship between language and culture

While the teachers saw language and culture as closely linked, and reported similar attitudes to various techniques for teaching culture, they were less clear in describing how culture and language are related in their teaching.

When the teachers were asked to comment on the connections between language and culture in general, they saw a very strong connection between the two. In Item 2.9 (Open-ended) the teachers were asked to describe their view of the relationship between language and culture. The responses they made enabled a classification of the answers into five categories; those indicating a weak connection, and those that indicated a strong connection, which could be divided into sub categories of ‘language shapes culture’, ‘culture shapes language’, ‘strong’, and ‘indivisible/interconnected.’ Only 6.3% of the teachers answered in ways classified as ‘weak’. Just under half of all the teachers (46%) answered in ways which were classified as suggesting an indivisible connection or strong interconnectedness, while 25.4% saw culture as shaping language, 6.3% saw language shaping culture, and another 13% expressed a view which saw the link as ‘strong’ (Table 2A.44).
This understanding of culture and language being closely related was replicated in Item 4.3, where the teachers were asked to indicate the location of their opinion on a scale between the statements, *Language use is about expressing meanings which can be conveyed in almost any situation*, and *Language use is about expressing meanings and negotiating your social relationships with those with whom you are communicating*. The distribution of responses to this Item is presented in Figure 2.8 below.

Figure 2.8: Distribution of responses to questionnaire Item 4.3

![Figure 2.8](image)

Only 15.9% of the teachers were on the half of the scale closest to the ‘invariable’ meaning end of the scale (Segments A, B and C), while nearly four-fifths (78.3%) of the teachers were in the segments C, D and F) closest to the ‘language use means negotiating social relationships’ statement (Table 2A.47). These views suggest that the teachers have a sophisticated understanding of connections between language and culture.
This is replicated when the relationship between language and culture was couched in terms of ‘communicative competence’ in Item 4.1. In that item the teachers also stated that linguistic features are related to cultural factors. In that item the teachers needed to place themselves on a scale between the statements *Because communicative competence involves sociocultural competence, communicative language teaching means that teachers only need to attend to linguistic-based rules and patterns* and *Because communicative competence involves sociocultural competence, communicative language teaching means that teachers have to pay constant attention to cultural factors that may be non linguistically based.* Over three-quarters (82.6%) of all the teachers placed themselves on the ‘language means paying attention to culture’ side of the scale (Segment D, E, and F), while none placed themselves in segment A (at the ‘linguistic code only’ end of the scale), and only 14.3% of the teachers were in segments B and C, on the ‘code only’ side of the scale (Table 2A.45). This is further reinforced by the teachers’ responses to Item 4.7, where the teachers were presented with the model of culture used in the questionnaire, as consisting of 3 layers – cultural knowledge, automatic ways of acting and reacting, and a sense of belonging and acceptance within a group. 41% of the teachers said they had encountered such a view ‘often’ before, while another 41% said they had sometimes’ encountered such a view previously. Only 5% said they had ‘never’ come across such a view, while 8% said they had ‘rarely’ come across such a view (Table A2.48).

However, when the teachers were asked to comment on culture in specific instances in their teaching, they did separate culture from language. Item 2.7 was an open ended item which asked what aspects of culture they taught in their classes. Figure 2.9 illustrates the pattern of responses.

When asked in this way, the teachers separated culture from language, with 60.9% of the teachers providing answers expressed in terms of ‘elements or dimensions of culture’. The responses classified as ‘other’ (14.3% of responses) also frequently listed specific aspects of culture, and a further 12.7% of the teachers integrated culture with non-language elements of the curriculum. Only 6.3% of the teachers referred to language as being integrated with culture in their teaching (Table A2.41).
This suggests that when the teachers come to teach culture, they do separate it from language, despite their general understanding that the two are very closely interconnected. Another item that explicitly asked whether language could be the key to culture teaching confirmed this pattern of responses. In responding to Item 5.9 (LS) two thirds (68.2%) of the teachers disagreed with the proposition that My teaching of language automatically teaches culture, and so no additional attention needs to be given to teaching the culture, only 11.1% agreed with this and a further 19% were ambivalent about this (Table A2.50).

This separation of culture and language was reiterated when the teachers were asked to say how they taught culture in their classes (Item 2.8), although more teachers linked language and culture in their responses to that item than in Item 2.7. The
pattern of responses also suggests that the teachers use rather different ways of dealing with culture in their classrooms. The pattern of responses is illustrated in Figure 2.10.

Figure 2.10: Distribution of responses to questionnaire Item 2.8

While just under a half of the teachers (44.4%) say they integrate culture with themes and topics (with nearly two thirds of the secondary teachers doing this), the teachers’ other descriptions illustrate rather different approaches. The responses they provided indicated two ways of explicitly dealing with culture. One was an explicit, conscious planning of culture, reported by about one in nine of the teachers (11.1%), while another 7.9% reported that they dealt with it explicitly in conjunction with language on a reactive basis – as needs arose. Another 7.9% reported that they did not explicitly teach culture. These categories were derived from the answers the teachers provided to this open-ended question. What is interesting is not only the fact that about a third of the teachers report that they teach culture in a way that links it to language. The diversity of the types of response, and the fact that almost half the teachers look to topics and themes, and not culture itself, are also of interest. The teachers’ consensus in seeing culture and language as closely linked is not replicated
in the general ways that they report that they teach culture. They seem to look to different sources for the focus on culture in the classroom, although there are some sectoral differences. The primary teachers look more to language, perhaps reflecting the more holistic nature of learning in primary classrooms, while the secondary teachers look more to topics and themes, possible reflecting the linking of language to areas of the curriculum. This indicates diversity among the teachers as to how they find a way of connecting culture and language in the classroom.

To summarise the ways the teachers connected culture and language, when the teachers were asked in a general or more theoretical sense about the interrelationship between language and culture (items 2.9, 4.1, 4.3 and 4.7), they gave responses indicating that they saw strong connections between language and culture. However, when they applied this to the more concrete or practical situation of their teaching (items 2.7, 2.8, 5.9), they tended to see them as separate entities, or at least see aspects of culture in terms that are not intertwined with language. Further, when asked to describe the way that they teach culture, they replied in terms that indicated that most did not look to language as a link to culture. They reported a range of ways of finding connections to culture, with many looking to other content (themes and topics) rather than language.

### 2.3.4.2 The formation or changing of identities

In some ways this topic is related to the connection between language and culture. It focuses specifically on the nature of identity formation in language teaching. In Item 4.3 (see above) most of the teachers indicated that they saw language use as involving the negotiation of social relationships with those with which one is interacting. In an abstract sense, this implies that learning and using a new language will involve some sort of renegotiation of one’s sense of identity. However, in questions where the teachers were asked specifically about this aspect of learning a new language and culture, they provided different patterns of responses, which vary according to the terminology used in the questionnaire item.

When the teachers were asked about their attitude toward the statement that *It is important that my students develop a sense of their identity and how they relate to*
other speakers of English in Australia, (Item 5.2), they expressed high levels of agreement, with 94.9% of the teachers either agreeing (63.5%) or strongly agreeing (31.4%) with the proposition (Table A2.16). A similar pattern of responses was given to Item 6.1, in which the teachers positioned themselves along a continuum between the statements *TESOL teachers should play an active role in helping their students to develop their own sense of identity and place in Australian society* and *TESOL teachers should concentrate on language teaching and leave it to students to develop their own sense of identity and place in Australian society*. A significant majority (84.2%) of the teachers were on the side of the scale closest to helping learners develop their sense of identity (Table A2.32), and only 12.7% on the other side of the scale.

However, when the item refers to ‘changing identity’ the teachers seem to be less ready to agree that this is part of their role. In Item 4.2 the teachers positioned themselves on a scale between the statements *Teaching a language means helping learners to communicate in a new ‘code’, without changing their sense of identity* and *Teaching a new language means helping learners to develop a new sense of identity*. As Figure 2.11 indicates, there was a much more dispersed pattern of results for this item.

**Figure 2.11: Distribution of responses to questionnaire Item 4.2**
This item produced a relatively wide spread of responses among the total number of teachers, although the majority of the teachers (57.2%) were in the half of the scale closest to the statement about ‘not changing learner identities’ (Segments A, B and C) (see also Table A2.46). There is significant sectoral difference in these responses. All the primary teachers placed themselves in the sectors closest to the statement about ‘not changing identities’, while the other sectors produced a wider spread of responses. Both secondary teachers and teachers of adults were more inclined to place themselves towards the centre of the scale. However, the majority of adult sector teachers (59.2%) tended to see themselves as being closer to not changing identities, while the secondary teachers were slightly more inclined to lean toward the idea of changing learners’ identities. Apart from the primary teachers, perhaps ambivalence is the best way to describe the overall response to this Item.

Item 5.5 (LS) produced a similar pattern of responses to the statement *My students need to learn new values and ways of perceiving the world in order to be proficient in the new language.* While slightly more teachers (38%) agreed with this than disagreed (27%), there was considerable ambivalence (28%). There is also a wider spread of opinion and more ambivalence toward this statement which talks of ‘new values and ways of perceiving the world’ than in Items 5.2 and 6.1 which refer to ‘developing identities’. This item elicited a higher rate of disagreement among teachers from the adult sector, with 36% of them disagreeing with the proposition, and 29% expressing ambivalence, compared to 25% of them agreeing with this statement (Table A2.19).

The teachers seemed to be more willing to agree with items couched in terms of ‘developing’ identities (such as Items 4.3, 5.2 and 6.1) which seem to elicit much higher levels of agreement among the teachers, than items that talked of ‘changing identities’ (Items 4.2 and 5.5). This preference may well reflect the profession’s rhetoric of valuing and appreciating the cultural backgrounds of learners. However, it suggests a degree of uncertainty, even unease among the teachers about the impact on learners of the teaching of language and culture.
2.3.4.3 Participation in Australian society

While the teachers seem to have sophisticated conceptions of a multicultural society, there is another area in which the terminology used seems to influence the patterns of responses produced by the teachers. This relates in one sense to the nature of a multicultural society, and more specifically the types of participation immigrants should have in Australian society. When the teachers were asked (Item 6.7 OE) to describe the nature of multiculturalism, they showed a clear awareness that it may involve tension between fostering diversity, and providing cohesion. They provided responses to this item that were classified as either indicating the term was problematic (14.3% of responses), involved cohesion with elements of diversity (17.5% of responses), reflected diversity as a reality (36.5% of responses), involved tolerance and acceptance of diversity (12.7% of responses), while 4.8% of responses saw it primarily as enhancing the society, and another 4.8% saw it as an ideology or policy (Table A2.90). These responses suggest some sophistication in the range of understandings among the teachers.

However, a real tension emerged between the patterns of responses between two items that referred to the nature of immigrants’ participation in Australian society. In Item 4.9 the teachers were asked to indicate where they stood on a scale between the statements *Non English speaking immigrants should learn English in order to ensure the cohesiveness of the society* and *Non English speaking immigrants should learn English in order to maximise their potential to participate in all aspects of life in Australia*. The teachers clearly placed themselves closer to the idea of ‘maximising potential to participate in all aspects of Australian society’, with the vast majority (87.5%) of responses on the side of the scale closest to the ‘maximising potential for participation’ statement. Almost three-quarters of the teachers (74.6)% placed themselves in the two segments (E and F) closest to the statement, and only a small proportion (9.5%) responses on the other side of the scale (segments A, B and C), with none at the end closest to the ‘social cohesion’ statement (Table A2.87). This is understandable, given the emphasis on participation in the social justice discourse of the rhetoric of the profession, and also perhaps in that ‘social cohesion’ was one of the concerns of those like Pauline Hanson who argued for government policies that
would decrease cultural diversity (and recognition of it) in Australia in the mid to late 1990s.

However, in another item, it appeared that the teachers had a constrained view of the nature of the participation in Australian society by immigrants. In Item 3.5, the teachers were asked to indicate which of a range of statements came closest to their opinions on the ways that immigrants should react to Australian society. While there were very low levels of support for the two statements that emphasised acceptance of mainstream Australian values, the teachers opted mainly for the statement *Migrants should accept certain core values that are essential to the cohesion of Australian society, and it is appropriate that they maintain their own cultural practices, values and traditions that don't conflict with those Australian core values*, with 55.6% of the teachers choosing this option. A further 19% chose the statement that while *migrants should accept Australian laws, it is appropriate to maintain cultural traditions and practices in other respects*, and only 7.9% chose the statement that *Migrants have every right to challenge Australian core values, and exert influence to have their own values and practices accepted as part of everyday Australian life* (Table A2.86).

There is a contradiction between this and the teachers’ advocacy of immigrants maximising their participation in Australian society. In the views of the teachers, ‘maximising participation’ does not seem to extend to immigrants challenging or attempting to change the ‘core values’ of Australian society.

### 2.4 Discussion: Evidence of the ‘culture conundrum’?

These data suggest a large degree of consistency in the views and discourse of the teachers in relation to many of the issues explored in the survey. These areas include some apparently contradictory views, such as the support for immigrants participating in full in Australian society, while at the same time expressing a view that immigrants should not change the ‘core values’ of Australian society. There were also some areas in which there was a divergence of views among the teachers, such as how they deal with culture in the classroom.
The responses revealed in these data suggest that the teachers who responded to this survey are caught up in the ‘culture conundrum’ that is the focus of this study. The conundrum resides in the fact that while the teachers have sophisticated understandings about culture in general, they are not so sure as to how to deal with culture in their classrooms, nor are they so sure of some of the cultural implications of their work as language teachers. To some extent, aspects of the culture conundrum can be seen both in the points of consistency and agreement in the data, and in the points of tension or divergence in the data.

The areas of agreement indicate that the teachers see culture as a significant part of their teaching. These relate to their roles as teachers, the ways that they teach culture, the influence of their curriculum frameworks, the value of immigration to Australia, and a belief in the value of and interest in professional development on many aspects of teaching language and culture. The teachers saw their role broadly, as more than language teachers, having a significant role in supporting their students in their settlement into Australia. In addition to teaching English, providing information about Australia and Australians, which in many respects can be considered as providing cultural insights, is considered very important. The teachers reported that they explicitly present information about cultural knowledge, practices, and to some extent aspects of identity in their classes, and report that to some extent this involves making comparisons between the cultures of the learners and the culture of Australian English. They widely involve their students in making explicit comparisons between their home cultures, so that their learners better understand each other. The teachers feel that their respective curriculum frameworks do not constrain them in their teaching of culture, but neither do they closely guide them. There is a feeling, especially among teachers in the adult sector, that the curriculum frameworks do not adequately take account of diversity in the learners. The teachers are virtually unanimous in their view that immigration has been a benefit to Australia, and also generally to the people who have come to Australia. These findings are supported by consistent patterns of responses to items of different types and expressed in different terms. There appears to be either no effect or very limited effect from the nature of the question asked in relation to these topics. In other words, no matter how the teachers were asked, the description above summarises the nature of the answers they
gave. These responses are consistent across the different education sectors, with the qualification that the school sector teachers seem less unhappy with their curriculum framework than teachers in the adult sector. In many respects, the patterns of responses here are consistent with the professional discourse of TESOL in the literature. Culture is seen as important and attention to it needs to be part of communicative language teaching. Contrasts between the home cultures of the students and the culture of the target language are seen as effective ways to deal with culture. To this extent, the teachers’ attitudes are consistent with much of the professional literature addressing the teaching of culture, which had informed the design of the survey.

But in the areas where there wasn’t such unity in the patterns of responses, there is the possibility that what is evident are manifestations of the ‘culture conundrum’. These relate to contradictory patterns of response to items framed as general or theoretical understandings, compared to responses dealing with the practicalities of teaching. The teachers expressed either ambivalence or contradictory views in relation to the connections between language and culture, the process of identity building in language learners, and the role of recent immigrants in political debate in a multicultural society. The patterns of responses can be summarised in the following ways. When the teachers talk in general terms, they see very close, even inseparable connections between language and culture. However, when it comes to the practicalities of teaching they separate culture from language, and talk of teaching the culture in terms of constituents of culture, largely devoid of a connection with language. It is similar when talking in general terms about the nature of language in affecting social relationships, and in the way that learning a new language involves some new construction of ‘identity’ for learners. However, except for the teachers in the secondary sector, the teachers are reluctant to accept that they are involved in changing the identity of their learners. The teachers are happy to talk of their learners maximising their participation in Australian society, but seem to be not be happy about this if it involves changing the (unspecified) ‘core values’ of Australian society.

Two types of response to these data are possible. One is to respond at the level of the content of the data. This involves accepting what the responses say as indicating
issues in the ways that the teachers are thinking, and indicating issues and topics in which professional development could be productive. This would involve exploration and hopefully resolution of such apparent contradictions in some way that may help the teachers to be more effective in their teaching. The second type of response is to consider the varying patterns of response as methodological, in that they are an effect of particular items in the survey, and varying or contradictory responses are an indication of problems in the validity or reliability of certain items in the survey instrument. In other words, there is something about the items that are causing the patterns of responses they elicit.

The numbers of teachers responding to the survey limits the validity of extensive statistical analysis of survey items. However, one aspect of the questionnaire design has potential to show whether the data elicited can be trusted as a representation of the views of the teachers. This is the use of a number of different types of item to elicit data on the same issues. Comparison of the patterns of responses for different items can indicate whether the nature of questions and question types have unduly influenced the data. It is noticeable that in most topics or issues covered by the survey, there is consistency in what the respondents said in relation to different item types or in some instances, when items are turned from positive statements to negative statements. It is only in a relatively small number of items that different patterns of responses are obtained. So on some topics there does seem to be an effect from the nature of the Item, but not with regard to item type, but rather with regard to the terminology used. This is noticeable in some of the items dealing with identity. Where the Item is expressed in terms of ‘building’ or a ‘new’ identity, the teachers seem comfortable in agreeing or accepting this idea. However, when the term ‘changing’ identity is used, it is much more difficult for the teachers to agree to that term – especially if they work in the adult sector. Similarly, in discussing the reasons for learning English, the teachers are more comfortable with the term ‘participation in Australian society or life’, than with ‘cohesiveness of society’. The teachers seem to have concern with social cohesion, in that they are uneasy about recent immigrants changing the ‘core values’ of Australian society. However, in Item 4.9, they appear anxious to avoid appearing to be concerned with this concept. This may result from its use at the time the data were collected by groups opposing immigration, to which
the teachers are clearly committed, and multiculturalism, which the teachers tend to see as a reality in Australia. In relation to the connection between language and culture, the varying patterns of responses seems to result from whether the focus of a question is general and abstract, or whether it relates to the practicalities of teaching. Different wordings do not produce an apparently random spread of responses (as would be the case if the intent of the item was confusing or ambiguous). Instead, there is a consistency in the type of wording that elicits different, but largely consistent, patterns of response.

Therefore, it seems that it is possible to derive plausible explanations for these conflicting patterns of responses from the nature of the issues rather than them being a statistical anomaly or a quirk of the questionnaire design.

In considering these patterns of response, then, it seems the data suggest the ‘culture conundrum’ is evident in the discourse and the practice of the teachers. While the teachers have understandings at a broad or theoretical level that are consistent with the literature, these understandings are either not consistently followed through, or are even ignored in the practice of their teaching. Their general understandings are indeed quite sophisticated, and they are largely consistent with the sorts of conceptions presented in significant parts of the TESOL literature on culture. However, when it comes to applying these to more practical aspects of teaching, the teachers either seem to break the nexus between language and culture, are not completely sure about what to do, or leave it to be dealt with ‘implicitly’. While they appreciate that identities are negotiated and projected through language use, adult sector teachers are uneasy about ‘changing’ the identities of their language learners, yet their sophisticated understandings of language would suggest that that is exactly what they are doing by helping someone to develop proficiency in a new language. The teachers also value cultural diversity and appreciate the cultural background of their learners, yet while they are strong supporters of immigration, they are uneasy about immigrants changing core values. They say they don’t want immigrants to merely ‘assimilate’, but they don’t want them to change the core values of Australia either. These are difficult issues, relating to the practical implications of more general understandings. It seems that the teachers have not been able to make sufficient
connections between the two. It seems that while they widely accept the strong
connections between language and culture that are often expressed in the
conventional literature, they are also saying that in order to think about teaching
culture as part of language teaching they need to separate the two entities. Their
identification of the topic as one requiring professional development supports this
interpretation, that the teachers are bemused in these areas. They see that there is
strong theoretical connection between language and culture, which is contrasted with
a realisation that if culture is to be explicitly talked about, it needs to be separated in
some way from language. Talking in terms of language alone will not sufficiently
guide TESOL teachers in their teaching of culture. The issue of identity is more
complex. This was a relatively new and emerging concept in the literature at the time
of the survey. In this sense, it is surprising that the teachers seemed to be comfortable
with this concept. This may mean that teachers’ conceptions may not always be
informed by what is being discussed in the professional literature. However, in this
case there may be an effect from professional development, which was raising
identity as an issue for many of the teachers in the period prior to this survey. Norton
Peirce, whose 1995 article was the first time the issue was raised in the TESOL
literature, had visited Melbourne and spoke at the National TESOL conference in
January of 1998, and had published an article based on her presentation in a national
number of the teachers may have been aware of these discussions, and so the
familiarity of many of the respondents with the notion of ‘identity’ may be at least
partly explained. The apparent comfort with ‘building’ identities as opposed to
‘changing’ or ‘creating new’ identities may be related to inadequacies in the
development of the concept of *identity* within a communicative approach to language
teaching, coupled with the teachers’ concern for the valuing and affirmation of the
cultural backgrounds of their learners. The fact that it was the secondary sector, who
deal with adolescents, who are in a process of identity formation, who were
comfortable with this notion, as opposed particularly to the adult sector, who in some
respects are working within a context that sees language teaching as a kin to training,
rather than a form of transformative education. The relatively high levels of interest in
the cultural consequences of TESOL may also reflect that this is an area about which
the teachers are uncertain in their own minds.
The pattern of the teachers’ responses to the terms ‘cohesiveness of society’, ‘participation’ and ‘core values’ could be construed to justify a critique of what some from a critical perspective (for example Hage 1998) see as hypocrisy in middle Australia’s approach to the ideology of ‘multiculturalism’. However, a less critical and cynical interpretation is also possible. This would be that the teachers have not fully explored the concept of multiculturalism, and to some extent the socially transformative nature of large-scale immigration and its consequences and implications, and are reflecting tensions that are apparent in different dimensions of the social context of their work. However, such questions seem to be less of a priority for the teachers in their identification of topics for professional development.

Either way, it seems that a culture conundrum emerges in the professional discourse of these teachers.

### 2.5 The impact of the study on the design of professional development on the place of culture in TESOL

The survey was initially undertaken in order to provide a sharper focus for the development of a professional development package on the teaching of culture in TESOL. The data it gathered were extensive and detailed. Recording and analysis of these data proceeded only slowly in the year after it was gathered, due to other professional demands on the researcher’s time. By the time the data were analysed it was evident there was considerable interest in professional development on culture and related issues among a number of ESOL teachers at least. But the nature of the apparently contradictory and puzzling responses suggested that the planning of the professional development program could not be completed without a much more thorough investigation and consideration of the TESOL literature that addressed culture and related issues. The following conclusions could be drawn, in terms of the guidance the survey provided for the development of a professional development program on culture for teachers of ESOL: the topic of culture in TESOL was of sufficient interest to motivate a significant number of teachers to complete a lengthy questionnaire, and for a high proportion of the responding teachers to identify as something in which they would be interested. ‘Culture’ would seem to be viable and useful focus for a professional development activity.
There were some issues and topics which required clarification and further exploration. These included:

- how the interrelated phenomena of language and culture could be dealt with and related to each other in language classrooms in ways that enabled significant learning of both;
- how language learning impacts on the identities of learners, and the nature of the language teacher’s role in this transformative learning;
- relating a desire for learners’ opportunities to participate in Australian society in a way that enables them to express their cultural identity with the teachers’ sense of the ‘core values’ of Australian society;
- the fact that the curriculum frameworks teachers were working with did not seem to be a significant problem for the responding teachers, despite the inadequacies they identified in them;
- the teachers expressed a strong desire for professional development on how different approaches to language teaching facilitated the teaching of culture, even though issues about techniques for teaching culture had not been extensively explored in the survey.

The purpose of this survey was the identification of issues of interest and relevance to ESOL teachers. Having identified these issues, it was time to consider how they might be addressed. But these are significant issues. In order to plan a professional development program, clarification of them would involve a more comprehensive analysis of relevant literature. In order to take this study forward from its original plan, it was time to once again turn to the literature, but with some clearer idea of what was being sought. This involved exploration of whether the culture conundrum as described in Chapter 1 and which seemed to emerge from this survey could be resolved by the literature, as well as exploration of the more specific issues identified above.

As it turned out, the years following the collection of these data were a period of great activity in terms of exploration of the issues related to culture in TESOL, and publication of new work – some of it moving in new directions. The search for
concepts and data that could inform a professional development activity proved to be longer and more difficult than anticipated.

Chapter 3 contains a more extensive review of the literature, to see how it could inform a response to the issues identified in the survey of the teachers, to see whether it is possible to find an escape from the ‘culture conundrum’, and to see what new insights were emerging in the literature on culture in TESOL.