Teaching Conversation and Negotiation Skills in English
Using Home-Grown, Semi-Scripted Conversation Models
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Statement of the Issue

For many years now I have been involved in the teaching of English as an additional language to adult migrants and refugees in a New Zealand tertiary institution. These learners have come from Asia, South America, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. I believe that it is vital for their survival, successful settlement and full participation in an English speaking world that they learn the skills and cultural norms of conversation and negotiation in English as quickly and as efficiently as possible. It is important that the models from which they learn are as close to the language of the context they will be living in as possible, so that they do not have to 're-learn' in the 'real' world.

The challenge for the teacher is to find readily accessible, authentic (ie real world) samples of the target language suitable for classroom use and to devise appropriate consciousness-raising activities to facilitate this learning. Learners are surrounded by 'authentic' language in their daily lives but it is heard fleetingly, and simple absorption by exposure is not the most efficient way of learning, as the data is too complex and seldom has the built-in redundancy necessary for efficient learning. One could presumably record the language of the street and use it in the classroom, but there are ethical and practical barriers to this. Even if recorded samples of actual language use could be used (and some theorists advocate this), the data may be too complex for most learners to handle in the classroom. Textbooks provide models, but they are not always very authentic and they may be derived from a context that is very different from the one in which the learner is to live. The many parts of the English speaking world have varying linguistic and cultural norms for casual conversation and other genres such as negotiation and service encounters and the use of language and socio-cultural strategies from a different part of the world has the potential to lead to miscommunication. Even Australian models do not reflect he particular blend of Pacific and Asian culture that contributes to the New Zealand context today.

Literature Review

A number of articles and books have influenced my approaches to this issue. I will briefly survey those that were most influential and related more directly to these studies.

In an article introducing *Teachers' Voices 6* (de Silva Joyce & Slade, 2000), Helen de Silva Joyce and Diana Slade summarize the literature to date on analyzing and teaching casual conversation, outlining the

problems that arise from using the scripted dialogues often found in traditional textbooks as models. They point out that these dialogues are often based on the grammar of written language, omit or distort many of the important features of real life oral interaction and fail to model longer turns which are so often part of natural conversation in English. They ignore the insights gained from recent linguistic analysis of the features of casual conversation (Burns, 2001; Eggins & Slade, 1997). In the same article de Silva Joyce and Slade describe how the features of conversational genres can be taught, using the teaching/learning cycle to exploit an authentic model in order to help learners identify the stages of the genre and the key discourse and linguistic features within it. In addition they point out the importance of teaching the micro aspects of discourse and describe the typical problems learners have with these.

In the same volume Butterworth (2000) explains how it was possible to create authentic models for classroom use for lower level learners from semi-scripted role-played dialogues. His method of developing authentic texts was to set up role-plays with colleagues using semi-scripted scenarios based often on real life interactions he had encountered. He then recorded the role-plays and transcribed them, later abridging them for classroom use with lower level learners.

Carter and McCarthy (1995) Carter, Hughes and McCarthy (1998) and Barraja-Rohan (1997) also advocate the use of authentic models to teach the norms of spoken English. Carter and his colleagues suggest that learners should be encouraged to undertake consciousness-raising activities such as looking at naturalistic data, discussing it, and creating their own or the group's rule for the features they notice. In addition, Barraja-Rohan emphasizes the importance of helping learners to identify differences in cultural and pragmatic norms of interaction in cross-cultural discussion. She advocates the use of role-play after initial exposure to the authentic data, to practise the language and further explore differences in cultural norms. The teaching of socio cultural norms as an essential part of the teaching of conversational genres based on naturalistic data is also advocated by Liddicoat (1997).

Finally McCathy and Carter (2001) argue that while corpora and naturalistic data should inform teaching, they should not control it. Teachability, learnability and relevance to the learner should also play a part in the decisions made by teachers.

Procedures

Inspired by the literature I had been reading I decided early in 2003 to try to find more authentic models for my teaching of conversational and negotiation skills to adult migrants and refugees at a pre Intermediate to Intermediate level in New Zealand. I will describe later in this chapter how I first used published Australian

materials and then went on to develop my own. In order to facilitate the development of my teaching in the use of these models, I decided to engage in some action research. I collected and analyzed data to find out if the materials (both the published and home-made) directly or indirectly helped to lead to an improvement in learners' skills, and to see which activities facilitated the improvement as well as how practical they were to use in the classroom. In carrying out the research I learned much about teaching from models and also about the process of teacher action research. I initially carried out two cycles while teaching conversational genres in semesters one and two 2003. I then carried out a third cycle while teaching the language of negotiation (in semester two 2005). In the second and third cycles I tried to improve my teaching practice based on the findings of the last, and in the third cycle I made improvements to my research methodology and data gathering tools.

Student Profile

The students in the three classes were adult male and female permanent migrants aged from late teens to mid fifties. They were at a minimum level roughly equivalent to IELTS 4.5 General) but some had individual skills well below or well above this level. Table 1 gives a brief summary of the numbers in class, countries of origin, and time in New Zealand:

Table 1

	Semester 1 2003	Semester 2 2003	Semester 2 2005
Number in class	22	19	24
Time in NZ at enrolment	6 months - 6 yrs no data for one student who had been in NZ for at least two years	5 days - 4 yrs	9 months - 17 yrs
In NZ less than 1 year	6	9	3
Countries of origin			
Mainland China	11	6	5
Iran	1		2
Somalia	1	1	1
Taiwan	2	2	1
Korea	1	2	4
Thailand	3		1
Sri Lanka	2	1	1
Vietnam	1		

Turkey		2	
Japan		1	1
Indonesia		2	
Cambodia		1	
Jordan		1	
Ethiopia			3
Malaysia			1
Serbia			1
Afghanistan			1
Tonga			1
Hong Kong			1

The Materials

The samples I used in the first cycle were the unscripted or semi-scripted Australian conversations in the textbooks *Beach St 2* (Delaruelle, 2001) and *Listening to Australia Intermediate* (Brawn, 2002). The discourse and cultural norms of oral interaction in Australian English are very close to those of New Zealand English, so these texts were useful, but there are differences in context and small differences in cultural norms between these and the types of conversations we believe are the most useful, relevant and transferable for learners in the New Zealand context.

While using the Australian samples, I therefore began to make models of my own to supplement them, also writing transcripts and worksheets with 'consciousness-raising' activities to go with the new models. The methodology for making the models owed much to Butterworth's description of the semi-scripting he used to create the raw data for his post-beginner dialogues. From my experience, and from my knowledge of the kinds of interactions my learners were most likely to engage in their daily lives, scenarios were written. Native English speaking EAL (English as an Additional Language) teachers were then asked to role-play themselves in these scenarios - a fictional but relevant and natural situation in which a problem was discussed. They discussed, for example, how to find a parking place in the city in the evening without paying and how to ensure teenagers observed their curfews. I recorded all the conversations except the first with no prior rehearsal, as I wanted the language to have as many of the features of natural conversation as possible. I then transcribed them, looked at the resulting language, picked out the features that I thought would be of most use for learners to 'notice', and created an accompanying worksheet with questions about the key vocabulary, discourse and other linguistic features and socio-cultural underpinnings of the language

used in the models. The linguistic awareness I needed to identify the key features came from my reading of Eggins and Slade (1997), Burns (2001) and Pawley and Syder (1983). Later I recorded another set of role-played semi-scripted dialogues in the same way to teach the norms of negotiation. Further dialogues were recorded in 2005 to supplement the material in the textbooks for teaching the basic conversational genre.

In the first cycle I needed to find further naturalistic data on which to base my teaching because the material from the Australian books was not sufficient to demonstrate fully the features of the genre I was teaching and researching, and I hadn't yet completed the recording of the 'home-grown' models. As there was no known published authentic New Zealand material suitable for this level and I wanted to avoid relying on less authentic sources, I listened to conversations between native speakers. I also occasionally did a demonstration role-play in the classroom with learners who had already mastered the socio-cultural norms and much of the language of this genre. For the second and third cycle I used my own newly-created models and materials supplemented with some material from *Beach St 2* (Delaruelle, 2001) and *Listening to Australia Intermediate* (Brawn, 2002).

<u>Using the Authentic Data in the Teaching</u>
From my experience teaching over many years I have discovered that there are certain basic conversation skills that learners at this level rarely have. One is an ease and fluency in using questions to elicit information from a conversation partner. In addition they are rarely able to use conversational discourse markers, or manage long turns in conversation. They also have difficulty in natural transitions.

In all three semesters, the skills I decided to focus on were those identified as weak in both the pre-tests and the initial self assessments. Thus, in the teaching of basic conversational strategies in the first cycle, the focus was on using pre-fabricated questions and conversational discourse markers to enhance fluency. In the second cycle the focus was on the transition from casual small talk to the main purpose of the conversation. For the teaching of negotiation the focus was on getting attention, introducing the situation, and insisting.

<u>First Cycle: Basic Conversation with Long Turns</u>
After revising the conversational skills learners had already learned at the intermediate level, I began to address the weaknesses I had identified in the pre-test.

The only models available to me at this stage to teach skills in elicitation were the Australian ones, and these samples did not offer sufficient data to teach from, so I had to draw on my familiarity with the natural

interactions I heard as a native speaker. I presented to learners the kinds of statements which typically occur in a natural conversation, particularly in small talk, for example 'I'm from Korea' 'I went to the movies last night.' and invited them to create follow-up questions which were then put on the board, examined and modified to make them more 'native-like'. This introduced learners to the formulaic and cultural nature of 'follow-up' conversational questions used for elicitation. We next brainstormed questions to initiate a topic in conversation and found that they also tended to be formulaic. I encouraged learners to memorize this formulaic language to increase their fluency in conversation, and we used role-play to practise in the classroom.

To teach the use of discourse markers, I made copies of the transcripts of the Australian textbook samples mentioned above and took them to class. I asked learners to find samples of the use of 'and', 'so', 'anyway' and 'well' as discourse markers in the texts and try to work out what their meaning or effect was in the context. Most already knew from their intermediate studies how to use 'anyway' to change the subject. But analysis of the use of other markers proved too hard for students at this level. They didn't have the language to explain even if they could see what was happening, so I helped them articulate the meaning or effect of the discourse marker in each case. In subsequent semesters I asked them to find the markers, but explained the meaning to them, and followed up with short dialogue practice in which they used them in the same way. For 'actually' I did a role-play with a fluent student and asked the other students to listen for discourse markers. The situation I set up called for the use of 'actually' in a dispreferred response. It is interesting that the students did not hear this discourse marker until I pointed it out to them. I hoped that a new awareness would help more noticing and therefore more rapid acquisition of all these common markers and thence more fluency in conversation.

Finally, to practice both skills simultaneously in a simulated situation, students did role-plays in groups of three. Two conversed while the other one rated them using the criteria that would be applied in the final assessment.

During the course of the teaching learners also listened to and answered questions on the models found in the two Australian textbooks to enhance their familiarity with basic exchanges in English and to increase their conversational vocabulary.

All these activities were directly or indirectly based on information about the language gathered from observation and analysis of naturalistic data, either in published materials or in the immediate environment. Learning was reinforced by classroom role-play practice.

<u>Second Cycle: Conversation with Transitions</u>

Models were used at various stages in the instruction for this cycle – some of the home-made semi-scripted dialogues which were now available, one model from *Beach St 2*, and a role-play with a competent student. The skill I was focusing on was the staging of transitions from small talk to the requesting and giving of advice. Before they started this unit learners had already been taught and tested on the norms of basic conversational exchanges.

Learners initially listened to a tape of one of the New Zealand models in the language lab and answered comprehension questions, then questions on conversational vocabulary and discourse strategies. The answers were discussed in class and a transcript given to the students so that they could identify examples of the different features.

I then presented another model in the form of a role-play which I did with a competent student, and gave the learners a worksheet describing three strategies for transition. These strategies were based on my analysis of the staging and language of the semi scripted dialogues. They practised the transitions using the different strategies. I later asked some learners to demonstrate and the class discussed the conversation strategies used. They then did further role-play of a complete conversation in which they were asked to request and give advice about a family, health, study or money problem of their choice, using a self assessment checklist. Additional listening exercises were also completed using the home-made and Beach St models together with worksheets similar to the one used with the first model. Before the final assessment was given there was a final role-play practice in threes as for the first competency and volunteers did a demonstration for the class with the class rating them on the assessment criteria.

In this cycle I had more suitable recorded models available and so I did not have to rely so much on the less accessible data derived from listening to native speakers. The teaching was based on a study of the semi-scripted dialogues, but as I had found that learners had great difficulty in analyzing the language in the samples in the first semester, I modified my approach. This time I asked learners to find the features, but I explained them. As in the first cycle practice using role-play was an important part of the teaching.

<u>Third Cycle: Negotiation</u>

In this cycle I used three semi-scripted home-made dialogues which included a negotiation with a librarian, an employer and a teacher, one model from *Beach St 2* involving a negotiation with a real estate agent, and some demonstrations with competent students.

Consciousness raising activities again included listening to the models and answering written comprehension questions, as well as questions about vocabulary, linguistic features, staging and negotiation strategies (for example getting attention appropriately where necessary, stating the problem in general and then in detail, insisting using softeners, offering compromises, and checking the outcome). There was also classroom discussion of the context, the participants, the power relations, the situations and their influence on the politeness strategies used (or in some cases not used), and the language used for each of the strategies in the models.

Learners did paired practice of each stage in the negotiation, using a further teacher-created worksheet summarizing the language and the staging of negotiation. This worksheet was based on an analysis of the language used in the samples and observed in natural interaction. This was followed by paired practice of the whole negotiation using everyday situations that learners chose from a worksheet. I also used one written worksheet from an Australian textbook to practice the language of indirect requests and a further teacher created worksheet to practise, in paired dialogues, the use of the relevant discourse markers.
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Further reinforcement of the learning took the form of demonstration role-plays between the teacher and volunteers. These were based on situations they had encountered in their own lives. In later stages I encouraged the class to coach the volunteer at difficult points in the encounter.
Towards the end of the teaching when learners had encountered a number of models and practised negotiation in a number of different situations, there was further discussion of the ways in which the language and staging of negotiations, in particular opening moves, can be affected by the power relations of the participants and the situation. Finally there was the usual three-way role-play task, with two people negotiating and one person listening and monitoring according to written criteria.

Again, models from authentic or simulated authentic interactions were directly or indirectly the basis of nearly all the activities. Classroom discussion and teacher-student role-play played a greater part in the teaching in this cycle, but paired role-play practice was again the basic strategy for reinforcing and developing skills.

The Action Research Data
For all three cycles the data collection tools were learner pre- and post-tests, learner pre- and post- written self-assessments, a survey to find out which activities learners thought helped, and most helped towards any

improvement in their skills and a reflective journal I kept while teaching. Samples of assessment and survey tools are in appendices 1-3.

The pre-tests of the first two cycles consisted of paired role-play in which learners used the target language and were observed using a simple checklist of the key features of the language. Learners were rated competent (at the exit level of the competency according to the criteria to be used in the post-test), somewhat competent, or not competent in each skill. The pretest for the third cycle consisted of a role-played negotiation in which I played the 'gate-keeper'. This time I made a recording and used it to check the data in the checklist.

The post-tests were the normal institutional summative assessment for the competencies and consisted of paired learner role-play or (in the case of the negotiation) teacher-student role-play. All role-plays were based on everyday situations. These were recorded. Students were assessed using a standard checklist and the data checked later from the recordings.

The student self assessments consisted of a checklist in which learners rated their skills by answering 'Yes' 'Sometimes' or 'No' to a series of 'Can you………' questions (see appendices 1-3). The same checklist was completed by learners before and after the teaching period. After reflecting on the results of the self assessments in the first two cycles, I ran the final self-assessment in the third cycle before the results of the teacher assessment were available, to ensure the results did not influence the self–assessment.

The survey was filled in at the same time as the post self assessment. Learners were asked if they thought their skills had improved and were asked to select from a list of activities the ones they thought had helped, and also to identify which two had most helped, in their improvement. For the final cycle, the description of activities was made more specific, in order to get more accurate data. The lists mentioned all the types of activities used in the teaching of each unit. They included those which directly involved the use of models such as 'listening to negotiation tapes, 'studying transcripts of negotiating conversations' as well as some that were less directly linked (for example 'practice in the classroom with a partner' 'information from the teacher'). They also included some other activities that might have facilitated improvements such as 'practice outside the classroom' and 'listening to people outside the classroom'

I used a reflective journal to record what I did in each lesson and my perceptions of the usefulness and effectiveness of each activity as well as the progress learners were making.

For each cycle I provide two analyses. The table in each cycle (Tables 2, 3 and 4 below) shows the number of students who met the criteria for competence and whose rating improved in the target skills in each cycle. I measured improvement by comparing the rating for each individual student in the teacher pre-test and post–test and the student pre self-assessment and post self- assessments. The number improving did not always equate to the difference between the number competent on the pre-test and the number competent on the post–test for two reasons. Improvement could be from not competent to somewhat/sometimes competent or competent or from somewhat/sometimes competent to competent. In addition occasionally a student did not assess themselves on an item in one or other of the self assessments so it was not possible to make comparisons to see if they thought they had improved even when they judged themselves competent on the post-test.

The figure in each cycle (Figures 1, 2 and 3) summarizes the results of the surveys in which learners were asked to tick any number of a list of activities which had, in their opinion, helped them and to list which two had helped them most towards any improvement in their skills. I included in the data only those students who had done both the pre- and post- tests and self-assessments and the survey and who had also consented to participation.

First Cycle: Developing Skills of Elicitation and the Use of Discourse Markers To Increase Fluency in Basic Conversation

Table 2: Teacher Pre- and Post-Tests and Student Initial and Final Self Assessments

Skill	Competent on teacher pre-test	Competent on teacher post-test	Number improved according to teacher	Competent in student initial self assessment	Competent in student final self assessment	Number improved according to student self assessment
Elicitation	2	17	16	2	12	11
Discourse markers	2	15	16	3	11	8

Notes

1. Numbers show improvement according to teacher and students in elicitation and use of discourse markers.

2. Total number of students =18

Figure 1 [NB: Not Table 2]

Table 2: Student perceptions of helpful and most helpful learning activities in developing their conversational skills.

Note: Graph represents the number of students who perceived the activities as helpful (lower part of bar) plus the number who selected them as one of two most helpful (upper part of bar).

Second Cycle: Developing Skills in Making Transitions in Conversation between Small Talk and a Request for Advice.
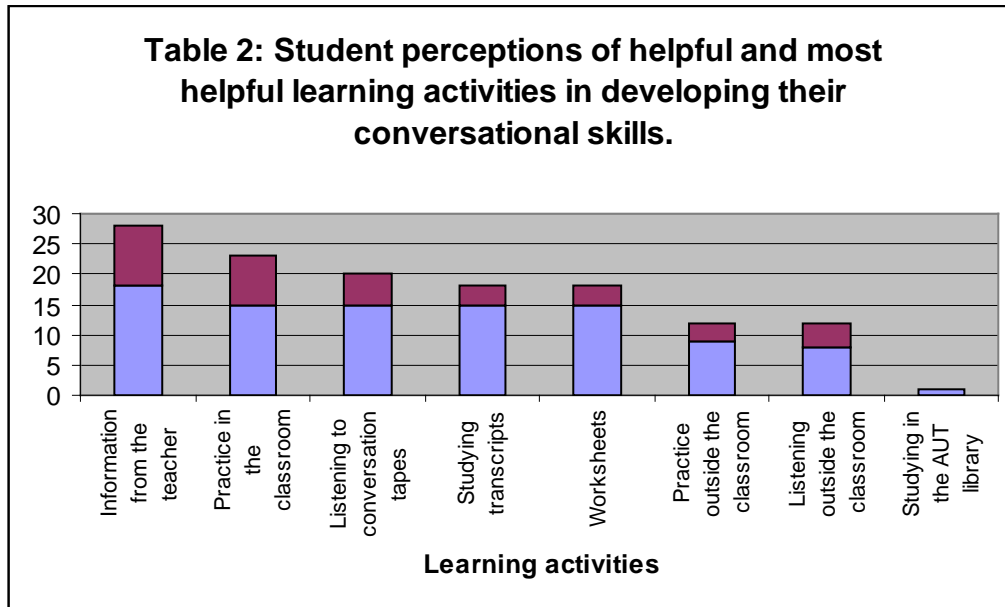
Table 3: Teacher Pre- and Post-Tests and Student Initial and Final Self Assessments

Skill	Competent on teacher pre-test	Competent on teacher post-test	Number improved according to teacher	Competent in student initial self assessment	Competent in student final self assessment	Number improved according to student self assessment

Successful and appropriate transition	3	10	7	7	11*	4*

* including one student who ticked both 'yes' and 'sometimes' on the post -test

Notes
1. Numbers show improvement according to teacher and students in making conversational transitions.
2. **Total number of students =12**

Figure 2 [NB: Not Table 2]

Table 4: Student perceptions of helpful and most helpful learning activities in developing their conversational skills.

Notes
1. Graph represents the number of students who perceived the activities as helpful (lower part of bar) plus the number who selected them as one of two most helpful (upper part of bar).
2. Two students in this group (*) did not respond to the 'most helped' part of the survey and one listed only one activity on the 'most helped' section.
3. Includes one student (**) who chose three items instead of two

Third Cycle: Developing Negotiation Skills

Table 4: Teacher Pre- and Post-Tests and Student Initial and Final Self Assessments

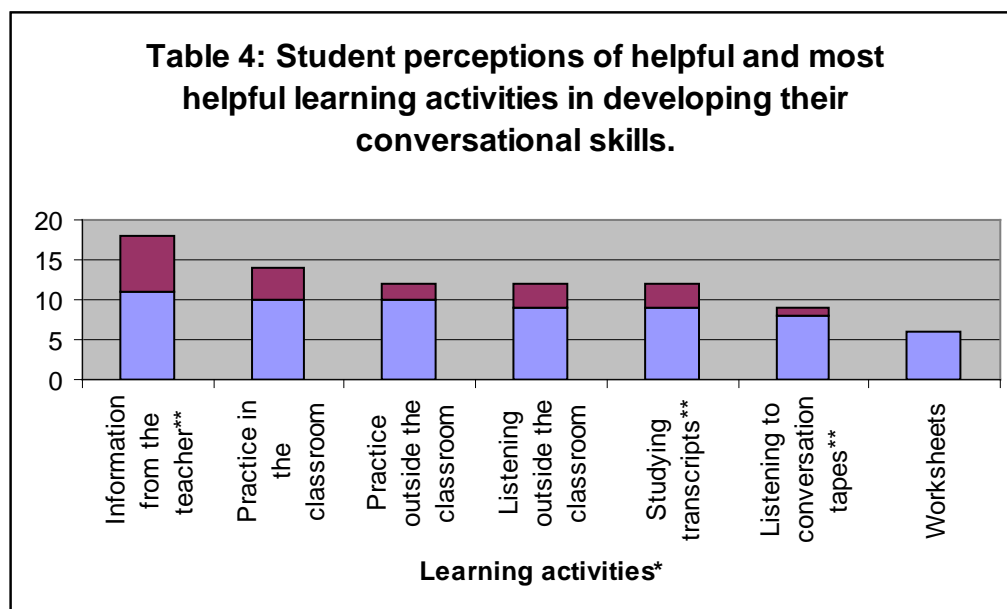| Skill	Competent on teacher pretest	Competent on teacher Post-test	Number improved according to the teacher	Competent in student initial self assessment	Competent in student final self assessment	Number improved according to the student
Gets attention politely	5	15	10	9	12	3
Introduces problem appropriately	5	14	10	9	10	4
Insists/argues politely, using further explanations	3 (2 not attempted)	14	13	4	7	2

Notes:

1. *Numbers show improvement according to teacher and students in negotiation skills*

2. *Total number of students = 15*

Figure 3 [NB: Not Table 6]

Table 6: Student perceptions of helpful and most helpful learning activities in the developing of negotation skills. *

A stacked bar chart. Y-axis ranges from 0 to 20. X-axis labeled "Learning activities" with the following categories and approximate bar values (lower purple part / upper maroon part):

- Listening to tapes: ~12 / ~17
- Information about negotiation: ~11 / ~16
- Practice in classroom: ~11 / ~16
- Studying transcript: ~12 / ~14
- Lanugage lab worksheets: ~11
- Correction from teacher: ~10 / ~11
- Discussion or suggestions during practice: ~7 / ~8
- Practice outside the classroom: ~6 / ~8
- Listening outside the classroom: ~5 / ~7
- Written exercises: ~6
- Listening to cassette at library: ~2
- Reading book at library: ~2
- Watching TV: ~2

Notes

1. Graph represents the number of students who perceived the activities as helpful (lower part of bar) plus the number who selected them as one of two most helpful (upper part of bar).

2. Students were asked to tick any number of activities that had helped and list two that had most helped. (See appendix 3). Two students gave irrelevant responses in the 'Most helped' section. These were not counted.

In all three semesters the teacher assessment showed there was considerable improvement in the weakest skills, although the student data shows a lower perception of improvement for all cycles, particularly in cycle two, partly because students rated themselves higher on the pretest. The proportion judged competent in these skills at the end of teaching was also high, ranging from 83% to 100%.

The surveys were designed to show what activities might have lead to the improvements. However, it became clear when I analyzed the results of the first two cycles that the wording of the survey needed tightening. Firstly, students were asked what they thought helped towards general improvement in their conversational skills during the period of instruction rather than in the specific skills I was focusing on. Secondly, the item 'information from the teacher' was too vague and could have referred to a number of different types of information given in different ways. Thirdly, the descriptions of activities and instructions for completing the survey were not precise enough to prevent misinterpretation, I learned how important it is for the teacher researcher to fine-tune data gathering tools and in the third cycle made the descriptions of

activities and the instructions more precise and ensured that students completed the survey as instructed. The results from this cycle were easier to collate and interpret and are likely to be more reliable.

In spite of this the results in the three cycles are similar. In all cycles information from the teacher, practice in the classroom, listening to tapes and studying transcripts are among activities that more than two thirds of students say helped them, with worksheets also chosen by more than two thirds in cycles one and three. It is interesting that listening to tapes were seen as helpful in the improvement of negotiation skills by more students than information from the teacher in cycle three. This is a reversal of the ranking in cycles one and two, and may reflect the greater focus on the tapes and tapescripts in this cycle.

To summarize, then, a significant proportion of students showed improvement, and the survey data shows that it is likely that the authentic materials, directly through listening to the tapes and studying transcripts and indirectly though teacher information in all cycles and worksheets in cycles one and three, also helped in this improvement. Practice in the classroom was also shown to be a very important contributor to improvement in all cycles.

Reflection

My experience during the conduct of these studies and since strongly indicates that it is both practical and realistic as well as effective to use home-made, semi-scripted materials. Learners enjoy listening to the home-made tapes and find them interesting, recognizing the participants, the context, and the situations. Choosing the situation and recording the tapes is straightforward and enjoyable, and although transcription is time-consuming, the worksheets can be created in draft form, trialed and developed over time.

During this process I have also learnt much about teaching with the naturalistic semi-scripted models. I have learned to trust the data in them and have progressively worked more directly with the tapes and transcripts, becoming gradually less worried that learners would find them too complex. As a result of this research I have also revised my worksheets to make them easier for learners to use. This has involved better layout and indexing to the typescripts, shortening some worksheets that were too lengthy, more careful selection of lexical as well as linguistic and discourse features, and less use of complex and abstract metalanguage. In the second and particularly in the third cycle as a response to the high value learners placed on practice, I also increased the proportion of time spent on practice. In the third cycle there was more classroom discussion of cultural aspects. I also linked the practice more closely to the tapes by using similar situations for the role-play so that the learners were encouraged to go back to the models, review them and learn more directly from them. The higher ranking of the use of tapes and tape scripts in the

survey data indicates that learners in this cycle were engaging more with the models. I intend to continue this practice.

I would like to create more materials to help learners notice more of the cultural features of the interaction. The socio-cultural element to date has more often been raised in teacher led classroom discussion and learners would benefit from more individual observation and reflection on these before classroom discussion takes place.

Although some of the theorists recommend that the students analyze the models in the classroom (Barraja-Rohan, 1997; Carter & McCarthy, 1993; McCarthy, 1998). I have continued, as I did in the first semester, to find this to be too difficult in an introductory exercise for most at this level. It involves language and academic skills that many don't have. I have found it best to ask the students to find examples of different features, but initially explain them to learners myself. This ensures they are learning authentic conversational skills and their consciousness is being raised, creating the necessary noticing of the features which facilitates learning without making the exercise too academic. Features once explained can later be identified and justified by students in other texts. Learning is further reinforced for some when, after being exposed to the tapes and having become aware of the features, they hear them in conversation outside the classroom.

During these three cycles I have also refined my research practice. Because I was not able to fully analyze the data from the first two cycles and learn from this experience until after the second cycle, this refinement of my research practice did not happen until the third cycle. Firstly I discovered the importance of making recordings of the pre-test as well as the post–test in order to check data and this was done for the third cycle out of class time. I also learned the necessity for clear and unambiguous wording in the surveys. The wording of the survey in the third cycle was much tighter and the results more easily interpreted and trustworthy as a result, although there were still a few instances in which the responses of the learners were unexpected and difficult to categorize. To elucidate their responses follow-up interviews would have been helpful but I did not have the resources or the time to do this. In all cycles I learned again that careful and trustworthy research takes more time than anticipated. However I am convinced that the gathering of data facilitated more focused and rapid development of my teaching.

It has been very rewarding and interesting to work with learners using the semi-scripted, more authentic models that are embedded in the New Zealand context. I would recommend that teachers try making their own models relating to situations and the context of the culture in which learners will need to use their

English, and work with them in the classroom. Let students listen to them, understand them and absorb them and devise carefully scaffolded exercises to raise their consciousness of the features which occur in the models. It has become evident to me that 'noticing' is also an important step for learners in incorporating these features into their interlanguage. And of course this study has highlighted yet again what we all know from experience – the importance of sufficient practice in the acquisition of language skills.

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Biodata

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Appendix 1

Pre-Test, Post-Test and Student Surveys

First cycle, Semester 1, 2003

<u>**Pre-Test**</u>

Diagnostic analysis of the competency of students in selected areas of conversational competence

Students were asked to start and carry on a casual conversation in pairs and keep the conversation going until directed to finish. The teacher listened to each pair and filled in the following checklist using the code below the table.

SKILLS   Students

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Elicits information – listen, backchannel and appropriate question											
2. Uses conversational discourse markers.											

SKILLS   Students

	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22
1. Elicits information – listen, backchannel and appropriate question											
2. Uses conversational discourse markers.											

<u>Code</u>

Not at all – N

Sometimes, to some extent – S

Competent at exit HI (High Intermediate) level – C

Did not arise in the conversation heard – ?

Post-Test

LEARNER ASSESSMENT TASK SHEET: ENGLISH HIGH INTERMEDIATE

COMPETENCY 1: CAN PARTICIPATE IN EXTENDED CASUAL CONVERSATIONS

NAME OF LEARNER: ....………...

TASK INSTRUCTIONS :

Start a conversation with your partner, make small talk, then exchange information or opinions about past travel or sightseeing OR smoking and drugs OR food and restaurants. Keep the conversation going for at least 6 minutes. Then on a signal from the teacher finish the conversation politely.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	A	PA	NA
Asks for and provides relevant information or opinions : any of – past travel and sightseeing, smoking and drugs, food and restaurants.			
Is able to manage a conversation and keep it going for 6 minutes : opening, small talk, turn-taking, responding to questions, remarks etc, transitions, closing, appropriate behaviour. *			
Elicits information successfully.			
Gives information, gives opinions or tells stories in extended turns.			
Uses vocabulary relevant to the topic			
Speaks fluently with few hesitations using some conversational discourse markers.			
Grammatical structures appropriate and grammatical errors no barrier to communication			
Pronounces words adequately for easy understanding			
Can understand and respond to comprehensible remarks and questions from partner and seeks clarification where necessary and appropriate.			

* Compulsory criterion – PA for this and the assessment if more than one of these items missing.

A = Achieved   PA = Partly Achieved   NA = Not Attempted

Student Surveys

The first part formed all of the initial self assessment and the first part of the post self assessment. The second part was given only in the post self assessment.

Conversation Self Assessment

Name ………………………………………………….

Can you carry out a casual conversation in English?

Can you do these things? Tick the boxes:

	Yes	Sometimes	No
Start a conversation	☐	☐	☐
Speak fluently in conversation, using discourse markers (e.g well, anyway, so, listen. look, now)	☐	☐	☐
Find right question to get information from my partner	☐	☐	☐
Know when it is my turn to speak	☐	☐	☐
Give feedback in conversation	☐	☐	☐
Keep a conversation going for 6 mins	☐	☐	☐
Know how to be polite	☐	☐	☐
Tell a story	☐	☐	☐
Give an opinion	☐	☐	☐
Check if I don't understand	☐	☐	☐
Finish a conversation politely	☐	☐	☐

Self Assessment on Casual Conversation

Did your casual conversation in English improve this term?   Yes ☐   No ☐

If you ticked yes, please tick the things that helped you to improve:

☐   practice outside the classroom

☐   information from the teacher about English conversation (spoken, board or worksheets)

☐   listening to people talk outside the classroom

☐   practice in the classroom with a partner

☐   listening to conversation tapes

☐   studying transcripts of casual conversation

☐   worksheet written exercises about casual conversation

☐   other ……………………………..

Please write here the **two** things that helped you the most:

………

……..

Appendix 2

Pretest, Post-Test and Student Surveys

Second Cycle, sSmester 2, 2003

<u>**Pre-Test**</u>

Diagnostic analysis of the competency of FTHI#2 students in selected areas of conversational competence. Semester 2 2003

Students were instructed to start a conversation with a fellow student. They were required to introduce a topic into the conversation on which they wished to seek opinion and advice. Broad topic areas of interest and concern to new adult migrants were suggested by the teacher. The teacher listened and rated each student on the skills in the following checklist using the code below.

SKILLS   **Students**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1. Engages in adequate small talk at beginning of conversation																				
2. Uses appropriate language to manage transition to discussion topic (feedback to acknowledge previous conversation, discourse marker, general statement)																				
3. Waits for feedback and starts explanation with suitable discourse marker (e.g. "Well….')																				

<u>Code</u>

Not at all – N

Sometimes, to some extent – S

Competent at exit HI (High Intermediate) level – C

Did not arise in the conversation heard – ?

Post-test

Competency 2: CAN TALK ABOUT SELF IN RELEVANT AND AUTHENTIC SITUATIONS

NAME OF STUDENT: _____

INSTRUCTIONS:

You must take part in a conversation with another student. During the conversation you must introduce one of the situations on the task sheet and discuss it with your partner. You will be told who your partner is about 5–10 minutes before the assessment.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA At this level:	**A**	**PA**	**NA**
Appropriate conversational opening and closing.			
Makes initial small talk, maintains the conversation and observes the norms of turn-taking.			
Introduces the subject appropriately and explains the situation clearly (adequate small talk, 'rounded off', discourse marker if large shift in topic, statement, wait for feedback before giving details of problem)			
When listening, gives feedback, makes comments, and asks questions			
Gives and responds to opinion and advice appropriately.			
Can understand and respond to comprehensible remarks and questions from partner and seeks clarification where necessary and appropriate			
Uses a range of grammatical forms and vocabulary appropriate to the topic and register. Grammatical mistakes do not interfere with the meaning.			
Pronunciation, stress and intonation do jot impede intelligibility			

A = Achieved   **PA = Partly Achieved**   **NA = Not Attempted**

Students were given one of two task sheet. A sample appears on the following page. The second task sheet had similar tasks.

Choose one of these situations. Think about the details of the situation and be ready to introduce the subject in the conversation, answer your partner's questions about it, and discuss the situation with your partner. You will know who your partner is bout 5–10 minutes before the assessment.

You or your friend have/has a son or daughter who is staying away from school. S/he is going to the casino in school hours.	**Your friend is a qualified professional from your country but can't get a place in an university course in his/her subject.**
There is a position as a bilingual receptionist at AUT available. You are wondering whether to apply for it.	**A member of your family or a friend is planning to come to NZ. It is going to be difficult for him/her to find a job. You wonder what to tell him or her.**
Your friend and his/her family have just arrived in NZ. You are not sure what advice to give them about what schools to send their teenage children to.	**Your friend has been here for a year. He or she is short of money and wants to go home. You wonder what advice to give him/her.**

Student Surveys

This survey formed all of the initial self assessment and the first part of the post self assessment. The second part of post self assessment was identical to part two of the survey for the first cycle (see above).

Conversation Self Assessment

Name ……………………………………………….

Can you carry out a discussion in casual conversation in English?
Can you do these things? Tick the boxes:

	Yes	Sometimes	No
Make small talk	☐	☐	☐
Politely change the subject and introduce a topic I need advice about or want to discuss			
	☐	☐	☐
Explain a controversial situation clearly and fluently	☐	☐	☐
Ask for advice or opinion in conversation	☐	☐	☐
Give advice or opinions in conversation	☐	☐	☐
Check if the situation is not clear or if there is a misunderstanding ☐		☐	☐

Appendix 3

Pretest, Post-Test and Student Surveys

Third Cycle, Semester 2, 2005

Pre-test

Diagnostic analysis of the competency of FTHI#1 students in selected areas of transactional competence. Semester 2 2005

Students were required to take part in a role-play with the teacher taking the part of the gate-keeper in each situation. Negotiating tasks were allocated about 10 minutes before the assessment from the task sheets overleaf. The conversations were recorded and the teacher rated each student on the skills below using the code below the table.

SKILLS	Students																						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23
1. Gets attention politely																							
2. Introduces problem appropriately.																							
3. Explains the situation clearly																							
4. Insists/ argues politely, using further explanations (Yes, but……, I'm sorry but… or equivalent)																							
5. Makes suggestions which contribute to a solution in appropriate language.																							
6. Achieves agreement																							

7. Finishes politely with thanks																							

Code

Not at all – N

Sometimes, to some extent – S

Competent at exit HI (High Intermediate) level – C

Did not arise in the conversation heard – ?

The library has sent you a letter to say that you have lost a book. You are sure you have returned it. Talk to the librarian.	**You need to take a day off from class to look after a member of your family who is sick. Talk to your teacher.**
You didn't get any pay this week. Talk to your boss.	**Your stove is not working and needs repairing. Talk to the landlord.**

You have to take some time off work to meet someone from your family at the airport. Talk to the boss.	**You have agreed to help your friend with their homework, but you have just had a phone call from someone in your family or your flatmate and you have to go home. Talk to your friend.**
Your child is having difficulty making friends at school. You want him/her to change classes and go to a class where s/he has friends, but the school secretary says the class is full. Talk to the teacher.	**You are leaving your flat. It is clean and you haven't broken anything but the landlord will not give you back your bond. Talk to the landlord.**

Post Test

COMPETENCY 4: CAN NEGOTIATE MORE COMPLEX EXCHANGES IN PERSONAL, BUSINESS OR COMMUNITY SITUATIONS

NAME OF STUDENT: _____

INSTRUCTIONS:

The learner, in a role-play with the teacher, explains a complex situation and negotiates a suitable outcome in a possibly confrontational situation. The situation is on a role card given to the student about ten minutes before the assessment.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA At this level:	A	PA	NA
* You get a good outcome from the negotiation, provide all information accurately and answer the teacher's questions			
* You negotiate the appropriate outcome politely, using appropriate discourse markers			
You use appropriate staging for the conversation - getting attention, stating the problem in general and then in detail, making requests and suggestions where necessary, insisting and negotiating, checking the outcome.			
You do not have too many long hesitations			
Your grammar and vocabulary are suitable for the topic. Your grammatical mistakes do not make it difficult for the teacher to understand you.			
Your pronunciation and intonation are good enough to be understood and do not lead to misunderstandings			

*Compulsory criterion

A = Achieved   PA = Partly Achieved   NA = Not Attempted

Negotiating tasks were allocated from the sheet overleaf.

You are returning a library book that is two weeks overdue. There is a reason why it is overdue but it is not your fault. Talk to the librarian.	**You need to take a week off from work to return to your country for family reasons. Talk to your boss.**
You have a sick child and need to go home two hours early. The company is very busy just now. Talk to your boss.	**Your landlord says you are overdue with the rent. You know you have paid it. Talk to the landlord.**
You have just received your payslip at work. Your employer has paid you less than s/he should. Talk to the employer.	**You are going back to your country before the end of the school term. You want to take your children with you even though they will miss two weeks of school. Talk to the teacher.**
Your child is having difficulty with his/her work at school. You want him/her to join a class to help him/her with his/her English after school, but the school secretary says the class is full. Talk to the teacher.	

Student Surveys

The first part formed all of the initial self assessment and the first part of the post self assessment. The second part was given only in the post self assessment.

Negotiating in English: Self Assessment

Name …………………………………………………….

Can you negotiate in English? Can you argue politely with a person in authority to get what you want?

Can you do these things? Tick the boxes:

	Yes	Sometimes	No
Get attention politely	☐	☐	☐
Introduce the problem politely	☐	☐	☐
Explain your situation well	☐	☐	☐
Insist if necessary	☐	☐	☐
Suggest compromises or solutions	☐	☐	☐
Negotiate agreement	☐	☐	☐
Finish the conversation politely	☐	☐	☐

Self Assessment on Casual Conversation

Part 2

Did your negotiation skills in English improve this term?   Yes ☐   No ☐

If you ticked yes, please tick the things that helped you to improve:

- ☐ practice outside the classroom
- ☐ listening to people outside the classroom
- ☐ information about English negotiation. If you ticked this please also tick where the helpful information came from:
  - o spoken in the classroom
  - o written on the board
  - o written in textbooks
  - o written in worksheets
- ☐ practice in the classroom with a partner
- ☐ feedback or correction from the teacher during classroom practice with a partner

- ☐   discussion or class suggestions while a student practises with the teacher
- ☐   listening to negotiation tapes
- ☐   studying transcripts of negotiating conversations
- ☐   language lab worksheets about negotiation
- ☐   written exercises about negotiating language (not language lab)
- ☐   other ……………………………..

Please write here the **two** things that helped you the most:

……………………………………………………………………………………………………

……………………………………………………………………………………………………