Developing an Independent Learning Resource Centre

A Project in a Military Language Institute in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

Establishing new educational structures within an existing institute can be a highly complex and challenging undertaking. When the placement of the institute is also in a social and cultural context distant from that of the educators working to bring about the change, these challenges become extremely complex. This study considers such a scenario: the establishment of an Independent Learning Resource Centre (ILRC) within a military language institute, in Abu Dhabi. In working towards this goal there were, in addition to the tensions existing within any language learning institute, issues of culture, religion and the military organisation to be navigated.

To reflect the highly complex nature of this situation, this study adopts a framework acknowledging the intricately connected social/cultural 'ecologies' which provide the site for many of the issues that need to be resolved in successfully implementing a structural change in an institution. The study seeks to describe the elements of these relationships and to consider the impact they have on the overall context. The awareness of these cultural interactions was held in mind during the development of a proposal, with the intentions of avoiding what might be termed 'tissue rejection' or the failure of an externally initiated innovation to survive in the local host environment. The study follows the process involved, initially, in moving towards the development of the proposal for the establishment of the ILRC and the set up of the centre and its early period of operation, and raises the question of whether this dilemma of 'tissue rejection' was satisfactorily resolved.

The process described is a long one, and in the hiatus between planning proposals and implementation of the centre, a course was developed, designed to be an adjunct to the ILRC. Due to institutional constraints which are explored in this study, this course was not able to be trialled as designed. The course, in seeking to provide students of the Institute with a supportive context for developing increasing degrees of independence in language learning, emphasised the acquisition, development and practise of language skills through a practical engagement with real tasks. This study offers a description of the course, along with a discussion of a modified version of it, implemented for a year with two classes of students. In supporting this curriculum, and in the absence of an existing ILRC, as much as possible was done to make use of

available resources, carried into class, as a portable ILRC. Within the limits of this course's operation, the following study offers an assessment of the success of the modified course initiative in terms of what it can suggest about the value of moving towards increased levels of independence.

In this study, the establishment of the ILRC and its subsequent failure to fulfil its expected outcomes is described and discussed with reference to the ecological framework and its significance. In conclusion, the distance of understanding between the committed parties, teachers and administration, is seen to widen to the point where there is little remaining of the common purpose which enabled the process of innovation to begin.

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Chapter One Introduction

This study is concerned with the development of an educational initiative to introduce an Independent Learning Centre, within the context of the United Arab Emirates. The move to bring an Independent Learning Centre into the programme of a language learning institute operated by the UAE military was initiated both by the expatriate teaching team and the military administrators of the programme, both supported by input from a team of educational consultants from the USA. The efforts to develop this initiative can provide an insight into the ways in which attempts at educational change are dependent on a complex interplay of factors. These factors, if not fully allowed for, can result in the achievement of limited success in terms of intended goals. At worst, it can result in failure.

By way of introduction to the more specific matter at hand, I will present here, an overview of the historical and social context of education in this area, and the way in which this creates the ground conditions for all educational endeavours in the UAE.

1.1 Learning in the UAE and the Qu'ran

Education in the Arab world is rooted in the teaching of the Qu'ran. From this source flows literacy, world view and ethics and morality. Historically, the teaching was conducted in the mosque, led by *Mutawa*, men dedicated to their belief in the principles of Islam and committed to their promulgation. This was a highly decentralised education, with no formal system, operating out of every mosque in every town and village. Its purpose was to provide the only education that a young Muslim boy could ever need, an ability to read the Qu'ran. For girls, a similar level of education was provided within

the home. The methods of teaching were traditionally based in rote recitation. More important than comprehension was accuracy. For those who could not master the skills of literacy, memorisation was an acceptable goal, and indeed a great deal of praise was given to any student who showed the ability to memorise Qu'ranic verses and Surahs, feats that continue to be celebrated in annual festivals. But to be able to read the Qu'ran is a special gift and one of the main commitments of the period of the Holy Month of Ramadan is the reading of the Qu'ran in its entirety. This is the traditional root of educative process in the UAE. Its objective was the formation of the good Muslim, and its main outcomes were, academically, literacy in Classical Arabic, and socially, a cohesively held set of social and cultural values which provided stability. This qu'ranic education continues to be a strong influencing factor in contemporary education in the UAE as the indigenous educational experience of the Arabian Peninsula, but as contact with the broader world encroached on the region, different educational needs were indicated.

1.2 Learning in the UAE as a foreign experience I

When we look at much of the visible structures of education system in the UAE today, we identify a highly westernised process, and come to the conclusion that for the Emirati students in schools, learning is a foreign experience, defined by foreign ideas, often delivered in a foreign language by foreign teachers. Such on observation, might make the mistake of identifying this as a recent product of global moves to standardise educational practice and outcomes. But what is missed in this analysis is the historical reality that in the UAE, education has been a foreign experience for a very long time. As the British government began to operate in the Trucial States, eventually to become the UAE, there was a new educational imperative: employment.

Advancement was seen as possible through employment with the British administration, dominated by clerks and specialists from the Indian Sub-continent. To gain entry to civil service work, the requirements were literacy in English, advanced numeracy skills, and a degree of familiarity with the cultural norms of the administrative culture. Throughout the British Empire, during this period in which the administrative civil service grew in importance, there was always the goal of the British education, achievable by only those with a reasonable degree of wealth. But in the UAE, for those with fewer financial resources, there were the many schools in India which had produced the skills of those workers from the Indian Sub-continent already filling essential roles in the local civil service.

The education in these schools was modelled on the British system of the late nineteenth century, with large classes, and emphasis on rote learning and a rigorous schedule of testing. The schools were run for and by the citizens of the British Indian Raj, the language of instruction was primarily English, though Hindi, Urdu, Gujarati and other languages of the Sub-continent were used at times. For the boys sent to these schools, there was the added burden of extended separation from their families. This practice continued through the period of Indian and Pakistani independence. The main outcomes of this process of education, in the UAE, was the development of bilingual literacy, an increase in the depth of world knowledge and a growing influence of Emiratis within the civil service structures which administered the country.

1.3 Learning in the UAE as a foreign experience II.

As the region began to benefit from its oil wealth, money began to be directed more rigorously into its infrastructure with some improvement made in roading, housing development, health care and education. Schools began

began to appear in the larger towns which housed administrative offices, and these continued with the pattern set in the schools on the Sub Continent. Like those schools, classes were taught primarily by teachers from India and Pakistan, the curriculum still carried out in English and the goals still linked to involvement in the civil service. At this time there was also a growing move to involve Emirati girls in some form of external education. This was the start of what would become the UAE's imported education system. With low numbers of trained and qualified local teachers, oil revenue was used to bring teachers into the country to fill newly built schools with ready to go expertise. There was no room or time to train locally, and education, while seen as a desirable commodity, was not viewed as a valued career. The only truly valued teachers remained the *mutawa*, who continued to teach from mosques and halls through out the countryside as well as in the cities. The main outcomes of this educational development was the continued development of local involvement in regional government and a strong impression of schooling as a foreign construct, useful but not identifiably part of the local lifestyle.

1.4 Learning in the UAE and the role of independence

Independence brought the UAE a new collective sense of self. It also brought full control of the burgeoning oil revenues which would allow the country to take control of its newly gained independence in a way that few other countries could. Infrastructure development was suddenly flooded with capital, ambitious roading projects and urban developments projects were initiated and the health and education systems were brought abruptly up to speed. At the beginning of the 1970's Abu Dhabi was a large village, within a decade it had the structure of a modern city and by the year 2000 it was a city of over 500.000 people. Dubai similarly grew from a small fishing port

into a major modern city with a reputation for some of the most ambitious architectural projects in the world. Between these and other cities in the UAE, built up out of villages in the desert, wide modern highways created links that made travel across the country more efficient and less stressful.

In the midst of all this, was the drive to educate the people of the country to take up their place in this new world. Schools were built in every community, staffed with teachers brought in again with money from oil revenue. The most significant difference here was that many of these teachers came from Arabic speaking countries, as this became the official language of schooling. English continued to be seen as a highly important element of the educative process, and instruction in this continued to be delivered by teachers from Pakistan or the Middle East who were deemed proficient in English. Also, increasingly in schools, teachers were imported for whom English was their first language. A Tertiary sector was similarly constructed and staffed with teachers from around the world. As the country developed, it imported the skilled workers it needed, not only in education but in industry, health and commerce. This created an increasing population of 'guest workers' and their families who helped fill the growing cities and expanded the demand for services as well as schooling which met the specific needs of the expatriate communities.

Educationally, the flow on effect to the local community was a broadening of options for education, as the schools, based on North American, British and other European curricula, staffed primarily by teachers from the countries of origin, became available for local student enrolment. The dilemma in all of this was that education, as well as health, industry and commerce, continued to be dominated by non Emirati workers. This has begun to be slowly

corrected as newly educated and trained locals take up key roles in these areas. The civil service and its recently created adjuncts, the military and police, continue to draw the majority of Emiratis, with commercial endeavours most often engaged in outside of existing jobs and the health sector is gaining in the number of local doctors. Education, and ironically the oil industry, however remain heavily dependent on expatriate workers as is the entire service sector of the UAE. In exchange, the UAE has gained an up to the minute modern infrastructure providing all of the attendant benefits and convenience to its citizens. It has also found itself in the situation of having those citizens substantially outnumbered by the guest workers who are needed to maintain this infrastructure.

1.5 Coming to the question

What then are the questions that must be answered with regard to developing educational initiatives in education? Firstly I think we need to ask, to what extent do such initiatives meet the educational needs of the students of the host country and how might they be expected to do so? There are expectations on the part of those seeking to introduce a new initiative, those receiving it, where do these meet and where they are disparate, how can they be resolved. What degree of interplay exists between the initiators of change and the recipients of the new structures and indeed amongst different factions within those seeking to initiate change? Also, how will the extremely complex environment that exists in the UAE, which is suggested in the above discussion of the history and role of education in this country, impact on attempts to introduce new ideas? This question is applicable to each and every country where new ideas in education are tried.

Specific to the idea of independence in learning, there is the question of whether this is, in itself, a foreign concept. What difficulties or dilemmas does the introduction of such a concept produce for the initiators and for the recipients. Further, how do differing understandings of the nature and purpose of independence in learning contribute to difficulties in instituting new ways of supporting such independence?

In seeking to answer these questions through the following discussion, the significance and relevance of such developmental initiatives can be clarified, and at the same time a pathway for enhancing the effectiveness of such initiatives can be defined.

In the following chapter, I will discuss the methodology that underpins this study, focussing on the choices made between qualitative and quantitative approaches, the value of an anthropologically holistic perspective rather than a sociological one and the influence of the action research model on the shaping of my approach. The chapter will also lay out the three main aims of this study.

Chapter 2 Methodology and Aims

I shall present here the three main aims which give this study its shape and focus: the presentation of an institutional environment as one which is complexly and intricately connected; the description and discussion of the process of establishing an Independent Learning Resource Centre, with in this complex process; and the attempt to shape a matching curricular innovation to complement the operation of an ILRC (independent learning resource centre). Then I shall consider how in this study I have drawn on a wide variety of factors in developing the way in which I approached this topic, from a combination of my reading and my own personal experience and background, which I shall discuss here.

2..1 Aims

This study consists of three parts:

The first part will present some of the issues and contexts in establishing an Independent Learning Resource Centre, considered from an ecological perspective. In defining my own sense of the ecological perspective within social research I started with Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979) who developed an ecological model for human development and Adrian Holliday (1994) who has more recently presented a variation of the ecological approach. My consideration of these systems will be based in an Anthropological/ Ethnographical perspective, taking into consideration the significance of the specific culture of my institution. In considering the issues affecting the development of an Independent Learning Resource Centre I will make use of this ecological model as follows:

Socio Cultural (Macro–system): This will involve a consideration of the overlapping cultural contexts which define the MLI (Military Language Institute): the Arabic/Islamic cultural milieu; the national culture of the UAE: the military culture of the UAE armed forces.

Institutional (Exo-system): This will describe the specific context of the MLI as an educational facility operating within the UAE Armed Forces, staffed with teachers from North America, the UK and Australia. It will also include a discussion of the curriculum structures specific to the MLI.

Personal (T-S, S-S, S, T) (Meso-system and Micro-system): This will consider some of the factors involved in interactions between Teachers and Students allowing for a consideration of the impact upon the routine classroom interactions of social construction, the students' deep placement within the broader culture and the degree of alienation experienced by teachers. All of these, and the ways in which these two key elements in the educative process interact with the other levels of the institution and of the broader contexts of culture and society, play significant roles in the conceptualisation, initiation and final implementation of a project such as the ILRC (independent learning resource centre).

In addition to an ecological model as a structure for considering the issues affecting the establishment of an ILRC, I will also consider the medical metaphor of transplanting an "exotic" structure into a new environment and the subsequent impact on both the host environment and the new structure (Holliday, 1992, 1994). Here the primary concern is the balance between innovation and the introduction of something which might effectively be

rejected by the host system. Holliday speaks of this as being a 'tissue rejection'.

The second part will seek to describe the process involved in the establishment of the ILRC at the Military Language Institute in Abu Dhabi. In this section I shall consider the reasons for establishing an ILRC, from both the institutional and pedagogical perspectives. This will highlight some of the central tensions in implementing any significant change to structures and practices within educational institutions. Then there will be a closer examination of the steps which were taken towards the establishment of the ILRC. This will show the preliminary process of investigation and needs analysis and the initial proposal for the ILRC. This will also illustrate the intentions for the physical organisation of the ILRC and decisions regarding materials and hardware. Finally there will be a brief description of the initial set up and operation of the centre, taking into account the impact of shifts in the administrative/institutional environment.

The third part will concern itself with the description of a curriculum initially designed to maximise the use of the ILRC, a curriculum which was intended to be literacy skills driven, able to enhance the degree of independence in students, and to maximise the use of the centre. But perhaps above all, a curriculum predicated on the idea of student ownership of the learning process. The curriculum under consideration in this study was initially developed in tandem with the initial activity around the investigation and consultation process. During a hiatus in activity around the push towards setting up the ILRC, falling between the conclusion of consultation and prior to final approval being given to set up the centre, an adaptation of this curricular innovation was trialled. Both the original concepts for the

curriculum and its trial iteration are considered here with respect to the role that course and curriculum can facilitate increased levels of independence. This study, then, will seek to answer the following research questions. What are the issues and contexts, taking an ecological perspective, that need to be addressed in establishing an Independent Learning Resource Centre? What are some of the central tensions in implementing significant changes to structures and practices within educational institutes? What curriculum approaches can be viewed as supportive to independent learning?

2.2 Methodology

My choice of methodology for this project is rooted in two key factors: firstly, in my own formation, academically and professionally and secondly in the demands of the context in which the project has been conducted.

As I began this project I envisioned myself conducting a tightly defined action research project based on principles which I had adopted as a primary and secondary school teacher. Geoffrey Mills (Mills 2000) provided me with some ideas on how to progress with the study, making use of Action Research approaches. His presentation of comparisons between action research and traditional research approaches was useful in helping me to solidify this decision to adapt the action research strategies to my needs. Similarly, Benson (2001), amidst the practical recommendations for setting up independent learning systems for students, provided a range of interesting and useful structures and guidelines for implementation in our own centre and concluded with a discussion of research approaches and case studies in the area of learner autonomy. Of most interest to me here was his discussion of Action Research which initially added to my inclination to take a qualitative rather than quantitative approach overall to my own study even

though it is not specifically Action Research. J Michael O'Malley and Anna Uhl Chamot (1990) also present a very useful discussion on research methods relevant in considering learning strategies. Various methods of data collection were considered, ranging from questionnaires to subject diaries and individual and group interviews. Certainly the idea of subject diaries – while problematic in my immediate context – raised some interesting ideas in support of qualitative data collection. However, as the study began to focus increasingly on factors outside of my control the action research model became less and less appropriate and even my intentions to modify its application became increasingly untenable.

With a first degree in both English Literature and Anthropology and an MA in English Literature I became familiar with an approach which was anthropological/ethnographic rather than sociological, qualitative rather than quantitative, critical rather than descriptive. In my professional development as a teacher, action research was a tool and a process which reinforced these ideas as an appropriate way in which to consider the contexts of teaching and learning.

Anthropological rather than Sociological

An anthropological, or ethnographic approach is one in which a descriptive analysis of the cultural context is conducted by an observer. Unlike the sociological approach, there is no attempt to fit the observed context into a pattern of generalized norms, rather to emphasize the significance of the cultural distinctiveness in producing what is described.

Qualitative rather than Quantitative

In a qualitative approach, as opposed to a quantitative, greater emphasis is place on non-measurable data, things which can be observed or reported but not easily assigned a relative value. Qualitative analysis allows the research to deal with the attitudes, subjective perceptions and shifts in context which define interactions within any human system.

Critical rather than descriptive

The dynamic nature of the implementation of any programme changes leads to a need to move beyond the strictly descriptive into a more critical set of interpretations. The interaction of different attitudes and at times very divergent agendas for the operation and direction of MLI led to a process of constant revision. Most key to the need to take a critical approach then was the need to not merely describe the track of ILRC (independent learning resource centre) development complete with unexpected events and alterations in original plan but to seek to clarify the background to these events and the extent to which they were eased or exacerbated by reactions throughout the various levels of the Institute's operation.

The context at MLI is heavily determined by layers of specific cultural value – so much so that it seemed less useful to approach a study here from a narrowly sociological perspective. To seek to extract general terms of reference from this environment would be less productive than providing a critical description of the specific complexity of this context and how that complexity impacts on the development of any plan of action. Further, the study, concerning itself with the process rather than the impact of ILRC (independent learning resource centre) development, did not lend itself to a quantitative analysis. There is little in the way of numbers to sift and compare here, but much in the way of opinion, intentions and hopes.

Finally, the MLI is a teaching environment in which it is impossible to limit or isolate variables which could disturb the validity of an experimental study. Any effort to impose experimental rigor within this teaching environment is fraught with difficulty. The same can be said, to a greater or lesser degree, of any teaching environment: the practice of teaching does not lend itself easily to the experimental method. My approach to this context seeks to show 'ecological validity' in my effort to do justice to the layered complexity both of the subject at hand and my immediate experience of it. If the ecological model supposes a complex interaction of nested levels and niches, each one defined by its own internal interactions as well as through their interactions, transparent or otherwise, with other levels of the system and other niches across the same level, an ecologically valid approach needs to reflect the nature of this system, emphasising the interplay between niche and level rather than seeking to approach them in isolation or acknowledging interaction only when it is overt.

Overall, this is similar to the approach that was taken in my earlier study of the effectiveness of the Bilingual Education Project in Bluefields Nicaragua (Hurtubise, 1990). With all of this in mind, the following study makes use of a qualitative assessment of data drawn from observations of the ILRC (independent learning resource centre) development process, interviews with teachers and MLI officers involved in ILRC set up, and MLI students. It seeks to treat the MLI as an institutional niche within a broader ecological structure

This study shall seek to provide a description of the needs analysis and the data gathering processes which formed the basis for the initial plans for the

ILRC and a description of the planning process and decisions made and the stages of implementation. It will be, by nature, a longitudinal study taking into account the key stages of discussion, research, initial resourcing, and initial implementation with a necessary acknowledgement of the shifts and changes in policy, administration and staffing of the ILRC project. It will also provide a record and discussion of the readings which informed both the process of establishing the ILRC and the analysis of the process.

In the following chapter, I shall outline some of the key themes and contexts which lay at the heart of this study: culture, the ecological approach, the concepts of autonomy and independence, the importance of motivation as a factor, the interaction between the process of language learning and local cultures and technology in education.

Chapter 3 Themes and concepts

This study draws on many themes, in order to present what are extremely complex contexts and processes. In this chapter I will discuss some of the literature which underscores these themes and clarifies the central concepts of this study.

3.1 The Cultural context

A study of any institute, process or activity in the UAE cannot be complete without a full consideration of the Islamic and Arabic cultures. Interest in the region of the Middle East has grown in recent years, as a result of the increased profile of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict and of the war in Iraq and the current occupation of that country by Alliance troops, however, there is much about the interplay between Arabic and Islamic culture which is not clearly appreciated in countries outside of the region, an interplay as evident in the processes of a language learning institute as in the activities of organizations such as Hamas and Al Quaeda.

Lapidus (2002) suggests for the development of the Islamic world, four phases: the inception of Islam; its spread by conquest and conversion; the engagement of the subsequent Islamic countries with the west, defining their various twentieth century identities; and finally, the Islamic revival, manifesting itself in reformist movements seeking to turn around the secularism of the twentieth century in a return to Quranic principles in a new political/nationalist/religious identity. But as Lapidus points out the process of reform, dramatically initiated by the Islamic revolution of Iran, has not replaced the secular national processes and movements of the twentieth century, but rather continues in tandem with it. Hourani (1991) affirms this

process through these first three phases, but asserts that there is a resilience and cohesion in the secular states, rooted deeply in the traditional culture of the Arab world and fused with modern ideas. Both writers emphasise the importance of family associations, the recognition of traditional authority, the pride of history and the crucial role of Islam in shaping national identities as well as the identities of counter-secular movements. Seeking to create enlightenment and understanding between the Muslim and Western world, Robinson (1996) initially highlights the ways in which the attitude of the West has its origins clearly rooted in hostility, based in a perceived conflict of faith; while that of the Muslim world has shifted from one of disregard historically towards an increasing sense of threat. But Robinson emphasises above all the degree of shared history and tradition: the common religious roots, the shared tradition of knowledge and discovery stemming from the ancient Greeks, as well as the degree of interdependence that has evolved in the modern world, through trade and political dialogue.

3.2 The ecological approach, structural and curriculum innovation and the metaphor of grafting and tissue rejection

The ecological approach in social sciences is strongly rooted in Uri Bronfenbrenner's Ecology of Human Development (1979). It can be argued whether it is a metaphorical framework or an actual reality of human interactivity, but clearly the concept of nested interconnected structures of human involvement provides a method of understanding the complexity of any interaction and in doing so allows us to consider and comment on the nature of human engagement and the practices and underlying beliefs which construct the cultural setting. Tissue rejection sits comfortably with the ecological approach as a metaphor which expands the sense of human systems, including education, having biological properties. First posited by

Hoyle (1970) and expanded on in the current field by Holliday (1992, 1994), tissue rejection provides a way of considering and assessing the degree of success or failure present in innovations and changes to educational structures.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) sets out the ideas and structure which underpin the ecological approach to studying human behaviour. Clarifying the principle that the traditional approach to such studies needed to be expanded to involve a wider consideration of all of the cultural factors playing on each participant where, the dyad within the classroom is looked at in terms of all of the cultural settings each partner is engaged in, expanding outwards like matrioshka dolls, each nested system of relationships and settings embraced by another. The most significant diversion from accepted understanding that Bronfenbrenner took lay not in suggesting that we are complexly located in society and culture but that factors drawn from all levels of our nested system play directly upon each other within a given setting can be as significant as events that might be taking place more immediately and beyond this, that the individual is deeply affected by events that take place even when they are not present In approaching the task of effecting change designed to enhance the learning outcomes of students, to fail to attend to the level of complexity involved in human interaction is to invite abject failure, or at best, a result falling far short of projected expectations. Bronfenbrenner went on to highlight an issue that is crucial to those seeking to operate between cultures: "within any culture or subculture, settings of a given kind – such as homes, streets, offices – tend to be very much alike, whereas between cultures they are distinctly different. It is as if within each society or subculture there existed a blueprint for the organisation of every type of setting. Furthermore, the blueprint can be changed, with the result that any

structure of the settings in a society can become markedly altered and produce corresponding changes in behaviour and development" (p4).

Adrian Holliday (1994) states that the "first task is ...to learn about and appreciate the real world of relevant parties within the host educational environment." (p113). To not address this central concern, he goes on to indicate, is at the heart of failure in initiating English language projects. Here is the practical rooting of human ecologies: to introduce new ideas without proper consideration of the social ecosystem is to invite rejection. And to observe the reactions of local professionals, Holliday maintains, is the surest way to gauge the response of the 'real world' of the host environment.

Holliday (1999), also emphasises the importance of "small cultures", in comparison to their "large culture" embedment, which can become the primary focus of study. The idea of small cultures draws on the complexity of Bronfenbrenner's mezzo level of ecological nests, encompassing those spheres of activity such as work, hobbies and the process of interactions highlighting the extremely complex and multilayered reality of human interaction. Holliday asserts that the approach of small culture focussed study answers the difficulties of engaging in assessments of our complexly multicultural world., especially as it is manifested in localised contexts. Further, in Holliday's construction, small cultures are defined as much by the activities carried out within and between them as they are by the nature of the groups themselves, so that observation of these interactions can produce a growing and dynamic picture of the small culture context under study. The small culture approach lends itself to a definite research orientation, where the focus is interpretive, process focussed providing a model which will feedback positively into the process of establishing with clarity the degree of

cohesion that exists within any social grouping being studied. Holliday provides an example of small culture focused research in a text book project at the University of Pune, India. The issue of introducing the new material was approached from a large culture perspective where it was assumed the greatest thing to be warded against was the intrusion of British ideas on Indian culture. But the reality revealed was complex intercultural conflicts: "not between (large) British and Indian cultures, but between (small) culturally different Indian elements". An awareness of this complexity at the mezzo level becomes essential, then, for any accurate planning around the introduction of changes to institutional structures.

Numa Markee(1997), looking at issues of curricular innovation, made use of the nested systems model, reflecting an ecological approach to the analysis of the process of change in the chapter Issues and Definitions, drawing on sources such as Cooper (1989),) and Kennedy (1988). The extent to which the introduction of curricular innovation is process which can be seen to impact on a whole range of micro cultural levels is an important consideration in approaching this task. Rather than a clearly defined process of policy, initiated by a singular administrative entity, it is the dynamic interplay between all levels of the institution, and the attendant small culture perspectives which effectively define the ultimate direction and outcome of the initiative. The discussion here is pertinent to the UAE context of the current study, especially in terms of describing a model of social-cultural interrelatedness which is reflective of both the context and the perspective of the analysis. A clear message is the need to be clear on identifying those social cultural variables which are significant to the context of study in order to create an effective model of interaction. Similarly, the definition of innovation as a developmental process, "involve(ing) a sequence of decisions

that are made *over a period of time.*" (Markee, 1997, p 51) tied to the sense of teacher initiated development moving from the bottom up resonates with part of the push for change which often results in the instigation towards change, and indeed with the process described in the current study.
The role of the 'foreign trainer' as an agent for implementing changes to curriculum structures in China was explored by Kennedy (1999) While emphasising the importance of an outside perspective dealing with the complex issues of culture and belief, he identifies this role as being productive from the point of view of providing new insights into ways of operating. Carless (1999) similarly emphasised the need for expatriate driven shifts in the curriculum process to be aware of the cultural context in which it is being introduced, while also highlighting the ever present difficulty of resistance to any change, which can occur at any level, relating this directly to the theory of tissue rejection (Holliday 1992). For Carless, important issues include the commitment of substantial resources to the initiation of any major shift in structure or change, and a commitment of energy to effective teacher training in the changes.

The introduction of innovation and change within educational contexts is commonly a reaction to what is perceived as being a deficiency in current provisions or, at best a sense there is more that we could be doing. In this sense and from various points of view, 'doing' can be constructed as, improving educational outputs, enhancing student engagement, or even creating a better profile for the institution. With these various perspectives often all at play at once, when innovations in educational initiatives are initiated, they are often placed under a great deal of performance stress. Implementing changes to a curriculum or a practice methodology or an institutional structure is freighted with difficulty. The metaphors of grafting,

and of tissue rejection, both provide a strong handle on considering the issues contained within the process of innovation. In the field of language teaching in overseas contexts there is often foreignness in the initiation of these changes, especially within the contexts of developing countries where there can be a sense of outsider educators holding the role of consultants and advisors to institutes and of organisations seeking to bolster their credibility both locally and globally. Even when the process is initiated and followed through locally, without the sense of being driven by foreign elements, the innovations themselves often carry the significance of being foreign ideas. So, the foreign or alien is grafted to the extant system in the hope of creating a vibrant hybrid but with the fear and very real possibility of foundering on unresolved distance between the needs and the expectations of the institute and the students and the ability of any innovation to successfully respond to these.

The metaphor of tissue rejection is a dramatic one. Holliday (1994) cites Hoyle (1970) as initiating its use, drawing on the medical context of surgical procedures where incompatibility of donor and recipient result in organ transplant failure. Its aptness as a metaphor for describing the process of local culture rejection of introduced ideas is strong: "In English Language projects, the implant often takes the form of courses or materials.....Tissue rejection takes place when the implant does not survive as an integral part of the host institution, once project support is taken away." (p134)

Kemale Pinar's (1999) case study of introducing new course materials in a classroom in Saudi Arabia focuses on the issue of innovative failure. Citing Pettigrew (1992), the following are identified as necessary for effective innovation: "involvement, participation, ownership, communication,

commitment and trust" and conversely, citing a study by Gross et al (1976) in identifying the reasons for the failure of an innovation, even in the absence of active resistance to it :

"1 The teachers did not have a clear understanding of what was expected of them in their new role.

2 They did not have the necessary skills to carry out their new role.

3 They did not have the required materials and equipment.

4 There were no feed back procedures to correct these deficiencies." (p67)

Pinar's study highlights the extent to which these considerations played a part in the initial attempt to introduce new curricular materials to the classroom : " lack of communication between the participants and the management was apparent. Teachers were unaware of discussions which took place ... were not informed about the possibility of training sessions (and) no effort was made to explain to the teachers why these books were being considered in the first place." (p72) Pinar identifies, as well as an absence of involvement in the decision making process, the lack of necessary support and guidance for the teachers towards making use of the new materials. After the rejection of the material innovation by the teachers, Pinar reintroduced the materials to the teachers, convinced that they would enhance the programme offered in the school. This time, with greater focus on involving the teachers in the process with training and support actively provided, the result was more successful.

Carless, (1999) in presenting his case study of curriculum change in Hong Kong takes into consideration Holliday's concept of tissue rejection as a reaction of local systems to expatriate initiated innovation, particularly revealed in an underestimation of the fixity of prior attitudes and beliefs within the local education system and an apparent absence of mutual trust

between expatriate change agents and local receivers. He summarises the difficulty by stating that " A curriculum designed principally by expatriates must take into account the realities of the local classroom context and needs to be perceived as doing this by implementing teachers, otherwise 'tissue rejection' (Holliday 1992) can occur." (p28)

3.3 Defining Autonomy and independence

Benson (2001) offers as one definition of autonomy, "the capacity to take charge of one's own learning" (p110). However, Scharle and Szabo (2000) define autonomy as reflecting the degree to which students take on responsibility for their own learning. All students display varying levels of autonomy across a spectrum determined by personality traits, preferred learning style and, in Bourdieu's (1977) terms, their culture capital. With this in mind, Scharle and Szabo suggest that students drawn from a culture or community which have a " strong aversion to individualism and a strong preference for collectivism ... may not be able to handle uncertainty and do everything they can to avoid it (and) find it alarming to work without the supervision of a teacher" (p5). This reflects the definition presented by David Little (1999) "In formal education contexts, the *basis* of learner autonomy is acceptance of responsibility for one's own learning: the *development* of learner autonomy depends on the exercise of that responsibility ... and the *effect* of learner autonomy is to remove the barriers that so easily erect themselves between formal learning and the wider environment." (p11), which connects the development of autonomy to the transformative, revolutionary dialogic education of Paulo Freire (1972, 1974) who also emphasises the importance of responsibility of the learner for their own learning in order to achieve 'integration' of learning rather than adaptation, where integration is distinguished primarily by its dependence on the ability

of the learner to actively make choices which can affect changes in their world.. Taking this as an operating definition of autonomy, which allows for the consideration of the ecologically complex dynamics of education systems, we can return to Benson's definition, the capacity to take charge of one's learning, and apply this as a distinct definition for independence. Here, the product of autonomy, a growing responsive sense of responsibility, rooted in the construction of the individual, can be given expression as praxis.

The discussion and research on the nature of autonomy and independence is central to this study. How independence is viewed by teachers, administrators and students, has a great impact on the effectiveness of planning around increasing its importance in the learning process. Phil Benson (2001) provides an excellent discussion of Autonomy and Language Learning presenting a strong background in the concepts underpinning learner independence and issues of autonomy as a prelude to presenting a thorough analysis of implementations of independent learning approaches. Particularly interesting is the linkages he creates between autonomy and learner independence and the contexts framed by Paolo Freire and Ivan Illich, with their revolutionary underpinnings of empowerment and politicisation. In effect, the act of moving to enhance student independence is fraught with political significance, often unrecognised initially in the rush to become more modern. When it *is* recognised by more conservative minded parties to the planning process there is the move to retrench and minimise the impact of change, often at the expense of significant benefits.

3.4 The question of motivation

A great deal of my initial thought and focus as I approached this task was placed in the area of motivation and how it might be related to the implementation of ILRC (independent learning resource centre) within an institution. While this became less significant as I moved away from a close study of the direct impact of the ILRC in our institute towards an examination of the journey itself, the linkages between ideas in independence and motivation I believe continue to be valid and significant factors in any discussion of ILRC establishment.

Benson (2001) presents a well focussed discussion on motivation and its intersection with learner autonomy. He identifies self determination theory and attribution theory as productive avenues to consider the linking of motivation and autonomy: self determination theory emphasising the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, where, extrinsic motivation in itself can be constructed as a continuum from self-determined to controlled (citing Deci et al., 1991) while intrinsic motivation can be argued as a means towards more effective learning, "promoted by structures and events that are informational rather than controlling and by situations in which the learner is self determined and the locus of self control lies with the learner" (p69). Thus action inspired by intrinsic motivation leads to enhanced learner autonomy. Attribution theory, in dealing with the learners perceptions of their own learning successes and failures, also suggests a link between increased independence in tasks and heightened degrees of confidence towards success, and hence high levels of motivation. Citing Dickson (1995: 172) attribution theory "provides evidence to show that learners who believe they have control over their learning – that by accepting new challenges they

can increase their ability to perform learning tasks and so increase their intelligence – tend to be more successful than others".

Benson suggest that while "The relationship between autonomy and motivation is a relatively new area of interest" there are many possibilities for subsequent research, particularly in terms of the extent to which increased independence in learning might be seen to enhance learner motivation and, similarly, the feedback of enhanced motivation in learners can create an increase in learner confidence and autonomy, leading them to actively seek greater degrees of independence in learner activities.

Schumann, (2001) provides a nicely turned anthropological metaphor for the learning process, which, is both appealing and useful. Learning as foraging allows for a consideration of the learning process in terms individually directed actions, focussed on and defined by the needs of the learner. In Schuman's construction, the process of gathering new ideas produces the same sort of dopamine cascades associated with food acquisition. This suggests a biological motivator can be determined to be at play in the learning environment, and that foraging for food and foraging for knowledge both trigger the brains reward system as payback for motor and cognitive activity. This is pertinent to the application of motivation to autonomy in terms of the 'forager-centric' nature of the process, where "teacher or institution-defined foraging activities may at times be incompatible with learner goals and abilities" (p26), and also to the definition of 'foraging patches' (p25) where the ILRC (independent learning resource centre) can be constructed as, optimally, a forager centric patch creating opportunities for reward and reinforcement.

Julkunen's (In Dornyei and Schmidt, 2001) research around task level motivation also highlights some issues around motivation and independence, comparing open and closed tasks, where he identifies closed tasks as high in risk, requiring a single right answer, while open tasks are lower in risk, offering several correct responses. While closed tasks offer anxious students a quick response in terms of accuracy and can be seen as useful ways of feeding back immediate classroom learning, open tasks allow students more latitude in drawing from outside the formal language environment, allowing for an insight into the student's "whole competence"

Syed (2002) emphasise the link between motivation and the "individual's psychosocial and sociocultural history, development and interaction(s)" (p131) , and in arguing for this contextual base for motivation, encompasses factors which, overarchingly contain the established paradigms of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The idea that the process of second language learning can become instrumental in the process of identity formation, within cultural contexts is significant to this study, as is its implied inverse corollary: what might happen to motivation and engagement in language learning if the process was conceived of as being inimical to the learners culture based identity formation

Schmidt, Boraie and Kassagby , (1996) present a very useful case study of motivation in language learners within a similar milieu to the UAE (specifically, Egypt), reinforcing the need to maintain a strongly culturally focussed assessment of student motivation and factors influencing it. They found that students who were identified as having a more traditional orientation to learning "indicated a preference for classes in which the teacher maintains control and guides learning (while) students with a less

traditional, more relaxed attitude toward language learning were less concerned with what teachers do to structure their learning" With this dichotomy of attitudes a key feature of language students in the region, and notably in the UAE, this suggests key concerns for initiating independent learning initiatives. Firstly, there is the need to clarify the role of teacher in the learning centre, and secondly there is a further need indicated to establish a diversity of activities which will engage students at various levels of comfort around independent learning.

3.5 The interaction between language learning and local culture

The issue of global versus local culture is an important thread in current research of English language teaching as the construction of English as a Foreign language gains greater leverage. As with the context in the UAE, teachers of English are confronted with a range of attitudes towards English as a target language, issues of culture versus language instruction and different sources (or indeed absence) of motivation to learn. In addition to this, in the absence of a local English language culture, is the question of what English is to be studied.

Kubota (2002) emphasises the extent to which, in Japan, through the discourse of *kokusaika,* 'foreign language' *is* English, North American and British English are the most desired forms of the language, that learning English leads to international/intercultural understanding and even that national identity can be fostered through English. "Although there has been an increased attention to teaching languages other than English, the emphasis on teaching English has been intensified. The emphasis on English is observed in the presentation of foreign languages in high schools, a push towards English in Elementary schools and in the number Assistant

Language Teachers. This later factor, the rise in the number of non-Japanese language teachers reflects in Japan the same leaning towards speakers of "Inner Circle varieties of Anglo-English" particularly British and American native speakers, as a source of language learning with about 48.8 per cent coming from the USA, with a further 21.1 per cent from the UK and 16.2 per cent from Canada, making up more than four fifths of the total. This preferencing lends itself to a degree of focus on language culture of North America and Britain. The Japanese trend is reflected more widely in the teaching of English within non English speaking countries including the Middle East. The authors here express concern for the extent to which this preference inhibits an appreciation of the broader more complex tapestry of global Englishes, undercutting one of the proclaimed values that English offers, that of promoting greater international/intercultural understanding. Furthermore, the seeming imposition of North American and British English and their attendant cultures is also seen as being a process which is not universally accepted with complacence. Indeed it is seen as something which seeks to actively under cut Japanese language and cultural identity. This placement of English as, oppositely, a unifying common language for the world, or an invasive and destructive threat to local cultural integrity, is one which faces any project supporting English as a foreign language option.

In considering the role of English, being taught as a foreign language, as a tool to broaden ideas literacy, Wallace (2002) emphasises a diverse approach to the definition of language, embracing all of the varieties of English as well as local language and culture. Wallace also promulgates the importance of critical literacy and the ability to engender in students a distance from what they take for granted so that they are able to be more aware of other ways of viewing this, asking: how could a text have been written differently, and in

what other ways could it be read? She identifies cultural disjunction in culturally laden texts within EFL environments where the messages transmitted by the texts not only have no relation to the lives of the students using them but "bear little or no relation to the lives of anyone anywhere."

Gray (2002) confronts the dilemma of the global coursebook in ELT, which is essentially the struggle to centrally create materials which can be utilised in any EFL context. The tension between inclusivity and inappropriacy of material, or the struggle to be inoffensive everywhere, inevitably produces material which is identified as too bland to engage the interest of students anywhere while still managing to offend the sensibilities of someone. While the publisher's acronym, PARSNIP (politics, alcohol, religion, sex narcotics, isms and pork) might go a way to insure the absence of offence in many countries of the Middle East it provides little guide to what might provide challenging thoughtful dialogue to the material. Similarly, balanced and inclusive portrayals of women outside approved traditional roles, while lauded by teachers as providing realism and a direct challenge to stereotyped ideas, has the ability to produce discomfort among some and often the reinforcement of a disparaging set of beliefs and attitudes towards western cultures to the point that the content is bland with a tendency to assert the value of target culture. In a. 'one size fits all' approach which seems to actively alienate local culture. Gray clearly indicates that with the production of any material, or indeed the implementation of any initiative in language learning, the emphasis needs to be on creating a better fit to the local environment while still providing a connection between the world of the students with the world of English.

Norton (2000) also explores many of these issues in considering the extent that "relations of power in the social world impact on social interaction between second language learners and target language speakers." Her discussion on the place of motivation within the process again reflects the importance of this area on any consideration of language acquisition initiatives and her construction of motivation as 'investment' and the drawing of Bourdieu's envisionment of 'cultural capital' into the process of language learning raises a range of significant questions around the construction of independent access for language acquisition. There is a clear relationship that must be drawn between that which the learner brings into the learner environment and the extent to which the learner is willing to commit, or invest, to the enterprise – a balance between what is internally considered possible for the student and the willingness of the student to push and challenge this, resulting in "organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity" (p11).

The Language Learning initiatives set up by the government of the UAE for its people in many ways reflected part of the trend discussed in Pincas (1995). For the UAE, the development of a young population comfortable in various foreign languages was seen as a most desirable development goal. The projects and initiatives discussed in this collection of papers all reflect a growing development of foreign language learning as a tool of national development and the distance inevitable between the perceptions of the host nations and of the target language providers. In the cases presented here, there is a greater sense of aid and support, which clearly tempers the relationship. The clearest difference with the UAE context lies with the extent to which language learning in the UAE is fully funded and

commissioned by the UAE government and the perceptual distance between target language providers and host nation is stressed by the demands of a paying client with a very distinct plan.

My own observations (Hurtubise, 1990) highlighted the issue of conflicting expectations, from government, teachers, parents and children, of a Bilingual Education initiative on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. The resultant programme, shedding the local Creole English for Standard, proved unsatisfying to all parties. A programme, intended to be an opportunity for mother-tongue education became an unplanned un-thought out venture in language learning in a foreign environment, with achievement results which reflected poorly against the indigenous language programmes being conducted at the same time in the same region.

Byram and Risager (1999) indicated the interplay between culture and politics in the European context of bilingual and multilingual education. From the perspective of the context in the United Arab Emirates this provides an interesting parallel frame of ideas around the learning of a foreign language in your own country and the role that language learning has in providing an education in appendant culture. Within this context, the use of authentic materials, access to first language speakers of the target language and an active process of critically considering the cultural context of the target language and how it can be compared to their own are all highlighted as being significant in the process.

Within the specific location of the Military Language Institute, when efforts were made to introduce ideas of culture with language, the result was extremely mixed, commonly hanging on the perception of conflicts between

Arabic/Islamic culture and American culture. Where it was deemed that there was a moral or ethical disjunction between the cultural embedment of language and the host culture material and content was required to be changed to be less offensive or removed altogether and replaced with something deemed more suitable. In effect, this left little space for the inclusion of a cultural content in the language learning which in turn created a certain degree of imbalance in the programmes as a whole. So applying the three perspectives of culture in language learning that Byram and Risager espouse:

"

- culture as contained in the pragmatics and semantics of language (Ca);
- culture as macro-context for language use (Cb);
- culture as thematic content in the discourse of language teaching (Cc)." (p146)

Progressively, within the Military Language Institute culture was limited to an inclusion of Ca, a restricted content of Cb and virtually nothing of Cc.

The papers in Cotterall and Crabbe (1999), deal with the broad range of issues and challenges faced in working towards the development of learner autonomy in language learning. Aoki and Smith, (1990) consider the impact of introducing a pedagogical approach emphasising autonomy into a Japanese system not culturally familiar with this. This highlights the reluctance to accept that this could really be learning, that the teacher could be trusted to do what they said they would, and even the degree of questioning as to whether the teacher even knew what it was that was being done. Aoki and Smith suggest that this was resolved by a growing trust and

engagement in the new approaches. As Crabbe(1990) comments on their paper, the authors "do not disagree with the claim that taking charge of one's own learning is peculiarly Western in origin but instead grapple with the issues head on," by establishing "...that the dynamic nature of culture makes it open to change and change from the outside is not always bad." (p7) Conversely, the opening paper of the collection by Little suggests that autonomy in the learner is not a Western Cultural artefact but a natural process in human learning, and that research in the area could benefit from concerning "itself with firstly autonomy as a general human behavioural capacity ... and secondly the relation between social knowledge systems and the discourse by which learning is mediated. This is certainly a heartening idea to hold when faced with the daunting task of introducing such systems to enhance learner autonomy in a structural context which does not seem to be favourable to its success.

Mark Warschauer, (2003) creates a global sense of the impact of technological access on the development of learning economies. This is a divide which the UAE awkwardly straddles, torn between the traditional, qur'anic literacy, where memorising text is at once the key to and goal of learning, and the new, electronic literacy, where text is a flow of information to be interpreted. While the UAE's wealth pushes itself to provide the tools seen as required for modern learning, there is often a cultural reluctance to make use of them. While it is, in many ways a developing country, the UAE possesses vast reserves of governmental capital and the will to use this results in a greater deal of success in engendering electronic literacy than in the Egyptian context. Schools are outfitted comprehensively with computers and multi media facilities at a level at least as intensive in developed countries, but their use varies widely from site to site and many students coming to tertiary institutes have little or no confidence in using computers,

despite having had the opportunities to access them in schools. While it is true that "resources that are spread too thin will have little impact" even resources spread liberally can not ensure success if, as Warschauer points out, there is " too much emphasis on the physical resources without attention to the digital, human, or social resources that make effective use of technology possible" It is through creative and expansive approaches to applications of available technology, rather than the sheer volume of technological resources, that effective programmes can be built, and Warschauer identifies such private Egyptian initiatives as the 21st Century Computer Clubs, providing access to computers and the acquisition of computer skills to thousands of children who would not otherwise have such an opportunity; and the ThinkQuest competition for children's development of academic websites.

Hall and Kelly (1995), highlight the difficulty of establishing a language learning centre and the degree of close co-operation and consistency in the development of underlying policy essential for success. The stage at which our own centre, the MLI (Military Language Institute), was at during the operation was clearly very early, and the ILRC (independent learning resource centre) initiative was a part of the involvement of all staff in "the policy making process from the beginning through to the final decision" (p28). The success of any initiative clearly hangs on maintaining this engagement of staff in policy formation, in order to secure the "sense of communal ownership or team responsibility". The absence of this engagement or its effective bypassing by administrative decisions has a potential to undermine the effectiveness of any initiative. Hall and Kelly further highlight the danger "that learners may reject the autonomous classroom before they have a chance to experience its effects, making use of

the autonomy which the methodology allows them." (p 40) So that even in successfully creating the structure for an autonomous option for language learning, we cannot enforce the students' participation in it.

3.6 Technology as a learning tool and other practical considerations

When developing systems for independent learning in the contemporary world, the role of multimedia and computer technology is an essential factor to be dealt with. Much of traditional independent learning was centred around library access with the addition of focus activities and access to multi media through the means of tape, video or film and television/radio broadcast. With the explosion of computer technology and the internet as tools for learning, how independent learning can be delivered has changed dramatically. Therefore a close consideration of the issues and applications of technology in the learning process is necessary to provide substance to decisions affecting the provision of independent learning opportunities.

Leask (2001), gathers together some very pertinent thought around the applications of technology building up a picture of developments in the use of technology in schools. Michelle Selinger (2001a, 2001b) explores here the issue of to what extent the growth of in-classroom technology has affected the role of teacher and the nature of interactions between Teacher, student and learning environment. For Selinger, the teacher remains a central construct in the formal learning process, never redundant, always responding to shifts in the educative environment. First, she offers insights on the extent to which ILRCs (independent learning resource centres)can be used to draw the students towards an increasingly independent pattern of action, constructing technology as an enabler of increased independent action in

learning. Selinger posits the availability of computer technology as Tutor, offering guidance through new learning, as Pupil, affording the learner with the opportunity to instruct and assess the effectiveness of that instruction through interactions with learning software, and as Resource, providing access to vast stores of information and the use of tools to shape this information into a variety of relevant presentations. Selinger builds on this last construction further by suggesting approaches towards implementing technology based learning activities which strive to create a degree of authenticity and validity to students. It is the expanded dimensions of the learning environment, potentially created by the use of technology which enables the classroom to move towards a greater degree of authenticity and validity in its activities, by the simple expedient of opening the door and inviting what lies on the other side, in. Darren Leafe, (2001) sets out key ideals to be aimed at around which an institutes should move towards, not just in terms of the implementation of the ILRCs but also any institutes existing Classroom/ CALL/ LAN systems and the overall integrative effectiveness they can afford. For Leafe, the introduction of these technologies goes beyond expanding the available learning resources, they concretely impact on the achievable standards of a learning institute, through the creation of a sharing culture reflected in the wired learning community.

Johansen(2000) creates a focus of attention around considering technology, less as a tool for language acquisition and more as a means for creating new paradigms of working and thinking. By creating access to and encouraging engagement with technological media, there is an opportunity to build new ways of approaching not just a task of learning, but information and the world. This is a very important aspect of any ILRC (independent learning resource centre) project in as much as in establishing ILRCs we seek to

encourage some significant changes in student attitudes and behaviour through access to and use of technology.

Warschauer and Kern (eds, 2000), present research and theory which highlights the difference between CALL and NBLT (Network Based Language Teaching): "Whereas CALL has traditionally been associated with self contained, programmed applications such as tutorials, drills simulations instructional games, tests and so on, NBLT represents a new and different side of CALL where human to human communication is the focus." In the context of initiating a new independent language learning initiative in an institute locally known for it's extensive use of multimedia classrooms and CALL lab facilities carrying out the function of traditional CALL systems, this becomes an important way of clarifying how what we seek to do within an ILRC is distinct from what is already being done in CALL and within the classroom. The expansion of the CALL concept to NBLT, allows for increased degrees of communicative practice, and increasing the level of authentic or near authentic language use, through the use of networked applications, creating a valid basis for an ILRC project use of computers and networks not being explored within an existing programme.

Davis and Thiede (2000), Schultz(2000) and Chun and Plass (2000) all discuss asynchronous electronic discourse, collaborative writing and networked multimedia environments. Davis and Thiede (2000) note the degree to which electronic conferences drew syntactic complexity, in direct response to the demands of the medium. Schultz (2000) observed that collaborative writing with computers amongst French 3 students produced a high degree of content modification, which had "a reverberative effect on organization and style" while the impact of computers on more advanced

students showed little differences between face to face or computer based collaborations, but displayed "dramatically more interpretative-level content changes" when alternating between the two. Chun and Plass's (2000) consideration of multimedia environments based in networks and the Web focuses on these resources as sources of authentic material and the extent to which there is a need to consider cognitive boundaries around the students' uptake of these materials. In the first instance there is the need to allow for differences between spoken and online exchanges of/access to information in order to better understand what is potentially a distinct communicative process. Secondly, with these considerations in mind, there is the issue of designing environments on line where this process can take place with best efficiency.

Similarly, Warschauer and Shetzer's (2000) discussion around electronic literacy draws attention to the need to expand student skills in language use in the area of computer and internet applications as an aspect of enhancing skills in independent access: in the same way that traditional literacy skills enable a student to pursue ideas and develop proficiencies with increasing independence, the skills of electronic literacy are equally important in the contemporary context for independent student learning.

Gardner and Miller (1999) draw together some interesting theoretical positions on self access and practical considerations of setting up self access centres. Their consideration of the importance of learner teacher beliefs raise some useful issues in respect to how to approach the idea of assessing how students (and indeed teachers) feel about moving towards learner independence. In very practical terms they offer a strong platform of recommendations and guidelines for the actual set up and administration of

independent learning environments highlighting the processes of negotiation and accommodation which are pivotal to any such enterprise.

The establishment of learner profiles, which allow the student to track their use of independent activities, is an integral aspect of encouraging ownership of the process, providing students with a tool which can be used to plot their progress and make decisions about what goals they wish to move on towards, Profiles also enable the teachers to gain an overview of students' needs wants and learning objectives as well as gaining a better degree of insight into how facilities are being used. Gardner and Miller also stress the need to draw widely in choosing materials, to create a variety which can appeal to different student needs and interests, advocating an "eclectic approach to collecting anything available which may be of use to self-access learners" , with a balance of in-house produced materials, student generated material, authentic materials and selected commercial materials: "Materials from each of these sources have advantages and disadvantages in terms of time, money, availability and suitability (cultural and pedagogical)" (121)

In terms of activities within the self access centre, they indicate the need for a diverse range of these: general and specifically focussed activities; individual work, pairs, and groups of varying sizes; informal as well as formal approaches. So that task based individual, pair or group work might just as well be conducted as informal discussions within an English Club type format. Above all, there needs to be the ability to generate language products which have real value to the students.

Gardner and Miller also emphasise how the physical layout and plant of a centre defines many of the activities which the centre will be used for, and

needs to be considered in terms of the Institute's intentions for self access. While self access learning can take place in any number of environments, including classrooms and libraries, they point out that centres dedicated to the task of self access are the most difficult to plan and equip requiring the time and effort of a large number of people for the successful development of the centre.

Further to this, Gardner and Miller offer that there needs to be a significant shift in teacher attitudes around such centres, a relinquishment of control of the process of learning, moving the main focus from themselves to the students, by allowing students to discover what it is like to become responsible for their own learning.

The themes and concepts outlined in this chapter emphasise many of the key aspects of this study, the precarious balancing of cultural perspectives and pedagogical concerns. These are explored in greater depth in the following chapter, which shall examine the complex cultural context of the Military Language Institute (MLI) in the UAE and the issues arising from this.

Chapter 4 The issues and contexts for independent learning

This chapter is concerned with the contexts which encompassed the projected Independent Learning Resource Centre at the MLI (Military Language Institute) and the issues which these contexts raised. The issues in context which need to be dealt with are determined by two needs – the first is to show respect for the contexts within which the centre is to operate. The second is to recognise the specific features and issues which construct the critical factors within the socio-cultural settings. As Holliday notes, the first objective in establishing the introduction of a new project is "to learn and appreciate the real world of relevant parties within the host educational environment" (1994, p113).

4.1 Context Overview

The MLI is a military institute, located in the United Arab Emirates, a relatively recently (1971) independent federation of small states in the Arabian Gulf Region, "states ... governed by local tribal chiefs who ruled a population divided between seafaring coastal residents and inland nomadic peoples" (Lapidus, 2002, p580). The government is now headed by a President, selected from amongst the hereditary rulers of the seven emirates. The incumbent at the time of this study was Sheik Zayed, hereditary ruler of Abu Dhabi, and the President since independence. The UAE is an Islamic state, though not overly restrictive. The citizens of the UAE are Gulf Arabs, and make up a minority of the resident population which in the majority is composed of expatriate workers and their families making up eighty percent of the total population (Lapidus, 2002, p583). The origins of these expatriate, or guest, workers varies from surrounding Arabic countries, such as Egypt, Syria and Jordan, to other Islamic countries, such as Pakistan, Afghanistan,

to other countries around the world, such as India, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, the US, the UK, and France.

4.2 Macro-context

The cultural and social context of the UAE national is defined by the cultural background of the Bedouin and Sea Peoples of the Arabian Gulf, by the pervasive influence of Islam and the great affluence brought about by the discovery of oil. It is upon these foundation that the Social and State structures of the modern nation of the UAE are built.

4.2.1 Traditional Culture

Prior to the discovery of oil, the people of the emirates lived by fishing, pearl diving and trade. The Bedouin raised camels and crisscrossed the Arabian Desert. The traditional cultures of the Arabian Gulf reflect the harshness of the physical environment producing a dual emphasis on guest hospitality and family loyalty. Within the traditional society, authority and precedence is derived from a combination family and lineage or *nasab*, and "hasab...esteem a person acquires through individual merit and deeds" (Eickelman in Adams, 1988, p78)'. In the UAE this authority is referred to as *wasta*.

In terms of teaching, the whole issue of *wasta* played an important role in defining relationships between teachers and students, students and the administration and teachers and administration. Clearly, as guest workers, the teaching staff held no *wasta*, and thus lacked the ability to project a sense of authority or control in the teaching environment. While not a topic that might be raised within class, teachers and students knew that the teachers had little control over the process. Conversely, many of the students held

significant *wasta* and were able to influence aspects ranging from gaining privileges for the class (early departures, favourable changes of rooms) to avoiding disciplinary action. Given the balance of perceived power in the teacher student relationship it was more likely that students would be able to have a teacher they disapproved of removed from the class than a teacher would be able to have the administration deal with difficult students. The key to successful teaching here was to establish comfortable relationships with the students. While this may seem an obvious sort of observation for any teaching, in this context it is of overarching importance. Lacking a situation in which the teacher is granted a degree of respect through their role, or where the importance of the process of learning might be seen to override personal concerns the only effective way to achieve any educational goals is to make sure that your students like you. It is essential that they actively enjoy what you present in class, find you personable, approachable and respectful and aware of their culture and religion. But above all, they must like you and know that you like them.

4.2.2 The influence of Islam

The social-cultural influence of Islam in the countries of the Arabian Gulf is perhaps the singularly most binding factor in the formation of context. State structures and the education and legal systems in the region are built upon the religious laws of Islam. Customs, mores and social behaviour are defined by right behaviour as prescribed by Islam. The specific rituals of the religion, for example, the five calls to prayer during the day and the religious observance of Ramadan (the holy month of fasting), the Eids (feast days) and Islamic holidays through the year, provide the rhythm and structure of life in the Gulf States.

This influence reaches directly into the teaching environment in a host of ways. Just as you are likely to have at least one or two students with a very high degree of *wasta*, each class is likely to have a student who carries religious authority. These individuals, *mutawa*, are perceived as being both spiritually elevated as well as highly knowledgeable of the Quran and other religious writings of Islam, through a personal path of study and devotion. The presence of a *mutawa* in the classroom creates at all times for the teachers and students alike the awareness of materials, or content or discussions which could be perceived as contrary to Islam. Though in many cases, *mutawa* in classes take a relaxed and indulgent attitude towards the realities of young men in the wide world, others can be very demanding in their expectations of rectitude and even the most lenient and kindly of *mutawa*s can express opposition to something which they feel oversteps Islamic propriety. Another significant impact of the religious culture on teaching and one of the most challenging times for a non Muslim teacher within the religious context here is the period of Ramadan. This is the holy month of fasting and requires that all Muslims refrain from eating or drinking between sunrise and sunset. While there is some stress from not being able to eat during the day, the biggest impact on students is sheer tiredness. During Ramadan, most people fasting stay up very late during those hours when they can eat, sleep for a few hours, then wake before sunrise to eat a breakfast. During this month, night time sleep probably averages two or three hours resulting in very unresponsive students.

4.2.3 Linguistic Factors

Linguistically, the official language of the UAE is Arabic. Arabic is not only the national language of the various Arab Countries, ranging from North Africa to West Asia, it is the sacred language of Islam, used as globally as

Latin within the Roman Catholic church till the latter half of the twentieth Century. It is the language of the Quran, the language of the prophets and indeed the language of the first prophet, "Even if the majority of present-day Muslims cannot speak Arabic ... it remains today the major religious language for the world's 800 million Muslims" (Eikelman cited in Adams 1988, p768). While it may be observed that there are regional variations in Arabic language, the held belief is that the language is immutable and original. It is advisable to never forget the religious importance of the Arabic language when approaching the job of teaching another language within this context or to challenge too rigorously the deeply held beliefs about the nature of the language. While there may be an acceptance or acknowledgement of the growing importance of English or indeed any other language in the world, this can never overshadow the absolute supremacy of Arabic as the first and most sacred language.

Other significant linguistic influences are Urdu, Farsi, Hindi and of course English. The role of English has become increasingly as a lingua franca for use between the speakers of other languages and Arabic Speakers, and amongst speakers of other languages. The variety of English found in the street is most heavily derived from forms of English used widely in Pakistan and India. As a result of this, much of the work of the English teacher involves a debate around the sense of what language the students need to know and what value there is in the standard varieties of English which they are teaching. Convincing students of the need to learn accurate production of standard forms, when these forms are not the best way to be understood in the English speaking context that is most real to them, is a difficult process.

4.2.4 Issues raised by religious and ethnic contexts

In terms of the ethnic and religious context of the region, there are some clearly delineated impacts upon the execution of an ILRC project. In the first instance, the reality of operating with a linguistically and culturally unified population, introduces the issues of language use outside the Institutes' program. This raises a first suggestion of where the value of an ILRC (independent learning resource centre) might lie. Whereas in an institution lodged in an English Language dominant context there might be many opportunities for language exposure and practice, in the UAE the limited availability of these opportunities provides a rational for accessing language experiences within a provided facility. The language issue also raises a less salutary point. There can be a greater degree of resistance evident in students within this context with respect to the motivation to acquire and practise English language skills. As I noted above, when the English (if any) that you are most likely to require in your daily life is so markedly different from that which is being presented within the language program it is difficult enough to convince the student of the value of the program itself let alone the value of pursuing study of the language independently.

The issue of religious sensibility has a very significant impact on how you go about the task of developing any aspect of a language learning operation. Most significantly are the constraints that can be placed on the selection of materials for use with students or which students might be encouraged or expected to access independently. Materials considered profane or contrary to the principles of Islam can be rejected for use, or required to be heavily modified in order to come into line with acceptable standards. Complaints about materials previously approved, even from a single student, might easily result in the immediate withdrawal from use of the offending item.

Consequently stocking an ILRC with material that is age appropriate can be an extremely trying task for an institute serving adult students and can result in difficulties even for institutions serving the needs of younger learners.

4.2.5 The Military

With regard to all of this, it should be noted that the Military is the primary employer of Emiratis. Like Militaries all over the world, the UAE's is administered through a strict rank structure. This international military culture, however, is modified by the application of the traditional Arabic principals of power and authority, drawn from the hierarchy of families and lineage. This application of *Wasta*, can cause perturbations in the usual understanding of the military chain of command. Similarly the significance of Islam is felt in all aspects of the military. The day remains punctuated by the religious demands of prayer, the same standards and mores of Islam are expected to be adhered to.

However overall, decisions made within the military must proceed through the chain of command and any decisions made at the institutional or unit level can easily be modified or overturned by decisions outside of the unit and further up the chain of command. This in effect means that while the appointed commander of the MLI (Military Language Institute) may approve or even initiate an innovation, new program or the acquisition of materials, final approval for any decision in the MLI rests with the appropriate officers in GHQ. Clearly this has implications for anyone seeking to develop an ILRC within this context. Not only must the program meet the approval of the immediate command structure but also be able to secure the approval of decision makers more distant from the process and with whom you have no direct access.

4.3 Exo-context

Here, I want to consider the exo-context, or in this case the institutional layer of the social structure. At the level above, the structure of society is defined in terms of ideology, custom and belief. This feeds down to the institutional layer by imposing key boundary elements on how any institution can function. The description below of the MLI reflects the extent in which it has been shaped by the broader aspects of its embedding society.

4.3.1 Administrative structure

The MLI was initially set up to showcase the integration of computer technology in language learning: the Institute is comprehensively provided with Computer Assisted Language Learning labs; all teachers have individual computers which are used to develop class materials; the Institute operates a Local Area Network, where the students save language projects, worked on in CALL sessions; all classrooms are equipped with a computer with multimedia projection facilities and teachers are able to access course materials and teacher developed materials from the LAN. Because of its high profile character, the MLI is subject to regular high level visits, from embassies and from within the UAE military and other government agencies which can cause some disruption to the programme.

The administrative staff at MLI is divided into two main groups. The first is the Officer Cadre of the military unit which comprises the MLI. These are Emirati military personnel. Other than the commander and a few of the senior officers, the other officers do not have a background in education. At the beginning of the process, the second group consisted of the academic

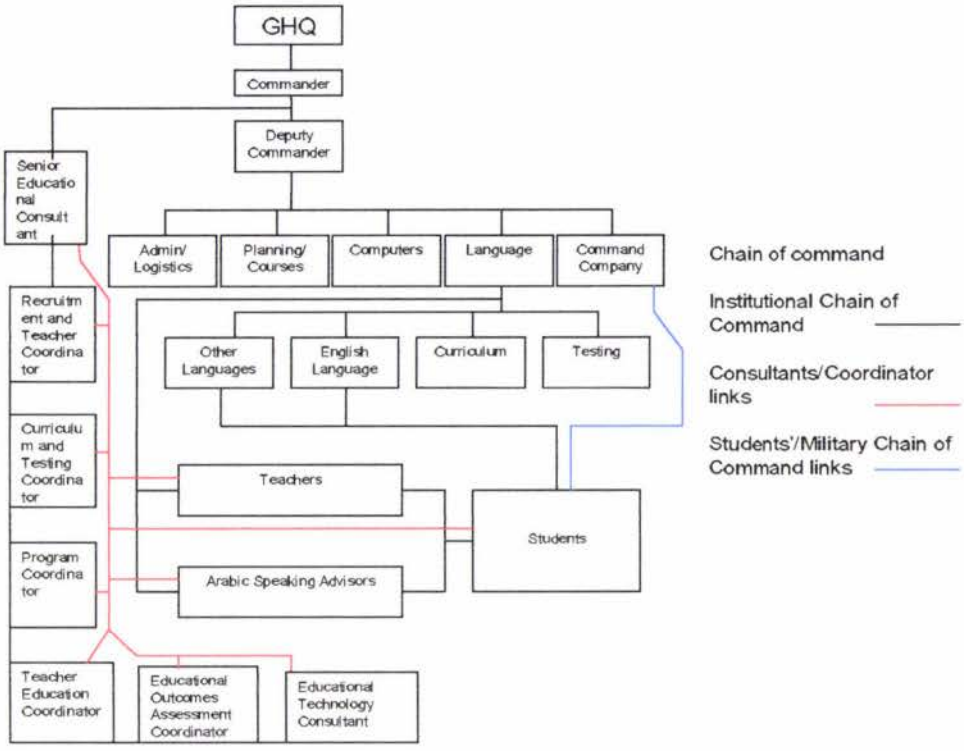

Fig i operational structure of MLI

consultants, who were employees of a US based company contracted to oversee the MLI programme. Later, this group was added to by teaching staff employed by MLI being promoted to administrative roles with more teachers progressively selected to make up the administrative complement, shadowing the consultants, in co-ordinator roles.

As can be seen in figure i, above, the resulting administrative structure can offer a labyrinthine structure, difficult to negotiate, and potentially working at cross purposes. It is through this structure that all matters of the Institute, minor or major, were required to be worked.

4.3.2 The Program

Pedagogically, the MLI was based on a communicative approach, with emphasis on as much 'real' activity in language as possible. The intention was for students to become confident and proficient in their language use. Initially, the Spectrum series of ESL texts was utilised for the main programme but this was subsequently replaced by an in house produced set of modular units.

The MLI originally offered three programmes of English acquisition, targeted at specific needs as requested by the UAE Military. There are two intermediate level courses and one beginning level course. Students are initially placed into courses through a combination of their destinations on completion of the MLI programme and their results on an entrance test, the SLEP test.(Second Language English Proficiency)

The Core course is a project assessed, modular course targeted at students with low beginner to low intermediate English language proficiency. Students enrolled in the Core Course are learning English for use within the operation of their military units in the UAE or who will study in non-English-speaking countries. Students who are initially designated for study in MLI's other two courses may be enrolled in Core in order to gain further practice in English.

CORE COURSE

Students Return to Their Units After Graduating from MLI

Students Learn At a Level Appropriate to Their Previous Experience and Exposure to English

The SLEP test is periodically administered to Students during the Core course and students initially designated for another course who gain a SLEP score of 37 or higher are moved on to the next course. Core course students proper who score higher than 37 on a SLEP test are moved into either ELC or a Core extension programme.

The SLEP test is periodically administered to Students during the Core course and students initially designated for another course who gain a SLEP score of 37 or higher are moved on to the next course. Core course students proper who score higher than 37 on a SLEP test are moved into either ELC or a Core extension programme.

Those students who are expected to travel overseas to study at English speaking universities, and score higher than 37 on the initial SLEP test, are enrolled in the Academic Preparation Course, a college preparatory course in academic English, for intermediate level students. The Academic Preparation Course is a skills-based programme with each class period devoted to a language skill (Listening, Reading, Writing, Grammar, and CALL). Student achievement in the programme is determined by the administration of the TOEFL test, with a minimum score of 450 being required for successful completion.

ACADEMIC COURSE

After Graduating From MLI, Students Go Abroad to Continue Their Studies in Universities

Authentic Materials Derived From Various Sources

Students tracked for *university study* continue in the Academic Course until the end, or upon obtaining a minimum score of 450 on the TOEFL.

The third course offered by the MLI is the ELC (English Language for Communication) Course, an intermediate level course primarily designed for students expected to go to Technical Training courses in English speaking institutions.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE for COMMUNICATION COURSE (ELC)

After Graduating From MLI, Students Go Abroad to Continue Their Studies in Technical Schools

Authentic Materials Derived From Various Sources

Students tracked for higher level *technical studies* continue in the ELC Course until the end, or upon obtaining a minimum score of 75 – 85 on the ECL

This course has two primary objectives, firstly to develop speaking and listening skills that students will need in interactions with English speakers, and to provide students with the higher level listening, vocabulary, and grammar needed to be successful on the ALCPT (American Language Course Placement Test) and the ECL (English Comprehension Level) exams or the OPI (Oral Proficiency Interview) exams. Like the Academic course, the ELC course is skills-based with class periods devoted to language skills development (Listening, Speaking, Vocabulary, Grammar, and CALL) with Reading and Writing integrated into the practice of these.

The Academic and ELC course students are also periodically tested using SLEP through the year as an external assessment of progress. At the end of the course the SLEP test is taken by all students to determine the degree of their course completion.

Students attend the MLI for periods of between six to ten months, five days a week for six hours a day. All of these hours are scheduled for class attendance. Teachers are organised into teaching teams of three members with each team responsible for delivering course content to two classes of twelve students. Most classes are held during the day but some classes are held during the evenings. The teaching day is punctuated by a short breakfast break and a break for midday prayers. As a military institute, personnel, both staff and students were not encouraged to stay beyond the close of classes. This created a sense that the MLI programme was a routine military duty (which for the students it was) and in many cases made it difficult to encourage students to do work beyond their 'on duty' period. Though homework was encouraged by the administration as they perceived this as being appropriate for an educational institution, students were reluctant to do this. Towards the end of my tenure at the Institute, an English club was

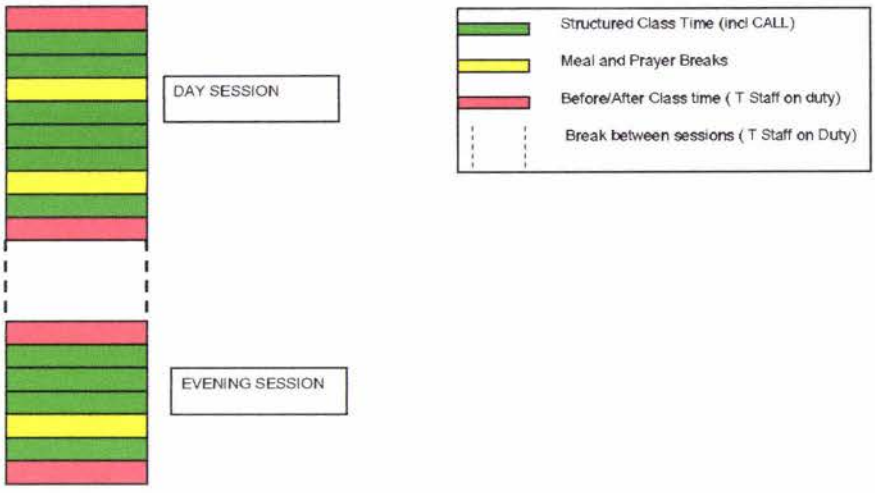

Fig ii Daily Schedule

established outside of regular hours, but again this was not widely attended, by either students, or staff, beyond those organising the events.

The intensive, long term nature of the programme left many students experiencing an increasing degree of fatigue and a decline in engagement in the language learning process. So, with the diversity of courses offered within the MLI, the demanding nature of the programme in terms of student engagement and a reinforced sense that the language learning process occurs within the context of teacher student interactions during the prescribed course of the teaching day, an effective ILRC (independent learning resource centre) developed within this context would clearly need to be flexible in its application to course demands, while providing an environment that can encourage, challenge and indeed energise students in their learning.

As a military unit there was a great deal of emphasis placed on measurables which could be reviewed by GHQ officers, outside of the Institute, up the chain of command. As these were generally people unfamiliar with academic schooling environment the most favoured measurable were examination results. One of effects of this was student initiated pressure on teachers to structure class work towards the exam.

4.4 Meso/Micro-context

The Meso and Micro contexts are the sites of interaction at a more personal level. Specifically the description of teachers and students and the factors which affect the way in which they relate to those around them and the interactions amongst these individuals.

4.4.1The Students

The Students at MLI are aged from late teens to early forties. They are divided into two groups, officers and enlisted men. These two bodies of students are not able to mix within the school programme. The officer classes may contain officer cadets through to majors. Civilian students without rank, sent by Ministries, are included in officer classes. Enlisted classes are made up of students ranged in rank from privates to warrant officers. The educational backgrounds of both groups also have a wide range – from students with an incomplete primary schooling to students with undergraduate degrees. There are only a small number of women students at MLI, and these women attend the night programme only. All of the students attending MLI are Emirati Nationals.

4.4.2 The Teachers

The Teaching staff of the MLI are all (at a minimum) Master's degree holders, either in Second Language Teaching, Linguistics or English. Teaching staff

must have had a minimum of three years teaching experience before beginning at the MLI. The teachers all considered themselves professionals and take pride in this. Most have previously worked in private language institutes, or universities, in Asia and the Middle East. Others had experience as teachers within state school systems in their home countries or abroad. Their status within the military is that of civilian employee without rank. Initially, the majority of the teachers were North American with a very small number of teachers with British, Australian and New Zealand backgrounds. The initial reason for the selection of North American teachers was based on two factors. In the first instance, it was perceived at the time the MLI was established (1997) that the USA would be the primary destination of students tagged for overseas study. Therefore, American English was selected as the standard form that would be taught at the Institute, and further that teachers with North American accents would provide students with invaluable exposure before travel. Also, an earlier iteration of the Institute, staffed with British teachers, found itself dismissing its entire staff and closing down apparently due to improper use of the internet. This latter factor highlights the extent to which the tenure of teachers in this context is dependent on the good will of administration.

The number of non-North American teachers has increased in recent years, particularly since the events following September the 11, 2001. The most significant impact of the development of US policy during recent years has been the difficulty of getting foreign students into the USA. This meant that, increasingly, students found themselves being sent to courses and universities in the UK, Australia and Europe.

4.4.3 Teacher-Student

Interactions between the teachers and students in this context are quite singular. The teachers' status as guest workers place them in a situation of being 'paid servants', their status as civilian employees of the military give them little authority when dealing with students (or indeed when dealing with the military administration). As a result of this, relations between students and teachers can often be heavily skewed. Teacher survival within the Institute is determined by the ability of teachers to establish a personal method of dealing

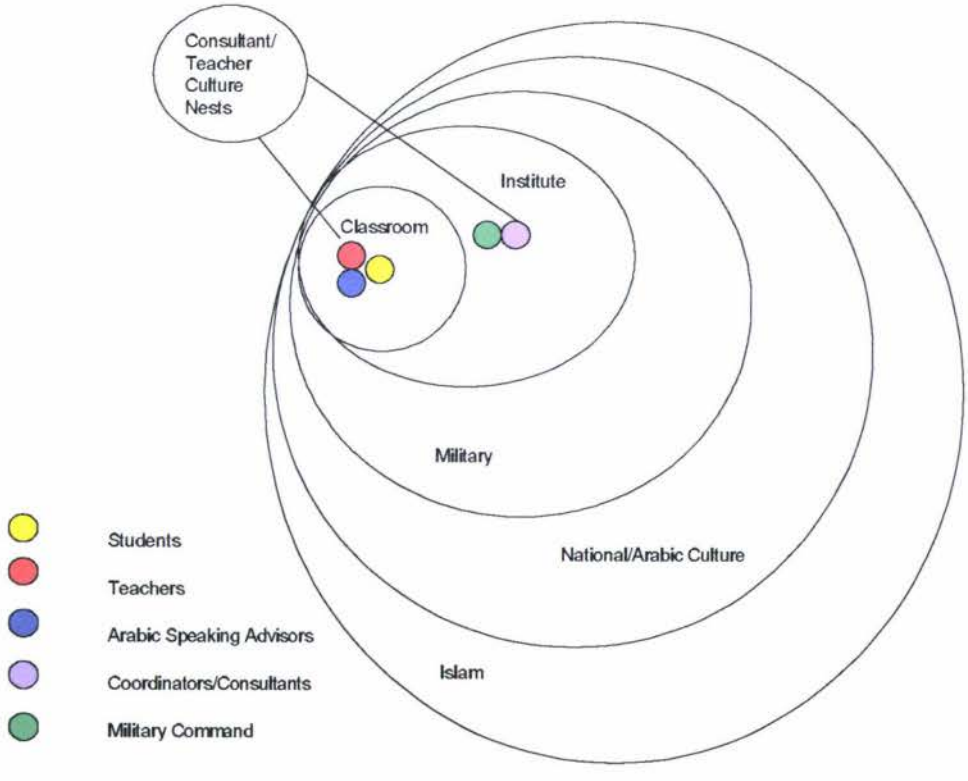

Fig iii Nested Culture levels

with this relationship. I was interested to note that teachers whose experience was based in working in state secondary schools were more readily adaptable to this context. Many of those whose previous experience was within private institutions, with direct fee paying students, had considerable difficulty reconciling themselves to the apparent lack of respect from their students. The sub-professional standing provided one of the most significant stress factors amongst teachers in the Institute and indeed this was the source of a great deal of the negative attitude that was present within the Institute.

4.5 The Issues

The strands of interconnected socio-cultural layers as described briefly above show the extent to which the MLI, as with other language learning institutes in the UAE and beyond is not entirely a product of regional factors: "...the classroom culture is not completely within the ...institution culture. Neither is the ... institution completely within the national culture and so on (Holliday, 1994, p30) This perspective is central to gaining a clear understanding of the development of relationships between teachers and students and what the resulting issues are.

4.5.1 Students

The student expectations at the Institute were somewhat varied. A significant majority of students at MLI, in all programmes, had expressed little initial desire to learn English. They had been selected by their units rather than having volunteered. As a result of this, expectations of MLI or indeed their own language growth were not high. For some, individuals who were motivated by a personal desire to study and learn English, the expectations were much higher, as was their enthusiasm for the task at hand. For the majority of the students, the study of English was associated with their

school experiences. In many cases these were described as being uninspired, uninteresting and most obviously, given proficiency levels on entry to the Institute, forgettable. Their prior experience of teachers suggested that education was akin to a market, where achievement could be haggled over or secured through influence or *wasta*. In some cases, the structures in operation at the Institute did little to diminish this impression.

4.5.2 Challenges in the Institutional context

The institutional expectations of the administration were caught between two often opposing ideals. On the one hand, there was the desire to present to the military command structure and indeed the wider government service, a premiere educational facility, offering the best language education, delivered by highly qualified practitioners and making use of the most current technology. On the other hand, they were faced with the requirement of taking what ever students GHQ chose to send and to ensure that all students who were entered MLI left prepared for their next assignment. There was no room between these two positions to allow the highly qualified practitioners to make judgements which might suggest that given students were not sufficiently skilled in English to pass out of the Institute. The resulting modifications to programme structure, teaching materials and evaluation procedures resulted in a serious dilution of the Institute's credibility, with passed students who showed little or no significant gains in English. In the process of maintaining their obligation to GHQ, the Institute found its standing in the educational community slipping.

4.5.3 Cultural/religious considerations

In viewing the establishment of an ILRC from the cultural and religious point of view, the central issues were, to ensure the material was not

incompatible with the beliefs and principles of Arabic Culture and Islam, and that the operation of the centre allowed for the practical considerations of culture and religion. With respect to the later, much thought went into issues of access times that would not be seen to be supportive of the requirements of prayer times and other religious observances. Aspects such as the social patterns of the students, led to a belief that opportunities for accessing the centre in the evenings would be likely to increase the likelihood that students would actively choose to make use of the centre outside of their usual class times. As for the former, the issue of careful selection of materials was taken very seriously. An earlier institutional choice of text book had resulted, in the first instance, a thorough editing of the book with marker pen to remove offending images, ongoing student complaints and an eventual shelving of the book in favour of an in house produced course book. With this in mind, discussions about the appropriateness of materials for the centre were a priority, with every effort made to ensure that the selections would be engaging to the students, appropriate, and not offensive.

4.5.4 Challenges in the Military context

The issues raised here relate directly to conflicts in purpose between the expectations and requirements of a military system and the operation of a language learning institute. The key guiding principles of a military base are security, discipline, and completion of duty. The key guiding principles of an adult learning environment could be presented as, access to information, self determination, and pursuit of attainment. These two sets of thought can generate a great deal of tension. Of these, the issue of security can prove most constraining, in that it effectively limits both movement, and the ability to access LAN based materials from outside of the Institute. The use of video or still photography in class work required written official clearances. The

dissemination of the name/rank/military number, deliberate or accidental, of a member of the UAE armed forces is an offence.
The student body was subject at all times to military discipline, unconnected from any process or issue relating in the first instance to their academic engagement. This was variously manifested in organised mass head shavings for students whose hair was longer than acceptable, snap uniform inspections, which could be held at any time during the teaching day and the rigorous segregation of enlisted from officer students. This later could be very difficult in arranging field trips if a teaching team had an enlisted and an officer class. Similarly, the exacting requirements around when and where military uniforms must/must not be worn also created difficulty when trying to organise educational outings.

Finally, the students of the MLI were present as an obligation of duty, rather than through a personal choice to learn English. While they complied with this obligation, there was most often little or no enthusiasm for being at the Institute. Failure to comply was met with military discipline. This created an issue often indicated by teachers in the Institute: the question of student motivation and whether this could be effectively engaged in such a context.

The environment presented by the MLI, its students, teachers and administrators is a complex one, involving not only factors of ethnic and linguistic difference, but of challenges offered by religion and the military context. The next chapter will look at how this environment provided the site for negotiations and actions around the establishment of the Independent Learning Resource Centre.

Chapter 5 Establishing the Independent Learning Resource Centre

When the MLI Independent Learning Centre project was identified as a new direction in which to further expand the use of technology at the MLI and to enhance the delivery of curriculum to students, an investigation into its viability was initiated. This initial investigation indicated that while ILRC's (independent learning resource centres'), were wide spread throughout the UAE in tertiary level institutes no one system was operating in a way which would provide a useful addition to the MLI's technology based programme. After compiling the information gathered from an initial investigation and consulting with MLI teachers recommendations were made to the MLI commander regarding the hopes for the ILRC at MLI. The emphasis suggested in this statement of intent was towards the expansion of the technology to a great extent already available at the MLI into the area of guided and independent access

Because of the highly 'wired' nature of the MLI, there was a push towards this online approach to independent learning. This was driven by three main factors. Firstly, the equation of technology with modern and therefore best, this was reflected in the set up of the MLI as an integrated multi media environment with computerised classroom work stations and Computer Aided Language Learning Labs. Secondly, the reality that institutions, throughout the UAE, were beginning to put a lot of energy and capital into developing independent learning options for their students. And thirdly, the American consultancy group which was assisting the administration at this time was keen to develop this as an aspect of the MLI.

The first discussions around the development of the ILRC, began at the start of the 2000/01 academic year, after the completion of a new building containing Call Labs, new administrative offices and a large space labelled, at the door, 'library' This was the first indication of interest on the part of the administration towards expanding the facilities offered at MLI and triggered the discussions between interested teachers and the Consultants. In the following year, approval was given for a survey of independent learning provision in local institutes and towards the end of the 01/02 academic year, discussions were held through out the institute, and initial orders were made for learning centre materials such as books, software and audio visual material as well as discussions of plant and hardware needs for the centre.

During the 02/03 year, there was an effective hiatus in Independent Learning Resource Centre development, though following on from earlier discussions, plant and Hardware orders were made. At the beginning of the 2003/4 year, material was revealed to be ready to be put in place and plant and hardware were installed, the centre began operating in a partial fashion from about February 2004 and by the beginning of04/05 was declared operational. By the end of that academic year, the Military Language Institute was being wound down staffer were transferred to the employment of Higher Colleges of Technology. Early in the 05/06 academic year, plant, hardware, software and other materials were reclained by the military and the ILRC was finally decommissioned.

The following chapter outlines the process form planning to implementation of the MLI's Independent Learning Resource Centre, incorporating the underpinning rationales for setting up such a centre in the Institute, the process of consultation and discussion, the investigation of existing centres in the UAE, the proposal presented to the administration and the initial set up and operation of the centre.

5.1 Why an Independent Learning Centre for MLI

There were clearly many parties involved in the initiation of the ILRC project at the MLI (Military Language Institute). Each of these was approaching the possibilities of such a facility from different perspectives. There was the perspective of the institution, with its responsibilities to GHQ and a desire to maintain the reputation of the Institute as a leading provider of Education services in the UAE. There was the input of the Educational Consultants, who were looking for a way to develop the practice possibilities of the Institute, having completed their initial brief of establishing an operational Language Learning Institute. Attached to this, were the voices of interested teachers, who were also interested in the learning possibilities that could be afforded by the establishment of an Independent Learning Resource Centre.

5.1.1 Institutional Rationale

From the institutional point of view, the ILRC (independent learning resource centre) was crucial to maintain the standing of the MLI as a leading provider of language teaching in the UAE. A great deal of capital was invested in the establishment of the MLI to ensure that it was provided with all of the technology required to provide in-class facilities integrating internet,

classroom computers and electronic display. In seeking to enhance the facilities provided by the MLI, the military administration took note of the development of interactive library systems and learning resource centres in the UAE.

The American consultants provided advice that suggested that the development of an ILRC would be a beneficial addition to the operation of the Institute. It was believed that the introduction of this facility would provide elements absent from the existing programme which would improve the engagement of students in the learning process and hence language learning outcomes. On the one hand, the idea of increasing independence was seen as a way to more effectively prepare students in the Academic programme (Academic students) for their future studies at overseas tertiary institutes and on the other it might offer another tool to increase the levels of motivation and participation amongst the entire student body. However, above both of these, in the administration's view, was the need to be able to support the justification for the ongoing existence of the Institute, primarily through visibly improved student performance.

5.1.2 Pedagogical Rationale

Much of the push for the ILRC from the pedagogical position came from the American consultancy firm which helped administer the Institute and a small number of interested teachers. As the idea was presented to the teaching staff, however, it was widely acknowledged that there was more that could be done regarding the provision of language learning to the students. Increasing the engagement, motivation and success of MLI students was at the heart of the pedagogical decision to develop an ILRC. Of all of the factors in the pedagogical mix of MLI, student motivation has proven one of the most problematic. The ILRC was seen by many teachers as a tool which

could be used to enthuse students about language learning. By offering students a range of interactive and entertaining language activities it was hoped students would be encouraged to practise their language skills. Literacy independence was also seen as being an important feature of independent language learning and an ILRC was viewed as a significant tool in effecting this. Also, the encouragement of independence in the students was seen as an important issue by many teachers who believed that the students' acquisition and maintenance of English was something which could be best secured by students becoming more personally and independently involved in the process. These views were held by the teachers involved in initial discussions about the ILRC and supported by the US consultants for the Institute.

5.2 Consultation and discussion

At a series of meetings, both formally convened and casual conversations through the teacher offices, general support was gained for the idea of an ILRC (independent learning resource centre) at MLI as a supplement to the existing programmes. While there was much expression of approval at the idea of an ILRC for the Institute amongst the teachers, this was not universal.

Attitudes towards students among many members of the teaching staff gave rise to a feeling that any moves to encourage independence amongst the students, for any reason, were unlikely to be successful. There was a significant number on staff who clearly stated doubts as to the value of such a facility. While on the one hand applauding the pedagogical rationale, they were critical and suspicious of both the institutional motivation and the ability or desire of our students to make good use of such a facility if

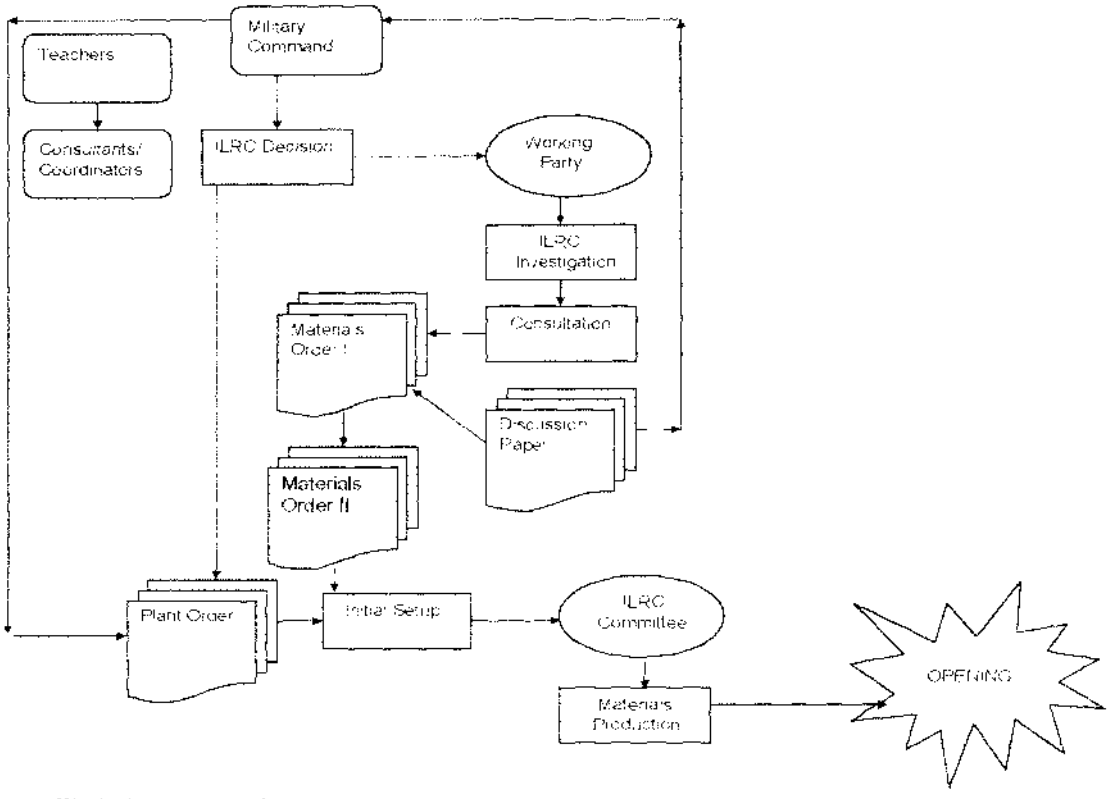

Fig iv Set up procedure

provided. In this view the students were characterised as being lazy and unmotivated, whose main purpose for being at the Institute was not to be working in their regular units.

While student motivation and attitude were issues which caused the greatest difficulty for teachers at MLI, the view held above constructed them as being unassailable factors which could be worked around but not altered. Central to the view in support of the ILRC was that these factors were the very things which could be targeted and dealt with through the implementation of the ILRC.

5.3 Investigation of Independent Learning Centres in the UAE

After the initial decision and consultations the small group of teachers who had taken part in the initial stages of moving towards establishing the ILRC (independent learning resource centre) were given authority to begin a formal investigation into the state of ILRCs and related facilities in the UAE. Across the country, tertiary level institutes were moving to make themselves as modern and attractive as possible and the ILRC is clearly seen as an essential feature of a language learning program. This is not unlike the impetus behind the MLI's decision to develop its own ILRC. An investigation of ILRC's in the UAE showed a range of strategies being employed, the most common form being to create an adjunct to existing library facilities. Other strategies reflect a push to computer and internet access facilities, often doing little more than recreating CALL lab structures. Most made use of, at some level, a more low-tech, reproducible paper approach to student activities within the centre.

The main purpose of our visits was to establish the extent to which ILRC's were integrated into the language programs of other institutes. Other issues such as resource provision, staffing policies and systems of student access, were also important. From each institute that we visited, we tried to carry away an idea of how our own ILRC could best be developed to meet the MLI's specific needs and constraints. We hoped to create an environment which would provide space for students singly or in groups (collective, supportive activity is a significant cultural aspect of Arabic students ways of operating) to develop confidence in their skills to become independent learners of English. In the minds of the teachers involved in forwarding this project, the concept of literacy as a tool of empowerment in language learning was very important and we were actively looking for models which

we could apply to our own ILRC that would enhance its efficacy in developing this as a primary skill towards independence.

The first centre we investigated was the Men's Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) in Abu Dhabi. This centre consisted of an ILRC seminar room with small computer classrooms attached to the main library and was administered as part of the library system. Within the library itself there were designated class areas with computer stations and there were also other computer terminals located throughout the library. In addition to this, there were attached facilities for video viewing and editing. There were no, specifically designated, independent access reading, listening or viewing materials provided.

HCT Men's conducted a required semester of ILRC instruction with the grade received in this course adding to the students' overall grades. This instructional period also serves as a period of general computer skills training. There was one period a week of class time set aside for ILRC usage and out of class access was encouraged. The centre's operating hours, 08:00 - 22:00, reflect HCT Men's operation as an all day tertiary institute with students' classes being held from early morning to late at night.

It seemed that given the MLI (Military Language Institute)'s own more constrained operating hours, which do not readily allow for student access outside their class sessions, that setting aside at least one ILRC period a week for each class would be an effective way to ensure student access and opportunities for students. HCT Men's use of the ILRC to teach basic computer and resource centre skills also suggested a valuable parallel use for the MLI centre, given the very high emphasis it places on the use of computer technology.

The Learning Centre at Zayed University for Women in Abu Dhabi was also attached to the main library with a decision to bring the centre under the administrative jurisdiction of the library, providing, however, experienced English teachers as full time staff. The centre is placed to one side of the main library, with a small classroom, also available to students as a "chatting room", off to one side. Computer terminals are provided for student use in this area. Video viewing was not in place at the time we visited but was due to be set up soon. Classes were brought to the learning centre by their teachers and there was no formal instructional component. Students accessed reading and listening materials independently in this period and were also able to use the centre in their free time.

The Zayed University centre's provision material immediately accessible to the students such as readers and video reinforced our own position that we wanted the MLI centre to provide similar access and build materials around these resources.

The Higher College of Technology for Women's in Abu Dhabi's Independent Learning Centre is broken into segments that are attached to and intermingled with the library. It is operated by an English teacher and library technicians. There is a dedicated room for independent access to computers and another room for class group activities. Video viewing and reading activity materials are distributed throughout the library.
Classes are scheduled to use the centre's classroom and individual students are able to sign up for access to the independent room. There is an introductory course that the students must complete and the materials for this

are provided on a CD-Rom. The students are required to work through this material during their class access time.
The HCT Women's set up was similar to that at HCT Men's, and our investigation here for the most part reinforced the possible value of a specific introductory course work attached to the ILRC.

The Learning Centre at HCT Men's in RAK had been set up more as a CALL Lab with little flexibility in its usage. It provided a stand-alone room accessed only during class time and under teacher direction. As the MLI is well provided in terms of CALL lab provision, the most important thing learned from this visit was the need to maintain the flexibility of space and function in our own centre, so that it can be constructed as an adjunct to the technology already in place rather than as a duplication.

Similarly, the University of Sharjah had also created a CALL lab in its development of the ILRC. However, the use of this facility had fallen in abeyance due to the departure of the single staff member who had set up the centre. Clearly, an ILRC needs to be institutionally established and supported; if it is left as the preserve of 'interested' teachers the danger of its falling into disuse is significant. For our own centre we recognised that it was important to strive to make ILRC access an integral part of every student and teacher's program.
At the American University of Sharjah they had established a separate centre consisting of a sequence of computer labs, a video viewing room and a reading room. The centre operated with its own distinct program and was accessible primarily by class groups with teacher accompaniment. Students wishing to make use of any of the facilities independently needed to work around the class timetables. This constraint on individual access because of

class timetabling seemed to be an important consideration to bear in mind when setting up the centre at MLI, it seemed important to insure that class use of our centre would not impinge on freer student access.
Similarly, the tagged-on aspect of the American University of Sharjah's ILRC program, separate from the specific course work being followed by the students seemed to be unworkable in the MLI environment where there was a need to ensure that the centre could be fully integrated with MLI program.

At HCT Women's in Sharjah, the learning centre was purposefully developed as a Library/ILC synthesis with the emphasis on its Learning Centre function. It showed a very dynamic organization with a strong sense of accessibility. There was a large central area for individual work, with and without computers, separate rooms arranged around the edges for specialist activities including video viewing, reading activities and group work. The main focus was on independent access to learning and reference materials online. There was some dependence on paper-based activities for reading but this comprised a small part of the whole. Students were able to freely access the facility and whole classes were able to make use of side rooms for instruction.

This was the facility which presented itself most forcefully as a workable model for the MLI's ILRCe. The flexibility and the close and balanced integration of learning centre features with library function seemed to reflect what was needed for an effective ILRC that would be best able to be integrated into the structure of MLI's program. The ability for class groups and individuals to access the centre at the same time would be an essential feature of any centre that established at MLI. On the other hand, this visit provided us with an opportunity to consider the value of paper copy activities

within the context of a computer-oriented centre. We considered it a better option to produce student materials and store these on the MLI LAN for access rather that building up banks of paper resources.

Overall, the investigation into the range of ILRC's in the UAE provided us with a strong base of positive and negative considerations upon which to build our own proposal for the MLI. One thing which was very apparent, from this process of investigation, was the range of interpretation, institute to institute, that was put upon the phrases independent learning and self access. In consideration of the information garnered in the investigation the following conclusions were drafted to present what seemed the best application of an independent learning initiative.

5.4 Proposal

The purpose of establishing a Learning Resource Centre at MLI was to create an environment that would encourage the students to gain and apply skills in independent language learning and to give students the opportunity to access reading and viewing materials. In order to best do this, there were some important considerations. The simplest issue, that of when shall the centre be open, seemed as fraught with constraint as the more obviously complex issue of material. Between these issues there ranged such points as organisation of student access, staffing strategies, and issues of organisational structure and implementation. In each case, a response was sensitive to the specific challenges of the Institute was required. In this section I will present the ideas proposed to the MLI administration, which sought to resolve some of these challenges.

5.4.1 Centre operating hours

Optimally it was considered that the centre should be open before and after the finish of classes and throughout the teaching day. Opening at 7:00 and 7:30 (summer and winter respectively) would provide early arriving students with an opportunity to access the centre before class. Having the centre remain open until 2:30 or 3:00 in the afternoon would allow students to continue working in the centre at the end of the day. There could also be an opening time arranged for the evening classes. This could involve the centre being open an hour or an hour and a half before night classes begin. The issue of whether the centre could be opened on Thursday morning was raised for consideration, though this was problematic in terms of the Military Security Issues involved . Over all, it was suggested that the operating hours of the centre could be set out to encourage the students to use this facility as often and as comfortably as possible.

5.4.2 Student Access

In terms of student access, it was considered that students would in the first instance, be able to access the centre with their class and teachers during class time. A hope was expressed that if possible, one or two periods a week could be booked as ILRC periods. These would be teacher introduced sessions aimed at language extension or project development. Another situation for student access was seen as involving the operation of specific language-skills courses run in the centre, by centre staff, outside of class hours. The centre was also to be accessible to students during the break times for project work and language extension work and it was suggested that it might also be useful to allow individual students access during class time with the approval of the class teacher. This would be appropriate for students who at any given time would benefit more from pursuing some independent

study rather than working within the classroom context. After or before school access for students it was suggested, could be seen as providing further opportunities for individual students to explore and utilize the resources and facilities offered. All of these access possibilities needed to meet the stringent demands placed by the military – both in terms of security and expectations of military personnel in an 'on duty' environment.

5.4.3 Staffing

For most efficient operation, it was suggested that the centre should be staffed by MLI (Military Language Institute) teachers. This would establish the focus of the centre as a language learning environment, in keeping with policy at the Military Language Institute. Teachers responsible for operating the centre would be trained in the use of the software and hardware necessary for tracking materials. Any ancillary staff employed to assist with the physical administration of the library were hopefully to have a high level of fluency in English in order to maintain the centre as an English Language only zone.

A proposal that a team of three teachers could operate the centre, while sharing a class, was offered to the administration, ensuring that the centre operators had ongoing classroom contact with students, thus fulfilling their contractual requirements as teachers, while having sufficient non-teaching hours to operate the centre. The idea of support teachers, actively engaged in the programme, also offered a potential bonus in maintaining relevance of ILRC access to the ongoing programmes. When rostered in the centre, teachers would be available to assist individual drop-in students and classes using the centre, acting as ILRC advisors and providing guidance on how the centre could be used by students, in the first instance, as a means to enhance

and facilitate their fulfilment of course requirements, and overall to encourage their exploration of individual learning strategies.

5.4.4 Materials

It was agreed that the materials available in the centre needed to both reflect the course work of the various programs being offered at MLI and provide language extension. Students would have access to listening and reading comprehension activities through the server. It was considered that keeping activities available on line as opposed to paper copies would remove the problem of storage and organization of paper masters and copies. Utilizing the existing body of materials already in the process of being developed for the Core programme by the teaching staff on the Local Area Network as a base, material could be further developed for the Academic program and ELC and stored in similarly accessible locations for use in the centre. It was also decided that additional material needed to be developed for Core focusing on more listening and reading practices as these areas were identified as being poorly supported by the current materials.

Video, audio and book materials would be selected that related to themes and language used in components of the MLI program with accompanying work material for these texts, which would allow students to apply the language they are learning in their program. It was also decided that Language extension material needed to be developed around a library of video, audio and reading texts independent of the specific MLI programs. The availability of appropriate and interesting material of this sort, it was believed, would encourage students to explore English and develop language their language skills. DVD was selected as the primary source of video material as it would allow the use of English language close captions to assist the students

understanding, while keeping the viewing process focused on language development. Further, it was agreed that DVD provided a great deal of flexibility in use over VHS. It was hoped that a DVD server/ shared drive, which could be accessed from the classroom, could be set up as part of the ILRC, to enhance the flexibility of access to video texts.

In all of the selection processes and development processes, one of the key overarching factors was appropriateness. This was clearly manifested in two directives: content needed to be appealing to our students, if there was going to be an encouragement of greater levels of independent engagement with the material; content had to be seen as not in any way contravening the view of Islamic propriety. Abridged adult targeted material, carefully selected unabridged adult targeted material and material primarily produced for younger people, but with high interest content, formed the basis of materials that were initially requested for the centre.

5.4.5 Tracking

Paper systems of tracking were seen as being too cumbersome in terms of storage and maintenance. It was suggested that full use of the computer should be made for tracking students' progress through the Learning Resource Centre. A system was envisaged, where students could log on to complete activities and receive feedback which could be saved to a profile maintained on the Local Area Network. The expertise for the development of such an in house system was identified at the Institute, and indeed the Institute had already developed an in house LAN structure which met the students needs in terms of producing and saving their work and being able to check on their own progress. The suggestion was that this structure be expanded to incorporate the use of the ILRC. This would provide students

with a running progress report pertinent to their ILRC activities. Students could also be assigned a folder in their profile dedicated to storing completed ILRC activities which would give teachers and students a way of reviewing a student's Centre history. Similarly, access to the students ongoing programme work on the LAN, through the ILRC, would encourage the integration of programme and ILRC.

5.4.6 Learner Independence

It was stated that clearly one of the key goals of the Centre should be to foster learner independence. Students coming into the Centre as part of a class should be given the opportunity and encouragement to make independent choices in how to use the facilities and resources. As such, the centre should not be viewed as a different form of CALL lab but as a distinct facility with a clearly different purpose. Materials such as books to encourage independent and guided reading, DVDs and comprehension activities should be available for individualized access as well as take home borrowing. Access by students independent of class groups should also be encouraged. In addition to being able to take materials home, students need to be actively encouraged to visit the Centre outside of class times and in some circumstances, small groups or individuals should be able to be released from class to work in the Centre

The Learning Resource Centre was presented as having the potential to become one of the most important innovations at the MLI. If it was used and developed fully it could be hoped to significantly enhance the way teachers were able to encourage students' engagement with English and the language learning process. It also had the potential to open up new avenues for developing the courses offered at MLI, placing an increased emphasis on

student independence. In its initial stages of operation, it was suggested that the Centre could require some degree of selling. Firstly, to the teachers, to make them aware of the resources and facilities that it can make available to them. Secondly, by the teachers to the students, to encourage them to use the Centre, not just in class sessions but also outside of class time too. It was believed that the Learning Resource Centre could become one of the most important facilities offered at MLI both as an aid to students' language learning and as a way of enriching teachers' planning.

5.4.7 Facilities

The facilities which were envisioned, involved the distribution of study carrels set up around the perimeter of the resource room. Each carrel equipped with a PC linked to the resources on the LAN, including real texts in spoken and written English, as well as interactive activities produced for hard copy material such as books and DVDs. At one end of the centre, 2-3 person viewing suites, equipped with DVD ready computers, also connected to the LAN, to allow for viewing of DVD materials, and at the other end of the centre, multimedia editing suites which could be used for students seeking to work alone or with partners to experiment with audio video/visual presentations. In the central space, traditional stacks were to house the hard copy resources. A space available at the editing suite end of the centre was to be set up for full class instruction, with a presenter's computer attached to a projection system, to allow both for student presentations as well as for instruction in centre use. An attached quiet room was also to be available for students to use in practice activities and for group work and it was hoped that the computers in the adjacent CALL labs could be used during break times if required.

5.4.8 Usage

The use of the LAN/internet was presented as being very important in optimising usage of the centre. Access to the ILRC through a web portal was envisaged as affording students the opportunity to continue to develop their language skills, and enhance their independent practice, beyond the structures of the Institutes programme. The idea here was to enable students to work independently on project work from the programme as well as engaging in independent practice and production activities based on the ILRC Local Area Network.

Within the centre itself, while students were attending the Institute, the availability of language experience materials was envisioned as central. Material for reading, viewing, and listening, drawing on authentic or unedited sources where possible, could be accessed directly from the centre. In the first instance, the purpose of this material was seen as immersing the students in language, without laying down too many specific expectations for approaching or responding to it. But activities developing critical approaches to language texts tailored to the materials available and to the needs of the students were also to be accessible. There was also a hope that students could be given the opportunity to work collaboratively through activities involving the audio/video editing suites and the presentation facilities, as well as shared viewing of video resources. The use of these facilities, and the opportunities to engage students in online interactions through the internet were seen as being the most important role of technology in the centre, giving the proposed operation of the ILRC a very distinctive difference from other centres that we had observed, where computer based technology was primarily applied to research and writing and editing activities.

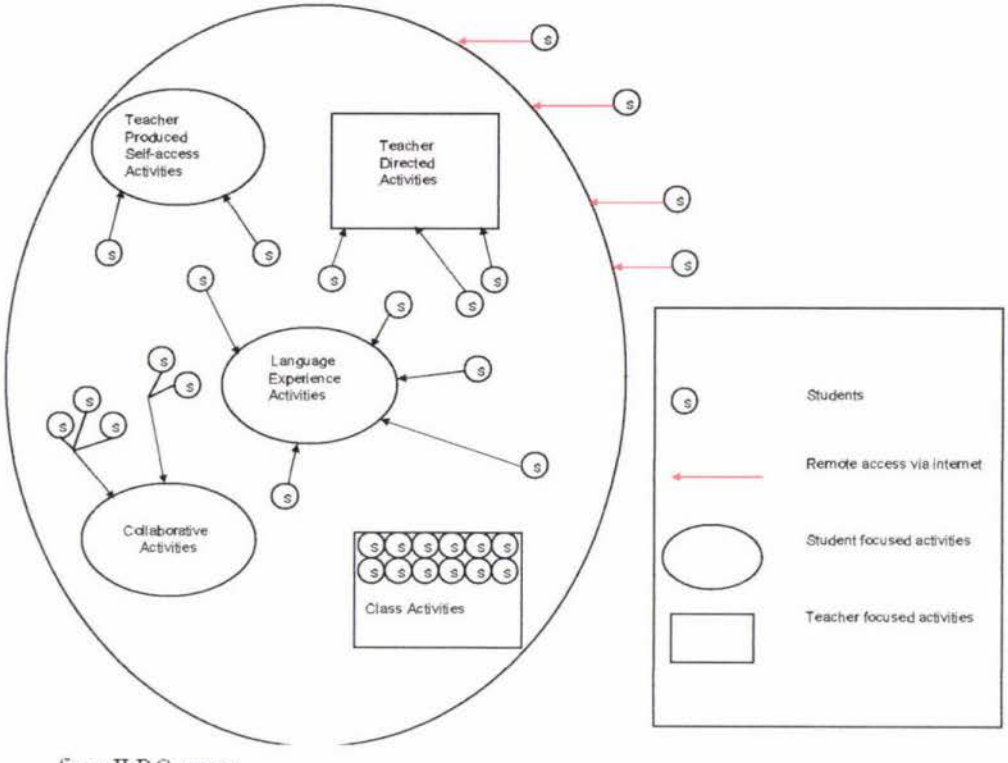

fig v ILRC usage

Another area where it was felt that computer based technology should be central was in the accessing of general language learning practice tasks and activities designed to critically engage students with the language experience material. The intention was to allow students to access the range of ILRC designed activities from the LAN, allowing them a greater deal of control over the access to these activities and an ability to store their work in personal folders on the LAN for review or completion in stages.

5.5 Implementation

Overall, in terms of centre usage, access, and organisation, the intention of the reporting group was to present a possible model for an Independent Learning Resource Centre which fulfilled the pedagogical goals of enhancing independence and expanding the possibilities of teaching practice, while at the same time, meeting what were seen as being the administrations requirements of improving student outcomes and providing facility which could allow the MLI (Military Language Institute) to continue to be seen as a showcase of new and innovative educational applications in the UAE.

However, between the initiation of research into the initial decision to investigate the possibilities of establishing the ILRC, the preliminary planning and the eventual commitment of resources to the project and its implementation there were a series of significant changes in the administration of the MLI programme which impacted on the set up of the centre.

There was a period of two years during which recommendations were made, orders for software, hard ware and language resources were submitted and resubmitted, and deadlines for initial setup of the ILRC were passed. The American consultancy group, in submitting for an extension to their contract, emphasised the ILRC as a project which could benefit from their ongoing input, as they saw themselves as having been closely involved in lobbying, with the teaching staff, for its realisation. Initially, they were given an understanding that their contract would be renewed, but this understanding was rescinded in a last minute decision, which allowed them a matter of weeks

to hand over their areas of responsibility to the Institute employed staff who had been shadowing them in their posts.

In this same period, there occurred a large outflow of teachers who had been with the Institute since its first couple of years. These teachers were duly replaced with new staff and there was an increase in the number of teachers employed overall, resulting in a high ratio of newer staff to more established staff.

Finally there was a change of commander, resulting in a major reshuffle of the Military Command structure personnel. The new commander and the new middle management tier then invited a committee to begin the set up of the ILRC, stating that this had become a priority, with expectations of it being fully operational within six months. The newly formed committee now consisted of mostly new teachers, with a range of prior experience in establishing self access and the use of technology in teaching, with only one person from the reporting group included.

There was no reference made to the previous recommendations. The administration representative revealed that hardware, software and other resources were currently warehoused and ready to be put into place. This material had apparently been in place for over a year. Members of the committee were directed to view the ILRC space and report back on determining the arrangement of the room. Others were directed to begin organising the production of materials for the ILRC.

It was decided by the Administration that not only was there to be no external access to the ILRC's computer network, it was also to be kept separate from the Institute's main LAN. This removed the opportunity for students to have

distant access or even to be able to use ILRC resources easily to support them in completion of project work from their programmes.

Access to the ILRC was initially limited to class timetabled sessions, with one noteworthy exception, in which a high ranking officer was allowed independent access to the centre as he was working outside of any formal class structure, with access to one to one tutoring. Students were also allowed to access the centre during breaks but there was no allowance for access before and after the Institute's class times and no provision was made for students attending the evening programmes. Therefore student access was determined by the willingness of classroom teachers to book sessions in the centre.

When resources were finally shelved, there were major gaps between items ordered and what appeared. There were also problems with alternative books being purchased instead of the specific editions ordered, resulting in many books which were inappropriate or simply unusable within our context, due to complexity, content issues, and overly childish presentations. There was very little video material for language experience, almost none on DVD and the material that did appear was highly problematic in terms of offensive content.

The committee members involved in material production, given little or no context to work in, and admitting no particular expertise in the area, initially generated a quickly growing body paper based materials which required storage and copying for use by students. As the ILRC was originally intended to be based on computer accessed activities, the centre had no facilities for their storage, nor had there been a purchase of photocopiers in the plant order. Some material was eventually prepared for storage on the ILRC's LAN, though there was no way to access or utilise the large amount of material on the Institute's main LAN.

Two staff members were selected from the teachers to be responsible for the administration of the centre, in conjunction with one of the Egyptian Language Advisors. However, given the difficulty of student access, compounded by the fact that many of the teachers, new to the Institute, felt unprepared to step outside their basic classroom activities, there was very little use made of the centre.

The ILRC, after a year and a half of operation was closed, when the administration of the Institute was shifted from military command to operation by a private educational provider, the Higher Colleges of Training. The teaching staff were broken up and sent to smaller sites around the UAE and GHQ stepped in to reclaim the materials, software and hardware which had been purchased for both the Institute and the centre.

The process described in this chapter took place over a period of four years, with many halts and starts. During the year prior to the centre being formally set up, there was a sense that the ILRC might never eventuate, lost in the processes of the UAE Military. At this time a group of teachers, involved in the push towards getting independent learning established at the MLI, presented a curriculum which had been developed in tandem with the work around the ILRC and with the intention of being used in conjunction with it. The following chapter presents this curriculum as conceived, and then examines an iteration of its principles in the Academic programme, supported by an ad hoc, travelling ILRC.

Chapter 6 The description of a curriculum developed to be used in conjunction with the ILRC and its partial application.

In working on the development of the ILRC (independent learning resource centre) for the students of the MLI (Military Language Institute), a concept for a curriculum which would be able to make use of the ILRC began to crystallize in the considerable hiatus between initial planning and concrete moves on the part of the MLI towards the set up of the ILRC This curriculum became the core of a small experiment in an alternative approach to teaching the Academic Stream students, focussing on development of greater degrees of autonomy.

A consideration of the needs of the students had resulted in the development of a curriculum concept which was literacy skills driven, able to enhance the degree of independence of students, with a primary outcome of maximizing use of ILRC. So the joint idea in operation with the implementation of this curricular innovation was on the one hand, the effort to encourage student independence in language acquisition, and practice, on the other, an intention to focus on literacy skills. It was hoped that students would be able to be encouraged to access the language experience materials at the heart of the ILRC, and to do this with increasing enthusiasm. By building on the literacy skills and independence of the students it as hoped that there would be a clear enhancement of the sense of student ownership in the learning process and hence an overall improvement in engagement and motivation

This chapter will describe this curriculum and assess its implementation in the limited environment created by the absence of an operational ILRC and

project its value as an adjunct to the operation of the ILRC in fostering learner independence.

6.1 background to a new curriculum

The new course was, initially, variously described as the Literacy Skills Development course (LSD) when it was being considered as a stand alone programme for the Institute, then as Post Core, when it was being argued as an alternative to students who had successfully completed Core course modules, and then finally, alternative Academic, when the opportunity to trial some of the central principals out with a group of Academic course students entering the programme with considerably lower than usual entrance scores for that course. What follows is a description of the full curricular innovation, as it was intended to be presented to students in conjunction with the ILRC. After this, will be a description of the way in which this curriculum informed the modification of the existing Academic programme.

The curriculum included three main routine divisions, the main course content, for three periods of each day, CALL activities, for one period each day and language exploration, also for one period a day.

The main course was to consist of 12 units each of which was to be taught over 15 days. This was set up to fall into line with the MLI's term structure and expectations for students. The course was originally designed for students who had a foundation in English and needed to improve their literacy skills. In response to this, the course incorporated all four skill areas of reading, writing, listening and speaking, focussing on the strengthening of literacy skills. There was to be a period of each day which would be devoted to each: Reading, Writing, Listening/Speaking.

The CALL lab was intended be used for developing all skill areas, making use of the range of productive software as well as interactive language acquisition software

The greatest departure for this programme was in the area of language exploration. For this, the design drew on the methods of English for native speakers, especially around encouraging the development of both productive and receptive skills. Three periods each week were designed to be in the classroom working on language skills that were necessary for the current unit. Two periods per week were to involve access in the Learning Resource Center (LRC) providing students with the opportunity to use what they had learned in class and to explore ways to use English independently, away from the classroom. This structured 'in' time for a whole class was predicated on the difficulties of access outside of class times at the Institute. In order to offer opportunity to practice and develop in all of the skills areas, the focus for each unit was a 'style' of language use: Narrative, Dialogue, Persuasive and Descriptive, chosen for the breadth of variations possible in

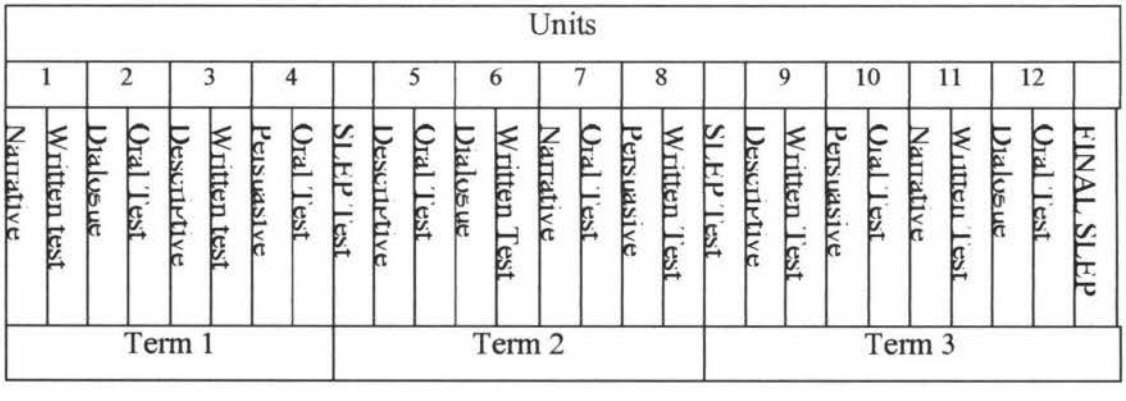

fig vi The course was to be taught over 9 months and was divided into 12 units

exploring the associated language. Each of these four language style units was covered in a term. Each of the three terms, they were revisited with development in complexity, and increased expectations in performance.

Because of this, the focus of the proposed curriculum content was real texts, received and produced. This was in direct response to a sense that, the grammar laden approaches of much of the current MLI curriculum, while being popular with many students, was producing very little growth in the students' confidence and use of the language. The popularity with the students was appeared to be based in its ability to be taught in a rote practice sense. While the Institute itself emphasised its commitment to a communicative approach, the pressure that could be brought to bear by students on teachers was considerable, and many teachers acceded to demands to use more 'traditional' approaches in teaching.

It was hoped that by increasing the students' engagement with practical and interesting uses of English, that grammar teaching could be approached as a supplementary support to their overall activities, rather than taking a central role. Similarly, it was hoped that by constructing a programme more focussed on assessing student language use that this would reduce some of the pressure towards teaching to the exam which had become a significant hallmark of the previous programmes.

Another significant feature of UAE students, in response to any curriculum or course, was their insistence on a text book. However, in support of the above curriculum intentions, it was proposed that rather than using a standard ESL text as the central text book, a Language Arts style text book be sourced, which would provide a focus around the use of English in specific contexts, with supporting grammar available fro reference.

A formal proposal to trial the above curriculum was made to the administration. The intention was to use it with a sample group of students assigned to the Core programme, but whose entrance scores were above or near the graduation level for Core. There was usually at least one or two classes of students to whom this applied each year, and these student were put into the ELC programme, without much success in terms of language improvement. (The supporting documentation for this proposal constitutes Appendices 1-7). The proposal was accepted and was to begin trialling at the start of the following academic year, but was shelved with no clear explanation given.

6.2 Adapting the Academic curriculum

At this time another opportunity surfaced to try out some of the central ideas behind the curriculum approach. A larger number than usual of Academic Course students were admitted to the MLI, with SLEP entry scores well below the usual entry expectation for academic. Many of these students scoring as pre-beginners. The previous response to this had been to put these students into Core classes until their SLEP scores brought them into the range considered appropriate for the Academic programme. This often resulted in these students being held in the programme for periods of time well beyond the expected term of the courses, and ultimately being sent overseas to study with inadequate preparation to enter University bridging programmes.

The newly appointed co-ordinator in charge of the academic programme presented a chance to use key elements of the proposed curriculum with two classes of these students. As there were another two academic classes

entering at the same time, what followed allowed for some limited comparisons and assessment of the effectiveness of the new approach, as the teaching team working with the other two classes of Academic Course students, opted to follow the established pattern of working with these classes. It should be noted that the most significant departure between the two approaches was that the established course emphasised direct teaching of grammatical structures and close following of the prescribed texts, with limited use of ancillary material.

That there would be two somewhat divergent approaches to presenting the same course, however, meant that there had to be consistent structures for assessment agreed to by both teaching teams and approved by the administration. After initial discussions around this, the team undertaking the modified approach conceded that if this approach was to be effective in its stated intentions of enhancing student performance across the board, then they accepted that the existing assessment structure, with very few modifications increasing freedom of choice in response for some sections, would be acceptable.

The central ideas which were carried from the ILRC (independent learning resource centre) curriculum to the academic curriculum were, emphasis on student access to wide ranges of real texts, a high level of expectation of student independent production, and a focus on productive and receptive 'styles'. The team of three teachers broke up their responsibilities into listening, reading, and writing. Speaking was shared by the team, it was agreed that grammar would be taught in response to student needs as identified through the classroom activities, rather than as a discreet component.

While the team made some use of the Academic text, whose content was the basis for testing, most emphasis was placed on the 'portable ILRC', consisting of books, sound files and video collected and selected for appropriateness for the students, in terms of being interesting and readily accessible, as well as avoiding offence to Muslim and Arabic sensibilities.

The approach in listening was to create an immersive environment, where large amounts of real texts were used and student responses were directed to be critical and analytical, rather than comprehensive. Listening was organised as an exposure to varied and diverse real texts. The assessment for listening was a sequence of previously unheard listening passages for which the students were required to answer comprehension style questions. Rather than working solely with the course provided parallel listenings, as test prep, students were provided with listenings which were selected for personal enjoyment and reflection as well as challenging use of language. These included radio serials which proved very popular. Overall, the aim of the Listening approach was to maximise the exposure to a wide range of spoken English, and encourage an active engagement with its content. They were encouraged to provide more than a basic comprehension response to the texts, emphasising a critical response, where students actively expressed their own opinions and thoughts about the listenings.

Reading was split in focus between the academic style readings presented in the text and which provided the focus of the test, and free reading selected from the 'portable ILRC'. Again, the responses to these texts were encouraged to be critical rather than descriptive, the intention being not to measure the students' level of comprehension but to encourage them to think about what they were reading and how they reacted to it. An important part

of the reading programme was a built in period of personal reading making use of the range of provided books or any other books the students chose to bring to class. As with any SSR programme, the teacher involved actively reads at this time. Here the hope was that increasing confidence and comfort levels around reading would reduce the stress of being confronted with unsighted texts.

Writing was focused around the production of key written assignments requiring the use of descriptive, comparative, and discursive techniques. Structures and tips for the techniques were presented, supported by the Academic Course text, and students were encouraged to select appropriate topics of interest to themselves, to research these using 'portable ILRC' materials and the internet, and to work through multiple drafts. Regular journal writing was also instituted in order to encourage the students to be more comfortable with written fluency, without having to be concerned with accuracy. Again, as in the SSR sessions, the supervising teacher took part in this activity, writing in their own second language. The assessment for writing required students to respond to an unseen topic, with some latitude for choice, so it was hoped that the combination of fluency and drafting practice gained from the writing programme would provide the flexibility and skill to respond to this task.

Speaking was shared on a rotational basis by all three teachers in the team, each making use of a strand of their topic area a sa focus for oral presentations. The presentations, one per term, were major events for the classes, with the two class groups coming together to share their work. The institutional assessments for speaking were SOPI (Standard Oral Proficiency Index) tasks and it was a conscious decision of the teachers not to prepare

towards these tasks with practice tests, a practice which had been the widely used procedure previously. Rather it was hoped that providing the students with increased opportunities to practice their speaking skills in terms of topics which they had selected and developed themselves would provide them with the confidence to respond freely and naturally to the speaking tasks of the test. In this single area, the students showed an outstanding response, producing scores in their SOPI tests which showed growth in confidence and facility above the expected outcomes for the classes.

The impact of the approach used, enhanced by an active encouragement of as much independently controlled language use was substantial. On regular SLEP assessments, the students showed continuous and significant progress, making jumps more sizeable than those of students of similar level being assessed in the Core programme, and quickly catching up to and in some cases overtaking the scores of those students in the Academic programme with higher entry scores. Their achievement levels in the tests, particularly as has been noted for the Speaking tests, also indicated the success of the less test-content directed approach, with high levels of success for most of the students.

The overall emphasis in the teaching of the three content areas was geared towards providing students with many opportunities to interact with different modes of English and to increasingly become confident in making choices, working independent of teacher direction and making active use of the language being learned. For the teachers involved in the experiment, this was a great success – offering proof of the value of a different approach to working with the students, as well as a strong indication of the potential value of independent learning support for the Institute. The significance of

this, and of the range of issues raised in this study, is discussed in the following chapter

Chapter 7 Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the ideas raised in this study, the importance of the ecosystem approach to the learning system and its impact on the set up of the ILRC (independent learning resource centre), the curriculum experiment and its reception, and the implications of tissue rejection as applied to the intentions, development process and final implementation of the ILRC.

7.1 The ecosystem

Much of the process of the ILRC was heavily affected by the stresses playing between the components of the system. Attitudes of many teachers, less supportive of the centre, were largely rooted in their perceptions of the students' ability to make use of the opportunities offered by a learning centre. This was sometimes compounded by frustrations at the seeming imbalance in authority, which, while impacting on teacher effectiveness, also coloured teacher attitudes to the students in general.

Within this context, student perceptions were also challenged. In the very idea of the ILRC, there was a conflict with their established expectations of the Teacher/Student relationship as one whose outcomes were negotiable but which was ultimately defined by a directive model of instruction. To be presented with the openness of an ILRC was at times disorientating. Indeed, the senior ranking officer, who in the ILRC's very earliest period of operation was first given the opportunity to access the facility freely, came back to the teachers he was working with and requested very structured tasks, stating that he felt he was not making good use of his time otherwise.

Between the teachers and the administrative structure, there were a number of areas where there was a mismatch of expectations. Part of this was rooted in different views held by the teaching staff and the administration as to the nature of the teaching role. From the point of view of the MLI (Military Language Institute) teachers, there was a perception of themselves as being responsible professionals, and an attendant expectation of professional autonomy and respect for their judgement. These expectations were not matched by the military administration of the Institute, who, while actively selecting Masters Graduates, limited their autonomy, due to military concerns around security and chain of command issues. The civilian employee status provided the teaching staff with little leverage within the military system and their position of guest workers did nothing to enhance their status. Teachers often felt as if they were jobbing language teachers, with little or no stake in the Institute, a belief that seemed to be confirmed by the lack of responsiveness to teacher input.

The stress between the civilian and military elements of the administration shared elements of this, though made more complicated in the status of the consultants as contracted employees of a US company, thus having a greater degree of independence in their actions. At their most effective, the consultants challenged the military administration to reassess their priorities in terms of maintaining a focus on educational effectiveness. Their role was to establish a fully functional language learning institute, serving the various needs of the UAE military. As this was achieved, they sought to extend their involvement, particularly around the development of the ILRC. But at this time the military administration, in choosing to discontinue their contract, effectively announced that the job had been done so successfully that there was no need for further input. The replacement of the US consultants with directly employed civilian administration staff removed the external voice

able to require the military administrators to reconsider their decisions. One of the results of this was the derailing of the consultative/development process around the ILRC in exchange for a series of directives from military administration.

From the military perspective, there must have been at this time a sense of regaining more sure control of what was after all an extension of the UAE military. There was now an unchallenged chain of command, with orders able to be passed downwards, with every expectation of their being followed.

The departure of the consultants added new stress to the teaching staff, as they lost a sometime ally in presenting challenges to decisions of the administration which were motivated by requirements of the military rather than of educational effectiveness. The new civilian administration staff were less effective in this role as they could be individually isolated, replaced or dismissed, if it was felt they were not carrying out their roles as directed, ultimately by GHQ.

7.2 The curriculum experiment

The curriculum experiment was viewed by the co-ordinator in charge of the Academic programme as being very successful, both in terms of illustrating a positive and productive way of working with students of varied entry level to the courses, and of illustrating the value of increasing student independence in terms of their language acquisition activities. Comparisons of achievement were presented to the administration, highlighting performance against the other Academic classes that year, previous rates of achievement in the Academic programme, and improvements in SLEP in other courses.

However, rather than viewing this as an indication of the efficacy of a new approach, the military commander viewed it as an aberration in statistics. Teachers of the other academic classes offered a suggestion that the two classes presented with the alternative academic approach had produced entry test results which were incorrect, though there was no rationale for this, and this was the position which was accepted by the Administration and other co-ordinators.

There was no offer of support for an extension or expansion of this trial in the following academic year, and an administrative decision was made to uniformly return the programme to its previous focus. There was a shuffling of responsibilities amongst the co-ordinators and the Academic programme was placed under the management of a co-ordinator who had expressed doubt as to the value of changing the approach to the programme. As a rough trial, the results of the new approach seemed, to those involved, to be significant. It was accepted that these results could not be read empirically as indicating any specific conclusions, but it had been hoped that they would win enough support for a continuation of the trial, under more formally monitored conditions. It was also hoped that this initial success of approach could be used as an argument for a suitable use of the ILRC within the broader range of programmes offered at the MLI (Military Language Institute).

7.3 Tissue Rejection

Was the ILRC (independent learning resource centre) subject to the impact of tissue rejection? Certainly there was every effort made to present to the local administration a proposed structure which attended to key requirements of the environment. Issues identified as central to this included a

consideration of issues of cultural and religious relevance and the need to operate within the structure of a military environment.

If the ILRC could be said to have been rejected, its rejection seems to be primarily a product of incompatibility with the military model. There were clear difficulties around student access which diminished its effectiveness. The expectation of military students being in clearly determined locations at specified times does not support the idea of enhancing student independence. Limitations placed on access of the ILRC's LAN system, due to concerns with security, closed down a possible way of working around the issue of physical student access.

There was also a clear sense that, in the end, and without the mediation of the US consultants, there was a significant gap of understanding between the administration and the teachers involved in fostering the centre, as to what an Independent Learning Resource Centre actually was. For the teachers, it was a set of resources, technologies and materials which could be made available to students in a variety of ways in order to enable them to develop independence in their language acquisition, to take greater responsibility for their own learning, and to perhaps foster their motivation and enthusiasm by providing a greater sense of ownership. From the administrative point of view it was, on the one hand, a means of showing that they remained at the forefront of UAE education, by virtue of having an Independent Learning Resource Centre. On the other, it was expected to be a tool to act directly on student achievement, to ensure better student results in testing and ultimately better outcomes for students attending courses outside of the UAE. But above all, for the administration, there was a growing sense that what an ILRC was, was a library with computers.

With these central mismatches in place, the job of encouraging teachers and students to use the centre was fraught with difficulty: students had little ability to access the centre and teachers saw little reason to go out of their way in order to incorporate it into their practice. The end result being that neither the administration's expectations nor the expectations of the teachers fostering the development of the centre were met. The facility provided little extra to the existing programmes, offered little to the students in the way of encouraging increasing independence, and was not able to provide any significant assistance in improving student performance.

Whether, given more time, the ILRC could have become more effective in achieving any of its hoped for aims became a moot point with the dissolution of the MLI (Military Language Institute) as a stand alone institute. At this point, one could ask to what extent was the entire Institute an example of tissue rejection.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

The intentions of all parties involved, in developing this ILRC (independent learning resource centre), was to bring about a change to the educational practices of the MLI which would advantage its students, and perhaps act as a model for other institutes – the teachers involved, the consultants and the administration shared this idea. It was what enabled the process to occur. Its failure to be realised was more closely related to the failure to resolve the distances that existed between the parties, and the issues of definition, than any mismatch between the 'large cultures' of Arabic/Islamic society of the host country and the Western Industrial society of the guest teachers/consultants. It was the conflict evident between the 'small cultures' which created the irresolvable difficulty.

In the moves to ensure that the broader issues of religion and culture were considered, the teachers, while aware of the military context, failed to present clearly enough a method of resolution for their concerns. There was an element here of the surety of the pedagogical value of what they were offering, and a conviction that large culture issues had been addressed. In the face of this, there was no doubt that the initiative as proffered would be satisfactory.

From the perspective of the administration, there was in the end no question of central issues of military security or discipline being undermined by anything. While there was a recognised need to improve student performance, as well as build on the prestige of the Institute, there was no latitude for changes to the essential way in which the military structure operated. In this view, the MLI was a military unit first and an educational

institute second, and the advice of the consultants and teaching staff was set in the context of their role as civilian employees, and as guest workers.

The consultants were able to add a little more weight to their suggestions by virtue of the fact that they were not direct employees, but rather contracted advisors outside of the chain of command and present to carry out a specifically designated sequence of tasks involved in the establishment of the centre. When the consultants' contract was not renewed, it being deemed that their primary objectives had been completed, the military administration was able to take unquestioned control of the ILRC project, and give priority to their own expectations of the centre.

Throughout the process, there was an attempt at maintaining a steady flow of ideas between all parties, and it seemed that there was clear understanding of what was to be achieved, how and why. However, in the end, there was little room for collective and collaborative planning in an environment which was operated within a military chain of command. Neither the teaching staff nor the civilian components of the administration were in a position to influence the final decisions of the military administration, and frequently felt that their professional input was discounted. This was a contributing factor in several failed attempts to implement changes or modifications to the programme and the curriculum at the MLI, two of which have been discussed above.

The UAE offers complex challenges to any educational initiatives because of the historical development of education internally as a transmitter of cultural and religious norms, running parallel with the belief of education as an externally determined process. Students frequently approach institutional education as something over which they have little ownership, supported by

the dominance in the schooling and university system by guest worker teachers. At the same time as feeling unconnected from the process, students are never able to ignore their own power within the process – while institutes are operated by non Emirati personnel, everything within the systems must comply with the expectations of UAE culture and society. Failure to do this can and does involve dismissal for teachers or closure for institutes.

Students understand that their personal expression of dissatisfaction can have dramatic effects on what happens. They also understand that their teachers are in the UAE as guest workers to make money; the same can be said of many of the schools which operate within the UAE. This is a disheartening reality, which does little to engender respect for teachers or for the educative process itself. Within the constraints of this 'market place' education, the introduction of new ideas, different ways of working, or even investments in improved facilities are viewed cynically.

Certainly, in the case of the ILRC initiative at the MLI, this would have had an impact on how the administration viewed the US consultants request for an extension to their contract in order to facilitate the ILRC development. Similarly, it could have been a factor in the dismissal of input from those teachers who were advocating for the centre's establishment and indeed of the curricular innovation which was presented as an adjunct to the ILRC's operation. The accepted role and status of the guest work teacher inside educational systems limits the extent to which they will be able to influence any issue of policy or structure.

There is nothing to suggest in the experience described above, that independence in learning is, in itself, a foreign concept. Indeed, given the

opportunity to operate in a way more focussed on independent action in language acquisition, two classes showed a readiness and an aptitude to work within this framework. There is certainly evidence, however, to support the idea that fostering independence does not necessarily offer obvious benefits to the student or the institution. The strongly negative attitude held by some teachers around the impossibility of providing opportunities for independence in learning were rooted in a central belief that the culture of the students was essentially deficient and incapable of taking up the challenge of such independence. However it is more an issue of the recent history of education in the UAE, and the priorities set by the Institute, which meant that for students there were more effective ways of gaining advantage in the system. But independence is certainly far from being proscribed by local educational values, or from being beyond the grasp of local culture, rather it is merely deemed a less efficient way of gaining advancement. Such advancement is more readily obtained from the judicious application of pressure on teachers, complaints directed at the administration and the use of relative status and the influence of *wasta*.

In this case, the difficulty of bringing the concept of independence into an institution rests upon training and preparation, not only of the students but of the staff and of the institutional administration. The conflict with previous ways of working needs to be clearly resolved and the project entered into with commitment from all parties. From the perspective of the teachers, this commitment would suggest a preparedness to relinquish preconceptions about who they are teaching and opening up their expectations of what their students can achieve. For students, there needs to be a willingness to commit themselves to the process, which needs to be based in a sense of trust in the integrity and intentions of their teachers and their institute. Students able to

perceive and accept the value of what they are embarking on, and convinced that the intentions of those teaching them are concerned with optimising their outcomes will be more able to take up the challenge of new ideas. For both, teachers and students, a strong and clear understanding of what is being done, why it is being introduced and how it will work within the practical reality of teaching/learning, is clearly essential. With less clearly established understandings, it proved difficult for teachers to find a way of integrating the new ILRC into their programmes, similarly, students had no clear grasp of what it was that they were supposed to be doing in the ILRC.

On the part of an administration, venturing to implement such an initiative in their institution, it seems that there needs to be a very clear definition of what it is they wish to achieve, worked out with input from all concerned parties. In the case of the MLI (Military Language Institute), the final decision as to the nature and operation was made unilaterally, in the fashion of an order issued through the chain of command. Previous consultations were dispensed with and in that action, the value of any further input was identified as being low. The reasons for the military administration for acting in this way are for the most part related to the nature of the relationship between themselves and their civilian employees. Where such a substantial difference in power balance exists, it is important for the more influential partner to be able to make concessions to the less influential, in the interests of working together successfully and productively.

The different perspectives taken on what independence in learning meant, and implied for the practice of language teaching, clearly were at the heart of much of the failure of the ILRC. Without a clear agreement on this, it was natural for the military administration to default to their own understandings,

and in doing this, act to modify this understanding to match the changing circumstances with which they were faced. In the end, the military driven issues of security and the students status of on duty personnel, ensured that the pedagogical concerns expressed by teachers, consultants and later co-ordinators, were pushed aside. The resulting ILRC system was so weakened in its effect that it made no appreciable difference to the learning outcomes of the students. Without clarity and consistency of understandings between the parties involved in the development and implementation of new ways of supporting student independence, there seems to be little chance for successful outcomes for the students or the institution.

Though a great deal of energy went in to insuring the success of the ILRC at MLI, the final operation of the centre fell well short of the expectations of all parties involved. There was little advantage evident for the students, there was no evident improvement in recorded outcomes that could help the Institute to justify the commitment of resources, and the teaching staff felt no sense of how the centre could be made to fit in with their programmes. The decision to proceed with the centre in a form that had not been discussed, and without spending time bringing the teachers and students up to speed on the value of the centre, seemed to have a direct impact on the erratic usage it received. This was exacerbated by a failure to find ways in which the centre could be used outside of the restrictions of the existing programme, to replace those suggestions rejected with the original operating proposal. The resulting situation left students unable to easily make use of the centre outside of class times, with little reason for teachers to make use of class time for centre access, which could only be seen as time away for test preparation which remained a very significant concern for students and teachers alike.

The subsequent break up of the MLI as a site based institution, and the reclamation by GHQ of the resources used for the set up of the ILRC ended what had already shown itself to be a failed initiative to enhance the language learning of military students in the UAE.

Appendix 1 Skills Examples for Post Core Course

Cycle One Skill Examples

	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Visual
Narrative	Read and respond to simple personal narratives	Write simple personal narratives	Tell a story about self or family.	Respond to people speaking about their lives and families.	Respond to simple, personal visual texts.
Dialogue	Read and respond to written conversations	Write a simple conversation with a partner	Practice conversations with partners.	Respond to simple conversations	Respond to visual texts containing conversations
Descriptive	Read and respond to simple descriptions of familiar places and things	Write simple descriptions of familiar places and things	Describe in a simple speech a familiar place or thing.	Respond to people talking about familiar places and things	Respond to visual texts describing places and things.
Persuasive	Read and respond to pieces of advice	Write response letters for an advice column.	Giving advice to a friend (orally)	Respond to advice being given orally	Respond to advisory posters and video.

Cycle Two Skill Examples

	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Visual
Narrative	Read and respond to more complex narratives: Short Stories and Tales	Write more complex narratives: Short Stories and Tales	Tell a story	Respond to people narrating Short Stories and Tales	Respond to more complex visual texts: Short Stories and Tales
Dialogue	Read and respond to comedy sketch scripts	Write comedy sketch scripts with a partner	Perform comedy sketch scripts with partners.	Respond to Radio comedy sketches	Respond to video comedy sketches
Descriptive	Read and respond to more complex descriptions focusing on feeling and action	Write more complex descriptions focusing on feeling and action	Verbally describe a scene focusing on feeling and action	Respond to verbal descriptions of scenes focusing on feeling and action	Respond to more complex visual texts focusing on feeling and action
Persuasive	Read and respond to persuasive essays	Write persuasive essays.	Present speeches	Respond to speeches.	Respond to persuasive video.

Cycle Three Skill Examples

	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Visual
Narrative	Read and respond to complex narratives: Novels and full length non fiction	Write complex narratives: Chapter style	Oral performances drawn from complex narratives	Respond to people reading longer, complex narratives	Respond to longer visual texts: full length movie narratives
Dialogue	Read and respond to play and movie scripts	Write scenes for a play	Practice and perform scenes from plays, with partners.	Respond to Recorded presentations of longer complex narratives	Respond to full length movies and play presentations
Descriptive	Read and respond to expository essays.	Write expository essays.	Orally present extended expositions	Respond to extended oral expositions	Respond to expository documentaries
Persuasive	Read and respond to persuasive essays	Write, in teams, speeches and notes for debate topics.	Present debate speeches in teams	Respond to recordings of individual debating speeches.	Respond to videos and live debate performances.

Appendix 2 Descriptive Language Cycle

Descriptive Language

Cycle One

Descriptive	Read and respond to simple descriptions of familiar places and things	Write simple descriptions of familiar places and things	Describe in simple speech a familiar place or thing.	Respond to people talking about familiar places and things	Respond to visual texts describing places and things.

Reading

Texts:

Descriptive passages

Stories with strong descriptive content

Responses:

(see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - reasons for choice of features described.

Discuss - choice and effectiveness of descriptive language used

- effect of descriptive passages on stories

Writing

Written descriptions of rooms in a house, outdoor spaces, objects and events

Written descriptions from pictures

Speaking

Converting selected written descriptions into oral presentations

Oral descriptions from pictures

Listening

Texts:

Descriptive Passages

Stories with strong descriptive content

Peer Recordings

Responses:

(see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Discuss - why is the organization of descriptions important?

- why is the 'voice' of the speaker important in listening to descriptions?

Visual

Texts:

Videos and photographs with strong descriptive content

Responses:

Write descriptions of some of the places shown in photos or videos

Identify through inference - how people feel about the place

Discuss - how do you feel about the places you have viewed?

Cycle Two

Descriptive	Read and respond to more complex descriptions focusing on feeling and action	Write more complex descriptions focusing on feeling and action	Verbally describe a scene focusing on feeling and action	Respond to verbal descriptions of scenes focusing on feeling and action	Respond to more complex visual texts focusing on feeling and action

Reading

Texts:

Descriptive passages focusing on feeling and action

Stories focusing on feeling and action

Responses:

(see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - what is the mood of the description

Discuss - how does movement affect a description?

- how does a focus on feeling and action in description influence a story?

Writing

Written descriptions focusing on feeling and action.

Speaking

Verbally describe scenes focusing on feeling and action

Oral descriptions from pictures focusing on feeling and action

Listening

Texts:

Descriptive Passages focusing on feeling and action

Stories with strong descriptive content focusing on feeling and action

Peer Recordings

Responses:

(see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Discuss - how does focusing on feeling and action help spoken descriptions?

- how does focusing on feeling and action affect the 'voice' of the speaker?

Visual

Texts:

Videos and photographs with strong descriptive content focusing on feeling and action

Responses:

Write descriptions of some of the places shown in photos or videos

Identify through inference - how people feel about the place

Discuss - how do you feel about the places you have viewed?

Cycle Three

Descriptive	Read and respond to expository essays.	Write expository essays.	Orally present extended expositions	Respond to extended oral expositions	Respond to expository documentaries

Reading

Texts:

Expository essays

Responses:

(see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - What are the main points of the essay

Discuss - What does the essay do to increase our understanding of the subject ?

- What does the essay do to increase our interest in the subject?

Writing

Expository essays

Speaking

Orally present extended expositions

Listening

Texts:

Extended oral expositions (Alistair Cooks America)

Peer Recordings

Responses:

Identify through inference – What does the speaker want you to understand?

Discuss - How is voice useful in presenting a topic exposition ?

Visual

Texts:

Videos and photographs with strong descriptive content focusing on feeling and action Video Documentaries

Responses:

Write reviews

Identify through inference - attitudes of the film maker towards the subject

Discuss - How could this imformation be changed to be presented as a spoken or a written exposition.

Appendix 3 Language of Dialogue

Language of Dialogue

Cycle One

Dialogue	Read and respond to simple written conversation	Write simple conversation with a partner	Practice simple conversation with partners.	Respond to simple conversation.	Respond to visual texts containing simple conversation.

Reading

Texts:

Simple play scripts

Stories with strong dialogue content

Responses:

Write and speak dialogue (see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - what important things have happened before the text begins?

Discuss - what kind of information is best communicated through dialogue in stories and plays?

Writing

Chain Dialogues

Prose Dialogues

Simple play script

Speaking

Two person Conversations on simple topics

Radio play

Listening

Texts:

Radio Plays

Peer Recordings

Responses:

Write and speak dialogue (see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - the relationship between the speakers

Discuss - how does tone of voice change the meaning of words in dialogue?

Visual

Texts:

Video with strong dialogue content (Stage plays converted to film?)

Responses:

Identify through inference -

Discuss - are staged conversations realistic?

Cycle Two

Dialogue	Read and respond to comedy sketch scripts	Write comedy sketch scripts with a partner	Perform comedy sketch scripts with partners.	Respond to Radio comedy sketches	Respond to video comedy sketches

Reading

Texts:

Comedy sketch scripts

Responses:

Write and speak comedy sketch scripts (see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - why is the sketch supposed to be funny?

Discuss - can important ideas be included in sketches?

Writing

comedy sketch scripts

Speaking

Comedy sketches:

Present to class

Radio sketches

Listening

Texts:

Comedy sketches/Radio

Peer Recordings

Responses:

Write and speak dialogue (see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - the characteristics of the speakers.

Discuss - how do the actors make the sketches effective without visuals?

Visual

Texts:

Comedy sketches

Video focusing on comedy

Peer presentations of comedy sketches

Responses:

Identify through inference - who are the "straight men" and who are the "funny men"

Discuss - - how does body language add to the communication of the words in the sketch?

Produce – A video of a comedy sketch

Cycle Three

Dialogue	Read and respond to play and movie scripts	Write scenes for a play	Practice and perform scenes from plays, with partners.	Respond to Recorded presentations of longer complex narratives	Respond to full length movies and play presentations

Reading

Texts:

Play and Movie scripts

Responses:

Write scenes for scripts (see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference What themes are developed in the script ?

Discuss - How does the script show development of characters ?

Writing

scenes for a play

Speaking

Plays:

Present to class

Radio plays

Listening

Texts:

Radio plays

Peer Recordings

Responses:

Identify through inference - Who are the central characters?

Discuss - how important are peripheral characters in the development of a visual story?

Visual

Texts:

Plays

Full length Films

Peer presentations of plays

Responses:

Identify through inference - themes presented

Discuss - How do visual techniques enhance theme development.

Write reviews of films and plays

Appendix 4 Narrative Language

Narrative Language

Cycle One

Narrative	Read and respond to simple personal narratives	Write simple personal narratives	Tell stories about self or family.	Respond to people speaking about their lives and families.	Respond to simple, personal visual texts.

Reading

Texts:

Simple biographies/autobiographies

Stories about families

Responses:

Write and tell stories (see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - characteristics of people in the narrative

- reasons for choice of events included

Discuss - how are the 'biographies' and the 'stories' different?

Writing

Stories about family and childhood

Speaking

Talking about childhood memories

Listening

Texts:

Simple Radio Biographies

Peer Recordings

Responses:

Write and tell stories (see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - how did this person's life affect others?

Discuss - who has had the biggest effect on your life?

Visual

Texts:

Video with family/childhood memory content

Responses:

Identify through inference -

Discuss - what are the differences between the families viewed?

- what are the similarities between the families viewed?

Cycle Two

Narrative	Read and respond to more complex narratives: Short Stories and Tales	Write more complex narratives: Short Stories and Tales	Tell a story	Respond to people narrating Short Stories and Tales	Respond to more comlpex visual texts: Short Stories and Tales

Reading

Texts:

Short Stories

Folk Tales

Responses:

Write and tell stories (see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Describe: the plot of stories and tales

Identify through inference - character motivation.

- plot devices and their effects.

Discuss - how are the short stories and folk tales different?

Writing

Stories on any topic

Traditional Folk Tales

Speaking

Telling Stories and Tales

Listening

Texts:

Radio Stories

Peer Recordings/ Student stories

Responses:

Write and tell stories (see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - The most important event in the story ?

Discuss - how important is the story tellers voice?

Visual

Texts:

Short Stories and Tales on Video

Responses:

Identify through inference - the relationships between the characters

Discuss - is seeing a story better than reading a story?

- what changes are made when a story is told in a video?

Cycle Three

Narrative	Read and respond to complex narratives: Novels and full length non fiction	Write complex narratives: Chapter style	Oral presentations of reviews of complex narratives	Respond to people reading and reviewing longer, complex narratives	Respond to longer visual texts: full length movie narratives

Reading

Texts:

Novels

Full length non-fiction narratives

Reviews

Responses:

Present complex narratives in writing and speech (see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Compare and discuss books in writing and speech (see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - character development.
- themes.

Discuss - how do we use chapters to construct longer narratives?
- how does character development interact with theme?

Writing

Chapter style sections

Book reviews

Speaking

Spoken book reviews

Listening

Texts:

Audio books

Spoken Reviews

Responses:

Write reviews of Audio Books

Identify through inference - attitude of reviewers?

Discuss - how important is the reader's voice?

Visual

Texts:

Full length Film and Documentary

Responses:

Identify through inference -

Review Films

Appendix 5 Persuasive Language

Persuasive Language

Cycle One

Persuasive	Read and respond to pieces of advice	Write response letters for an advice column. Write advisory stories	Giving advice to a friend (orally)	Respond to advice being given orally	Respond to advisory posters and video.

Reading

Texts:

Advice letters/columns

Stories with strong advisory content (Fables? Folk Tales? Teaching Stories?)

Responses:

(see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - results if people follow the advice given
- who the advisory stories are meant for

Discuss - is it always a good idea to give advice?
- what different advice could have been given?
- what different 'lessons' could be learned from the story?

Writing

Letters of Advice

Stories modeled on Fables? Folk Tales? Teaching Stories?

Speaking

Giving advice face to face

Listening

Texts:

Radio advice segments?

Stories with strong advisory content (Fables? Folk Tales? Teaching Stories?)

Peer Recordings

Responses:

(see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - what impression the speakers are trying to make

Discuss - how important were teaching stories in the past and how important are they today?

Visual

Texts:

Advisory videos and posters (Health, Fitness, etc.)

Responses:

Discuss - how effective are these advisory videos and posters?

Produce - an advisory poster

Cycle Two

Persuasive	Read and respond to persuasive essays	Write persuasive essays.	Present speeches	Respond to speeches.	Respond to video essays.

Reading

Texts:

Persuasive essays

Responses:

(see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - the position held by the writer

Discuss - are the arguments well organised?

- what different arguments could have been given?

Writing

Persuasive Essays

Speaking

Speeches presenting an argument

Listening

Texts:

Speeches

Peer Recordings

Responses:

(see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - what impression the speakers are trying to make?

- who is the intended audience for the speech?

Discuss - what is the purpose of speech making today?

- what makes a good speech maker?

Visual

Texts:

Video Essays

Responses:

Identify through inference - the most important points of the argument

Discuss - how does the video essay use visuals to emphasize the point of the argument?

Cycle Three

Persuasive	Read and respond to more complex persuasive essays.	Write, in teams, speeches and notes for debate topics.	Present debate speeches in teams	Respond to recordings of individual debating speeches.	Respond to videos and live debate performances.

Reading

Texts:

More complex persuasive essays

Responses:

(see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - key points

Discuss - how do the arguments work together?

- what different arguments could have been given?

Writing

Speeches and Debating notes

Speaking

Debating with teams

Listening

Texts:

Debating speeches

Peer Recordings

Responses:

(see **Writing** and **Speaking**)

Identify through inference - which speaker makes the most important contribution to the team argument?

Discuss - How difficult is it to debate against what you believe?

- How important are the team members in constructing a debate?

Visual

Texts:

Video and live debate

Responses:

Identify through inference - Do you think the speakers really support their arguments?

Discuss - How important is body posture and movement in carrying a speakers arguments?

Appendix 6 Assessment for Post Core Course

Evaluation and Tests:

1. SLEP test entrance exam

2. End of term SLEP test: Students take a diagnostic test at the end of each term to measure their progress and chart their proficiency development.

3. End of course SLEP test: students take a SLEP test at the end of the course and the score is compared to that of the entrance SLEP test in order to assess the level of language improvement made by the students.

Module Evaluation

Tests

At the end of each unit – Alternating

- Spoken Assessment

- Written Assessment

Products to be published and assessed

At the end of each unit

- Written Piece

Products to be completed

During each unit

- Spoken Pieces

At the end of each week

- Journal
- Reading Log
- Word List

Reading Running Records

At the end of every term

Grades

Grades are calculated as follows:

Projects	Written project	20
	Oral projects	5
Class Work	Writing Journal	15
	Reading Log	5
	Excel Vocabulary List	15
Unit Test		40

A student who does not obtain a 70% in any unit is considered to have failed the course and will be dismissed.

Tests

At the end of each unit - Alternating

- Spoken Assessment (SOPI [Standard Oral Proficiency Index] style)

- Written Assessment (TWE [Test of Written English] style)

Products to be published and assessed

At the end of each unit

- Written Piece

Products to be completed

During each unit

- Spoken Pieces

At the end of each week

- Journal
- Reading Log
- Word List

Reading Running Records

At the end of every term

Assessment Cycle One

Style Unit	Journal	Reading Log	Word List in Excel	Written Project	Oral Assessment	Unit Test: written/oral
Narrative	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 1 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher assessed a story about childhood	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	Written Test A simple story
Dialogue	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 1 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher assessed a scripted conversation	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	Oral Test Role Play
Descriptive	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 1 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher assessed a description of a place	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	Written Test Description from a Photograph
Persuasive	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 1 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher assessed an advice letter	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	Oral Test Giving Advice
Point Value per unit	15	5	15	20	5	40

Assessment Cycle Two

Style Unit	Journal	Reading Log	Word List in Excel	Written Project	Oral Assessment	Unit Test: written/oral
Descriptive	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 1 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher assessed Description of a scene	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	Oral Test Verbally describe a scene
Dialogue	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 1 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher Script for Sketch	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	Written Test Script for Sketch
Narrative	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 1 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher assessed a short story or retold Folk Tale	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	Oral Test presentation of a Short Story
Persuasive	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 1 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher Persuasive Essay	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	Written Test Persuasive Essay
Point Value per unit	15	5	15	20	5	40

Assessment Cycle Three

Style Unit	Journal	Reading Log	Word List in Excel	Written Project	Oral Assessment	Unit Test: written/oral
Descriptive	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 2 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher assessed	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	WrittenTest Expository Essay
Persuasive	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 2 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	Oral Test Debate
Narrative	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 2 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher assessed	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	Written Test Discussion of two/three books read
Dialogue	3 pages per week.	Record of reading by pages. Complete 2 book.	Maintained in Call Lab 5 words a week	1 Task teacher	3 Tasks: recorded in Lab - peer feedback	Oral Test Play Performance
Point Value per unit	15	5	15	20	5	40

Appendix 7 Suggested Daily Timetable for Post Core

	Saturday	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
Period 1	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading	Reading
Period 2	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing	Writing
Breakfast	**Breakfast**	**Breakfast**	**Breakfast**	**Breakfast**	**Breakfast**
Period 3	Speaking/ Listening	Speaking/ Listening	Speaking/ Listening	Speaking/ Listening	Speaking/ Listening
Period 4	CALL	CALL	CALL	CALL	CALL
Prayer	**Prayer**	**Prayer**	**Prayer**	**Prayer**	**Prayer**
Period 5	Language Skills	Self Access	Language Skills	Self Access	Language Skills

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