

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

CULTURAL PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING SITUATIONS:

**Overseas Students in Their First Year Of
Teacher Education in New Zealand**

A thesis presented in
fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in Second Language Teaching
at Massey University

Penelope Anne Haworth

1996

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the perceptions of four overseas student teachers, based on teaching practice observations in their first year of teacher education in a New Zealand College of Education. Data was collected by means of questionnaires, interviews, a semantic differential scale and a stimulated recall procedure. Perceptions of New Zealand learning situations were examined at three points during the year, as the subjects participated in teaching practices. Results from the study relate to the nature, focus, orientation and shifts in the students' perceptions of the target culture. It was found that perceptions were variably focussed on three broad zones of perception, notably teacher/learner roles, the nature of learning and the contextual features of the target learning culture. A number of perception indicators were generated from the data. These included positive perception indicators such as clear conceptualization, strategy formulation, surface assimilation, positive uptake and avoidance of closure, and negative perception indicators relating to partial conceptualization, self doubts, rejection and closure, overlaying, and the lack of effective models. The major outcomes of this study point to the influence of prior beliefs and expectations on perceptions of the target learning culture, as well as the developmental nature of perceptions. In addition, findings reveal the importance of perceptions in the process of acculturation. The study concludes with a number of suggestions for the development of more effective programmes for overseas student teachers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely acknowledge the support of all those who have helped in me in the process of developing the germ of an idea into a thesis. I have greatly appreciated the professional input of my supervisors Dr Cynthia White, Associate Professor Noel Watts, and Margaret Franken. I am sincerely grateful for all the time which was so freely given, and the continued interest shown in my work. In particular, I would like to thank Dr Cynthia White, for her on-going encouragement, expert counsel and guidance. Her continued confidence in me and her generously shared wisdom has been invaluable in helping me to maintain my motivation, and to focus and clarify my ideas.

I would also like to acknowledge the Massey University College of Education who have provided research grants in support of this research. Their assistance with travel, tapes and audio-visual equipment in 1995, and provision of funding for assistant tutors in 1996, has enabled this project to be completed.

I am especially indebted to the many schools and teachers who generously allowed me to video tape classes, and to the four student teachers who took time to share their perceptions in the midst of a busy year of study. Without the participation of these people, this research would not have been possible. I hope that, in return, the findings from this study will contribute to a more informed approach to the teacher education of overseas students, which will have lasting benefits in the education of all of their future students.

In closing, I am truly grateful to my family who have supported my academic efforts over many years. My very special thanks to my husband Geoffrey, for his constant support and willingness to allow me the freedom to pursue my own learning pathways. My thanks also to my daughter Jillaine for her patience and understanding, and to my Mum for always having time to listen to me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	THE NATURE OF PERCEPTION	5
2.1	Key themes	5
2.1.1	Perception	5
2.1.2	Cultural Perception	8
2.1.3	Socialization, Beliefs and Role Expectations	8
2.1.4	Acculturation	10
2.1.5	Teacher Education	10
2.2	Cultural Perceptions in the Educational Setting	11
2.2.1	Perception, Learning and Teaching	11
2.2.2	Cultural Perception: Influences on Learning and Teaching Styles..	14
2.2.3	Cultural Perception: Influences on Learning and Teaching Roles ..	17
2.3	Shifts in Perceptions	19
2.3.1	Culture Shock	19
2.3.2	Interaction and Context	21
2.3.3	Teacher Education and Teacher Beliefs	22
2.4	Summary	26
3	METHODOLOGY	27
3.1	Population and Setting	27

3.2	Subjects	28
3.2.1	Selection	28
3.2.2	Characteristics of Subjects	31
	<i>Subject A</i>	32
	<i>Subject B</i>	32
	<i>Subject C</i>	33
	Subject D	33
3.3	Research Design	34
3.3.1	The Research Questions	34
3.3.2	The Research Approach	35
3.3.3	Data Collection Techniques	36
3.4	Instrumentation	38
3.4.1	The Questionnaire	38
3.4.2	The Initial Interview	39
3.4.3	The Semantic Differential Scale	39
3.4.4	The Stimulated Recall Technique	42
3.4.5	The Final Interview	46
3.5	Summary	47
4	RESULTS: ZONES OF PERCEPTION AND PERCEPTION INDICATORS	49
4.1	Interpreting the Semantic Differential Scale	49
4.2	Data Processing and Analysis	51
4.3	Zones of Perception	51

4.4	Perception Indicators	53
4.5	Data Display Matrix	63
5	RESULTS: CASE STUDIES	65
5.1	Subject A	65
5.1.1	Teacher/Learner Roles	66
5.1.2	The Nature of Learning	68
5.1.3	Contextual Features	70
5.1.4	Summation	71
5.2	Subject B	72
5.2.1	Teacher/Learner Roles	73
5.2.2	The Nature of Learning	75
5.2.3	Contextual Features	77
5.2.4	Summation	79
5.3	Subject C	80
5.3.1	Teacher/Learner Roles	82
5.3.2	The Nature of Learning	84
5.3.3	Contextual Features	85
5.3.4	Summation	86
5.4	Subject D	88
5.4.1	Teacher/Learner Roles	90
5.4.2	The Nature of Learning	92
5.4.3	Contextual Features	94

5.4.4	Summation	95
5.5	Summary	96
6.	DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	98
6.1	Question One: <i>What perceptions do overseas student teachers have of learning situations in New Zealand?</i>	98
6.1.1	Perceptions of Teacher/Learner Roles	98
6.1.2	Perceptions of the Nature of Learning	100
6.1.3	Perceptions of Contextual Features	102
6.1.4	Perceptions Across Zones	102
6.2	Question Two: <i>How do these perceptions change over time?</i>	103
6.2.1	Shifts in Perceptions of Teacher/Learner Roles	104
6.2.2	Shifts in Perceptions of the Nature of Learning	105
6.2.3	Shifts in Perceptions of Contextual Features	106
6.3	Question Three: <i>Does the general direction of any shifts in perception tend towards the target culture or away from it?</i>	107
6.3.1	Cultural Orientation of the Zones of Perception	107
6.3.2	Cultural Orientation of the Perception Indicators	108
6.4	Summary	109
7.	CONCLUSIONS	111
7.1	Theoretical Implications.....	111
7.2	Methodological Implications	113

7.3 Practical Implications 114

7.4 Implications for Further Research 117

BIBLIOGRAPHY 120

APPENDICES 137

LIST OF APPENDICES

1.1	Introductory Letter to Subjects	137
1.2	Subject Consent Form	138
2	Characteristics of the Subjects	139
3	The Questionnaire	140
4	The Initial Interview Schedule	142
5	Final Version of the Semantic Differential Scale	143
6	Time Line for the Research	146
7.1	Introductory Letter to Schools	147
7.2	School Consent Form	148
8	The Pilot Semantic Differential Scale	149
9.1	The Practice Exercise	151
9.2	Visual Stimulus Used for Practice Exercise	152
10	The Final Interview Schedule	153

LIST OF FIGURES

2.1	Hayes (1991) Model of the Perceptual Cycle, as Adapted from Neiser (1976).....	6
2.2	Entwistle and Tait's (1990) Heuristic Model of the Teaching Learning Process	12
3.1	The Stimulated Recall Procedure	44
4.1	Results: Zones of Perception	52
4.2	Results: Positive (+) Perception Indicators	54
4.3	Results: Negative (-) Perception Indicators	59
4.4	Data Display Matrix	64
5.1	Subject A: Data Matrix	66
5.1.1	Subject A: TLR Shifts	67
5.1.2	Subject A: NL Shifts	69
5.1.3	Subject A: CF Shifts	70
5.2	Subject B: Data Matrix	73
5.2.1	Subject B: TLR Shifts	74
5.2.2	Subject B: NL Shifts	76
5.2.3	Subject B: CF Shifts	78
5.3	Subject C: Data Matrix	81
5.3.1	Subject C: TLR Shifts	83
5.3.2	Subject C: NL Shifts	85
5.3.3	Subject C: CF Shifts	86
5.4	Subject D: Data Matrix	89

5.4.1	Subject D: TLR Shifts	91
5.4.2	Subject D: NL Shifts	92
5.4.3	Subject D: CF Shifts	94

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Number of Overseas Students in Tertiary Education at 31 July, 1995	27
Table 3.2	Characteristics of the Subjects	139