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**WHEN THE DOORS OPENED: TRANSITIONAL ERA IMPACTS  
ON ALBANIAN ENGLISH TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LIVES**

**presented by**

**Lisa Anne Morgan**

**has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for the**

**Ph.D. degree in Teacher Education**

*Douglas R. Campbell*  
**Major Professor's Signature**

*January 28, 2005*

**Date**

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**WHEN THE DOORS OPENED: TRANSITIONAL ERA IMPACTS ON ALBANIAN  
ENGLISH TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LIVES**

**By**

**Lisa Anne Morgan**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Department of Teacher Education**

**2005**

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## ABSTRACT

### WHEN THE DOORS OPENED: TRANSITIONAL ERA IMPACTS ON ALBANIAN ENGLISH TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL LIVES

By

Lisa Anne Morgan

The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge of the perceived impact of sociopolitical and economic change on English teachers' professional lives in Albania during its transitional years. Data consisted of a series of tape-recorded and transcribed face-to-face semi-structured interviews with five women who taught English in Albanian state elementary schools, high schools, and universities during and after the end of the communist Albanian state. A modified life history approach allowed the researcher to investigate the importance of teachers' past language learning and teaching life and the impact it had on their professional life during the transition. The research findings indicated that three main factors affected Albanian English teachers' transitional teaching life and development: 1) the student factor, 2) the teacher factor and 3) the native-English speaker factor. English teachers' own efforts to develop language and pedagogy, students' new expectations for their teachers, and contacts with the outside world, including native English speakers, provided teachers with a stronger sense of language ownership, boosted teachers' language confidence, and helped develop teachers' communicative competencies. The link between communicative language teaching and democratic-oriented classrooms in the context of transitional teaching is explored.

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I am indebted to the five Albanian English language teachers who so graciously gave of their precious time, welcomed me into their homes, and shared their many thoughts and memories of learning and teaching English. Thank you, Valbona, Ajkuna, Drita, Zana and Zamira, for making the interviewing part of this project so easy!

Special thanks to my dissertation advisor, Doug Campbell, for his constant guidance and continual accessibility and to committee members, Keely Stauter-Halstead, Geneva Smitherman and Lynn Fendler, for their intellectual support and personal encouragement.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my family, friends, and professional colleagues for never doubting that I would successfully complete my doctoral studies and dissertation. Thanks Karen, Dad and Ingrid, Charlie, Aunt Ginny, the Barnett/Kinney families, Megame, Sarah, Jeannie, Mark and Janice, Currin, Linda, Heidi, Christine and Mark, Dee, Maria, Myrtis, Sara, BetsAnn, Aquinas College colleagues, staff of the U.S. State Department English Language Program, and Ketí and Zana and my many English language teaching colleagues in Albania. And no longer on this earth but with me just the same, thank you, mom, gram, aunt Ferne and Tricia.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES IN ALBANIA**

#### **Introduction**

From 1992-1997, I lived and worked in Albania. In the first two years, I served in the United States Peace Corps and for the remainder of the time I was an English Language Fellow for a United States State Department Program. During these five years in Albania, I taught English as a foreign language and was involved in pre-service and in-service English teacher education, and in materials and curriculum reform in the field of English language teaching. I met and worked with many English language teachers who taught in state elementary schools, high schools, and universities throughout the country. I also taught English to Albanians as young as seven and as old as fifty years old who had varying educational backgrounds and experiences in learning English or other foreign languages. Since returning to live in the United States, I have made two brief working trips to Albania with the United States State Department Academic Specialist Program. In 1998, I participated in a foreign-language-curriculum reform project. Then in 2003, I assisted in an initial design for a teacher education program for under qualified practicing English teachers. Involvement in all the aforementioned projects has versed me in several aspects of English language teaching in this tiny southeastern European country.

Despite the time I spent observing Albanian English language teachers in their classrooms, educating practicing teachers, English language teacher trainers, and pre-service English teachers, and participating in a number of English language teaching projects, my understanding of language learning and teaching, especially prior to the

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transition,<sup>1</sup> was not as complete as I would have liked. I was left with many questions about English language teachers' past learning and teaching experiences, how these experiences had shaped their practice, and how they influenced their professional lives during the transition. It was difficult to understand this aspect of their practice because the English language teaching projects in which I and other foreigners worked generally ignored the previous teaching life of Albanian English language teachers and concentrated on the present and the future of English language teaching in Albania. We did this by advancing current, popular western English language teaching materials, curriculum, and methodologies, without looking back to what had come before.

Our role, as foreigners, was not to impose new or different methods, materials and curriculum on Albanian English teachers. Rather it was to collaborate with teachers and to assist them in making decisions for themselves about their teaching. This was not, however, always the case. The myth of the native-English-speaking teacher, the role of the mysterious "alien like" American, and the Albanian cultural custom of hospitality<sup>2</sup> sometimes made our role of professional collaborator far from neutral, natural, or simple. I questioned how much "we," the foreigners, intentionally or accidentally, imposed our own agenda on teachers and on the field of English language teaching. How transparent with us were teachers in their thoughts and feelings about their teaching situations? How comfortable did they feel in talking to us, the outsiders, about their teaching lives, both past and present?

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<sup>1</sup> It is noteworthy to add here that for the purposes of this study I have defined the transitional years as occurring between the late 1980s and early 1990s. However, the transition was a very gradual process that began, in some ways, with the death of Enver Hoxha in 1985 and certainly continues on to this day.

<sup>2</sup> There is a strong tradition of hospitality in Albania that dates back centuries to the *Kamun* of Leke Dukagjini. The *Kamun* or code, named for Dukagjini (the famous Albanian leader who lived from 1410-1481) still has an impact on Albanian social conduct. The *Kamun* has strict codes about the treatment of guests in Albanian homes and foreign guests in the country and in Albanian homes. Hospitality is a high priority in Albania anyway, but foreigners receive extra special treatment.

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I had heard teachers speak of what learning and teaching English was like during the Hoxha (the president who led almost fifty years of Communist rule in Albania) regime. However, because the current emphasis was on the present and future of English language teaching in Albania, teachers' pasts were in some sense forgotten. Not honoring teachers' past English learning and teaching experiences disadvantages the foreign as well as the local English teaching professionals who work in contexts such as Albania. The approach that dismisses the historical context of English teaching prevents foreign aid English language teaching program professionals from knowing or understanding certain aspects of their local colleagues' professional lives. I often wondered if exposure to and working with native English speaking teaching professionals was benefiting local English teachers' language proficiencies and professional practices. I also speculated as to whether or not English teaching aid projects and the native English speaking professionals working in them were having a positive impact on the development of teaching and subsequent learning of English in Albania. If the answer to these questions was yes then what were the benefits and positive impacts? If the answer to these questions was no, then how could foreign English language teaching aid project representatives modify their work to have a positive impact on the field of English language teaching and the local teachers with whom they worked?

In order to find this out, I decided to investigate the learning and teaching lives of a small number of English language teachers. Looking closely at their lives over a span of time - starting from when they first began learning English, through their university years as students in the English department, to their years as English teachers - gave me rich insights into English teachers' lives as learners and teachers, both during the communist

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and the transitional periods in Albania. By employing this approach, I hoped to understand Albanian English teachers better as individuals who found themselves thrown into an era of radical sociopolitical, economic, and educational change.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, I hoped to understand how teachers were affected as members both of a professional group and of a larger society that was undergoing a rapid transformation. Where, I asked myself, did English teachers fit in to these changes? And what role did English teachers have, if any, in the larger societal changes going on during the transitional years? With a deeper understanding of English teachers' wider context (both past and present) foreign English language teaching professionals can develop more fulfilling and satisfying relationships with their local colleagues and have positive impacts on the projects in which they participate. To understand the assumptions I held when approaching this research, it is worthwhile to provide my own personal and professional outsider perceptions of the changing Albanian educational landscape in the years I spent inside the country.

Before I carried out the research for this study and analyzed the data, my personal and professional experiences in Albania led me to an initial hypothesis. In the remainder of this chapter, I explain how I came to this hypothesis more fully. I describe my impressions of the changing economy and its effect on Albanian schooling and the daily professional life of individual English teachers in the transition. Then I explain the Albanian government's policy of self-reliance and isolation and the impact that this

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<sup>3</sup> The notion of change for the purposes of this study does not view it in its simplest form, "defined as no more than a variation, an alteration or the substitution of one thing for another" (McLeish, 2003, p. 164). Throughout this study educational change is conceived of as a complex phenomenon of long duration, one that is fraught with conflicts that emerge between political, social, and economic life on a continuous basis. This phenomenon also affects educational policies and teachers' professional attitudes and instructional practices.

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policy had on English teachers' language and teaching practices. Part of my story about the teachers' past isolation is also that of the opening of the country and the impact that native English speakers had on teachers' transitional teaching life. In the last section of this chapter, I put forward the main research questions of the present study.

### **Pre-Research Perceptions of English Language Teaching**

#### **Economic Impact on English Language Teaching**

Although I had heard stories from administrators, teachers, and students about school conditions before the early 1990s, except for a few photographs, it was impossible to see for myself what teaching and learning conditions had been like for English language teachers and students of English in Albanian schools in the past. Students and teachers maintained that schools had been far from luxurious but that they were physically adequate for teaching and learning. Classrooms on cold winter days were made tolerable with small wood burning stoves. Students, especially at the university, often lacked textbooks, but chalkboards were useable, chalk was supplied, and there were a sufficient number of desks and chairs.

The economic situation in Albania - in the late 1980s up until the time I arrived in 1992- had deteriorated greatly. A lack of infrastructure - almost non-existent at that time - had contributed to the crumbling state of affairs. Besides a lack of organization and regular maintenance, in the anarchy following the downfall of the ruling communist party, the population, especially those who had suffered at the hands of the communists, lashed out at state institutions. Anger acted out against the state resulted in heavy damage to school property. Physical conditions of schools were in a terrible state. Glass in

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windows and light fixtures and desks were broken or missing. Heating was nonexistent and running water, if present, was erratic at best. Classrooms, if equipped at all, had poorly made chalk and blackboards that were difficult to use. Moreover, teachers lacked even the most basic materials, with most students (and even some teachers) having no textbooks or notebooks. In *Secondary Education in Albania* Ylli Pango (1996) documented this dismal state of affairs in Albanian education when he wrote that from 1990-1992 educational expenditures had fallen more than two-thirds and the GNP had declined by almost 40%. Not only had this depressing situation adversely impacted English teachers' morale, for some teachers it also diminished their commitment to teaching. In a large-scale study (Kloep & Tarifa, 1994) investigating teachers' working conditions in Albania, 349 teachers from 20 schools located in various parts of the country answered a 112-question survey in a particularly difficult year, 1991. In this study, participants confirmed the results from the Pango report, with a significant number of teachers reporting that material and physical conditions in schools were very poor.

Another aspect of the economy that affected teachers' morale and commitment was the amount of money they earned. In conversations with teachers, they complained that although in the past they had suffered from state restrictions on freedom of movement and expression that they had earned high enough salaries to provide a comfortable living. This contrasted sharply to the buying power of teachers' monthly wages in 1992. Woefully inadequate at roughly \$12.00 USD per month, wages, although slowly increasing, could not keep pace with the rapidly rising price of food and non-food goods and services.

One telling story supports how seriously the profession of teaching was affected by the economy. In the foreign language teaching methodology courses that I team-taught at the University of Tirana, I took informal polls with my students who were slated to become English teachers. I asked them to rate from high to low what they thought were the current salaries in a number of professions in Albania. They chose taxi drivers and small business owners as the highest wage earners in the country. In contrast, they ranked teachers and medical doctors near the bottom. Therefore, the low economic status of a teacher affected the English teaching profession and these students' feelings about entering the profession were of interest to me.

Whereas at one time economic security had meant guaranteed employment to all its citizens, with the collapse of the communist system and the resultant closure of the majority of state enterprises large numbers of Albanians were left unemployed (varying sources reported 30-80%). Despite the difficult physical and material conditions found in schools and the economic hardships that teachers in Albania had to face at this time, English teachers were constantly sought after for their knowledge of English. The business of English was booming (Dushku 2000; Hyde, 1994; Huizenga & Morgan, 1997; Kadija, 1996; Kaufman, 1996), and English teachers were increasingly in demand in the growing private sector. (This remains true at writing.) Because of the attraction to better working conditions and higher wages, novice and experienced English teachers alike were leaving state schools and flocking to foreign government and non-government agencies and private enterprises to work as translators, interpreters and administrative secretaries. If they did not leave state-held teaching positions, in order to supplement meager salaries, most English teachers took part-time work by interpreting or translating,

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held private lessons, or taught at newly opened private language schools where, forbidden during the old regime, English teachers received reasonable wages, used up-to-date texts and materials, and taught in relatively pleasant conditions. On the one hand, teaching private lessons was an opportunity for teachers to supplement the low wages they received from the state. On the other hand, teachers of other disciplines, formerly united with their English teaching colleagues in resistance against “the system,” were now envious of those whose special knowledge of the English language provided them with greater marketability and earning power (Kaufman, 1996). However, with advantages also came disadvantages. Many English teachers were working longer hours and adding stress to a life already fraught with transitional hardships.

Another way in which state school teachers’ lives were affected by the transitional situation was that students in university English departments - no longer obliged to become teachers as they had in the past - were opting to work in the quickly growing private sector with higher paying, more prestigious positions that it offered. The decision for young qualified teachers not to enter the field of English teachers resulted in an English teacher shortage and, in turn, often caused English language class size to double or even triple in size. Another upshot to the growing shortage of English teachers in state schools, and much to the chagrin of experienced highly qualified teachers who continued teaching, was that newly recruited English teachers were frequently methodologically and linguistically under qualified. For example, the majority of newly hired teachers had studied general English but had graduated from the university in other disciplines. Moreover, these same new teachers mainly were hired because they had passed a test of English speaking and reading proficiency offered by the University of Tirana, an exam



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that many teachers complained was not sufficient to qualify someone to teach a language in a formal school setting. These events clearly frustrated teachers who were university graduates of the English department and further compounded the problem of low morale of English teachers. Thus, going into this study, my assumption - based on personal and professional experiences in Albanian - was that I needed to investigate how the tensions between the old and new economy was changing English teachers' professional lives.

### **Isolationist Policy Impact on English Language Teaching**

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the past that affected teachers' professional lives in Albania of the early 1990s was the communist regime's position of self-reliance and its ensuing isolationist policies. When the Albanian government gave permission to foreigners to enter the country and to Albanians to leave the country - the majority for the first time – the country had been isolated from much of the world for more than forty-five years. Despite the Albanian government's alliance with Yugoslavian President Tito after World War II, this friendship quickly soured. Shortly thereafter (in the early 1960s) the tight alignment that had existed between the Russian and Albanian communist parties also disintegrated. Enver Hoxha, for fear that Russia was becoming too revisionist in its policy toward the West, especially the United States, demanded Albanian university students and working Albanians to return home from countries in which they had been living in the Soviet Union. At the same time, he banished Russians and other allies of Russia to their respective countries, thereby disrupting inter-governmental and institutional alliances, destroying friendships, and separating hundreds of husbands and wives and their children. Enver Hoxha and his Albanian Labor Party government lastly

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turned to China, believing that its party ideology most matched that of Albania. However, when Richard Nixon visited China in 1973, Hoxha accused Chinese communist party leaders of selling out to the West, promptly rid the country of Chinese, and refused further support from China. In this radical move, he and the Albanian Labor Party turned the country inward on itself.

From that time until the early 1990s, the Albanian state more than ever restricted the general population from traveling across its borders, and from having contact with foreign visitors. English teachers, with special needs in the area of cross- cultural and cross-linguistic contact, had little or no professional development opportunities except for those within their own tiny country.<sup>4</sup> Teachers could neither obtain teaching materials published outside their own borders nor correspond with native speakers of English or the many non-native English speaking teaching colleagues in neighboring countries like Italy, Greece, and Yugoslavia. Except in the early years after World War II when exchanges were common with Russia and during the early 1970s when a small contingent of Chinese English teachers taught at the University of Tirana and Chinese-published English language materials were used, English language learners and teachers were virtually locked away from professional contacts and resources.

This linguistic, cultural, and material isolation provided English learners and teachers with neither the means to practice the language in real life situations, nor the exposure to English-speaking countries' cultures and the progress that had been made in language teaching theories, methods and materials. Teachers taught from an extremely limited number of texts, all published in the distant past and all infused with communist

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<sup>4</sup> Albania is roughly the size of the U.S. state of Delaware with a population of about three and a half million people.

ideology. Pango (1996), Dushku (2000), and James (1984), all English teaching professionals cite the state's role in the politicization of language learning and teaching and its detrimental effects on Albanian education. Xenophobia was cultivated towards anything foreign, which resulted in considerable impoverishment of the cultural, aesthetic, and social education of the new generation. Due to the paranoid attitude of the political regime toward that which was foreign, English language teaching materials and the topics that teachers taught in language classrooms especially were geared toward party ideology:

About 37% of all lesson texts deal with subjects which are treated from a political standpoint: over the eight-year English course (including therefore the high school), the pupils will have read 13 texts dealing with war and revolution, 10 concentrating on poverty in capitalist societies, six treating the problems of unemployment under capitalism, six dealing with slavery in the United States, five praising the virtues of productive work, and three extracts from the life of Lenin, as well as pieces on free education and a free health service, and episodes in the lives of Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, Galileo, William Tell, Rob Roy, and Robin Hood. (James, 1984, p. 81)

However, by 1992 when I arrived in Albania the country had opened itself to the rest of the world and the government was allowing its citizens to travel outside its boundaries. The newly found freedom of movement that came with the end of the communist-led state in the early 1990s had a surprising impact on many English teachers' lives, both in and out of the classroom. Speaking freely to foreigners, listening to VOA, BBC, and Italian radio, and watching American films and television programming on Italian, Turkish, Greek and even Albanian television, many English teachers' began to open their minds, eyes, and ears to the world outside the tiny confines of Albania.

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For the first time many English teachers were provided with forms of professional development unheard of in the past fifty years. From an economic point of view, it was difficult to attend professional development courses, workshops, or conferences outside Albania without obtaining financial assistance from foreign or non-governmental agencies. Despite the desire to attend these professional development activities, permission from foreign embassies was not easily forthcoming and gaining it required waiting in long lines at foreign embassies and much patience on the part of the petitioner. Notwithstanding these obstacles and the daily teaching frustrations brought on by Albania's economic collapse, English teachers gradually began attending professional development seminars and courses - both in and outside Albania - that were held by foreign governmental agencies like the British Council, U.S. Peace Corps, and the State Department English Language Fellows Program. During this time, a more comprehensive world of the English language and native English speaking cultures was made more easily accessible to teachers. This openness resulted in new levels of language and cultural awareness on the part of both English language teachers and learners.

### **Conclusion**

Given the extreme isolation in which teachers had learned and taught the English language, my initial hypothesis for this study was that exposure to the outside - especially in the form of native English speaking language teaching professionals and the projects in which they worked - was the most significant influence on an Albanian English teacher's professional life during the transitional years. This I assumed to be the case, especially if one considered the harsh circumstances in which Albanian teachers taught during the

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transition, one in which teachers lacked material support. The importance of outside influences then has played a dominant role in the present chapter and in my thinking in the initial stages of this study.

To study this initial assumption more thoroughly I chose to focus much of the study's literature review - chapter two - on native speaker/non-native speaker English teaching issues. Studying this area of the literature further fueled my interest in this important issue and solidified my initial assumption. However, not wanting to focus on this assumption entirely - believing that it would limit my thinking - I chose to devote my research questions to a general understanding of the transitional teacher's context, both in the past and in the transition. This desire to avoid a focus on the effect of the native speaker on transitional teaching of non-native teachers also influenced my decision to use a life history approach to my study and underlies how I crafted chapter three, the research design.

Although outside influences seemed the most apparent reason to me (a foreigner whose native language is English and who worked in the field of English language teaching in Albania), this initial assumption was later proved partially incorrect. This came about because of my own efforts to avoid clinging to the supposedly obvious and partly because the data proved this assumption incorrect. As I began to sift through the data in chapters four - the teachers' past - and then moved deeper into chapter five - the analysis of the teachers' transition years - a subtle shift in my thinking also began to occur. Despite the outside impact that native English speakers had on transitional teachers' lives, two other factors that I would call internal to the transition also emerged as influential to English language teaching and learning during this time. I more fully

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explore the evolution of this idea in the culminating chapters of the study, chapters five and six. In chapter five, I begin to recognize this need as I expand on the differences between the teachers' past and their present teaching life. In chapter six, I attempt to delineate the influences on teachers' professional lives more sharply into three main areas. Although I still contend that native English-speaking language teaching professionals and the foreign aid projects in which they worked had an impact on teachers' pedagogical and linguistic development, I also expound on the internal influences. First, I explain how English language teachers themselves came to assess and take charge of their own transitional teaching needs. Second, I illustrate how English language learners began to expect higher levels of language and different methodologies from their teachers to meet their new needs in English language learning.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that drove this study were comprised of two areas of inquiry. I decided to formulate my questions based on what I already had witnessed in Albania concerning English language teaching. First, I chose to explore the general context of English teachers' lives, both as learners and teachers of English. At the same time, wanting to develop a more holistic, historical understanding of Albanian English teaching and teachers, I made inquiries into English teachers' teaching lives in the past and during the transition. Another two lines of inquiry that I had not investigated in any formal way while living in Albania were especially compelling to me. Because of this interest and my belief that they could be helpful to my study, in the second set of questions, I addressed the political role and status of the English language in Albania in

the communist past and in the transitional years. I also designed questions on the effect that the political role and status of English had on English learners' and teachers' learning and teaching of English.

### **Group #1**

- 1) What was it like to be an Albanian English language teacher who taught both before and after the collapse of the Albanian socialist state in the early 1990s?
- 2) How did the past learning and teaching of English affect Albanian English teachers' instructional practice?
- 3) What did the turbulent times of the late 1980s and early 1990s mean to Albanian English teachers?
- 4) What are Albanian English teachers' perspectives on how (and if) the changing economic, social, and political life in Albania influenced their teaching practice, their professional development, and their attitude toward the English language, teaching English, and English language learners.

### **Group #2**

- 1) What was the political role or status of the English language in Albania before the transition of the late 1980s – early 1990s? How did it affect teachers' relationship with or attitude toward the language?
- 2) How did the role/status of English change during the transitional years of the early 1990s?
- 3) What effects did these changes (if any) have on English language teachers' personal and professional life?

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH**

#### **Introduction**

A monumental change for the Albanian sociocultural, political, and economic life in 1991-1992 was that the new government allowed foreigners to enter the country freely. One group of foreigners arriving in Albania when the doors opened was native-English speaking English teachers who came to Albania to work for foreign aid projects. Aside from the differences in teaching methodologies and linguistic competencies between non-native and native English language teachers, there is little in the related literature that addresses the effect of foreigners on local English language teachers' transitional professional lives. Although it was important in this study to understand how non-native English teacher language competence and pedagogical knowledge affected their self-image and teaching, it was more critical to understand the correlation between foreign and local English language teachers working together and local teachers' linguistic and pedagogical development.

The sheer number of American citizens <sup>5</sup> who work abroad as English language teachers is evidence of the potential impact that native-English speaking teaching professionals can have on language teaching aid projects, the local institutions in which they teach, and the local English language teachers with whom they work. Hundreds - if not thousands - of foreign language educators are employed in both governmental and non-governmental English language teaching programs around the globe. Besides the

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<sup>5</sup> Native English speaking English language teaching professionals from countries other than the United States, such as the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, also provide English language teaching programs internationally, but for the purposes of this research, I have given examples of programs with which I happen to be most familiar.

dozens of private institutional programs, which employ native speaking language educators to work abroad, the United States federal government has several programs of its own.

Every year since its inception in 1961 when John F. Kennedy announced the formation of the U.S. Peace Corps, its Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) programs have trained American men and women volunteers to teach English in secondary schools and universities in more than a hundred nations. As of November, 2003, 1294 Peace Corps volunteers were serving in the field of English language teaching, with 1,110 volunteers serving as secondary English language teachers; 58 as university English language teachers, and 126 as secondary education English teacher trainers.<sup>6</sup> In the aftermath of the events of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush called for the doubling of the number of Peace Corps volunteers to a total 15,000 by the fiscal year 2007, in hopes that our image abroad would be improved, and that cultural understanding between populations would be facilitated. In a bill initiated in Congress, Senators Dodd and Farr wrote “There is deep misunderstanding and misinformation about American values and ideals in many parts of the world, particularly those with substantial Muslim populations, and a greater Peace Corps presence in such places could foster greater understanding and tolerance of those countries” (The Peace Corps Charter for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. 107<sup>th</sup> Cong. S., 2002). Critical to creating an improved image of Americans should be a deeper understanding of the contexts (both past and present) in which Peace Corps English language teaching volunteers work.

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<sup>6</sup> Bill Salisbury, Management Analyst in the Office of Planning, Policy and Analysis, U.S. Peace Corps, Washington, D.C. (personal communication, November 20, 2003).

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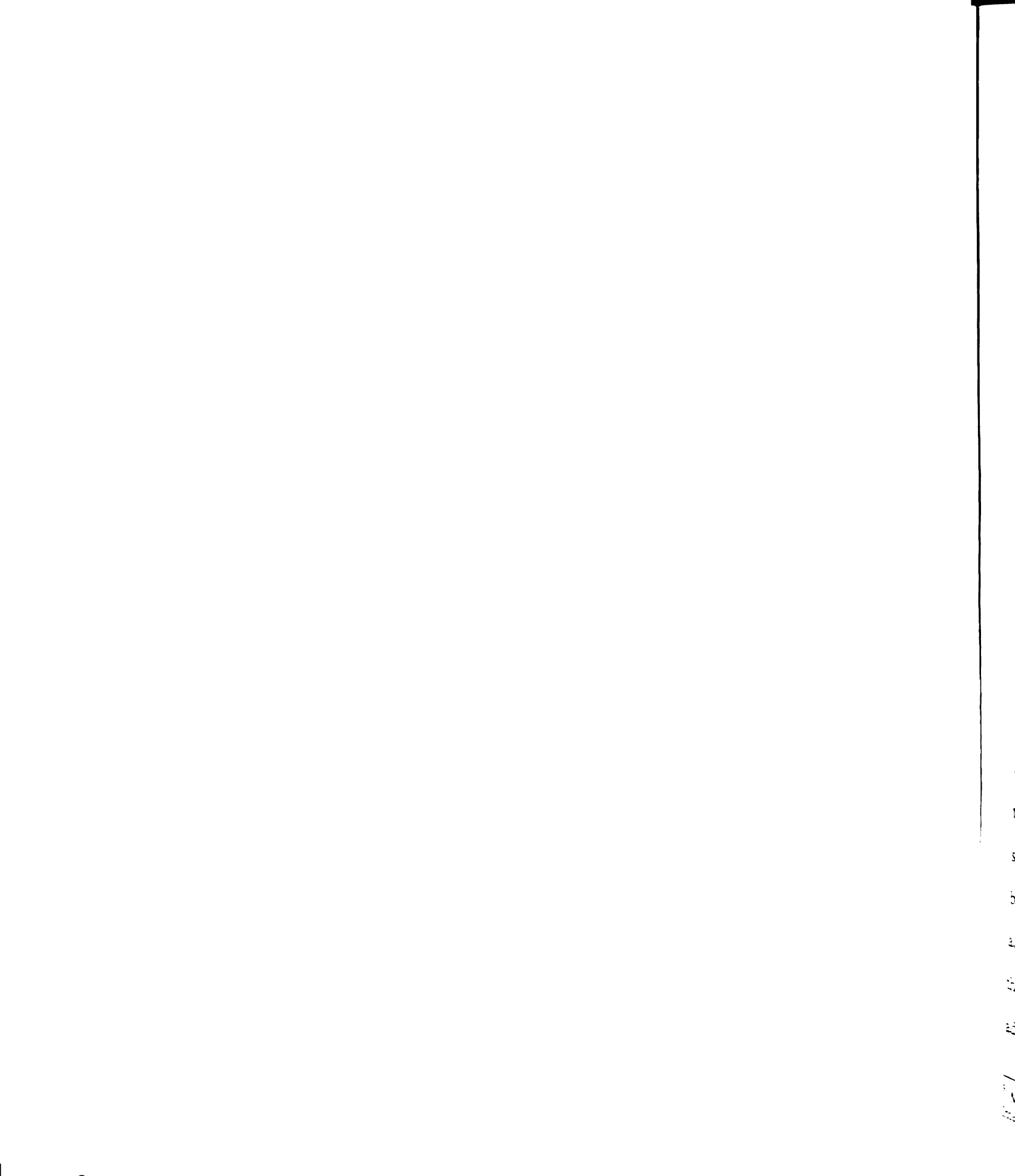
Another English language teaching aid program whose initial objective was temporary assistance for English language teaching professionals in former communist countries has now spread to countries outside the former Soviet Union and Eastern and Central Europe. Since 1991, The U.S. State Department English Language Fellows Program, part of the Educational and Cultural Affairs sector, has been sending American English language teaching professionals on ten-month contracts to teach English as a foreign language and to work in English language teaching materials and curriculum reform and pre-service and in-service teacher education. Since its inception, 907 positions have been filled and the budget has grown considerably (1997- \$2 million to 2003- \$5 million). In the 2003-2004 academic year, 107 fellows were sent to work alongside local colleagues in forty-six different countries worldwide.<sup>7</sup> In another State Department English Language program - the Academic Specialist program - American English language teaching professionals are sent abroad for two-six weeks to assist local institutions in a range of English language teaching, materials, and curriculum projects. In the last six years, the number of specialists in this program has averaged seventy-five persons being sent abroad per year. Eighty one academic specialists visited fifty-nine countries in 2002 and close to one hundred were sent in 2003.<sup>8</sup> Another widely known program - the Fulbright Research and Scholars program - provides various opportunities for Americans to teach English as a foreign language and applied linguistics professionals to spend an academic semester or academic year abroad to teach in university departments. In this program, Fulbright scholars work closely with their local colleagues

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<sup>7</sup> Catherine Williamson, Program Officer, English Language Fellow Program, U.S. State Department (personal communication, February 2, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Julia Walters, Program Officer, Office of English Language Programs, U.S. State Department (personal communication, August 5, 2003).





to educate both undergraduate and graduate students in the field of English language teaching. In academic year 2003-2004, U.S. Fulbright grantees in teaching English as a foreign language or applied linguistics were serving in twelve countries.<sup>9</sup>

In nations where relationships between the United States and foreign governments are friendly, where ties are long standing, and where programs are firmly in place, foreign professionals may fit smoothly into their host institutions. However, this is not always the case. It is critical to these programs first to understand how the factors that make up the sociopolitical, economic, and educational contexts affect the professional relationships between foreign and local English teachers. For example, many unknown variables affect local and foreign English language teachers in countries where such programs are new, such as the former Soviet Union and Eastern and Central European countries in the early 1990s. In countries where there is war, natural disasters, or strained relationships between governments, (e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq, Cuba, and North Korea) programs either do not exist or face considerable challenges.

From my own experiences and from the dozens of conversations that I have had over the years with other native English speaking language teaching professionals about these issues, I have come to understand that relationships between local non-native speaking English language teachers and native English speaking colleagues can, at times, be problematic. However, these problems between local and foreign teachers are not addressed enough or always in an open transparent manner. Finding the roots of problems that exist between local and foreign English language teaching professionals is, admittedly, a sensitive, lengthy, and challenging process.

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<sup>9</sup>: Margo M. Cunniffe, Manager, Program Administration, Fulbright Scholar Program, Council for International Exchange of Scholars (personal communication, December 8, 2003).

Given the time it takes to understand local contexts in which native English-speaking teaching professionals work, the manner in which conflicts are dealt with is often unsatisfactory. Some foreign English language teaching aid project participants simply choose to ignore their existence or dismiss problems as cross-cultural conflicts that with time and tolerance eventually resolve themselves. Despite the frequency of such situations, knowing when tensions between non-native and native English speaking teachers are - or are not - caused by the collision of two cultures would be useful to the governmental and non-governmental agencies that implement English language teaching programs in developing nations or transitional contexts. Considering the large number of native English-speaking English language teaching professionals working abroad in the types of programs -as mentioned above- it makes good sense to look at the literature involving native and non-native speaking professionals collaborating in English language teaching contexts.

Based on my initial research questions and the areas of interest that surfaced during the data collection and analysis phases of the study, I investigated the following lines of inquiry. First, I looked at how foreign English language teaching projects and training goals come into conflict with local needs or desires, sometimes causing misunderstandings and ineffective results. Second, the literature that directly addresses native and non-native English speaking teacher issues was explored. I divided this into three main areas: the myth of the native English-speaking teacher; self-perceptions that non-native English-speaking teachers hold of themselves, something intricately bound to the myth of the native English speaker; and the issues of non-native English speaking teachers' language competence, confidence and ownership. Third, I attempted to link the

role of English in the past and in the transition to its effect on Albanian English teachers' identity. Lastly, I surveyed the literature on transitional teaching contexts, with a focus on Eastern and Central Europe. Although I did not examine the literature on student-teacher relationships initially, when the data revealed an interesting correlation between English language learners and professional development factors in English language teachers, I felt compelled to research the literature associated with youth in post-communist society and education.

### **Outsider Intentions and Insider Needs**

Silvana Dushku (2000) approached this issue in an evaluative case study of English language teaching foreign-aid projects (British Council and U.S. State Department English Language Fellows Program at the tertiary level of education) operating in the beginning transitional years in Albania. In her study, she argued for a deeper understanding of the wider context on the part of English language teaching foreign aid managers.<sup>10</sup> Dushku conducted thirty person-to-person and electronic mail interviews (with both foreign and Albanian English language teaching professionals involved in English language teaching aid projects), three group interviews with university teachers and English project coordinators, and surveys with 30 Albanian English teachers and 612 undergraduate students of English. In her findings, she concluded that Albanians' perceived project needs differed markedly from the project

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<sup>10</sup> Due to its extreme isolation little has been published, until recently, about Albania, its educational system or the state of English language learning and teaching. Hence, Dushku's study is extremely valuable for English language teaching aid agencies' projects and programs. It was also a helpful source of information for this study.

aims that were outlined and carried out by the foreign-aid project managers. One criticism, among many valid criticisms Dushku made of foreign English language teaching aid projects, was that foreign English language teaching aid projects failed to solicit evaluations from local English language teaching professionals. This, Dushku asserted, virtually ignored Albanian local English language teaching professionals' project experiences, their perceived needs, and their opinions about changes they would want to make to similar projects carried out in the future.

I agree with Dushku that understanding local contextual features and teachers' perceived needs is vital to effective and sustainable aid projects. However, unlike Dushku's research, which evaluated on a more general level the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of English language teaching foreign-aid projects, the present study examined in depth individual English language teaching teachers' English language learning and teaching histories. By viewing the Albanian context through a different lens, smaller in scope, my hope was to paint a picture of how teachers personally and professionally perceived their move through the transition process and their perceptions of how variables within the process affected their teaching lives.

The need to understand context, as seen in Dushku's writings about the Albanian context, also was substantiated in the general literature on English language teaching. Early and Bolitho (1981), Enyedi and Medgyes (1998), Holliday (1994), and Widdowson (1994), have all addressed the importance of understanding the various sub-cultures and contexts (academic, educational, historical, sociopolitical, and economic) in which teachers practice. Early and Bolitho (1981) in their piece *Reasons to be cheerful: Or helping teachers to get problems into perspective* wrote of conducting two consecutive

one-week in-service courses for non-native speaking teachers on communicative teaching. When course leaders understood that participants' perceived needs were different than their own, they reconfigured the program, seriously taking into consideration the stresses and constraints that course participants faced in their daily teaching contexts, such as student discipline problems, poor motivation, poor working conditions, inadequate salaries, conflicts between administrators and teachers, and too little preparation time. Realizing that these problems needed addressed, in conjunction with the trainers' intended topic, local teaching and individual teaching contexts became central to the course activities and contributed, the authors reported, to the eventual success of their working relationship with the participants and to the course outcome.

Holliday (1992), in his compelling piece about foreign language educators who misunderstand the academic culture of their host institutions, provided a set of strategies for what he calls *intercompetence* (an intermediary stage in acquiring behavioral competence). He argued that the foreign English language teaching professional can significantly decrease his/her intercompetence "...if management strategies are introduced to provide all parties with opportunities to observe, reflect upon and learn about the new situations within which they are working" (Holliday, p. 223). Reading about the need to be aware of context and to understand the context in which one teaches has been helpful in understanding how contextual issues affect the lives and practices of local teachers and in realizing that foreign language educators can enhance collaborations with their colleagues. The importance of these issues is especially true in times of transition when academic cultures are inconsistent and unstable, and at times, even for local professionals, hard to understand.

## **The Myth of the Native English-Speaking Teacher**

One reason that I have drawn attention to the lives of Albanian English language teachers is that the number of non-native<sup>11</sup> English speaking learners and teachers has grown enormously in recent years. Adding to these numbers has been -after the collapse of the Berlin wall - the demise of Russian language teaching and the immense growth of English language teaching in the former Soviet Union and Eastern and Central Europe. Today more than 80% of all English language teachers worldwide are non-native speakers of English. Thus, it would be presumptuous for anyone in the field of English language to ignore the fact that non-native English speakers, not native speaking English teachers are the main force in English classrooms throughout the world (Canagarajah, 1999; Kachru, 1986). The large number of non-native English speaking teachers has resulted in a changing power structure between non-native- English speaking teachers and their native-English speaking counterparts.

The myth of the native-speaker, which has historically perpetuated the image that the best English teachers are native speakers, is an old and enduring one in the field of English language teaching. However, in recent years, this myth has been challenged alike by native and non-native speaking English language teaching professionals (Amin, 1997; Boyle, 1997; Canagarajah, 1999; Edge, 1988; Liu J., 1996; Nickel, 1987; 1999; Phillipson, 1996; Rampton, 1996; Widdowson, 1994). One important arena in which this issue has been raised is in the international organization of Teachers of English to

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<sup>11</sup> There is a strong debate about how one should distinguish between a native English-speaking person and a non-native English speaker. For the purposes of this study, a native speaker implies: 1) inheritance, birth, or early start with English 2) expertise, proficiency, or fluency in English 3) continual use of English as one's dominant language 4) loyalty, allegiance, or affiliation with the English language and 5) confidence or comfortable identification with English. Admittedly, these are only guidelines and degrees of each factor could make the identification of a native speaker difficult. However, these distinctions are helpful in distinguishing who is *not* a native speaker. (Boyle, 1997)

Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Interested native and non-native speaking English language teaching professionals have banded together to form a caucus to research and further examine non-native English speaking teacher issues (Braine, 1999b). The TESOL organization's active caucus has spawned several professional publications and presentations on this topic in which they have vigorously contested the "superiority" of the native-speaking teacher and western (i.e. native English language speaking countries) methodologies and pedagogies. If native and non-native speaking English language teaching professionals are to act as equal participants in their collaborations then it is necessary for both groups to break the power that this myth holds on the profession and move toward equalizing their relationships.

### **Self-Perceptions of Non-Native English-Speaking Teachers**

A central question concerning non-native speaking teachers and significant to the analysis of Albanian teachers' professional histories is to ask teachers to identify what they perceive as critical to their success in teaching. Much of the literature in the field of English language teaching connects to non-native speaking teachers' linguistic and pedagogical self-image. This rather recent but growing body of literature examines linguistic, cultural, and political questions of power, legitimacy, competency, and the overall place of non-native speaking teachers as a homogenous group. Moreover, these issues are looked at not only in the realm of non-native English speaking teachers, but also in the contrast between non-native English speakers and their native English colleagues. Two non-native English-speaking professionals, George Braine (1999a, 1999b) and Peter Medgyes (1992; 1994; 1996; 1999), have contributed much to this



literature. Braines and Medgyes have also raised awareness on the part of professional organizations, institutes of higher learning offering teaching English as a second language and teaching English as a foreign language degrees, and individual administrators and teachers in the field of English language teaching.

Several pieces of research on this issue have been helpful to the present study. However, a look at the research questions, the methods, and the results of this research show striking differences between them and this study. First, in deep contrast to the qualitative method (semi-structured, in-depth interviews) in the present study, in those found in the related research, researchers have used a quantitative approach. Second, in the present study the sample is small, five women. In previous studies, in contrast, researchers surveyed large teacher and student samples, 208 students, 216 teachers; and 47 teachers, respectively. A third difference in the cited studies and the present study can be found in the guiding research questions being asked. While the cited studies were interested in directly addressing perceptions of native and non-native English speaking teachers' language competencies and their correlation to non-native English-speaking teachers' self-image and perceived ideas of successful teaching, this study's questions have emphasized the transitional period in Albania and its indirect impact on teachers' teaching lives. Moreover, some of the studies analyzed were carried out with pre-service teachers whose beliefs about language competence may be different from seasoned teachers, whereas the women for this study were all, except one, highly experienced teachers.

Several scholars have addressed the issue of language proficiency in non-native speaking teachers. Some have urged teachers to work toward a native-like proficiency in

their language skills, while others (Liu J., 1999; McNeill, 1994; Medgyes 1992; Peretz, 1988; Ruza, 1988) have clearly discouraged non-native teachers from aiming for native-like speech. English as foreign language teachers, however, view target language improvement as critical to their professional development and the research on this subject has supported the argument that there is a perceived link between good language skills and good teaching.

One study, conducted at two English Teachers' Colleges in Sri Lanka (Murdoch, 1994) which focused on language competence in future English teachers, surveyed 208 English students about the importance of language competence and its correlation to successful teaching. In relating competence to a teacher's self-image, 89% of the respondents agreed that a teacher's confidence is most dependent on his or her own degree of second or foreign language competence. In addition, over half of the surveyed prospective teachers wanted at least 50% or more of their college time devoted to language work. Seventy-nine percent favored 40% or more of their course time engaged in language learning and use. Surveyed students also considered language practice opportunities as a top priority and believed that the speaking skill was vitally important to their future competence. Furthermore, when asked to rank the various components of their program students placed language improvement in the top position, above methodology. Murdoch (1994) vigorously supports the students' concerns about language when he says:

We must question the effectiveness of a pedagogical focus which fails to address this core anxiety. All the evidence suggests that a greater concern with language training, particularly during early phases of the training programme, would produce more competent teachers.... Given its role in molding the confidence of the successful non-native English teacher in developmental educational contexts, it is

high time language improvement was afforded proper status. (p. 259)

Another interesting piece of research carried out with similar results is Reves and Medgyes's 1994 study covering ten countries, in which 216 subjects' responses to a questionnaire were analyzed to find out how teachers (both native and non-native speakers) viewed differences between the two teacher groups. Results revealed how these perceptions influenced behaviors and attitudes about respondents' teaching. Data showed that non-native English speaking teachers' teaching behaviors were in large part due to divergent levels of language proficiency, and that in effect, the lower their perceived levels of language proficiency the more deficient they were in teaching.

In a third study, Tang (1997) showed again that perceived proficiency levels of non-native English speaking teachers helped shape self-image. In surveys carried out in Hong Kong, between 1995-1996, 47 non-native speaking teachers answered questions that attempted to understand the perceptions of proficiency and competency among native and non-native English speaking teachers. When they compared themselves, non-native speaking teachers perceived their native speaking colleagues as superior in the following categories: speaking (100%); pronunciation (92%); listening, (87%); vocabulary (79%) and reading (72%). In contrast, non-native speaking teachers viewed themselves as having more accuracy (grammatically) and their native-speaking colleagues as having more fluency.

### **Language Competence, Confidence and Ownership**

The concept communicative competence coined by Del Hymes in the 1960s put forward a new, more comprehensive definition of foreign or second language competence

than had previously existed. Hymes and those who followed his lead stressed that grammatical competence alone, although critical to a person's knowledge and use of language, was not sufficient. To have communicative competence requires that a second or foreign language learner recognize and produce language not only correctly (i.e., grammatical competence) but also idiomatically, fluently, and appropriately in a variety of communicative settings (Brown, 2000). Four separate but interdependent components make up the conceptual framework for communicative competence: grammatical, sociocultural, discourse, and strategic. Sociolinguistic competence is the ability to use language appropriately in different contexts and shift registers. The second component, discourse competence, is the ability to be cohesive and coherent. Strategic competence is the ability to use verbal and non-verbal strategies to compensate for gaps in knowledge (Canale & Swain, 1980; Savignon, 2001).

In addition to the above-mentioned framework of communicative competence, a related concept of language ownership (Widdowson, 1994 and Pierce, 1997) is also valuable to this study. Language proficiency and ownership is defined as the use of language as an adaptable resource that can be bent to the speaker's will, something in which the speaker can assert him or herself, and that a speaker can turn to his or her advantage and make real for him or herself (Widdowson, p. 384). The concept of language ownership is not the mastery of language determined by linguistic accuracy and knowledge of a language's form. It departs slightly from theories on communicative competence. My understanding of language ownership for the purposes of this study is that language is viewed not only as an academic, functional, or social tool, but also as something individual and personal.

A final concept that is both interesting and useful for the purposes of this study is language confidence. Closely connected to the topic of non-native English-speaking teachers, language confidence refers to the amount of confidence one has in his or her language ability. If confidence is high in a teacher's language abilities, then he or she is more apt to interact with native-speakers of the target language, and to interact spontaneously with students. On the other hand, if a language teacher's confidence is low, it can have a negative effect on his or her ability to teach. If excessive, a lack of language confidence can cause non-native speaking teachers to suffer from general feelings of anxiety and lead them to have less oral/aural interaction with their students (Soonhyang, 2000) and native-speakers of English.

Communicative language teaching, also known as CLT, a principled approach to teaching English that grew out of theories on communicative competence, is also worthy of mention. The theoretical approach to the nature of language and of language learning and teaching in the communicative language teaching approach has four interconnecting characteristics. First, teachers using this approach do not put an emphasis on the correct use of grammar, but attend equally to all four components of communicative competence as described above. Second, in order to develop all competencies equally teachers design techniques to engage their learners in the pragmatic, authentic, and functional uses of language for meaningful purposes. Third, language teachers believe that fluency and accuracy are complementary principles that underlie communicative techniques. Finally, teachers lead learners to use the target language in productive and receptive ways, and in unrehearsed contexts (Brown, 2000).

Throughout the long history of language teaching, there always have been advocates of a focus on meaning,

as opposed to form, and of developing learner ability to actually *use* the language for communication. The more immediate the communicative needs, the more readily communicative methods seem to be adopted (Savignon in Celce-Murcia, 2001, p. 18).

Language educators who employ a communicative language teaching approach in their classrooms are more prone to draw on interactive, authentic, meaningful activities and tasks in the classroom, all of which require instances of spontaneous or unrehearsed uses of language on the part of both teachers and students. It also naturally contradicts lock step, highly prescribed lessons, and rigid authoritatively structured relationships between English language learners and teachers. Thus, an English teacher, whose theoretical and practical approach to language teaching is in line with the principles of the communicative language teaching approach, relies heavily on a high level of communicative competence (Canale, M. & Swain, M., 1980).

In their years of isolation, English teachers in Albania were exceptionally well-schooled in the form and structure of language. Their English teachers had worked hard to ensure that their students had a strong grammatical competence. Not surprisingly, teachers focused on eliminating errors in pronunciation and grammar. In an Albania shut off from the rest of the world, the way to learn language was with an emphasis on form, without errors. And the purpose for learning the foreign language was more as an academic exercise and to “discuss, translate, and propagate revolutionary themes and ideas within the official Albanian interpretation of the world situation” (James, 1982). This approach to teaching and learning the language stunted the growth and development of teachers’ linguistic development especially in the areas of socio-cultural and discourse competence and less so in strategic competence (an area explored more in chapters five

and six). This ideologically driven pedagogy also hampered English teachers' ownership over their language. Instead of exhibiting the hallmarks of ownership, spoken English was often "bookish" in nature. Because Albanians were not allowed to write English for communicative purposes (native English speaking pen pals or correspondence with outsiders was generally prohibited), writing was confined to sentences, paragraphs, or short essays for academic purposes only. Consequently, although teachers had good control over even the most complex linguistic structures, their familiarity with language for prolonged social interactions or for use in authentic settings was wanting.

As a result, English teachers accepted following a structural/grammatical syllabus, teaching in traditional teacher-centered ways, and utilizing state-sanctioned textbooks that focused on form and that promoted communist ideology. A link exists between a non-native English-speaking teacher's communicative competence and the willingness to partake in classroom activities that require spontaneous, authentic, and meaningful use of language. The utilization of communicative activities also indicate that practitioners whose language proficiency is at lower levels typically teach in more traditional modes than their more linguistically competent counterparts who are more prone to experiment with language and activities. It is no surprise then, that Albanian English language teachers who either had no venue to maintain or develop all aspects of their communicative competencies or were prohibited from seeking it out were also more apt to design prescriptive lessons and follow scripted language in their lessons.<sup>12</sup> When the doors opened, English teachers had their first exposure to instructional materials and

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<sup>12</sup> I saw examples of this repeatedly while observing English language lessons in Albania, especially in rural schools where teachers had not been exposed to or had participated in authentic language experiences. Teachers were wedded to their textbooks and refused to accept alternative (even grammatically correct) responses from their pupils.

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texts that promoted among other methods, the communicative language teaching approach. They also had exposure to the English language in different media and had opportunities to speak with English speakers from outside Albania for both personal and professional reasons.<sup>13</sup> Did these experiences help Albanian English teachers' language competencies, confidence, and ownership grow and develop? Did higher levels of language competencies, ownership, and confidence (if indeed there was) lead to teachers' application of more authentic, meaningful language in their classrooms?

### **Role of English and Its Effect on Teacher Identify**

An interesting and related topic that I investigated prior to this research was the historical, political, and economic role of foreign language learning and teaching in Albania. In studying the historical and political aspects of language policies in Albania and the republic of Kosovo, I attempted to shed light on the various foreign languages (e.g. Turkish, Italian, Serbian, Greek, French, Russian and English) taught in educational settings throughout the country's history and the ramifications of the imposition on Albanians to learn certain foreign languages.

The role and status of English in Albania, at least, in its historical context is not a central focus of this study. However, the importance that this issue has played in the formation of the Albanian nation-state and during the communist era in Albania prompted me to include mention of it in this study. It has also been useful in

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<sup>13</sup> It is difficult to determine the number of teachers who had new, varied, or frequent opportunities to practice the use of English or to read about, observe and/or discuss different methods or strategies for English teaching. In spite of Peace Corps volunteers and other United States, British or other European English language teaching aid programs being relatively widespread, opportunities for these activities were more often found in the capitol and half a dozen small cities that were more easily accessible to visitors. Consequently, teachers were excluded from these opportunities in hundreds of villages and difficult to reach towns and villages in the north and mountainous areas of the country.

understanding how learning foreign languages (most notable English) has continued to play a powerful role in the personal lives of Albanian people, and in the professional and personal lives of Albanian English teachers. From the new knowledge I gained from my previous investigation I decided to pose some questions to the women I interviewed about the political implications of learning and teaching of English and its effect on teachers' professional identity.

The politicization of learning, knowing, and teaching English surfaced in conversations with people when I lived in Albania. A repeated story in relation to this issue was that in the early years of communism, Albanians who knew English well or who were associated with westerners, especially Americans, were seen as a threat by the government and were subsequently persecuted or imprisoned. Stories also circulated that only those students whose parents had been openly loyal to the Labor Party were allowed to attend foreign language high schools for English, become English teachers, or act as official interpreters or translators. How accurate these stories were or how widespread the responses were to these policies, for the purposes of this study, I believed this subject deserved further inquiry, first as to the stories' credibility and, second to the impact that such policies had on the lives of English teachers and their students.

Although the effect of language ideology is addressed in the literature, most notably in Phillipson's 1992 text *Linguistic Imperialism*, the role and status of English and its affect on English teachers' professional lives and identities is not. Issues of identity and English language learning and teaching have been studied in English as second language learners. The same sort of research has been carried out with ethnic and racial minority teachers in the United States and Canada (Norton, 1993; Amin, 1997; Galinda,

et. al, 1996). However, these studies do not look at language and identity issues in English as foreign language teachers in educational settings in countries where English is not the dominant language.

Despite the absence of research that investigates the politicization of English and its attendant effect on English as foreign language teachers' professional lives and identities, there is one interesting piece of research that was potentially helpful to my study of English teachers' personal and professional relationship with the English language. Although the subject matter treated is not the teaching of English as a foreign language, Jennifer Helms (1998), in her qualitative study of six science teachers over the course of an academic year, offers a conceptual framework for thinking about identity and subject matter. Similarities between Helm's study and the current research can be found neither in the conceptual framework with which Helm organized her work, nor in the particular subject matter teachers she investigated (science), but rather in her concern with the external factors that contribute to one's identity via the subject matter that one teaches. Essentially, the notion that Helm advances is that the "self is the experienced self in *context*" (p. 829).

So the question for me is, in light of Helms' study, how did Albanian English teachers' identify with the English language given that, officially during the Communist era, the state considered native speakers of English, or at least the countries in which English was the dominant language, its enemies. Helms' findings showed evidence that teachers not only identified with the subject matter of science, but that science was rooted in these six teachers' own sense of themselves. Additionally, Helms went on to say that the identification of a teacher with his or her subject matter is something routinely

neglected when studying teachers' lives and practices. It is this connection, between the subject matter of English and an Albanian teacher's identity, which I attempted to investigate. Moreover, I was curious to know if such identification existed between teachers and their subject and, if it did, how this identity positively or negatively influenced their learning and teaching.

Another shared aspect of Helms' research with the present study was the way in which she explored the connection between identity and subject matter by utilizing the life history approach. Helms supports, as I do, Goodson's work in this area, (1992, 1994, 1995, 1997, 2000) which says that if we want to understand the teaching profession we need to know the people who engage in it. I concur with Helms who claims that the life history method may lead teacher educators and researchers to find ways for teachers to explore the relationship between the subject matter they teach and their own personal and professional identity and the impact that has on their teaching:

.... a greater understanding of this relationship will help teachers and teacher educators understand the influence of identity on teachers' curricular choices, pedagogy and career trajectory. ... Understanding the relationship between subject matter and a teacher's sense of self can inform teacher educators and researchers about a teacher's pedagogical commitments and can provide them with opportunities to explore this aspect of their identity. (Helms, 1998, p. 831)

### **Transitional Teaching and Learning Contexts**

Agnes Enyedi and Peter Medgyes in their piece *ELT in Central and Eastern Europe* (1998) approached the significance of context to improving English language teaching in post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe by analyzing how the teaching and learning of foreign languages were affected in the region by the political changes in 1989-1990. The researchers then investigated how the process was filtered

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through distinct national characteristics. Instead of a country-by-country analysis, Enyedi and Medgyes adopted an issue-based approach, taking their readers through a number of English language teaching topics of interest to the changing English language scene in post-communist countries. They provided an interesting look at language education during the communist era, describing major trends and achievements of the transitional period, and how language teaching and teacher education have come to claim professional status in the region.

The authors concluded that although all the countries involved had common features, they strongly urged their readers to consider important country-specific concerns, local contexts, and cultural and individual beliefs about teaching and learning languages. Within this framework, Enyedi and Medgyes also recommended that the change agents - often native-English-speaking teachers and project administrators- be “in tune with local attitudes and traditions,” and that they be “fully conversant with the socio-economic and political background” (p. 9). Enyedi and Medgyes’ approach to the importance of context was helpful to the present study because of its specific focus on Eastern and Central Europe, and its consideration of other influential variables on English language teachers’ professional lives besides language and pedagogical development.

Mintrop (1996), in his study of teachers and changing authority patterns in Eastern German schools during the transition, conducted research in eight secondary schools located in cities, suburbs, small towns, and rural areas in two Eastern German states. In a triangulation of data which included 90 interviews with teachers, in-service educators, and state and local administrators; 90 interviews with teachers and school administrators; 264 completed questionnaires; and 200 protocols of lesson observations

the researcher found that under conditions of fundamental systemic and cultural change in schools and society, redistributed authority relationships become a salient feature of educational change.

In his analysis, Mintrop showed that 50% of the teachers interviewed perceived relationships with students as having deteriorated in the transitional years, with changes in student needs and behavior perceived by teachers and administrators as significant and negative. Seventy-five percent of those surveyed reported a worsening of student behavior and 80% saw a lessened ability to deal with it through disciplinary measures. Judging from interviews, this perceived deterioration was to a great extent caused by uncertainty in teachers' authority. Finding a new position of authority or redefining one's old position among parents, students, and the authorities seemed to be an inevitable but daunting task for teachers working in conditions of great socio-cultural change. Similar to Mintrop's finding, the interviews in my own study were characterized by research participants' perceptions that English teachers had toward pressure, pressure that resulted from teachers having been trained in one way while being expected to teach in another.

However, Mintrop suggested that the cause of reported difficulties between teachers and students was not the result of teachers having been trained in one way, and students' expectation that they would teach in another. Instead, the reported difficulties stemmed from the cultural liberalization that was sweeping the country: openness, a growing focus on individual freedom, the influence of Western media and consumerism, and teens' rebellious attitudes helped fuel the growing perception of problems between teachers and students. Unlike the educational system in the transitional years which was being pressured by many students (parents and teachers too!) to allow the expression of

individual free will, schools in socialist times had primacy over the family in educational matters. In the former system, teachers were responsible for the success or failure of their students, and a teacher's negative evaluation could destroy a student's future academic or professional career. Teachers felt a kind of nostalgia for the past when students exhibited better classroom behavior. However, teachers understood the reasons for what they considered unacceptable behavior by their students, citing that it stemmed from students' confusion about the kinds of personal freedoms that do (or do not) exist in classrooms in democratically governed nations.

In the early years of the transition many citizens of former communist countries embraced change (Zaslasvskaya, 1990 and Cohen, 1989). At the same time, paradoxically, they resisted it (Dunlop, 1993). Some of the most captivating stories that the research participants in my study related arose in relation to this dilemma.

Contradictory feelings permeated many of the stories they told me, especially those dealing with the topic of teacher-student relationships in the classroom. Research on youth in post-communist countries has revealed contrasting views on how students responded to overall sociocultural, political and economic changes. One view is that "students actively were contemplating the changes going on around them, had become engaged in reading and seeking new information, and were reassessing their relationships with adults, trying to form opinions independently of them" (Adelman, 1992, p. xii).

However, others who have researched this same theme regarding students' attitudes and behaviors (Easton, 1989; Markowitz, 1999; Traver, 1989; Pilkington, 1994) have claimed that students did not emphasize the serious side of change, but instead took a keen interest in having fun, socializing with friends, and learning about rock music, new



clothing, and styles. Despite the finding that student behavior was shaped by the wider society's transitional era message to have fun, socialize, rebel, etc., it was also shown that teachers perceived that the "new" English student had needs that were significantly different from their own when they were learners. English teachers recognizing these needs worked to instruct their students in ways that would help them acquire language skills that would give them a competitive edge in a market economy:

In spite of the conflicts, obstacles, and impediments to change, when teachers spoke of their changing roles, they all voiced a shared commitment to providing their students with new opportunities in language learning and helping them with problems that had come in recent years.  
(Kaufman, 40)

Others (Kaufman 1996; Mintrop, 1996) also examined the conflicting feelings present in teachers who teach in societies in transition. In her piece on how educators responded to educational reform in Hungary during the transition from Soviet rule, Kaufman concluded that attempts to change teaching practices successfully in emerging democracies often were met with resistance, indifference, or a lack of understanding. Although ridding Marxist ideology from textbooks and materials in all disciplines was reported to have been highly successful when comparing material and instructional changes in East German schools, that of textbooks was strong at 85% while that of methods was weak at 23% (Mintrop, 1996). Neither teacher enthusiasm nor a new political climate necessarily motivated educators to embrace school reform in an active manner. The literature on teacher change views teachers' reactions to change in several ways. Some tell of teachers' resistance to reform (Gross, Giaquinta, & Bernstein, 1971; McLaughlin, 1987). Even when teachers welcome change and declare that they, in fact, are implementing reforms, they usually construct hybrid practices, cobbling traditional

instructional practices that are known and dependable onto those advocated in reforms (Cohen, 1990).

Another external pressure that had an impact on a teacher's professional life was the creation of schools opened under the tutelage of religious and private organizations and private language schools established by former English teachers or energetic entrepreneurs, all programs that provided students with more rigorous English language curricula activities. This movement has simultaneously raised the pressing issues of privatization and educational choice and threatened language educators with the new forces of parental demand and choice. And while some teachers have perceived the freedom in such opportunities, others see only the increasing burden and responsibilities.

In recognizing that changing relationships between students and teachers during the transitional years was central to English teachers' daily classroom teaching, it was important to this study that I also examine how I (through the lens of an American woman) interpreted and articulated relationships between Albanian English teachers and students, both before the transition and during it. A framework conceptualized by Andy Hargreaves (2001), who investigated authority in school settings but who concentrated on relationships between teachers and parents, addressed the aforementioned concern. It also helped me in remembering my essentially outsider status as the interpreter of changes taking place between students and teachers in Albanian English language classrooms during the transition.

In Hargreaves study, five key "emotional geographies" of teaching were identified (sociocultural, moral, professional, political, and physical distance). How the emotional geographies concept helped inform the present study was its concern with

closeness and distance in school relationships cross-culturally. For example, emotional geographies of teacher-parent relations are typically characterized by greater professional distance in Hong Kong (Lee, 1996) than in many parts of South America (Bernhard & Freire, 1999). These differences reflect important cross-cultural variations in how people experience and express different aspects of emotionality in their lives (Kitayama & Marcus, 1994). Like senses of personal space, then emotional geographies are culture bound, thus not context free.

### **Conclusion**

In concluding my literature review, and before moving on to chapter three, I would like to explain the role that the abovementioned areas of literature have played in this study. Most importantly, they served as a touchstone throughout my study. Before collecting data, I had already looked into the literature of how the transition affected teachers' professional lives: the isolation of Albania, its subsequent opening, the outside world's entrance into Albania and Albanians movement outside the country, and the subsequent impact that native English speaking teaching professionals (and the projects in which they worked) had on teachers' professional lives. In conjunction with native and non-native English speaking teacher issues, during the data collection stage of the study, I more fully explored the importance of understanding transitional contexts to the overall effectiveness of foreign English language teaching projects and relationships between local and foreign teaching professionals. As the process continued and when I came to realize the impact that English language learners had on teachers' professional lives, I turned to the transitional teaching context as far as student-teacher relationships were

concerned. I drew on this literature to further assist me in analyzing my data. In chapter six, I turned once again to the literature to re-view it in light of the analysis of the study's data. Again it served as a touchstone and springboard for my conclusion which states that three interrelated factors - the teachers themselves, their students, and the outside world (including native English speaking colleagues) - were prominent in affecting Albanian English teachers' professional lives, especially their language and pedagogical development.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **The Power of Stories: Giving Voice to the Past and Present**

In remembering the five years that I spent in Albania I recall many stories that Albanians told me of their lives during the years of the communist led state, stories often tinged with tragedy, persecution and suffering. Stories in which Albanians compared their previous way of life with the troubles, triumphs, and interesting experiences they were having since the collapse of the one-party system were prominent. On further reflection, I have come to believe that these stories acted as a kind of catharsis for the storytellers whose voices had been stifled or totally silenced for so long. They also provide me with informal yet sincere glimpses into an Albania of the past. Given the importance of these conversations to my understanding of the impact that the past had on the thinking and actions of the storytellers' present lives I realized that a similar but more formal inquiry with a small number of English teachers would be as revealing as the stories Albanians in the general population told me. By conducting a personal in-depth investigation of the language learning and teaching history of five teachers my hope was to give individuals a venue to discuss their thoughts and feelings about their past and present language and teaching learning and development. Moreover, this method provided these teachers with an opportunity to reflect on their teaching lives. As a result, I hoped that they would gain a deeper understanding of the history of English language learning and teaching in Albania, at least in their lifetime. By utilizing a modified life history method - only concentrating on the years of learning and teaching English- it was also my hope that the significance of the wider context (the socio-cultural, the political

and the economic) on teachers' professional lives, before and after the transition, would reveal itself more fully and naturally.

Despite my focusing the interview questions on the participants' English language learning and teaching history, a limited number of questions pertaining to family and background were included as essential to the research for two reasons: First, it helped establish a rapport with the interviewee. Second, these questions assisted me in understanding how large of an impact that family, friends and other life experiences had on the language learner and teacher.

### **Qualitative Research Methods**

Merriam (1998) specifies that several types of qualitative research often work in conjunction with one another and share essential characteristics. The qualitative methods referred to in this study are a mixture of ethnographical, phenomenological, grounded theory, and case study approaches. The common philosophical assumptions that underlie these types of qualitative research are three-fold. First, reality is constructed by individuals when they interact with their social world. Second, in order to understand a phenomena one must investigate it from an insider perspective. Third, researchers employ an inductive strategy by building abstractions, concepts, and theories, rather than testing existing theory (Merriam, 1998).

The abovementioned characteristics of qualitative research fit the study goal, which was to understand - in more than a superficial way - the inner-world and subjective nature of Albanian English teachers' language learning and teaching lives. As mentioned above, I spent many hours listening to Albanians tell life stories. This experience helped

pave the way to carrying out successfully in-depth interviews with the five Albanian English teachers I interviewed for this study. An intensive and thoughtful analysis of interviews with a small number of people was hoped to result in more personal and richer material than that found in a more quantitative approach. Butt, McCue & Yamagishi (1992) in their work on teachers' life histories lend support to this idea. In examining teachers' personal interpretations of their language learning and teaching lives I could more deeply understand not only how Albanian English teachers were being shaped and influenced by changing contextual factors brought on by the transition, but also could see how the teachers themselves acted on and shaped the context in which they operated:

...as outsiders and researchers, we need to understand how teachers evolve, develop and change their practical knowledge in the way that they perceive their experience of it.... We see one's architecture of self - the private person - as significantly influenced and shaped by experiences of context and situation. In turn, in cyclic fashion, how a person acts in a situation and context may shape and influence it.  
(Butt, McCue & Yamagishi p. 57)

It is my task not only to turn five individual Albanian English teachers' learning and teaching histories into a coherent story but also to keep alive and be true to the importance of the larger sociopolitical and economic context and how that came to bear on these English teachers' professional development during the sociopolitical and economic transition of the 1980s-1990s.

### **Life Histories**

It would be difficult to identify the transformation in English teachers' professional lives during the years of transition in Albania without examining the larger context of the teachers' socio-cultural, economic and political lives, both past and



present. Ivor Goodson (1992, 1994, 1995, 1997, 2000) in particular, and others (Biddle, Good & Goodson, 1997; Day, 2000; Menlo, 1999; Helms, 1998; Hargreaves, 1992; Le Compete & Schensul (1999); Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985) in much of their scholarly work in the social sciences, support and value the use of life histories as a way to understand teachers' practices within the broader context.

The use of educational ethnography in the United States in the 1970s spawned a generation of researchers who explored ways to understand better school processes. Its use also provided researchers with a way to generate theory and helped to make a link among the individual, collectively lived experience, and the wider society (Ball and Goodson, 1985). Dollard (in Goodson, 2000) defined the life history as a deliberate attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and then to make theoretical sense of it. Researchers who utilize the life history approach can obtain, via in-depth conversations, another perspective of a culture or sub-culture than that which they hold. Life history studies, besides providing the researcher with an insider's view of the researched culture, emphasize individual life experience and an individual coping with the wider society (Mandelbaum, in Goodson, 2000). Studies of individual teachers' lives allow us to frame those lives within the historical events of his or her time. Furthermore, life histories ground an individual not only in the context of one's lived experience but also within the broader social and economic system in which one lives. For the purposes of this study, however, I was also interested in investigating and further understanding how the context of lived experiences intersected and informed a teacher's life and practice. "In order to understand how a person knows what they know, it is necessary to view the relationships and tensions among context and individual lives not only as related

to the present but the past, as well. To understand one's present situation one needs to bring forward prior related experience." (Butt, et. al in Goodson, 1992, p. 60)

In order to understand teachers' knowledge and the application of it to their practice, it is imperative that we know it in the way that the individual teacher does. As outsiders, researchers need to understand how individual teachers evolve, develop, and change their practical knowledge in the way that they perceive they have experienced it. Thus, the background, life experiences, and attitudes of teachers are key ingredients of who they are, both as people and as professionals. Together these ingredients shape a teacher's practice (Goodson, in Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992). "These arguments bring with them a regard for and interest in the teacher as a unique *person*, and the teacher as a *learner* who possesses a special type of knowledge" (Butt, et. al in Goodson, 1992, p. 57). As researchers we need to start from a teacher's work in the context of her perceived knowledge instead of from an aspect of her practice that can be both vulnerable and problematic, such as her classroom practice. Focusing in on an aspect of a teacher's practice that is vulnerable and problematic can miss the teacher's voice, a critical piece in understanding a teacher's practice, and something that should be taken seriously by those who advocate the life history approach to qualitative research. Life histories should be developed in a way in which they can "facilitate, maximize, and legislate the capturing of the teacher's voice" (Goodson, in Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992, p. 115).

I observed dozens of Albanian English teachers in their classrooms and conferenced with teachers about their practices while living in Albania, all without gaining the kind of insight necessary to understand their professional development during the transition. By listening to the stories of teachers' learning and teaching of English I

hoped to have tapped into the new knowledge, skills, and dispositions, which teachers developed in the teaching of English during Albanian's transitional years.

### **Sample Size and Participant Identification**

The five women chosen to participate in this study reflected both a criterion-based selection (LeCompte and Schensul, 1999,) and a convenience sample approach to selection. Perhaps the most critical criterion is that each study participant learned and taught English in state schools during Albania's communist party rule and in the transitional era years. Women, not men, were chosen to be interviewed because the teaching profession (especially in K-12 schools) in Albania was, and continues to be, dominated by women. A second reason women were selected is that social, cultural and religious traditions<sup>14</sup> make close relationships somewhat difficult, or inappropriate, between men and women who are not relatives or married to one another. Consequently, because I - the sole researcher in this study- am a woman, I had more prolonged contact with female teachers than with male teachers when living in Albania. This helped me more easily identify women to interview and, at the same time, gave me a more natural rapport with women. Third, I suggest that Albanian women, who make up an equal share of the work force and are ultimately responsible for shopping, cooking, cleaning, and child care are able to talk more poignantly and widely about the sociopolitical and economic situation before and after the country opened to the outside world. The

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<sup>14</sup> Albania was officially an atheist state from the late 1960s until 1990. This created a whole generation of Albanians (Muslims 70%; Orthodox 20% and Catholics 10%) who have little experience practicing their faith. Historically Albanians have shown tolerance for other religions and are not considered fanatic in their beliefs. Nonetheless, certain social/religious/cultural restrictions do apply to women and men forming casual relationships. This seems to be changing, at least in the younger generation, but still has an impact on social norms.

changing context, I suggest, greatly affected women's lives, both personally and professionally

The identification of all participants in this study was through personal contacts. I met or worked with four of the participants while living in Albania. Two of the five participants, Zana and Ajkuna, I had close professional relations with in Albania. I observed them teaching; I designed and led professional development seminars in which they were participants, and assisted them in preparing in-service seminars that they conducted with local teachers. I also attended some of their seminars and gave feedback to them, if requested. I also socialized with them outside the classroom and was invited to Ajkuna's home on more than one occasion. A third participant, Zamira, and her family had hosted an American friend of mine for two years. I met Zamira's family, visited her home several times, and was a weekend visitor more than once. I knew Valbona while living in Albania; however, only in a cursory way. The fifth participant, Drita, I made contact with through another Albanian friend in the United States. We had never met one another before our first interview session but upon meeting we realized we had common professional acquaintances in Albania. Since Albania is a very small country, the world of English language teaching professionals is a relatively close-knit circle of professionals.

I attempted to locate and interview five Albanian elementary, secondary and university teachers who taught the English language in the years of the communist regime and after the political changes of the early 1990s. Ideally, each teacher would have taught a minimum of five years in both pre and post communist Albania and be

between 35-50 years old.<sup>15</sup> All but one study participant, Valbona, who was 34 and had only five years of teaching experience in Albania, fit these study criteria. Having study participants who matched these criteria insured a deeper understanding of the past and present political, economic, and social lives of Albanians, and the influences that these factors had on teachers' language and teaching development.

The original research design required that participants be female Albanian English language teachers who had immigrated to the U.S. or Canada. The following rationale can be given for these particular criteria. First, since I live in the Great Lakes region of the country, interviewing people in the U.S. and Canada was a more convenient and less expensive way to collect data. Several people had informed me that there were large communities of Albanians in the areas of Toronto, Detroit and Chicago, all cities in relative close proximity. Second, if Albanian women were living in the U.S. or Canada I thought they might have more knowledge and understanding of U.S. university research procedures and participant protections than they would if living in Albania where research procedures are quite different and qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews are not routinely utilized. Having some familiarity with research procedures, especially protections to safeguard participants, was important to my research because during the communist regime revealing one's thoughts and opinions was not always a prudent thing to do. With the passing of time and living in the "safe" psychological environment of Canada or the United States, it was my hope that participants would be more open and willing to discussing their past. Third, whereas my relationship with local teachers was, at least, while living in Albania, friendly, foreign professionals, especially

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<sup>15</sup> I have chosen not to investigate the literature on stages or cycles in a teaching career for this study. However, I have read with interest Huberman, Thompson & Weiland's (1997) work in this area and don't rule out its possible contribution to further understanding the data for of this research.

in the early years of the transition, were highly respected and treated reverentially - sometimes undeservedly. Wanting to avoid teachers feeling that they were obligated to participate in this study and to ensure that study participants were forthcoming during interviews - something critical to a life history – I selected teachers who had left Albania. The research design was modified slightly when a unique opportunity arose to interview a woman still living in Albania, but who was on a long-term academically related visit to the United States. The decision to interview this particular participant, Ajkuna, was made because I believed that she had a relatively clear understanding of the research process in American universities: She had participated in several professional development programs abroad and had worked closely with me and other foreign professionals in Albania.

Study participants, at the time of interviewing, were between the ages of 34 and 52 (34, 38, 46, 48, 52 years old respectively, with an average age of 42.6 years) All five respondents are married and have children, anywhere from 6 months old for the youngest and the mid-twenties for the oldest. The youngest participants, Valbona and Drita, have one child. Each of the other three participants has two children. All respondents have brothers or sisters, but are from small families, with nobody having more than two siblings.

In order to obtain an understanding of teachers' experiences of learning and teaching English throughout Albania, I attempted to include one participant from the east, west, north, south and central parts of the country. All five women were born and raised in Albania but were from different cities in the country. Zana was born and, except for one year, lived in a small northern city in the capital city Tirana, which is located in the



north central part of Albania. Ajkuna was born and still lives in a moderate-sized city in central Albania. A third participant, Zamira, was born in the southwestern corner of the country, lived in various towns during her childhood, but spent her adult years in a small town in southeastern Albania. A fourth participant, Valbona, was born, raised, and lived in south-central Albania. The fifth teacher, Drita, was born and raised in a small city in the central-eastern part of Albania. Although there are five specialized foreign language high schools presently in Albania, all five participants graduated from the four-year foreign language high school in Tirana. Those participants whose parents were not living in Tirana at the time that they were there lived in a special dormitory while attending the school. One of the five participants, Zamira - except for one year - spent her entire career in a small town teaching English in a local high school. Another, Drita - except for her last years in Albania - spent her career teaching in two villages. The other three, Ajkuna, Zana, and Valbona, taught in, what by U.S. definition would be called, large towns. Only one of the five respondents, Ajkuna, was a formal member of the Labor Party of Albania. Zamira's husband and parents were communist party card carrying members. The parents of a third participant, Zana, were party members, but were both expelled when she was in her beginning years at the university. The three older participants' - Zamira, Ajkuna and Zana - parents were all veterans of the war against fascism in the 1940s.

### **Family Foreign Language Learning Histories**

Two of the three respondents' (Drita and Zamira) mother tongue is not Albanian, the latter having Greek and the former having Macedonian as their home language. Greek and Macedonian were spoken in the home when they were children, and are still the main



languages spoken in their parents' home. However, neither Drita nor Zamira speak their first language in their own homes with either their husbands or children. Both respondents were educated in schools where Albanian was the medium of instruction. All parents (except two mothers) of the respondents were university educated and all of the study participants' parents worked outside the home. Their parents had white-collar or professional jobs, in various fields such as economics, agricultural administration, education and public health. All the respondents' parents formally studied foreign languages in school: Russian was the most common formally studied foreign language, but a few participants' parents also studied French and a number of parents had acquired Italian, Hungarian, or Bulgarian in informal situations. These informal language-learning experiences were usually in response to work-related exposure to native language speakers of the foreign language or because they lived in areas of the country where pockets of people spoke the foreign language. For example, Greek is spoken in eastern or southern parts of Albania. Serbian is spoken in northern/northeastern parts of the country and Italian is widely understood throughout the country, especially along the coast in western Albanian. Moreover, small pockets of Bulgarian and Macedonian speakers can be found in eastern Albania. All study participants themselves had either formally studied or informally learned other foreign languages (e.g. French, Italian and Russian) A few could speak these languages with some fluency, but none of them to the degree that they had learned English. The respondents' general attitude towards learning foreign languages is positive and thought to be a natural response to a population that lives in such a small country which does not share (except for ethnic-Albanians living in Kosovo, Greece and Macedonia) a common language with neighboring countries.

### **Study Participants' Teaching Experiences**

Study participants' accumulated years of teaching English in Albania totaled 90 years (4, 10, 20, 26, 30 years respectively, with a mean of 18 years teaching experience). Study participants taught English at several different levels and some held administrative posts. Ajkuna still lives and teaches at the university level in Albania. She currently holds an administrative post at the university. She has taught English to upper elementary school children, high school, and university students and, for a brief time, adults. She has served on several committees for English teacher development and pre/in-service education, served as the English teaching advisor for her city, conducted in-service education seminars to local teachers, and has participated in several conferences, programs, and courses abroad.

At the time of our interviews, Zana was teaching English in a large metropolitan city in Canada in a private school for adults learning English. She has since fulfilled all the requirements to teach ESL in a public school and is now seeking employment. In Albania, she taught English at the upper elementary and high school levels, and English for specific purposes (ESP) at the university level. She also taught at a newly established private language school in the mid-1990s. During this time, Zana also worked with foreign NGOs and conducted in-service English teacher education seminars as English teaching advisor.

Valbona, the recipient of a prestigious scholarship from the U.S. government, holds a MA-TESOL from a U.S. university. She currently teaches English as a second language at a public elementary school in a large Canadian metropolitan area. She taught

English at a foreign language high school in Albania, and briefly held the position of English language teaching advisor before coming to the U.S.

Drita is currently working as a English second language paraprofessional in a suburb of a large Midwestern city and is attending courses leading to an English as a second language endorsement. In Albania, Drita taught English in two village schools and then transferred in the last few years of her teaching career to the foreign language high school in her home city in eastern Albania.

Zamira, the fifth study participant, decided to leave the field of education entirely when she immigrated to the United States. She now lives in a large Midwestern city. In Albania, her first teaching assignment was teaching adults English at a ministry office. Then she was transferred to a general high school in a small city in the south of Albania where, for over twenty years, she taught all levels of English. She briefly taught at an elementary school and also carried out in-service qualifying seminars with village teachers in the area. In her last years in Albania, Zamira taught part-time and acted as the assistant principal at the same high school.

### **Interview Protocol**

The method used for this study was a mixture of a non-standardized and semi-standardized (Berg, 1995) approach to interviewing. Berg's "semi-standardized" interview involves implementation of a number of predetermined questions or topics, asked in a systematic, consistent order. In such interviews, interviewers are allowed to digress from a strict protocol script and probe for richer responses. "Non-standardized"

interviews operate from a slightly different set of assumptions in that there is no pre-planned set of questions and interviews naturally develop: Topics and subsequent questions are generated by the unfolding conversation and the overall purpose of the research. For this study I initially employed a semi-standardized approach, but as I became more comfortable with the questions and confident with the process, I took a more non-standardized approach.

Seidman's (1998) ideas on phenomenologically-based interviewing (a method combining life-history and focused, in-depth interviewing) helped in developing the design of this project. Seidman states that this methodological design involves a number of predetermined questions that are primarily open-ended. A major task for researchers using this method then is to build upon and explore participants' responses to open-ended questions within the framework of the topics under discussion. Protocol questions for this study were constructed in a way that I could at first establish the purpose and focus of the interview. However, I also allowed naturally occurring questions and comments that were in direct response to what the participant or I said. This approach helped keep the interview moving along and also put the participants more at ease.

This study's interviews essentially followed Seidman's notion of phenomenological-based interviews. I organized the kinds of interview questions in two ways. The first set of questions, titled "main questions," was focused on the chronological order of an English teacher's learning and teaching life. Each session focused on approximately one span of time in a participant's life. All the questions were



broken down into four topics. For each topic one to four questions were prepared.<sup>16</sup> These questions were intentionally designed so tha the interviewer could work through the participant's language learning and teaching history from childhood to the present time.

Anticipating that these questions might be too general in nature for the participants, a second set of questions was prepared. These questions were organized into three groups. The first group asked participants to discuss their English language learning and teaching lives during the communist era. The second group required participants to respond to questions about their language learning and teaching lives during the transition. The third group of questions asked participants to make comparisons and contrasts between pre-post communist Albania and their language learning and teaching lives. Each group of questions contained as few as eight and as many as thirteen questions. This interview protocol consisted of complex questions containing more than one question. These same questions turned out to be rather problematic for both the interviewer and interviewees. Sub-questions contained in a main question confused interviewees, caused them to loose focus, and put too much pressure on the interviewee. Furthermore, perhaps the problematic aspects of multiple questions was compounded by the fact that the study participants' first language was not English. Multiple questions embedded in one question forced participants to pay too much attention to each detail of the sub-questions, thus neglecting the overall meaning of the inquiry.

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<sup>16</sup> 1) The role and status of English in language learning and teaching 2) Teaching practice 3) Contact with the outside and its perceived effect 4) Looking back and wrapping up. It should be noted, however, that the discussion on the role of English was not confined to the first interview session, but was revisited as needed.

Initially only one topic area was treated in each interview session with the participant who was interviewed during the pilot project. However, in the remaining set of interviews with the four other participants I changed my interviewing style. If a question, for example, from the second day's set of questions naturally arose in the first day, it was addressed at that time. This contributed to a more fluid, natural interviewing process. Reference to the sub-questions then arose when either the study participant or I felt it was necessary or when we wanted to mine a specific topic.

### **Data Sources and Collection Procedures**

All data for this study were collected between February, 2001 and August, 2002. A year before the first interview was conducted I made contact by phone or e-mail with eight Albanian women<sup>17</sup> who all agreed to assist me in researching this question. Before I continued further, I conducted a pilot-study with one Albanian English teacher living in Canada. The pilot study consisted of two intensive interviews in February. Two more interviews were then conducted in June, 2001. All of the interviews were between two and two and one half hours in length. In the intervening months, I contacted three more potential participants, one each in Canada, Minnesota and New York. Of the eleven women who agreed to participate in my study, I ended up conducting interviews with two women in a large metropolitan area in Canada, one woman in a small city in upstate New York, one woman in suburban Detroit, Michigan and one woman in a large city in Minnesota. To conduct these interviews required me to travel to Canada a total of three times, New York once, the Detroit area twice and Minnesota twice. Times were arranged when participants were available for a series of four-five interviews, lasting

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<sup>17</sup> 3- Ontario, Canada 1-Michigan, 2- Washington, D.C., 1- Vermont, 1- Illinois

approximately two hours each. It was agreed that interviews would all take place in the space of a week. This particular design was preferred especially for participants who lived at a great distance. When participants' schedules would not permit completion of all interviews in one extended visit, I conducted them on separate occasions.

With oral and written permission I tape recorded all interviews and then fully transcribed them. Field notes taken before, during and after each interview provided a place to reflect on the day's interview in general, make modifications to protocol, and write down potentially emerging themes, etc. The language of the interviews was primarily in English, although participants were encouraged to use Albanian whenever they felt the need or desire.<sup>18</sup> Sensitivity to language use in interviews was critical to establishing a good rapport with participants. Encouraging participants to speak Albanian, instead of English, showed respect for them and their mother tongue. It also allowed participants to express themselves better if English failed to provide an accurate description of their feelings or thoughts. Awareness of linguistic differences is also vital to understanding the ideas of both researcher and research participant in that a choice of words often more accurately or authentically reflects participants' thinking (Vygotsky, in Seidman, 1998, p.88).

Research participants decided the venue for each interview, making it wherever it was most convenient and comfortable. I conducted the majority of the interviews at participants' homes. Because she was temporarily living in the U.S., I conducted

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<sup>18</sup> 1) When teachers didn't know or couldn't think of a word/phrase in English 2) When teachers preferred the Albanian word or phrase to the English word 3) When either the interviewer or interviewee happened to slip into speaking Albanian. (Although, my Albanian is not what it used to be, my comprehension skills are still at a high level. In fact, during the interviews in the pilot study, the participant and I both spoke Albanian quite frequently.



interviews with Ajkuna in her rented apartment. Since she felt that family members' presence might cause too much distraction, Zamira chose to have her second interview outside the home. We agreed on a cozy café within walking distance of her home. Although noise from the busy café interfered with clarity in transcribing the interview, this environment seemed both familiar and comfortable to us. Cafes are very popular in Albania for socializing and I spent many pleasurable hours in them discussing professional issues with English teachers. For the third interview, we chose to sit outside in the backyard.

Besides asking participants to read and sign consent forms I fully explained my responsibilities verbally on the phone when making initial contact and again at the beginning of the first interview. This included an explanation of the required use of pseudonyms for participants' name. Before the first interview, I sent copies of the interview protocol to each of the participants either via e-mail attachments or through regular snail mail. Moreover, feedback about specific interview questions, the general nature of the interview format, and any pragmatic issues were elicited at every stage of the process. A comment by one participant was that there was some redundancy in the topics discussed. The last three participants also suggested that we arrange for three longer interview sessions instead of the four, as originally planned. They insisted that they were not too tired to change this feature of the design, even though I found interviews very draining. The first participant to suggest this told me upon completion of our interviews; however, the other two expressed this earlier in the interviewing process and I complied. During the data collection and analysis process, so I could insure the

privacy and confidentiality of all participants, all interview tapes and field notes were collected and stored in a safe place.

If there was enough time between interviews that I could transcribe an interview, I sent a copy of the transcript so that participants could read and comment on it. I also asked them to read transcripts so that if necessary they could expound on areas or make modifications to responses when we met again. If interviews were conducted in a brief period, I sent transcripts after finishing all of them. Again I asked for any feedback, expansions, or modifications. My hope, especially with interviews with the first few study participants, was that comments or suggestions would be helpful for future interviews with remaining participants. Consistently encouraging participant feedback helps the study with both “descriptive accuracy and interpretive validity” (Huberman, Thompson & Weiland, p. 31). Besides leading to a study that is more open and honest, this procedure also recognizes the interactive/constructivist nature of the knowledge that emerges from such interviews (Fontana, & Frey, 2000; Kvale, 1996). Despite the avowed significance of participant feedback, none of the five women I interviewed provided any except for the abovementioned.

However clearly the focus of this study is on the teaching lives of Albanian English teachers, it would be unethical for me, the researcher, to claim that my thoughts and feelings did not enter into the analysis and interpretation of participants’ interviews. In an interesting piece on memory in oral histories, Antoinette Errante (2000) reminds us of how the memory of events from our past can color the descriptions, explanations, and interpretations of our present ideas. Consequently, not only have Albanian English teachers contributed to how the social, economic, and political climate of socialist

Albania and its aftermath impacted teachers' lives, but they have also affected my own memories, and no doubt have had a bearing on the story written here. As a foreigner and English language teaching professional living in Albania during a time of such radical change, I openly admit that the many experiences I had definitively shaped my opinions and ideas of what it means to be an Albanian English teacher. The hope was that by recognizing this, admitting it to participants, and by encouraging them actively to provide on-going feedback, together the researcher and participants would more fully realize the goals of this research.

### **Coding and Analysis**

Throughout the interviewing process and during early stages of the analysis, refining research and protocol questions was made largely from my experiences in the interviews, and on the few responses I received from participants. For example, during the piloting of the protocol questions, I wrongly assumed that one question, "How did you reconcile your learning or teaching of a language that was considered in some way "dangerous" by the communist party?" was too sensitive of a subject to address head on. I also incorrectly thought that, due to the topic's ambiguous nature, participants would have difficulty in articulating an answer. Consequently, this issue was initially embedded in other questions and was rather ambiguous in nature. Seeing that this approach did not get the kind of responses I was looking for, I chose to ask questions outright that dealt with this issue. A highly revealing and engaging discussion ensued. Subsequent questions surrounding this topic were revised for the next series of interviews and continued to be modified as I moved through the interviewing process with each participant.

The research questions, interview protocols, and data focused on language learning and teaching lives of five women. The unit of analysis consisted of eighteen interviews. Each interview lasted one and a half to three hours. Beyond this, e-mail correspondence and field notes taken before, during, and after the interviewing process for each participant were analyzed. While transcribing interviews of each participant a system for coding reoccurring or prominent themes or patterns was created. Themes originally consisted of naturally occurring classes of topics, persons, concepts, events, and words or phrases. Similarities and differences in how participants viewed commonly occurring topics were looked for (Berg, 1995). Next, a set of categories was developed. This step required me to immerse myself in the interview transcripts in ways that I could begin to identify emerging themes that I thought were considered meaningful to the participants (Berg, p. 179).

In the early stages of analysis tentative categories were made that were modified and refined by constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) of participant responses. In the subsequent analyses, I attempted to solidify consistent themes within each participant's interviews, a process also followed in the pilot study. I looked for emerging themes in individual participant's interviews and then across all five participants' series of interviews. Finally, I considered themes salient if they were found in most or all of the participants' responses.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE PAST**

We were not allowed. Yes, they [BBC or VOA] were blocked. And even if you could catch it, you were afraid even of yourself, from yourself, like you were doing something, sort of violation of.... No, you'd get into trouble. So the fear was very well built inside our body and there was an expression.... 'Even the walls have ears.' Because the fear was so planted in us not to do something, because even the walls have ears means that even if you do it with yourself then the walls will make sure it'll come out, somebody, yes, will know. (Zana)

#### **Political Context of Learning, Teaching, and Knowing English**

In order to explain the effects of the transition on English teachers' professional lives, in this chapter I start by looking at the Albania of the past, during the regime of Enver Hoxha, starting at the end of World War II and lasting until the late 1980s. I describe the role of English and the purposes for learning it through the eyes of the study participants. I continue with study participants' views on the politicization of English as seen in their classrooms. Next, I examine Ajkuna, Zana, Zamira, Drita and Valbona's special memories of their own English teachers. I define the role of teacher and student in the Albanian educational system when the study participants were students learning English and in their years of teaching during this period. I draw attention to how the five study participants carried their own language learner experiences, attitudes, and language learner-teacher relationships into their own teaching settings and instructional practices. An examination of the culture of fear and isolation in Albania during Enver Hoxha's regime concludes the chapter. I explain how the notion of fear underscored each Albanian's life and how it also entered the

English language classroom. Finally, I end with how isolation influenced all aspects of an English teachers' professional life. Although I may single out a specific study participant's words to illustrate a point that I am trying to make, unless otherwise noted, all five women interviewed for this study held roughly the same views on any given topic.

### **Role of the English Language and Purposes for Learning English**

First, it is important to understand the more general role of the English language in Albania during the communist regime when the women interviewed for this study learned and taught English. It is also of value to look at the purposes of learning, teaching and knowing English during this time. This helps set the stage for a later and more in depth examination of the study participants' English language learning and teaching histories in light of the transition. It also locates the histories within a particular political period in Albanian history.

It is significant to mention that the study participants' interest in and reasons for learning English were at cross purposes with those of the communist party.

Understandably, these conflicts were not clear or important to Zana, Drita, Ajtanga, Zamira and Valbona when they were children. The subject of English was new<sup>19</sup> to the elementary curriculum and they learned English out of a genuine curiosity and interest in learning the language. "At that time, I didn't see America as an enemy. So, maybe at that

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<sup>19</sup> Although learning English and French had been relatively popular in Albania prior to the Communist takeover, except for some French courses, the Russian language became the dominant foreign language taught in schools after World War II. With the end of Soviet-Albanian (1960) relations, Russian continued to dominate. In the 1960s, English was gradually introduced into Albanian primary and secondary schools and quickly gained popularity.

age you learn something for fun, something interesting, something new. And that's it. It was just learning something new" (Zamira).

However, the state's position on foreign language learning, especially English, became clear as the learners invested more time and energy in their studies, completed the university, and began teaching. As Zamira and the other study participants grew older they became aware of the discrepancies between the need to practice the language in meaningful and authentic contexts, and the political aims of the state. First, the party made all decisions as to who would teach and translate English. As one of the younger study participants, Zana recalls that who was able to become a teacher and who was appointed a translator was tightly controlled and prescribed by the state:...

Why people learn foreign languages now compared to why they learned foreign languages at that time. They are totally different. First, they were told to learn foreign languages to that degree that the party wanted them to learn.... First of all, Hoxha wanted his deeds, let's say "in commas", his works published abroad. And if he didn't have someone with foreign languages, how could they [his works] have been translated into English, French or Italian. So, his writings and his works had to be translated. So he had to qualify or educate the people to learn these foreign languages then they appointed who was going to become a teacher and who was going to become a translator. It was not an option. Never. (Zana)

Second, Zana explained, to know a western language (for the government anyway) was to learn the language of the enemy, the bourgeois, the capitalist states of the west, especially the United States.

Thus, learning English was to serve the purposes of the party and to transmit ideology of the party. By translating Hoxha's works from Albanian into English, Albania's socialist success story could then be distributed abroad and therefore known to





a larger audience.<sup>20</sup> Symbolic of this thinking was a very popular slogan at the time. “To learn a language is an arm in the struggle of life” was a conspicuous message that greeted every visitor to a foreign language classroom in Albania and summed up the government’s position on why Albanians should learn the language of its enemies.

To learn a language is an arm in the struggle in life. Because you could interpret and translate the works of our leader and they should distribute all these works abroad and make known to the world how Albania was flourishing under the Socialist regime. That was the concept at that time. Being a weapon so we can tell the people-the imperialists... the American imperialists... how we are building socialism in this small country. So mostly in that aspect, that’s how people interpreted that slogan. (Drita)

However, Valbona’s understanding of the Marxist slogan is in contrast to Drita’s understanding of it and conveys contradictory reasons for learning a foreign language. Valbona reported that the slogan’s meaning was not simply in line with the communist party’s position that one must disseminate the works of Enver Hoxha and be privy to the language of the enemy. To her, knowing a foreign language was a practical tool. This view, she said, was taken as a realistic viewpoint shared by many Albanians. With a population of less than four million inhabitants who speak an uncommon language the necessity to learn another language was obvious, she and others said. On the one hand, it made practical sense that Albanians learn a foreign language since very few outsiders would ever have need to learn Albanian. On the other hand, by knowing a foreign language one might be tempted to be a part of that world, to think like that world, and therefore reveal a desire to know about that world:

Well now I see that it’s not such a bad slogan because you need,

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<sup>20</sup> As the Albanian language as a native language is spoken by approximately seven million people worldwide - more outside the borders of Albania than within them- the role of translators was critical to this aim.

especially in Albania, you need a foreign language to survive. You need to communicate with the rest of the world and how do you do that? You don't do that in Albanian, unfortunately. [You do it] either in English, in French, in German, also in Italian. So I think that languages have helped people in Albania and I don't think that it was the Party or the Communist regime that made the people aware that learning a foreign language was a good thing. I think the people themselves saw the need, became aware of the need to understand [the people] surrounding them and, maybe well, that's why some of them were incarcerated or lost their lives trying to cross the border and go abroad. Because maybe [they] knew too much about what was going on abroad in the other countries. It was not just those in inverted commas, "the government" but also the people that had different views. They didn't share the views that our government proclaimed that were shared with the rest of common people. So some of these people would say something or they would have a slip of tongue somewhere... somebody would hear... and that was it. So people would learn and study but this was done sometimes in secrecy. (Valbona)

You might ask, what was the thinking on this subject by older English language learners, teachers, teacher-translators and translators? How did they understand their role of foreign language learners and teachers? Were their desires being met? Clearly, reasons for learning English for the learners and teachers of English ran counter to those that the state officially sanctioned. The need to see, have relations with, and understand the "other" was in opposition to the oft seen slogan. To practice the English language, to communicate in it, to use what one had studied and learned were ignored:

The point was not for the students to practice, the point was to realize their [the leaders] idea, their aim. Students did it very well because they wanted to speak English and be responsible. So the interests were different. Everyone wanted to do their job but not with the idea in mind to transmit ideology, to be politically or ideologically involved. (Zana)

So it went throughout the years of the communist years in Albania. Students and teachers knew that learning English would not end in their being able to communicate in natural settings, but in furthering the aims of the state. At the same time that the desire to

practice the language and communicate in English was strong, the hidden message of its danger lay right outside. As Valbona so poignantly stated, to know the language meant to know the world that that language shared and to know that world, so different from the world of Albania, might be the reason that some people “were incarcerated or lost their lives trying to cross the border.”

The state’s control of how a foreign language was understood and utilized outside the classroom was not the only way it interfered in the field of learning and teaching of English. Politics also entered into the English language classroom and affected the materials for learning language, the language lessons, and the methods used to teach it.

### **Politicization of English**

Instead of current English language materials, English language learners and teachers were exposed to heavy doses of the language of political ideology, a language that permeated and dominated all lessons in all subject areas (Grant, 1979; Rosen, 1971; Zajeda, 1980; Lita, 2004). Not only were students exposed to texts saturated with political ideology, but also English teachers were required to plan lessons according to these dictates. As a result, much of the English language that learners were required to study and to learn was that of the political party. In the many informal conversations I had with Albanians while living in the country, I learned that the strong political element turned many of them off from learning English. Others ignored the implicit and explicit political messages for the sake of learning the language. And for others like Ajkuna and Zamira, learning the political message via English was the norm and acceptable. “I liked English in the middle school, although it was filled with ideology. Anyway, I liked

English. So I even learned the history of the party or things like that. We were obliged. I wanted English” (Ajkuna).

I don't remember reading English books at that time, just learning or reading the methods<sup>21</sup> that we used at school. But we were used to that because not only in English but in all other subjects there was politics and we considered it as something normal. It was everywhere in all subjects.... It wasn't something special to English. (Zamira)

Although teachers recognized in later years, during the transition, that the government had sheltered them from the outside world, the earlier years of isolation kept them from realizing the impact this policy was having on their language competence and professional development. On reflection, study participants shared their views of how language ideology played itself out in the hearts and minds of individual language learners and teachers. One way that this was done was through the materials language learners had access to and the content of their English language texts. All materials writers were required to design their textbooks so that a certain amount of popular political slogans, and positive references to the Albanian communist party and its leader, Enver Hoxha, were inserted in all textbooks (Lita, 2004):

Everywhere, everywhere in all subjects, you had to have a sentence from a Congress. You had to have a saying from the leader or something like that. It was everywhere in all subjects. It was like injected in every subject and all the people were like, “We have to do. This is our life.” Because nobody knew what was happening on the other side of the border because nothing was allowed. Because everything that was predicted here in Albania was, “This is a socialist country in the world, the only socialist country. We are flourishing. We are the best.” Things like that. (Drita)

And teachers were required to not only teach to the textbooks and display political slogans in English in the classroom, but also to incorporate party ideology into their practice. These factors limited what one could learn in a foreign language and curbed

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<sup>21</sup> In Albania a “method” refers to the class textbook.

opportunities for real world language communication, exposure to varied and authentic materials and resources, and knowledge about modern literature and culture. Reading literary magazines and newspapers published in Albania was permissible but these materials were written solely by Albanian authors and were carefully scrutinized by censors to ensure their political correctness. Modern American or British literature was forbidden because of its “reactionary” content.<sup>22</sup> Study participants took this facet of language learning in stride, at least as children:

You know we didn't understand at that time that we were isolated. Just to be open. We thought that we were learning something... English... and that's the way it should be learned, so we didn't know that we were isolated. At that beginning we were kids and that's the way that it should be. (Ajkuna)

However, as they became older and more cognizant of the strict limitations on the human, material, and technological resources they had access to, study participants reported that they found ways to learn English language and culture in whatever way and from whomever they could. Despite the state making every attempt to distort the learning of English by injecting political ideology into English language textbooks and requiring teachers to teach to those textbooks, the subject of English was considered different. It had a special quality that other more tightly controlled subjects like Albanian language literature, history or political science did not:

But to learn foreign language, the English language, was not the only source in the classroom. We could find it whether they liked it or not. It's inevitable. We could find it from somewhere else. So they couldn't corrupt it 100%. That's the reason they couldn't corrupt it. In that respect, English, or foreign language was special, special because they tried to block the other sources, like we didn't have access to magazines, to films, to English music, and other stuff. Anyway, they couldn't corrupt it. Still there was a beam. Still there was something. You could find something. (Zana)

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<sup>22</sup> Reactionary authors were those who wrote against the principles of socialism.



Now that I have provided the external context in which English language learners learned the English language and became teachers I will move in for a closer look at the English language classroom in the years during the communist regime and the years leading up to the transition. First, I analyze study participants' responses to questions about memories of their own English teachers and the influences they thought that their teachers had on them when they became teachers themselves. Based on these responses I construct a profile of what a good teacher would be like during this period.

### **The Good English Teacher**

Because of the long struggle for Albania's autonomy and the right to manage their own educational system,<sup>23</sup> historically Albanians have placed a high value on formal education. Thus, not surprisingly, it is common to see Albanian parents who are willing to sacrifice time, energy, and money for the sake of their children's education. In keeping with this mentality, Albanian teachers have been treated with great respect and their knowledge and authority not questioned. Study participants echoed this general attitude of respect for educators when discussing their own elementary and high school teachers and university professors. Notwithstanding the isolating climate in which study participants learned and taught English, teachers reported that they had worked hard to learn English, had a deep sense of satisfaction in the time and effort they had invested in this endeavor, and felt they had met with success. They attributed their success, not only

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<sup>23</sup> Albanian independence from Turkish rule came in 1912. However, schooling for the masses was slow to reach all Albanians. Eighty percent of all Albanians were illiterate in Albania at the close of World War II (Lita, 2004). Thus, prior to the communist regime the number of Albanians having the opportunity to attend formal education was extremely low. Stamping out illiteracy was a high priority for Albania, like many other socialist led governments of this time, and met with great success. Formal education, then, was highly touted and required of young and old alike.

to their own hard work and commitment, but in many ways to the Albanian school system and to their own English teachers. At the same time that she acknowledged the challenges that English language learners and teachers faced in a climate of a closed Albania, Valbona expressed her deep admiration and respect for her teachers and the educational system in which she participated:

Because in spite of the fact of all these shortcomings of the system and everything, the schools and our teachers were able to produce generations of well prepared students. And many of us are living examples of that. I wouldn't have survived had I had a bad education... (Valbona)

The women interviewed for this study not only had respect for their teachers but were also moved by the hard work and diligence that their former teachers of English exhibited. One way in which the older generation of teachers compensated for the isolating conditions in which they themselves had learned and taught English was to apply themselves vigorously to their learning of English and by doing so obtain a record of academic excellence. This form of excellence then followed them through their careers and instilled feelings of respect and admiration in their students. Receiving all 10s<sup>24</sup> could gain students admission to the prestigious foreign languages high school and to the department of English language teaching and translation at the University of Tirana.<sup>25</sup> Study participants unanimously expressed the belief that their best teachers had studied hard to learn English and in working hard had gained respect and prestige through their academic excellence. "And if you say that she used to be a good student, she had everything. A good student complete with very good qualities, had all good qualities.

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<sup>24</sup> Albanian schools operate on a 5-10 scale grading system, with 10 being the highest mark

<sup>25</sup> A less than stellar standing in the party or a family member with a "bad biography" easily could have prevented an Albanian young man or woman from pursuing a degree in English language teaching, whether his or her grades were excellent or not.



You got that name and you'd keep it." (Zana) Not only did Albanian teachers unconsciously follow in their own teachers' methodological footsteps, but they also related their conscious wish to emulate the qualities they found highly desirable in their teachers.

One of the qualities, besides academic excellence, that surfaced frequently during interviews I conducted with study participants was that of the *punetore*.<sup>26</sup> Translated to English, *punetore* means "hard worker." *Punetore*, used by Albanians to describe people who are respected by others, are known to be dedicated to their vocations, careers, studies, or even house wife duties. When study participants were asked what a hard working teacher was like, they used several adjectives and qualities to describe such a teacher. I have analyzed their responses and defined a hardworking teacher as someone who is devoted to her career, provides a systematic approach to teaching the language, is highly prepared, is well organized in her lesson planning and instruction, is strict with students, and is committed to imparting a high level of knowledge of the English language to her students.

Study participants, themselves both English language learners and teachers during communist leader Enver Hoxha's regime, not only had sympathy for the oppressive condition in which their teachers taught them English, but in later years when they experienced a similar teaching climate, also had empathy with them. The empathy that study participants felt towards their teachers did not in anyway diminish their admiration and respect for what their teachers were able to accomplish despite the challenging conditions in which their teachers taught them. It only strengthened it and the ties they felt toward them. The lack of personal contact with non-Albanian English speakers bound

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<sup>26</sup> *Punetore*, narrowly translated into English, means "worker" but is often taken to mean "hard worker".

both students and teachers to their classroom in an unusual way as the only place where students and teachers could practice their English. And since English language learners had no other access to the language, the model that teachers provided was viewed as especially meaningful and critical to their learning the language.

Teachers also found other ways to compensate for the lack of access to English outside the confines of the Albanian classroom. Drita describes one way they made up for this lack of opportunities. “The teachers were very well prepared. I don’t think anyone had been like abroad to speak the language. But they always came well prepared to class to give lessons to the students, all the time” (Drita). Preparedness for lessons is a quality that all interviewees regarded as integral to a successful lesson and the mark of a good teacher.

Along with the pragmatic aspect of teaching –that of strong preparation- that study participants noted was an important quality of a good teacher, they also valued something more subtle in their favorite teachers’ instructional practice. Drita, and other study participants, highlighted a certain style of teaching that their favorite teachers practiced. This type of English teacher, they reported, came to class not only well prepared, but also made an effort to explore topics not covered in the texts. Despite the attendant risks to do so, these teachers, they said, successfully engaged their students and expanded the limits of their narrowly prescribed lives. As Drita and Valbona described it, the kind of English teachers they were partial to could cross some boundaries without raising undue suspicion on the part of students or other teachers:

While he lectured, he also gave us the history of Great Britain. And it was interesting because he brought interesting facts not always sticking to the book, facts from the books., But [he did] other things and tried to explain and tell us how life is there and

showing us...but not going into details....like the free life or the democratic life...not things like that. ” (Drita)

Yes. Because I loved teachers of English who...He didn't just teach English, he taught more. He knew more about things. He would switch from one subject, from one topic to another easily and teach us so many things. That's why I liked him. (Valbona)

### **Teacher and Learner Roles**

Now that the larger political role of English has been established and the good English teacher has been described, all through the lens of the study participants whom I interviewed, I move on to the roles that English language teachers and learners played in the learning and teaching of English. In analyzing the interviews, it gradually became clear to me how relationships between language learners and teachers were altered during times of a country's transition. The positive impact that shifting relationships (if recognized, understood and valued) can have on teaching also became clear. At this time, I analyze how study participants talked about relationships between teachers and learners of English before the transition. Later, in chapter six I go more in depth into comparing and contrasting the characteristics of teacher-learner relationships during the transition with those of the past.

Study participants Zana, Ajkuna, Drita, Zamira, and Valbona all reported that before the transition in Albania (late 1980s-early 1990s) the relationship between students and teachers was authoritative in nature. This relationship was also characterized as formal. Strict codes of conduct were accepted as the norm. One of these norms was that students show respect to their teachers. Teachers stated that these prescribed behaviors between teachers and students felt natural and right to both teachers and students. Drita expressed this sentiment in the following way:

You know how education was in Albania. Teachers were supposed to be not very close with the students. They were supposed to be the only figure in class and students were supposed to respect everything the teacher said. Everything the teacher said was holy and they had to respect it. (Drita)

Valbona discussed this same notion differently when she compared the role of the teacher she had known as a student of English with the teacher-student relationships she has witnessed since living and teaching in Canada. “I would have...liked a friendly relationship with my teachers. But although it was friendly- of course it was much more different than relations that students have here with their teachers- we had to keep our distance. It was more authoritative.” (Valbona) As study participants said, a kind of psychological distance between English teacher and students also influenced how teachers conducted English classes. Because of the centralized system of education, teachers in every classroom followed the curriculum closely. Therefore little room for spontaneous discussions or extra questions by either language learners or teachers was allowed. “Well, they [students] would say whatever they had prepared. Not many questions were asked. It was about what you prepared rather than what had popped up... a question you had on your mind” (Valbona, 2-2). Drita, like Valbona, also viewed the Albanian teachers’ strictness both in hindsight and through the contrasting lens of her more recent observations of and experiences with teachers in U.S. classrooms. “They were very strict, very strict about things. Not like teachers are here. They are very flexible, very friendly with the student. The student can talk to them and discuss things with them. The teacher there is very tough, very strict. (Drita) There existed then a distinctive psychological or emotional distance between English language learners and

teachers who played well-defined roles that were tacitly recognized and understood by both sides. Neither the authority of the teacher nor the subordinate role of the student was questioned by either language learner or teacher. Unlike classrooms in the United States where, as Valbona says, students are expected to question the teacher and different interpretations by teachers and students are, in theory anyway, invited and accepted, a teacher's words in Albania at that time were taken as gospel truth:

He or she was the teacher. You are the student. You can not question your teacher. Whatever he says he says and it's true....I didn't question. It was routine. That was the way it was and I believed that it was okay... And then when I started in the States and I saw that there were so many different theories and of course you can question your teacher. Of course you can ask questions. And see that not everything that one particular professor [says] is true but there are different interpretations. So yeah...this was something I learned later. (Valbona)

With isolationist policies in full force, the government's tight grip on the foreign literature that teachers could access, and without any other methodological models to follow, English teachers were left with no recourse but to follow in the footsteps of their own teachers when they became teachers themselves. Not only was this seen in how and what they taught, in what materials they could share with their students, but also in how they related to their students.

### **Soviet and Chinese Methods: The "Apprenticeship of Observation"**

When study participants became teachers themselves they behaved toward their students as their teachers had toward them. When they became teachers they also expected to receive the same treatment from their students as they had given their teachers. Study participants said they were well also aware of their natural inclinations to

imitate their own teachers' language teaching methods, a style of teaching, they say, was inherited from the Soviet era in Albania<sup>27</sup>. After ties with the Yugoslavian communist party were entirely severed in 1948, the Albanian communist party moved closer to its Russian counterpart and fell under the Soviet education system's influence which dominated Albanian education until 1960. To compound this influence, from 1951-1955 839 Albanian students were sent to study in various countries of the Soviet Union. Many of these students then returned to Albania to teach in the first university in Albania, the University of Tirana (then known as "Enver Hoxha" University) which opened in 1958. Zana Lita (2004) in her historical account of teacher education in Albania devotes an entire chapter to this subject. In measures to reform education the central committee of the Communist Party in 1946 stated that future education in Albania would be directed at providing education for all, to eradicating illiteracy, and to fighting against and uprooting the 'old ideology.' To reach this aim the country would have to rid itself of the remaining bourgeois and instill the teachings of communist thought. Marxist-Leninist philosophy permeated textbooks and curriculum; the Russian language was introduced in the curriculum, which led to the use of Russian materials and resources (Lita, 2004).

When Nikita Krushchev came to power and the Soviet communist party positioned itself against Stalinist policies, the Albanian communist party leadership broke with the Soviet Union and aligned itself with the Chinese communist party. Despite the vigorous attempts of the Albanian communist party to try to purge its educational system of the

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<sup>27</sup> Since the Soviet method of teaching was that most familiar to and most quoted by the five English teachers interviewed for this study, my focus here is on how Soviet methods impacted the Albanian educational system. However, emphasizing Soviet style methods is not in any way meant to exclude the impact that teaching methods used prior to the Soviet era had on instructional practices and teacher-student relationships. Before the takeover of the government by the communist regime in the mid-1940s, methods could have been considered traditional in nature and therefore similar to those that participants had experienced as learners and used as teachers.

effects of the Russian educational model, Soviet pedagogy and literature continued to be the sole sources of information. Study participants reported that the Soviet academic legacy endured long after the breakdown of relations between the two countries. The establishment of relations with China led to more isolation from the west and prompted the initiation of Chinese political ideological in education. In the field of English this was most significantly noted. Albanians went to China to major in English language while Chinese professors came to Albania to teach in the English department of the University of Tirana. English language textbooks published in China were used in English language classes at the University and "...every effort to imitate [sic] Western World was subject to severe criticism." (Lita, p. 154)

The tendency to reproduce in one's teaching what one has observed and experienced as a student is an oft cited topic in the literature. Dan Lortie (1974) in his seminal work on the sociology of teaching in the U.S. coined this notion the *apprenticeship of observation*<sup>28</sup> When I asked study participant Zana about her teaching methods, without any prompting, she described the notion of the *apprenticeship of observation* well:

Because my teachers were taught underneath a Russian methodology. You know students always imitate their teachers when they teach. So teachers are like archetypes. So you try to teach like him or her which supported a Russian methodology. Naturally it comes to you... you don't know, but gradually it's transmitted to you. And if a student of mine becomes a teacher and tries to imitate me, of course, she will inherit my way of teaching like she would say, "I know Zana taught me like this

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<sup>28</sup> The concept *Apprenticeship of Observation* posits that by being students ourselves we are witnesses to thousands of hours of teaching. This experience greatly influences the way in which we who choose to enter the teaching profession teach our own students. In other professions the same experience is not likely. This gives professional schools more of a chance to influence and shape their novices' beliefs and patterns of professional conduct. Colleges of education, conversely, must regularly contend with teachers' own personal experiences.

and it works.”(Zana)

Educational reformers recognize that it is natural to imitate one’s teachers in one’s own teaching and the *apprenticeship of observation* is seriously considered when reformers attempt to engage teachers in curricular and instructional changes. It is also important to acknowledge that study participants described the teachers they respected and looked up to: teachers who taught out of the tightly circumscribed box of traditional, Soviet and Chinese communist style methods they were used to; teachers who gave glimpses into the communicative language teaching methodologies that would come with the transition. However, open communication between students and teachers would still have many barriers to overcome.

### **Culture of Fear**

The history of Albanian education points out that education was highly valued by its people. When in 1912 independence from the Turks was won, Albania finally gained control of its own educational system. At the end of World War II, and with the formation of the communist state, measures were taken to make education available to all Albanians, and wiping out illiteracy became a top priority of the government. In order to reach this aim many new teachers had to be trained.<sup>29</sup> As far the government was concerned, these newly educated and trained teachers’ mission was not only to eliminate literacy in the population, but also to spread the ideology of the communist party. Because historically parents and students had looked up to Albanian teachers and admired their hard work and academic abilities, the challenge was met on both fronts.

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<sup>29</sup> 1,550 teachers with a total of 654 combined primary and secondary schools in the country (Jacques, 1995, p. 540). In 1945 in the Albanian journal entitled *Shkolla e Re* (New School) in that year alone, 336 new schools opened, creating an acute need for trained teachers (as cited in Lita, 2004).



The effect of Marxist-Leninist educational practices from Soviet and Chinese political ideology on the Albanian educational system added to this already potent politicization of the educational system. Curricula, lessons, textbooks, and materials were rife with politics. Not only did the centralized nature of the educational system limit the scope of the curriculum and the types of textbooks and materials utilized in classrooms, but teachers were fearful of the consequences if they or their students stepped outside politically acceptable curricula, materials, and teaching methods. Despite some teachers wanting to be creative in their approach to teaching, fear from state reprisals prevented many of these ideas from being acted on. “Because everybody was scared, we didn’t learn in school more than what we’re supposed to. We are going to learn this year this kind of material, not more about that.” (Drita)

Instruction in classrooms and relationships between teachers and students reflected not only the traditional Albanian cultural mores of respect and admiration for the teacher, but also echoed the political climate of the time. Oppression from the state suppressed free thinking and a spirit of inquiry in the classroom. At a time when it was possible for children to turn in their own parents or teachers to the authorities for “politically incorrect” thinking or speaking, to some extent fear also drove classroom interaction styles and relationships between students and teachers. This culture of fear even influenced relations between students and students as you will see in later examples. In all walks of life fear of the state was a common emotion felt by the people of Albania during this time in their history. The topic of fear was clearly present in and significant to each of the study participants’ stories of their English language learning and teaching, at least when discussing the period prior to the transition. Following are some interesting

and especially informative vignettes. These surfaced when study participants discussed the years after the initial fun of language learning had turned into a serious investment in time and energy and when learners and teachers of English were adult enough to understand the consequences of their actions and words.

First, Valbona tells a frightening experience she had as a student and the effect that this experience had on her ability to be open and responsive in the classroom. Her story epitomizes how the fear that permeated Albanians' lives outside school entered into a classroom. Although the venue for this story is not an English language classroom, it accurately portrays a teacher's behavior toward her student and a natural response to that behavior in an Albanian classroom of that period. It is evidence that a student feared being "too" inquisitive or curious in school. Moreover, it shows a teacher's inclination to nip curiosity in the bud if that kind of behavior could get her or her student in trouble with the authorities:

Our schools, in that system... you expected your students to obey blindly. You never expected them to question what you'd say.... I was in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and I loved geography. And we were studying- at that time it was called the Soviet Union- and I was so much interested. I saw a movie about the Soviet Union and the scriptwriter was Ismail Kadare.<sup>30</sup> Yes, it was an excellent movie and he had so much information that I didn't know about. It was a movie about when these two parties [the Albanian and Russian communist relationships] broke. But there was so much information in it that I had never heard about and it coincided with studying Russia in my geography class. So I kept asking questions to my teacher and she said, "Valbona, don't you think you're asking too much, too many questions?" And I was scared because that was about the Soviet Union so the Party in power considered it revisionist. So I kept my mouth shut for the rest of the class. And as soon as she said that, I said forget it. I'm not going to ask any more questions. I was scared. (Valbona)

The emotion of fear, however strong, did not diminish Albanians' dreams of the outside world or their wish to someday be part of that world. Indeed, the culture of fear

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<sup>30</sup> Ismail Kadare is the most well-known living Albanian author.

and the isolationist policies that were strictly enforced by the government did not keep the outside from traversing the country's borders in one manner or another. One way this happened was through the air, via foreign radio and television. Despite many Albanians secretly tuning in to radio or television networks from abroad, the risk Albanians took to participate in these forbidden activities was palpable and real. An expression I often heard, both while living in Albania and during study participants' interviews, was that the "walls had ears." Albanians used this expression when they attempted to explain to foreigners how oppressive their life was during the regime of the now dead dictator, Enver Hoxha. It also shows the deep distrust that Albanians had of the authorities and of each other. In this short vignette, Zana movingly relates how this expression was played out in life at the time. Listening to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) or the Voice of America (VOA) was very risky business.

We were not allowed. Yes. They were blocked. And even if you could catch it, you were afraid even of your yourself, from yourself, like you were doing something, sort of [a] violation. No. You'd get into trouble. So the fear was very well built inside our body. And there was an expression, 'Even the walls have ears,' because the fear was so planted in us not to do something. 'Even the walls have ears' means that even if you do it with yourself than the walls will make sure it'll come out. Yes. Somebody will know.  
(Zana)

Despite the benefits of knowing English, for some to take risks to improve it and be a part of the larger world of English as Zana had, it was not worth the trouble that these actions could bring to their and their families' lives. A brush with real language, no matter how tempting, was not worth jeopardizing a family's safety. In the following two short pieces we hear from Valbona and Drita and about their desires to connect to the outside world. The first of these stories relates Valbona secretly listening to the BBC. In this vignette you hear how she picked up just enough of an authentic British accent to be

potentially dangerous to her well being. It is also noteworthy that in both stories, it is not the teacher who instilled fear in the story tellers, but another student who scared them into silence. This further reinforces the expression that the walls had ears, and that it was not only authorities, like teachers, who might have turned you in but anyone, including friends:

Students went home and listened to it [the BBC] even though it was totally forbidden. But you know what's interesting? I went to the high school of foreign languages. And we had an assignment and the assignment was to take a piece of news and translate it into English... from Albanian into English and come to class and read it. So I did that! And I picked a piece of news about something and I read it in the classroom. Actually I, on purpose, gave some British intonation to it. I don't know how successful I was. But as soon as I was done, the teacher was really satisfied with my job. And one of my friends said after the class, "You sounded quite like one of those BBC anchors." And I said, "What?" I was just... scared to death! Yes. I was scared to death! (Valbona)

When I asked Valbona if she had repeated this activity, she replied in the negative with a vigorous shake of her head. Although at the time she felt fear that she might be found out, Valbona now expresses a deep, somewhat bitter, disappointment that she was unable to perfect her pronunciation in the way that she wanted, through listening to the BBC. "And the way I see it now...I see it as one way of encouraging students to improve their language skills and to be deprived of that. That's a shame." (Valbona, 1-17)

Attempts to gain some much needed exposure to authentic English language resulted in similar feelings by Drita, one of the younger study participants. Although curious and excited at the prospect of hearing Beatles music, she refused to question a close friend about where she had acquired a cassette tape of the Beatles singing on the grounds that it could be a dangerous for her and her family: "And I didn't ask... Yes.

Yes, it was a [dangerous question]. It was very dangerous, although she was my best friend, my close friend. But you know, if someone listened to you asking such questions or talking about such things, you would be in trouble, your family would be in trouble” (Drita, 1-25).

Despite the extreme isolation and the risks, Albanian English language learners and teachers harbored hopes that someday they could speak to the people and visit the places where western, especially English, languages were spoken. Unfortunately, these freedoms did not exist for Albanians. Pieces of modern literature that were considered circumspect by government censors were denied an Albanian readership:

And as I told you we were not allowed to read contemporary books in English or books [with] ideology different than what we were taught. So, they let us learn English. The authorities... the Party... the government, they set limits. And if they thought that something was dangerous they would take measures as always. (Valbona)

Not only as students of English did the study participants express feelings of fear, but as teachers they took similar precautions not to arouse suspicion. At that time, in Albania for someone to study at the esteemed foreign language high school, to gain acceptance to the university’s English department, and get a teaching job, he or she was required to be politically trustworthy. However, the whims of the leader made a safe and secure life in Albania a tenuous situation at best. Many people fell out of favor without warning. One study participant’s, Zana, parents were party members and in good standing when she was selected to attend the foreign languages high school and move on to the university. Half way through university, however, her parents were unjustifiably expelled from the Party. Although allowed to complete the university, Zana reported that she suffered from her family’s unfavorable political status. This punishment took many forms. For example,

she was publicly humiliated at university meetings on a regular basis, felt that she received lower grades than she deserved, was sent to a far off village for her year to student teach, and was not able to secure a full-time teaching position automatically on graduation. Although eventually appointed to a full-time teaching position, Zana was never allowed to interpret for small groups of foreigners who were allowed into Albania on brief and closely watched tours. All this happened, she says, because of her “bad biography.” Hence, the government made every effort to find and train English teachers they could trust to learn and teach the language of the enemy.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, Drita and Zamira both were able to guide tourists. Drita, when speaking of the time that she accompanied a small group of Dutch tourists to Albania, provided some insight into what such an experience was like for an English teacher in the mid-1980s. First, she gave credence to the limited access that interpreters had with the members of the tourist group. It also illustrates the desire that English teachers had for practicing the language even though they were forbidden to speak freely with the tourists as they would have liked. Drita, looking back on her experience, laughed at what now seems an absurd situation:

And I was not supposed to take anything from them [members of foreign tourist groups] if they offered ...even gum or something like that. I was supposed to say, “No. We have such things here. Our party provides with us all the needs we have.” (Laughs) They treated you friendly and if they asked you a question, you were supposed to answer the question like they were in the guide book. When I imagine what I said there with all those... Oh my God! (Laughs loudly) You were so afraid. You didn’t know what would happen to you. Why did you accept that? Who told you to accept all this stuff? This is chocolate coming from western countries.. And you had to follow all these restrictions while you

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<sup>31</sup> I do not mean to say here that the United Kingdom and the United States have sole ownership of English. Given that English is spoken as a first, second, third, or foreign language by millions of people worldwide, it can hardly be the property of a few countries. However, in general the literary and cultural materials that Albanians read and studied in English classes were centered around the U.S. and the U.K. with a minor emphasis on Canada, New Zealand and Australia.

were with these tourists. I wanted to talk to them mostly to practice my English, not to share about the country. (Drita)

Though the state considered them ideologically safe, because English teachers had spent so much time and energy learning English it was natural that they harbor a curiosity for the forbidden fruit of the west. This curiosity in “things” English or American kept teachers’ interest and enthusiasm in the linguistic, literary, and cultural aspects of English speaking countries alive during the communist regime. So in spite of the fear of “listening walls,” small acts of rebellion did bring some students and teachers closer to the outside world and subsequently to more authentic experiences with the English language. Zana, for one, knowing full well the risks inherent in listening to forbidden news and television, went ahead and took that chance. She was proud of her knowledge of English as it provided her a window on the world which most other Albanians could never see through:

Because I knew the English language, I could see the other channels, other films which were not offered to me. And my knowledge and perspective and my picture of different countries were different. It was not *endrudher*, constrained. So information was not constrained because I knew English. So they couldn’t confine me because I had my English language which took me further. So this English language which was like a window for me, gave me an opportunity to learn more, much more than they thought -for my generation- right for us to learn. Either they didn’t allow us to learn or to know at that time what was going on about that time, the music, the Beatles, the revolution in music. They didn’t allow us. I would have been a complete ignorant, if I hadn’t known the English language. Because through the English language I could listen to something, I could read something, of course, not openly. (Zana)

### **Isolation and Its Impact on English Language Teachers**

The programs in which I worked in Albania essentially required me to focus on the introduction of current methodologies, materials, and curricula into Albanian English language teaching. Although not an explicit focus, we did inadvertently address the English teachers' language development. Not surprisingly, the Albanian English language teachers selected for interviewing for this study echoed the same concerns that students and teachers of foreign languages express anywhere in the world who live in an environment in which the language being learned or taught is not the dominant language. (e.g., learning or teaching French in the United States., German in Spain, English in Mongolia, etc.)

In contexts where a foreign language is being learned, foreign language learners and teachers neither have the kinds of opportunities to practice the language that would benefit their language skills and competencies nor always have easy access to authentic materials that replicate language usage outside the classroom. Although it is always a challenge for foreign language teachers in foreign language learning and teaching environments, it is almost impossible to compare most foreign language learning contexts to the extreme isolation that the Albanian government imposed on its English language teachers who learned and taught English from 1946-1992.

Although the Albanian English teachers who participated in this study reported that they studied hard, were self-motivated, and truly enjoyed learning and teaching English, it was only when the country opened itself up to the outside world that they, and their English language- teaching colleagues, became fully aware of their isolation. They soon realized to what extent that the political system had cheated them professionally.



Not only did they report the complete lack of opportunities to interact with native speakers while learning and teaching English, study participants also stated that they had little hope of ever using the language that they had so diligently studied. Never did they imagine that in their lifetime they would travel to or study in English speaking countries or work with native-English speaking English language teaching professionals in Albania. Therefore, teaching English seemed to be the only way in which they could keep English alive:

There was a desire inside that someday I would meet Americans and meet somebody [with whom] I could use my language... There were many years of studying and studying. We were learning those [English and Russian] languages but we were not using them. We never used them. (Zana)

As has been stated previously study participants were not allowed as students or teachers access to up-to-date literature. Nor could they get their hands on current English language teaching materials, watch foreign films or television, or listen to radio broadcasts in English. A lack of live or authentic language also resulted in teachers reporting that without proper practice their knowledge of the language began to stagnate or deteriorate. A subject that they had studied so diligently in elementary, high school, and university, they were gradually beginning to forget. English teachers were forbidden to participate in the kinds of language development experiences that they were most deserving of and which they needed to keep their English skills alive. Limited opportunities to use the language also resulted in a severe blow to teachers' language confidence. As Zana said, after graduating from the university the language was still fresh in her mind, even the political language, but as time went on the language became less active:

The first year, the second, the third, [of teaching] I still had that air of being very confident in English and strong, especially in the political language. Perfect, in translation, perfect in those slogans. Later on, I felt like I was drying (up). Most of my language was being stored in a store house. It was like I was becoming passive. (Zana)

Study participants were very quick to point this out to me in the course of our interviews.

Not only did these teachers feel the need to interact with native speakers of English but those interviewed held that lack of English usage in more natural situations, outside the classroom, (outside Albania even) had resulted in what they called a stilted “bookish” language. Drita, as a novice teacher, spoke again of her stint as a tourist guide for Dutch groups visiting Albania in the mid-1980s. Her words conveyed the desire to not only practice English but also to speak freely in a language that departed from the texts used in schools:

They [the Dutch] influenced a lot my conversational English because I didn't have any chance to practice English while I was in school except with the text's subjects, not like free conversation. That's what we lacked most because we didn't have anyone to talk to us in English and to reply in English. Mostly it was about the text and that's all. And you know you have to work on the pronunciation of the words and also on conversational skills. That's why our English is very bookish. (Drita)

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have provided a backdrop for the upcoming chapter by giving a detailed account of the political context of learning, teaching, and knowing English during the nearly fifty year communist regime. Within this framework, I analyzed various areas of participants' learning and teaching histories. Teachers described their English language learning experiences, their teachers, the instructional practices that they learned

from their teachers, and the relationships they had with students when they became teachers themselves. I also examined the many levels on which the culture of fear and isolation affected the learning and teaching of English.

Albanian English language teachers followed a predictable path from being an English language learner to becoming an English language teacher. Learners and teachers knew the role of English and the purpose of learning it; it was like everything else in the lives of Albanians, tied up in the needs of the State, not in the individual needs or desires of those who learned and taught the language. It was not necessarily embraced, but it was understood and accepted (although grudgingly) that communist ideology would be woven throughout all language learning materials and inserted in some way into every lesson. Students knew their place and the place of their teacher. Fear was a constant factor in the lives of all Albanians; it marked the classroom behavior of students and teachers, affected relationships between English learners and teachers, and came between peers learning in the same classrooms. Risks were taken, but not without caution, and with thoughts of possible reprisals by authorities.

English teachers who were considered good teachers used methods and materials imported from the Soviet Union and China. Most teachers possessed similar qualities: As students, they had received high marks. They had an unblemished political record and were in good standing with the communist party. They were well prepared, dedicated, and worked hard. They also exhibited a deep knowledge of the linguistic aspects of the language. Good teachers instilled a curiosity in topics not covered in the text, yet did so in a safe, controlled way. With these qualities a university graduate could expect a secure future respect and admiration from Albanian society, parents, and students.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE TRANSITION**

I think everybody was injected with something in the brain that you should behave that way. And everybody was blind following all these directions. There were political forces that were against this, but they were exiled. Everybody was scared so nobody talked about them anymore. So everybody following all these rules and all these directives and directions and....a whole country blinded. And then all of a sudden -imagining now- what we have done! It's like, oh my God! Have I done this? It must have been another [person] Not me! (Laughs) (Drita)

#### **Introduction**

On the heels of Enver Hoxha's death in 1985 came the fall of the Berlin wall and the subsequent changes throughout Eastern and Central Europe. These events would eventually change forever all that had been secure and knowable in English language learners' and teachers' lives. Times certainly were changing. Hoxha's death and the loosening of the tight grip he held on the country precipitated a stronger desire for change in the status quo on the part of the Albanian people. Although not through official channels, Albanians caught wind of the events happening in Eastern and Central Europe. In the late 1980s, as Drita says, the government started to recognize that change was both imminent and unavoidable. As a result, more and more English language classes were opened up in state schools and soon overshadowed Russian and French:

I think that at that time it was considered a need from abroad. It was something that was coming from all these changes in the Eastern countries. Our government was seeing that everything was changing there, and people were not so much interested in the Russian way of dealing with things. So I think they had pressure from abroad, from the Western countries. And they were seeing that Western countries were developing faster than the Eastern countries which were going down because of their Socialist government. Probably they were looking at what was happening with our neighbors

and they let free the English language as the main foreign language in schools. I don't know whether they thought that this thing would happen in our country too. Probably they thought things would happen, but nobody envisioned that all these changes would make us close friends with the Western countries. I never envisioned it too because of all this isolation. I didn't think that one day that we could go abroad and we would see our cousins and relatives and be free to travel everywhere. It was all these things that made us scared of what was on the other side of the border. But the heads of the government traveled a lot. They knew what was happening and probably what they saw there they liked. So I think the times had to change. And so that's why they allowed it. (Drita)

As the first cracks began to show in the communist party's tight grip on the Albanian people and the country began its slow and difficult journey out of isolation, the Albanian people's movements were less restricted. Once looked on with great suspicion by many and downright dangerous by all, friendships between Albanians and foreigners, especially westerners, started to form. By the early 1990s these friendships were being openly encouraged and cultivated. A by product of the opening of Albania to the outside came more movement by the people. Contacts with the outside that had been ruthlessly cut off by the state were being re-established. Friends and families divided for almost half a century started to reestablish connections. And new friendships by Albanians and those who lived outside the tiny confines of the country blossomed. As a result of these new connections the role and status of the English language was transformed. With this transformation and the subsequent changes in the sociopolitical and economic lives of Albanians, English language learners and their teachers awakened to a new life of learning and teaching English.

In this chapter, I examine the effects of the transition on Albanian English teachers' professional lives. I illustrate, through analysis of my study participants'

responses, how the inside of English language teachers' classrooms reflected the external changes. English language teachers' and their students' responses to Albania's sociopolitical and economic instability, and the uncertain yet hopeful future of the country manifested itself in different ways in English language classrooms. I attempt to show how responses to changes, external and internal to the classroom, affected English language teachers' pedagogical and linguistic development.

Just as all Albanians struggled to come to grips with the Albania of the past and the Albania of the present and future, English teachers also felt the tensions that existed between two worlds. In a country undergoing sociocultural, economic and political change, some people were stuck in the past, yearning for what they considered the good old days. Others, especially those who suffered the most at the hands of the Hoxha regime, were firmly rooted in the present and looked with almost naïve optimism toward the future. A third kind of person expressed nostalgia for the past yet, in the next breath, condemned it. They critically analyzed the present and although hopeful for the future, viewed it realistically.

I initially titled this section of the chapter: "The Up and Down Side to the Transitional Classroom." Later I decided against such a blatant dichotomy of positive and negative aspects of transitional teaching. The teachers I interviewed had - especially in hindsight - the ability to articulate both the positive and the negative consequences of the transition on the field of English language teaching and on their individual teaching lives. They could also see - like life in general in Albania at that time - that some of what was occurring in their classrooms simultaneously contained negative and positive qualities. What seemed negative to one teacher seemed positive to another and vice-

versa. Furthermore, teachers' thoughts on a specific matter may have changed over time. Neither did I want to downplay some of the positive aspects of the difficulties and challenges teachers faced during the transition, because I have come to see a correlation between the problems found in teaching during the transition and English teachers' linguistic and pedagogical development. Naturally, as the sole researcher, analyzer of data, and report writer, my take on a particular transitional experience or event as being negative, positive, a mixture of both, or changing over time reflects my own personal understanding and my interpretations about what the teachers said about their professional lives at the time. My hope is that I have depicted the transitional period in all its inherent complexities and reflected teachers' perceptions of these changes as accurately as possible.

Before launching into a discussion of the transitional era, it is necessary that I preface it with an explanation of the typical English language classroom at that time, especially in the early years of the transition. In this chapter although I tend to describe English teachers' classrooms and teaching changed in various ways I do not want to imply that these changes were either dramatic or necessarily welcomed. Old ways die hard, and Albania was no exception. In order to clarify my thinking here, I would like to pause a moment and return briefly to the legacy of fifty years of hard-line communism and its lingering effects on Albania and Albanians. Throughout this study, I have emphasized that Albanian English teachers were born and bred in an environment of isolation. A central element of the policy of isolation was self-reliance. The ruling government's message to its people, especially when Albania withdrew from the world scene, was that Albania and Albanians must become a completely self-reliant nation and

people. Despite the state's policy of a self-reliant Albania, self-initiative in life and work was highly discouraged. With orders coming exclusively from the top, teachers made few teaching decisions and had little use for thinking or acting on their own ideas professionally. A paucity of instructional materials and an almost complete censorship of outside media also took a toll on an Albanian English teacher's desire and willingness to experiment in his or her classroom.

Real acts of autonomous teaching in Albanian English language classrooms during the transition years described in this study were rare or unheard of. Indeed, for many teachers to engage in communicative language teaching methods or other new instructional techniques were acts of bravery. Many would not attempt such instruction, even if encouraged by others. I would argue that most Albanian teachers resisted or feared changing their methods of teaching or the instructional materials they used. Although some authority figures appreciated and even encouraged teachers to experiment with different methods or materials, the majority did not. And when teachers themselves were open, willing, and took steps to change, most foreign language inspectors, school principals, and district or state educational authorities discouraged or challenged teachers. Others outright prohibited experimentation. Some went so far as to cause trouble for teachers who attempted to modify the content of their lessons, their interactions with students, and the pedagogical methods and materials they utilized in class. Another factor that kept teachers from altering instructional practice was linked to the curriculum and text. The content of new materials that teachers had acquired or the activities or techniques they had been exposed to at professional development courses or seminars did not match curriculum requirements. This mismatch made it nearly impossible or, at best,



difficult to implement new materials or instructional ideas. Although Ministry of Education personnel, non-governmental organizations, and foreign English language teaching aid project representatives discussed curriculum and textbook reform measures, such projects were slow to get under way in the tumultuous times of the transition.

However, these barriers to change did not eliminate teachers' attempts to become autonomous in their teaching practices. Admittedly, before I carried out this research my opinion on this matter was based entirely on the five years I spent working with Albanian teachers. My experience led me to believe that teachers, for the variety of reasons described above, were not allowed to make changes, resisted change, or did not have the knowledge about or experience in making different instructional or material choice. Notwithstanding the many impediments to change, as I have described above, a lot was happening in English language classrooms in the transition. Perhaps to an outsider, like myself, these changes went undetected on the radar screen of teacher change. In the eyes of the study participants themselves differences in classrooms - no matter how seemingly invisible to me - did indeed exist, especially if we compare them to the stories of how classrooms operated that were described in chapter four of this study.

### **Higher Expectations and New Responsibilities**

In order to bring down the ruling one-party system of government, in the winter of 1990-1991 hundreds of students throughout Albania staged sit-ins, hunger strikes, and general strikes against the government and educational institutions. Students bravely risked brutal retaliation by police and military forces. Except for the death of a few young people, the uprising was relatively peaceful. Once the initial violence was over, students

continued to thumb their nose at authority figures and make rigorous demands on educational institutions. Neither were the teachers, who are regarded as an integral part of the institutions, spared this scrutiny. Especially in the beginning when life was unstable and the country's future remained uncertain, such student activities taxed teachers' equanimity:

I think they [students] pushed it in the beginning. It was not easy. I remember when it started they broke the statues of the leader. And the teachers were furious. And sometimes they [students] would go on strike. And it was something not normal for the school life. It was something that nobody knew what to do and how to handle that situation. Yeah, many strange things happened in the beginning. (Zamira)

In our discussions about the teachers' learning and teaching lives, study participants often touched on the topic of relationships between teachers and students. In talking about their English learning lives, they spoke of teacher-student relationships of the past. Besides the problems that immediately followed the downfall of the communist regime, the teachers also spoke of the new, surprising, and complicated events that took place between teachers and students during the transition. They compared their own learning of language with their students' learning. Moreover, the teachers related tales of students who acted, for the first time, independently and assertively, in the spirit of the times. Furthermore, Drita, Valbona, Ajtanga, Zana, and Zamira discussed students' new demands on schools and higher expectations of teachers:

Before the transition there was a certain status quo and teachers were a part of it. And it was there. Nobody expected changes. The routine was well established and that was it. Teachers were expected to do this. Students were expected to do this. So some were doing it well and some were not doing it that well. But during transition... yes....it became more difficult because it was not that these changes were happening at school...these changes embraced the whole Albanian society... economic changes, social changes... political

changes. So of course they influenced us as teachers...the students... but in different ways. The comprehension of these changes was different so that's why I think we also had conflicts. (Valbona)

As Valbona indicated above, changing times meant changes to Albanian classrooms, change that was sometimes difficult. English language teachers also viewed these changes as creating new and different expectations in the English language teaching profession. Some of these expectations, the teachers reported, came from the outside. Interest in studying English by the general population had been growing steadily in recent years and became even more so in the early 1990s. Many parents realized that for children to be successful in the future - in an Albania that hoped for growing participation in the larger European community – that it would be advantageous to learn western languages such as French, German, Italian, and especially English. To meet this need some parents pushed to get their children in already existing English classes in state schools. Many parents also hired English teachers to give private lessons that would supplement the lessons their children received at school. Some of these parents hired private tutors simply because they wanted their children to get more hours of English lessons, others because they believed that the English teachers or lessons in state schools were not of high enough quality. Others, teachers reported, wanted private lessons because learning English was in vogue.

University students studying English also had different expectations of their English professors. Many of them already understood that their futures, to some degree, depended on their knowledge of English. Those who were studying English for specific purposes saw their needs change and grow. Students in English departments who were slated to become teachers were opting out of teaching to follow other more lucrative jobs.

Exacerbating this problem, many top-notch English teachers were leaving the field of English teaching to work in other fields at higher pay. This left the English teaching profession in a tight spot. It now lacked enough qualified teachers to educate the burgeoning number of Albanians who wanted to learn or to improve their English skills.

As external pressures mounted, English teachers acknowledged the growing need for more English classes. Most teachers, to meet this need and to supplement their meager income, began teaching private lessons. Although teachers benefited fiscally from this endeavor, the responsibility of teaching evenings and weekends brought additional burden to an already stressful life. Furthermore, English teachers realized the complexities of the new expectations and of their role in trying to meet them. New expectations and added responsibilities resulted in more and harder work for English teachers, more and harder than in the past when teaching responsibilities and job definitions were clearly defined and smaller in scope.

Although the subject of English had become popular and teachers were being sought after, as Drita explained, “It was more responsibility for us... We felt good that that we were the favorites of the school, but at the same time it was so much obligation and responsibility.....hmmm? I think it was more work. Yes, it was more work “(Drita). Valbona also noted that it was difficult to live up to the expectations that she had for herself. She had proved to be a good student and expected that she would be able to teach, and her students would learn, with the same high standards she had for herself when she had learned English. However, living up to the standards in the same way that she had set for herself in the past was not as simple as before:

Yes. It was hard. Frankly speaking, it was. Because I was very conscious that I had to do my job and I wanted to do it well. I

had always been a student that got good grades, that studied, that did her job and I was asking them to do the same thing but I was also demanding from myself to do the job the way I was supposed to do it, but with whatever was going on things were more difficult, becoming difficult. (Valbona)

Part of the difficulty that Valbona and other interviewees reported was that English teachers had new and added responsibilities that did not exist before the transition. The world of English language learning and teaching had been narrow in scope and teachers knew that world of English well. With new expectations coming from students, teachers had more to think about, more to prepare for, more to know. Consequently, when English teachers were forced to step outside the comfortable and limited boundaries of the old world of English, they turned to a growing amount of information and materials that became available to them. Teachers believed that the new expectations and added responsibilities made their teaching jobs more difficult. Again a certain sense of nostalgia for the past was reflected in teachers' memories of teaching in earlier days:

Earlier I think it was easier. You had to have the lesson plans, to teach the students.... I knew they didn't know anything so whatever I gave them was okay.... So they [administrators] figured you had done well if you passed all the students and if they had great marks.... But later on they came up with questions, I had never heard of..... I felt I had more responsibilities. Students were more fluent and they needed more information from me. And also they talked to natives. They got information. I had to work more. So students were curious. So I thought I have more responsibility now. I have to study more, especially to be prepared for some of the questions. Some people may say that it was easier, but it wasn't easier. If you really wanted to be a teacher, it was more difficult. (Ajkuna)

Not only did the new expectations and added responsibilities make teaching more difficult, it also made it more complicated and complex than it had been in the past. Now that students had more access to the world and to the world of English, an added responsibility that teachers had was in helping their students make sense of what was going on outside the English language classroom. Because, for the most part, Albanian teachers were committed to using the target language, English, in the language classroom, teaching the English language and the vocabulary surrounding concepts and topics associated with the transition meant a new set of responsibilities for English teachers:

For example, at that time democracy came as a new concept to Albanians. We didn't know the definition of it or how to understand it. Students' expectation of me as a teacher - as an adult - was to give them a definition and talk about democracy. If I didn't go somewhere and learn about democracy, how could I go into the classroom and talk about it? (Zana)

Zana expressed the desire to be able to understand and convey the information that her students sought. One drawback was that teachers did not possess the conceptual knowledge or the language that would clarify or explain these kinds of concepts to students. Some concepts, like "democracy", were new to her. Zana needed somewhere to seek out this understanding, or someone to whom she could turn to learn about this concept on a deep enough level to explain it to her students in a way that suited their need. English teachers did not have an easily defined source from which they could draw to get this new knowledge. Nevertheless, they accepted the responsibility. They sought ways to understand things that before they had never been called on to understand or explain. Moreover, teachers wished to be accurately informed for themselves and for their students:

.... And we could find a lot of materials that we could read or translate and see what is a democracy. Yeah, because everyone was speaking about democracy, but talk about democracy in a society that had been under communism for fifty years is hard because you try to talk about democracy with the old mentality... with the communist mentality... it was hard. (Zamira)

Textbooks and materials used prior to the transition could no longer hold language learners' attention. Nor did the old materials help teachers or students gain an understanding of concepts like democracy. The state school publishing house had created a few new teaching materials. Teachers used far fewer materials created outside Albania in their lessons. However, many teachers still taught using old texts and materials, sometimes because they felt more comfortable doing so, sometimes because they had nothing else available to them, or because school principals or district administrators forbade them to use anything else. To solve this problem, English teachers who wanted to see a change in materials attempted to use alternative sources. Given that new materials were hard to come by and foreign materials were uncommonly expensive, it made good sense for teachers to use the interests of their students as a new and interesting source of language in the classroom. Pulling this off was tricky, however. As previously mentioned, students' English language skills were developing at a fast pace: at a pace that teachers, a few years earlier, could never have imagined believable. Study participants stated that the solution to this difficulty was for teachers to take on the responsibility of more fully developing their own language skills so that they could meet their students' language needs. "So I felt responsible to teach these students who were so smart and so much in touch with the new information, because of the TV., etc. ....I felt I had lacked a lot from so many years not developing my language, and my way of speaking" (Zana).

Teachers felt that they should keep abreast with the changes on the outside that had affected their classrooms and their students. They also attempted to understand what interested their students: Teachers who were able to keep their finger on the pulse of their students' feelings and interests were able to maneuver their way through the difficulties and challenges during the transition and continued to be successful English teachers:

These go parallel with the changes. That's why I say teachers must be abreast with what's happening, and even know the students' lives, to what they are in contact with. Through kids, through neighbors, through talking, that's the role of the teacher, in order to be compatible with them. If they want you to discuss about a rock star, you have to know about it. You are a teacher, if you have to. If you don't know about that thing, go and learn about that rock star who is very popular and who the students are discussing at the moment. (Zana)

As Albanian English teachers moved into unexplored language territory with their students, they also saw a change in their students' behavior in class.

### **Student Classroom Behavioral Responses to the Transition**

Not only Albanian teachers, but also students, and their families sometimes yearned for a past, simpler and well understood. However, most Albanians, especially the young, welcomed the changes happening in and outside classroom doors. Students of English were highly motivated by new opportunities afforded them to use the language in authentic and useful ways. I think this was especially true of students living in the larger communities who had more access to the language. In contrast to the student who realized the probable need for English in his or her future professional life and who pushed, along with his or her parents, for quality English language teaching, there was also a troublesome aspect of the transition regarding education. A new type of student



emerged on the scene at this time, one who turned away from education. Some of these young Albanians lost interest in school, stopped attending classes regularly, or quit going all together.

Directly related to this problem was widespread unemployment in the adult work force in Albania. With nearly half the population out of work, a large segment of Albania's youth sought ways to contribute to their families' income. As a result, many students' focus shifted away from getting an education to finding a job. With little hope of that happening inside Albania, thousands of young and old alike, especially those living near the borders, fled the country and joined thousands of their brethren who left Albania for Greece, Italy and Germany in the large exodus of 1990. Many of the young people left behind directed their energies to joining friends and family members across the borders.

Individual Albanians and governmental institutions faced hard times. With the lack of both human and monetary resources, many village schools closed, forcing young people to travel to nearby cities to attend school. This resulted in larger class sizes<sup>32</sup> putting a further strain on teachers. School closings also caused high drop out rates as village students, the most destitute of Albanians, left to work abroad. The breakdown of institutional infrastructures, school closings, pressure from students and parents, large classes, and high unemployment changed the face of education and challenged teachers in new ways.

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<sup>32</sup> In the past, foreign language teachers had the privilege of teaching smaller classes, limited to approximately fifteen students. Three events changed the average class size. First, the Ministry of Education mandated that English class size equal that of other subject matters. Second, many village schools closed, burgeoning class size in towns and cities. Third, a larger number of students were requesting to take English.

As described in chapter four of this study, in the past English language teacher-student relationships were marked by a respectful distance. Teachers were the authority figure. Students did not question their own place or the place of their teacher. However, during the transitional years, a slow but obvious change began to take place in how students and teachers interacted with one another. Everything the teacher said was no longer holy. Students began to question their teachers. And students not only orally tested their teachers but their behaviors also tested their teachers:

Teachers were, in my generation, the same. You could not easily approach them like “Hey, Zusha!” You couldn’t say that. *Me fal, mesuese. Me fal, zusha.* But not like this, “*Zusha, c’kemi? C’kemi?*”<sup>33</sup> You could hardly talk to a teacher like this. There was a distance, but this distance doesn’t mean that you could hardly speak to them, in the sense that they weren’t kind. Teachers were kind. Teachers were teachers. Students were students. And everyone knew his position, the distance, the duties, responsibilities and everything else. (Zana)

For the first time in their professional life, however, classroom management and discipline problems became an issue for English teachers. Students were pushing for more liberties in society, schools included. Classrooms, consequently, were microcosms of the external world. Students’ understanding of what freedom and democracy looked like in the classroom was in its infancy and they experimented with their evolving understanding of these concepts. Teachers, on the other hand, perceived things differently. Some students’ behavior was problematic, teachers said. They reported that instead of acting responsibly in accordance with the new liberties that came with the country’s new freedoms, students’ behavior reflected the rebellion they felt towards the

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<sup>33</sup> Zana indicates here that students began to speak to teachers in disrespectful ways when they changed from the more respectful address of “*Me fal, mesuese*”(Excuse me, teacher) “*Me fal, zusha*” (Excuse me teacher....a little less formal but still polite) to “*Zusha, c’kemi? C’kemi?*” (Hey teach, what’s going on? What’s up?).

authoritarian system of the past. Thus, students' evolving understanding of the rules and responsibilities that exist in democratic classrooms made classrooms very complex places in which to teach:

The way they understood changes was weird. (Laughs) Because they said, "Well these changes mean less authority, less discipline." And that was not the case so actually they were not understanding the changes properly. So they would not listen to their teachers that much and they would... Do you know that song... (Begins to sing Pink Floyd's 'The Wall') "We don't need more education... We don't need more..." So sometimes they would sing this song or they would write it on the wall. (Valbona)

Like in the last years, the society was open. And there were all those problems of the transition... were reflected in our work with the students in the class. So we had much more to deal with. It was easy before... But it was different not only for us -the English teachers- but for all the teachers... Everybody had those problems. (Zamira)

Once again a sense of longing for a simpler past is expressed.

So how *did* English teachers cope with the myriad problems and responsibilities that the transition brought them? Despite the many challenges study participants faced, they indicated that teachers sought ways to cope with them. The following vignette illustrates one way that Ajkuna managed transitional era changes in her classroom, in the case of one student. She did not banish problem students from the classroom, as other teachers did. Nor did she deal with it head on. But she did believe, all things considered, that in the end this student did learn some English:

There were two or three who were like gangsters, in inverted commas, you know, trying to behave like gangsters. I had two or three who wanted to sit on the floor to show they were someone. And I said, 'Okay, sit on the floor.' For me it was important that the lesson went on. And at least they listened to some English and motivate them to... because even that way they were going to learn. It was much better than sending them out. But if they weren't going to answer the questions in a certain order that

I wanted them to answer. At least they learned indirectly. (Ajkuna)

Zamira, on the other hand, voiced a somewhat different approach to a similar problem. In her view, problem students were often misunderstood and dealt with too harshly. Older more conservative teachers who feared or resisted change, Zamira said, didn't accept the increased responsibility of the transition and blamed the students for their behavior. In her estimation, young people were not to blame: Education of the young is a teacher's responsibility, no matter how difficult the situation:

But, there were some teachers that said, "They don't want to listen. They are contradicting. They are throwing *battute*<sup>34</sup> in the classroom." So, they were difficult and not difficult. Because something is difficult for you when you don't know how to handle it, but when you try to find a way how to handle it, if you're positive to solve this problem that creates difficulty for you, if you try it's not difficult anymore. Because even in life you find things difficult, you don't give up and just say, "This is difficult and I can't do." Yes, you do. Because they are not your kids you don't want to cope with them? That's why they come to school. Otherwise they would have been born educated and scholars. That's why they come to school. (Zamira)

Zamira continued this line of thought. Below she gives a specific example of how she coped with troublesome students by letting her attention stray from her planned lesson, and by humoring her students:

*Gago*, naughty boys, you know. They threw words in English like from songs. And then I diverted my attention. "Yes, you're right. Do you remember this song? Do you know what it means?" Like *Beds [sic] and Roses*, I don't know. Do you remember? "Do you know what this means?" "Oh this means this." "I don't know," I said. Can you bring it tomorrow?" Like pretending I didn't know the song. Do you know, he came the next day, bringing the song? But it worked for me to make him learn some English, in some way. (Zamira)

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<sup>34</sup> *Battute* means "joke/kidding around" in Italian, but it is used often by Albanians.

In this brief but interesting vignette, I have been able to illustrate how one teacher was able to confront some of the difficulties that faced English teachers during the transition. Zamira turned around her students' problem behavior by tapping into their interest in the rock and roll band, *Guns and Roses*. At the same time, she found a way to motivate and engage them, found a new source of materials (song lyrics) and transferred some of the responsibility onto her students by having them bring in the lyrics to the song.

### Language in Use

For many Albanian English teachers one of the most significant and eventually satisfying changes that occurred during the transitional period was English teachers' opportunities to use the English language in authentic and meaningful ways with non-Albanian speakers of English.<sup>35</sup> In interviews with study participants, I found, however, that responses to questions about this topic illustrated the mixed emotions and complex feelings that English teachers had about it.

With the end of isolation, Zana, in recounting her first meeting with Americans, echoed the popular idea amongst Albanians that Americans were somehow not real, almost alien in nature. "Do you know we saw you as extraterrestrials, like aliens (as I told you) shivering while talking, having anxiety, to a simple person like you are! (Zana). Responses like this<sup>36</sup> gave credence to just how isolated Albania had been from the

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<sup>35</sup> I have tried to avoid focusing exclusively on native English speaking teachers of English because many Albanian English teachers had contacts with native English speakers who were not teachers, non-native English speaking English teachers from other countries and other non-native English-speaking people from outside Albania. They all contributed to teachers' language development and increased skills and competencies.

<sup>36</sup> A conversation with a male English teacher in Albania when I was first living there vividly illustrates this notion. One day he saw I had cut my finger and it was bleeding. Astonished, he said, "But I thought Americans didn't bleed." Although my friend tended to exaggerate to get his point across at times, it is an interesting aside that helps support my idea above.

outside world, and especially from Americans. Because Americans seemed not “real,” encounters between local teachers and foreigners created feelings of nervousness and anxiety in Albanian English teachers.

Despite having built a strong mastery of the linguistic code, study participants agreed that over time the isolating conditions in which they learned and taught English had stunted their language growth and development. Isolation from the living language, the inability to use English in a variety of contexts and authentic situations, and the frustration that teachers had with learning and teaching the language in a relative vacuum all contributed to the deterioration of an active, rich and modern vocabulary and flexibility in using the language. Although my data did not indicate that Albanian teachers suffered from this phenomenon *before* the end of isolation, once teachers encountered native language speakers of English and were exposed to authentic modes of English, they realized that there was much more to knowing a language than a strong foundation in linguistics.

This lack of language confidence and competencies also led some older experienced English language teachers to compare their language skills with younger English language learners and with novice English language teachers. Neither English language lessons nor English teachers escaped the scrutiny of learners of English and younger teachers of English. With the opening of the country, students of English<sup>37</sup> began to compare their English teachers’ language competencies - developed in a climate of

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<sup>37</sup> When I refer to English language learners in this and the following chapter I mean middle school, high school, and university age students. Elementary school children did not embody the same characteristics as their older counterparts. Although many Albanian parents of younger English language learners were aware of the changing role of the English language in Albania and pushed their children to learn it, elementary school English language teachers’ professional lives, I suggest, were not influenced as much by their students as middle, high school and university teachers.

isolation - with their own swiftly developing English skills. Younger Albanians' language skills, besides being nurtured inside the classroom, were being augmented outside the classroom in many – for them anyway - novel ways. For the first time in almost fifty years, Albanians had permission to read English language newspapers and magazines, watch television dubbed in English, listen to radio in English, speak in face-to-face exchanges with native English speakers, and in the later years of the transition they started having access to the Internet. In addition, many younger Albanians, especially at the university, took part-time interpreting and translating jobs for the many foreigners who had come to Albania. This work gave them direct access to English speaking people and opportunities to use English in challenging and complex ways. Other young people had chances to travel outside the country and use English in authentic situations and in other meaningful ways. Students' lexicon grew and many of them felt at ease speaking with non-Albanian English speakers. As a result, although teachers had the same needs for a wide range of communicative competencies as their students, the ways and the rate that these competencies were developed in experienced teachers and in younger Albanians were radically different.

A critical difference here, besides the fact that time was on the side of the younger Albanian, has to do with the traditional role of the woman in Albanian society. Although many experienced English teachers (the majority of them married women) had had similar opportunities to develop their language skills since the beginning of the transition, responsibilities at home including taking care of the home, shopping, cooking, and caring for children were very time consuming. Furthermore, during the transitional era when there were constant power outages, food shortages, and an acute lack of running water,

their regular burdens became even heavier. Younger, unmarried women without children, on the other hand, had more time to pursue such activities. Another factor that contributed to younger Albanian women potentially having more exposure to and practice with English was that they had more freedom to move about outside the home than the older generation of women.

Therefore, younger Albanian English speakers had access to the English language in ways that seasoned teachers had not imagined possible in their life times. This situation caused some teachers to feel a sense of alienation and frustration from their younger charges who at one time looked up to them for all things English. These feelings also resonated with the general feeling that afflicted all middle-aged Albanians, the so-called, *brezi i humbur*<sup>38</sup>. For many middle-aged Albanians this term refers to the regret they feel for the opportunities their generation forfeited during the years of communism in Albania. The younger generation, on the other hand, had many opportunities of which their parents or grandparents had been robbed. Being a member of the lost generation created a sense of inferiority in many middle-aged Albanians and also influenced the way English teachers felt about their own language skills:

We felt sort of inferior with those in the States and coming and communicating, let's say, with the younger generation that had more access... like some pronunciation is much better and structure's much better and the language is much more updated, you know and we felt like... inferior is the word. (Zamira)

For some English teachers the intensity of the anxiety they felt when interacting with non-Albanian English speakers, especially native English speaking teachers, loomed so large that they avoided getting close to or in severe cases even speaking to foreigners.

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<sup>38</sup> *Brezi i humbur*: This term refers to Albanians born and brought up during the communist era who call themselves the lost generation, *brezi i humbur*. The generations that came before and after them had more personal freedoms.



English teachers had taken their learning and teaching of English seriously before the transition. The place of grammar was central to the curriculum and grammatical correctness was extremely important to teachers and their students. The emphasis on grammatical correctness caused some teachers to fear their first encounters with non-Albanian speakers of English, especially native speakers of the language. It was natural that teachers would make some grammatical errors when they spoke spontaneously and in authentic situations with non-Albanian English speakers.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately, the fear that teachers had of making mistakes reinforced the anxiety of such interactions. Others, when they got past these feelings, realized the benefits. First, teachers' language that had been locked away since university days was unleashed when teachers had such interactions. Second, these interactions provided English teachers with opportunities to practice their English skills. Third, English teachers used these interactions as a self-assessment tool for language skills. They described these practice and assessment sessions as a form of language development, something unthinkable in the past and something that their textbooks, and sometimes their teachers, could not give them:

That period [transitional] of trying to find native speakers, and translating for them, interpreting, and working for them... I had demands on myself, first to test how well I was doing with my profession, my language and to upgrade my language. Because when you talk to native speakers, you find new vocabulary, and structures.... I considered them [encounters with native speakers] qualifications. It was sort of like training for me. Training for speaking skills, fluency, accuracy, pronunciation as well because you learn a lot, confidence building as I told you. Even in my teaching....even with my students I could give answers to many questions that students might ask in a classroom environment. They would ask you for certain words, because they aren't sure of them. Because certain things I learned through contact. Certain

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<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that Albanian teachers' level of proficiency was in any way inferior. Considering their lack of contact with other non-Albanian speakers of English, they did exceedingly well in their initial encounters with foreigners.

things you just can't learn in books. You learn them only when you have contacts with native speakers. (Zana)

Hence, those teachers who overcame the initial obstacles and were able to shift their way of thinking away from absolute correctness saw the advantageous in these experiences. "Everyone learned from those changes. We got new experiences. This is a positive influence, like a positive thing, giving you more confidence as a human being" (Zana).

### **New Freedom in the English Language Classroom**

It is through a close examination and a comparison of what teachers had to say about the two periods of their learning and teaching lives that I would like to approach the subject of freedom in the English language classroom. As I have already elaborated on, the opening of Albania and the subsequent changes in the country brought new dimensions to English teaching. Initial encounters with foreigners, anxiety provoking and intimidating as they were to some eventually came to be seen as beneficial to teachers. Another aspect of the transition that had a positive outcome was that students and teachers felt a newfound sense of freedom in the English language classroom. Indeed, the topic of freedom appeared repeatedly in interviews with study participants. After years of oppression Zamira and her colleagues spoke eloquently on some of the positive changes that took place in teachers and their students when control was loosened and the veil of fear was lifted. In the following quote, Zamira reveals her thoughts about the true self that she had hidden for the many years of the communist regime:

This is in a figurative way. We could breathe before the same way but it's something that you were released, you were allowed to do

something that you wished you could have done before. ... Yes, more of myself. Yes! Yes, who I was and I had more initiative and I could do something that I thought that was good for the students. (Zamira)

At the same time that she gained a free sense of self, Zamira also discovered ways to liberate her students. Outside the environment of the classroom, her role as teacher took on a new definition. She saw that it was possible for teachers to release some of their control. And by releasing control she realized that she could also provide opportunities for students to speak in unstructured ways in a natural learning environment. She also became aware that such activities could lower their anxiety, get them to take risks, and make errors:

Or we could go to the park and describe the weather. It was a nice sunny weather day so we could go outside in the park and they loved being outside.. Oh! They loved being outside. Because when you are in the class you have to be strict and to be kind of....emotions and fears and all those feelings are mixed. When they were outside, they didn't have any of those feelings. They were so released and free to ask questions and even the shy students that were in the class, they participated....It was so exciting to see. They could say some...some small sentences. But, yeah, they had the initiative to say something..... It was autumn and we could go out and discuss the autumn and the difference of the colors. (Zamira)

Thus, Zamira and her colleagues breathed more freely while teaching. Besides the freedom to move physically outside the confines of the classroom and to hold lessons where, she said, her students became less inhibited, there were other ways that teachers saw freedom from the external world mirrored in their classrooms. One of these freedoms was the choice of topics covered in the curriculum. Prior to the transition, there had been little room for spontaneous conversation and it was rare for teachers or students to be able

to choose topics they could discuss freely. Lessons were highly structured and teachers and students were required to follow the text very closely. After the transition, however, subjects that affected both teachers' and students' lives outside the classroom, especially topics that had not even existed before, were of high interest and actively pursued:

All these new things became a part of your life and so you reflected whatever you were in the class, in the school, outside, in society, [with] your friends. So the topic of conversation changed. It was not the same... the old monotony... There were new things to hear. There were interesting things. (Zamira)

Another way that transitional notions of freedom entered the classroom was via the interactions between teachers and students. As explained in earlier sections of this chapter, the relationship between students and teachers in this period was characterized by new expectations, pressures, and added responsibilities. At the same time, relationships became closer in ways that did not exist prior to the transition. Before, teachers and students had learned and taught together in an environment that was oppressive to both sides. Fear kept students and teachers from becoming closer allies in fighting the oppression that affected so much of their lives. Although teachers and students were in the same boat - as they had been during Hoxha's regime - and bore difficult and stressful burdens, in the early 1990s teachers and students began to operate in a significantly different sociopolitical climate. Thus, during the transition, tightly defined roles no longer drove the relationship between teachers and students. The hierarchy that was in place in the past began to show signs of strain and patterns of authority began to shift. The culture of mistrust and fear that had plagued some students and teachers in the past began to abate and students started to question the teacher's

absolute authority. What began to form was a feeling of mutual respect and cooperation between teachers and students:

Many changes took place and I think the feelings were changing as well. And this is something. Not only the students changed their feelings about the teachers, but even the teachers changed their feelings about the students. Because we started to be more cooperative with each other, as partners for the same cause, for the same thing....So, we were closer to them. I remember, in the beginning, we were very strict and we were serious. And when we entered the class, we couldn't speak to anyone. We just had the procedure and explain and do this .... It was a routine. But, ah... Then it was different, because we could breathe freely. The students felt it and we felt it too. (Zamira)

An outcome of these changes is that teachers began to take more liberties in planning and carrying out their language lessons. A component of the lesson that teachers began to tinker with was one that in the past had played a minimal role. Now that students and teachers showed more equity in their dealings with one another and felt less fear of speaking openly about their thoughts and opinions, open discussion time within in the lesson began to gain acceptance and popularity. Below Zamira reflects on the changes that took place between teachers and students and its affect on how they interacted with one another:

Yeah, they [teachers] respected the opinions, but at the same time, there were debates which [didn't happen] before. So if a teacher was going to say something it was a rule, a policy at school, but now it's different. They [students] had to respect our ideas but we had to respect their ideas. That was something new! (Zamira)

### **Inquiry and Debate**

At the same time that teachers squeezed room into their lessons for open discussion, classroom patterns of interaction between English language teachers and

learners became governed less by fear and inhibition. The kinds of classroom interaction between students and teachers also clearly reflected transitional era changes outside the classroom. As I more fully explained in chapter four, before the transition, English language learners felt constrained by what they felt they could share with their teachers and other classmates. This behavior partially stemmed from the traditional way of teaching in which students did not question teachers' knowledge and authority. It also stemmed from students consciously choosing not to enter into inquiry-oriented discussions with teachers. Fear that one slip of the tongue might endanger them or their families kept them silent, as one teacher so poignantly pointed out in chapter four.

So not only did a mutual respect between teachers and students begin to grow, but teachers started to relax the classroom rules. First, as Zana illustrates below, teachers demonstrated these changes for students by opening up their lessons to discussion on new topics. These discussions allowed for students' to raise questions, to debate issues and to argue their positions:

And we asked questions. We were free to ask questions and free to select ourselves what to learn... And everyone was mature. We had discussion, something that previously students didn't experience because they were put into a setting of, "This is it and you have to learn this." So, they tried to make it better, to make it no longer teacher-centered, like "Okay, you ask. You give your ideas. We can argue. We can discuss the ideas." (Zana)

Above, Zana provided evidence that students were beginning to break out of teacher-centered classrooms. She further elaborated on what a shift away from teacher-centered lessons looked like to teachers at that time. Despite teachers reporting that they had had difficulties with students' classroom behavior during the transition, below Zana

puts a positive spin on student behavior. She lays the blame not at the feet of the students, but with the teacher who she feels is ultimately responsible:

We, ourselves, didn't know where to go or how to do it, not only the kids. So if you knew how to handle those kids, especially at that time they were very good kids because what they wanted was to express themselves the way they wanted to. They wanted to contradict you. And it was nice. Let them contradict you. And you try to persuade them or give them your idea so what's wrong if they contradict you if they don't have the opinion that you have. It's a generation gap. And why don't you try to find yourself somewhere near them and try to understand them in a fair way, not from your standpoint because you are mature. And... they were good kids. They were coming from a very strict school. (Zana)

Valbona goes a step further on this same topic when she articulates students' reaction to teachers. She senses the need to have students participate more fully in the classroom in friendly, open ways. As she indicates, when teachers allowed these changes to take place, and then reverted to rigid teacher-directed lessons, the backlash by students was both fierce and swift:

Maybe because they [students] were sick and tired of that very, very authoritative type of school, type of teaching. They wanted and they appreciated when teachers were friendly to them. They wanted a different type of teacher. Because I could feel and notice whenever we would discuss things not related to teaching... to studies ... to learning... it was different. They would speak in a different way and whenever we went back to that it was like a firewall separating them. (Valbona)

### **Flexibility and Tolerance**

Social, political, and economic changes that neither teachers nor students had control over during the transition compelled them to act in more flexible ways than they had in the past. In some cases, study participants acknowledged the need for more

flexibility, not only in their teaching, but also in their life outside the English language classroom. The ways that flexibility entered the educational domain came in several ways. First, when the severity and strict codes of conduct in the relationship between teachers and students started to dissolve, teachers were called on to become more flexible in their dealings with students and in the contents and procedure of their lessons:

But later on, you see, you had to change the relationship between the teacher and the student because things were becoming more flexible. Students were not so strict. They asked questions. They talked in class. Teachers had to go and explain things to them according to their needs and you had to be very flexible, not like a very tough teacher. (Drita)

Coming from an educational system that had discouraged flexibility in the classroom, some teachers during the transition resisted the dynamic qualities inherent in enforced change. But even those teachers who did want change found it difficult to alter behavioral patterns in the classroom to which they had become accustomed, at least without some caution or ambivalence. In spite of this challenge, the Albanian English teachers who were part of this study realized that cultivating flexibility was critical not only to surviving the changes, but also to thriving during the change. "... If you know how to direct or conduct your teaching, suiting their needs and your needs, trying to put both in a balance, you'll never find difficulties" (Zana). Despite its critical role in making it through the transition, flexibility was not the only quality vital to the success of transitional changes in school. One also needed strength to move through the difficult waters of change. Zana warns of the danger of becoming too flexible. "I appreciate flexibility in someone's character, but you must know when and how to be flexible.



Anyway it's good. It's positive. It gives you a good result, if you're flexible in certain situations."

In addition to understanding that it would be to their advantage if they were able to cultivate the quality of flexibility to help them through the transition, study participants also appreciated another necessary quality of that times that was particularly salient in the interviews I had with teachers: That quality was tolerance. When Zana, Zamira, Ajtanga, Drita and Valbona spoke of the relationship between students and teachers before the transition, they characterized it as friendly but somewhat distant.<sup>40</sup> However, teachers realized with the times that a certain softening toward students, a deeper understanding of students, was required in their dealings with them. It was the times in which they were living that caused problems, not the students themselves. "The teacher should have been more relaxed, more flexible to not lose students because it was not the students' fault that they were living at that period, that time of democracy where people, in a certain sense, were crazy" (Zana).

Thus, to minimize transitional era problems and their impact on the English language classroom, teachers and students needed to approach these problems and each other with tolerance. In the following quote, Zamira looks at the importance of two characteristics of tolerance. First, she asserts that teachers had to see and appreciate the changes that affected teachers. Second, they had to put their feet in the shoes of their students and understand transitional era changes from their viewpoint. This required that

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<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that one study participant partially disagreed on this point. Although class size did not begin to grow from 15 students to, in some schools approximately 30-40 students, until the later years of transition, Zamira said that small class size made it much easier for students and teachers to be close to one another, and for teachers to have knowledge of their students' needs, both academic and personal. Some of the teachers I interviewed were spared this problem because they either emigrated before class sizes got that large or they taught in schools where the class size had stayed small.

teachers not only see both sides, but also to appreciate teachers and students experiences of the transition:

It was from both sides. You cannot understand the changes only from one side....And that is what the teachers wanted, to be more tolerant, to be more accepting, to be more open to the new ideas and to the new... Sometimes they [students] had requests. Some of them took advantage of the situation, because it was not normal in the beginning. But we tried to be very careful. We were prepared for every kind of situation and we knew it would not be this way forever. It was going to change for better. So this is something we made them know. (Zamira)

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have attempted to explain how the sociopolitical and economic changes during the transition affected the professional lives of Albanian English teachers and their subsequent pedagogical and linguistic development. I have continued to use what I learned in chapter four as a lens for looking at the transitional era changes to their lives. In each section, I have also tried to make clear to my reader how the teachers' perceptions of the transition on the outside of the school influenced what happened inside the English classroom and, in turn, affected teachers' linguistic and pedagogical development.

First, students came to have higher expectations of their English lessons and of their teacher's teaching. Their needs concerning English language learning became more numerous and immediate. Students pressed teachers to meet these needs. At the same time, teachers recognized the new needs of their students and made efforts to meet them. Albanian English language teachers also realized that they would have to develop themselves professionally in order to meet their students' needs. Although a difficult task, teachers felt accountable to their students, the English language profession in Albania,

and the Albanian society, at large. They accepted these new responsibilities but not without some anxiety.

Second, students' classroom behavior loosely reflected events in society on the outside of school. Because so many Albanians found themselves without work in the transitional years, many young people rejected Albanian education to flee the country to find work abroad. These problems were especially acute in the countryside but also affected students in large towns and cities. For simplicity sake, I have categorized the remaining students into two groups. One group was eager to learn English. They saw that learning it might give them a better future, either in or outside Albania. The second group did not show much interest in learning and either quit coming to class or disrupted the classroom with their behavior. However, both groups' responses to change, either consciously or unconsciously, helped teachers to modify their teaching and try new instructional techniques.

Third, English teachers were finally able to use the language they had studied and taught in authentic and meaningful ways. Initially this gave rise to some fears and trepidation. However, for study participants this feeling eventually passed. It was replaced by satisfaction and enjoyment. Teachers realized that an interaction with a non-Albanian speaker of English enabled them to practice their language skills, to learn new words and understand new concepts, and to assess their own language skills. These interactions gave teachers more confidence in their language skills, and helped boost feelings of personal confidence.

Fourth, teachers and students felt freer in the classroom. It is difficult to clarify whether teachers felt less constrained and therefore gave more freedom to their students

or if students pushed for this freedom and teachers responded to it. My guess is that it came from both sides in a dynamic, reflexive way.

Fifth, more autonomy in the classroom resulted in teachers not adhering so rigidly to structured lesson plans. For example, teachers allowed more room for questioning and debate. Students grabbed this chance for their voices to be heard on topics heretofore not dealt with in foreign language classrooms. Instead of a totally teacher-centered classroom, the center began to shift at the same time that students began to question their teachers' authority.

Sixth, I accented the qualities of flexibility and tolerance. Study participants reported that, during the transition, teachers needed to become both more flexible and tolerant. Sudden sociopolitical and economic change required all Albanians to cultivate these two qualities. In order to thrive, however, English teachers pointed out that they temper flexibility with strength. Teachers needed to be strong in order to overcome the obstacles and difficulties that they faced in their practice. The ability to approach the transitional era difficulties with tolerance was also highly touted. Not only did study participants express the importance of tolerance, but they also acknowledged that this was a two-way street: In order for there to be harmony in the classroom, students would also be obliged to see the situation through the eyes of their teachers.

In short, as I have indicated above, the transition changed teachers' lives in significant ways from what it had been when isolationism, communism and totalitarianism ruled their professional lives. Although challenged in a myriad of ways, teachers grew professionally in an interesting and unprecedented manner.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

How does transition affect English teachers' professional lives? One way to answer this rather complex question is to analyze what transitional teaching is like from the standpoint of English language teachers in the context of one country. I chose Albania to represent such a context. Accordingly, I conducted in-depth English learning-teaching history interviews with a small number of Albanian English teachers. In interviewing five women, I have been able to piece together a story of the teachers' English language learning and teaching lives during two periods of Albanian history: Enver Hoxha's leadership of the communist party, and the transitional era of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Participants had a wide range of professional experiences and the understanding of those experiences before and during the transition varied from participant to participant. Despite these differences, many common experiences and points of view also emerged which I grouped into various categories or themes. In chapter four, I attempted to differentiate and articulate these themes and in doing so tell the stories of Ajkuna, Valbona, Zamira, Drita, and Zana. The stories told here are not comprehensive. I selected, analyzed, and synthesized those strands of the five teachers' past English language learning and teaching lives that resonated with or informed the themes that I found most salient in chapter five. In chapter five, I moved on to the story of the period known as the transition, the time in which many sociopolitical and economic changes occurred. In chapters four and five, I analyzed and synthesized English teachers' responses to interview questions. In doing so, I could see how and where these two worlds -of the past and of the transition - stayed the same, overlapped, or collided with

one another. I made an effort to illustrate and clarify how these complex experiences manifested themselves in Albanian teachers' professional lives as a whole, with a new interest in what was happening at this time between teachers and students inside the classroom

In this, the last, chapter of my study I attempt to do a number of things. First, I reflect on the process of the study and its personal meaning to me. I also discuss what I think is the value of the study to the Albanian English teachers who participated in it. I do this by examining and synthesizing their comments and my interpretations of their comments, and by analyzing my own perceptions of our time together. Lastly, I indicate how, in the process of the study, the teachers and I, as researcher, were able to forge a new relationship with one another and to build a shared understanding of transitional teaching experiences.

In the section that follows my reflections, I revisit two areas. First, I return to my pre-research discussion on the effects that the changing economy and pre-transition isolationist policies had on English teachers' professional lives. On to that initial discussion, I map my findings from chapters four and five and make some initial concluding remarks. Second, I revisit the related literature. I have utilized this as a loose framework for my conclusions by re-examining certain aspects of the literature with a fresh view of it in light of what the data has told me and the extent to which the literature has helped me in understanding what transitional era changes affected Albanian English teachers' professional development. I end with some final thoughts about how this study contributes to the field of English language teaching, specifically how it may inform other transitional teaching contexts.

### **Post-Study Reflections and Connections**

As previously explained, English language teachers had little time to dwell on how their professional lives were changing during the transitional years. Neither were teachers' past professional lives adequately explored by foreign English language teaching professionals who came to Albania in the early years of the transition. Because neither I nor the teachers I interviewed had the time to reflect on the impact that the past had on their transitional teaching lives, it was important that I ask the teachers who participated in my study a number of questions about their past in order that I might understand it better. The life history (or what I have dubbed English language learning and teaching history) approach was best suited to this kind of inquiry. The teachers seemed to enjoy talking about their lives in Albania, discussing their earlier years of English language learning, and the years they taught both prior to and in the transitional years. By approaching the interviews in this way, the teachers and I were able to see a more holistic language learning and teaching picture emerge. In the simple responses, in the many vignettes, and in the more lengthy stories that my questions generated, I unearthed enough information to support my idea that the teachers' past professional experiences while living under the Hoxha regime had indeed influenced their perceptions of transitional era teaching experiences. My hunch proved right that their past learning and teaching of English was key to my understanding of the impact that the transition had on teachers' professional lives and development.

However, it would be unfair of me to claim that deepening my knowledge of the effects of the transition on English teachers' professional lives was the sole outcome of my research. It also gave me the opportunity to revisit and reflect on my own Albanian

experiences. Consequently, doing this study provided space for me the researcher, and the five study participants to connect in new ways, and to integrate certain aspects of our lives and experiences.

### **Personal and Professional**

#### **Researcher**

I am grateful for having the opportunity to carry out this research. Doing so has provided a kind of closure to my Albanian experience. The five years I spent in Albania left an indelible mark on my life. Because of political instability, I was forced to abruptly cut short my last year's contract and leave Albania in March of 1997. Afterward I felt that because I had left so quickly and without notice, I had abandoned my work, colleagues, and friends there. Within two months of returning to the U.S. from Albania, I was accepted into the doctoral program at Michigan State University and shortly thereafter began the demanding life that such a program requires. I had no time to sort out my experiences in Albania and felt somewhat disconnected from the life that I had left behind. One-on-one, face-to-face interviews provided me with a venue to reflect on many of the questions about the place that had gone unanswered.

Moreover, spending time with Albanians in North America helped me to integrate that period of my life into my life here in the United States. Interviewing Ajkuna, Zamira, and Drita in the United States, and Valbona and Zana in Canada, all in the comfort of their homes, was a wonderful way for me to reconnect with Albanian English teachers and with my Albanian experience. Moreover, in dialogue with these women who shared this period of history in Albania with me, I was able to put to rest some of the unfinished



business that existed prior to this study. Talking with them about their lives as English language learners and teachers allowed me to bridge two worlds that had remained polarized since my return to the United States. Thus, the need to link the two worlds and to understand how the first had affected the second was helpful to me personally and, at the same time, helpful to the goals of my study.

Not only did doing this study make an integration of two worlds possible, it also led to a reconnection with Albania in new and unexpected ways. First, I was able to reconnect with a network of English teachers I had known in Albania. Some of the teachers who I initially contacted, I did not interview. Nonetheless, we had pleasant conversations over the phone and caught up with one another's lives via e-mail. Others who did participate in the study, I not only interviewed, but also spent many enjoyable hours off the tape recorder "unofficially" reminiscing about Albania and discussing the lives we had built since leaving Albania. Drita, I met for the first time. Valbona and Zana, I came to know better. I was also able to reestablish an already close relationship with Zamira and Ajkuna. I was warmly welcomed into all their homes. I saw their children and I ate at their tables. Before the interviews, I had always been in "their" world in Albania. Now the teachers were in "my" world in North American. Better yet, we created a third world, irrespective of where we lived or worked. Presently, I am still in contact with some of the participants. Also, because of these contacts, I have been able to reconnect to other English teachers with whom I worked in Albania.

## **Study Participants**

Because, prior to these interviews, foreign English language teaching projects focused all their energies on the transitional teaching lives of English teachers and not on teachers' past professional lives, initially the teachers who were interviewed were not clear what significance or contribution that talking about their earlier learning and teaching lives could have to the field of English language teaching. Neither did they see the importance that the interviews could have to them as individuals. Like the others, who all consented cheerfully to the interviews, Zamira, in particular, was confused as to what contribution she could make to my study. However, when I commented in our last interview that she had found a lot to talk about, Zamira laughed and agreed. She admitted that she had had more to say than she had expected. More importantly, I told her, she had contributed to my understanding of English language teachers' lives in Albania. She also realized, in the course of the interviews, that since coming to the United States she had been so busy creating a new life that she had had no time to think about her teaching life in Albania. The interviews, she stated, had given her an opportunity to reflect on a profession she loved, but had decided to leave behind in Albania. It was with some nostalgia that she came to understand this. Other participants, although vigorously involved in the field of English as a second language in North America, made similar comments about this aspect of the interviews.

I suggest that by participating in the interviews the teachers<sup>41</sup> also bridged two worlds. One world was that of Albania. There they had learned and taught English through the oppression and tyranny of a dictator, Enver Hoxha, his death, the economic

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<sup>41</sup> Ajkuna was the exception because she still lives and works in Albania. However, her daughter lives in the U.S. and she has visited the U.S. on several occasions either to see her daughter or for extended scholarly visits.

and political collapse of the communist state, the opening up of their country to the world, the subsequent transition and in their leaving the country. The other world was the one in which they had begun to create a life far from Albania, their new home in North America. Given that all of the study participants, with the exception of Zamira, had stayed in the field of English language teaching, it was interesting for them to look back on their professional lives from a distance, and through the lens of a new environment.<sup>42</sup>

In the course of the interviews, the Albanian English teachers and I had the opportunity to forge a bond that had not existed in the past. Because I had lived in Albania for five years, the study participants perceived (unlike many other Americans or Canadians they have met) that, at least during the transition, I had gained a special understanding of Albanian life in general, and in English teaching in particular. However, given that Albanians had originally perceived foreigners especially Americans like myself as enigmas, it was hard for Albanians in the early transitional years to relate freely and comfortably with outsiders. To compound this already complex situation, Ajkuna, Drita, Valbona, Zamira, and Zana had expressed their initial anxiety in speaking with non-Albanian English speakers and acknowledged its effect on their communication. By the time I interviewed the teachers, however, several years had passed. The teachers had experienced many life-changing events. First, they had been exposed to more non-Albanian speakers of English. Second, they had traveled more. Third, their experiences as recent immigrants to Canada and the United States had helped them become more confident, independent and assertive. In concert, these experiences, whether positive or negative, made the teachers realize that Americans and other Westerners were just as they

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<sup>42</sup> This fact may have colored the impressions of their learning and teaching lives in Albania. However, due to its inherent complexities, I chose not to examine its specific effects on their responses although I do later touch on the positive ways in which it affected our abilities to communicate more freely in the interviews.

were, human and fallible. It also helped them to recognize more of the similarities and to overlook some of the differences between themselves and Americans.

Moreover, having physical distance between North America and Albania provided Albanian teachers with a safe haven for their interviews- a place away from Albania – where in the past there could have been harsh, and potentially very dangerous repercussions for expressing their opinions and feelings freely, especially with a foreigner. Although there was no risk in expressing oneself in the transitional years, I suggest that Albanians were still vulnerable and cautious. Conflicting feelings about foreigners still had an effect on communication with them. Were foreigners to be completely trusted? Hoxha in his decades as leader of the country consistently declared that Albania's true enemy was the United States. The party line maintained that the hundreds of thousands of concrete bunkers erected throughout the country, along with the constant vigilance of the Albanian people, would keep the enemy at bay. Even those who understood that Hoxha was paranoid about this topic still had good knowledge of or lived during Albania's struggle for independence from the Turks in 1912 and the later invasions of the Greeks, Italians and Germans in the 1930s and 1940s. Albanians had good cause to be suspicious of foreigners. Suddenly, however, the country opened its doors to the outside and hundreds, if not thousands, of foreigners flooded in to start businesses, or to work for governmental or non-governmental agencies. Therefore, when I arrived in 1992, although Albanians treated Americans with an outward show of affection and respect, lurking behind were feelings of conflict. So were we the invaders of which Enver Hoxha had warned the people? Or, did we have a different mission? Were we the bearers of freedom and democracy? Would we turn out to be imperialists or

friends? Therefore, by the time I carried out my interviews, the study participants had had time to experience foreigners and to integrate them into an already existing schema of the foreigner, as they knew it in Hoxha's time. As a result, our interview sessions gave these English teachers a chance to speak to an American colleague -who had had experience in Albania - on safe ground, on equal terms, and with no strings attached.

As a result, in the course of this study the teachers and I have fashioned a third world of Albanian English language teaching, one that did not exist prior to this study either for me or for the teachers. The world I speak of is the world of the outsider (the foreigner) and the same world of the insider (the local Albanian English language teacher). It is a world comprised of my experiences in Albania, and my reflection on those experiences. More importantly, it is a world that is inclusive of the teachers' experiences in Albania, their reflections on those experiences, and my interpretation of their reflections on their English learning and teaching lives, before and during the transition. Moreover, as Zana, Drita, and Valbona are now involved in the profession of English as a second language in Canada and the United States they have a deeper and more comprehensive knowledge of the field and can make comparisons and contrasts to their experiences in Albania. During the interviews, together we were able to build a new understanding of their past learning and teaching of English, and the impact that the past had on their professional lives in Albania during the transition. Moreover, I suggest that the teachers were able to see subsequent effects that their professional lives in Albanian have had on the new professional lives that they are creating in their homes in North America. Although their current teaching life was not emphasized in interviews, I did not want to diminish the hard work and effort that they have put into either continuing their

teaching here in North America or in making way for a new profession. Accordingly, I designed a few questions that bridged their professional world in Albania and the one that they had chosen in their new home.

### **Isolation of the Past and the Economy of the Present**

As I mentioned in the section of chapter one titled, Pre-Research Perceptions of Albanian English Language Teaching, there were two factors that initially struck me as having a significantly high impact on Albanian English teachers' professional lives during the transition. Based on the Albania, as I first found it in 1992, I identified these factors to be the isolationism of the past and the Albanian economy of the transition. From my initial impressions of the country, I intuitively knew that these two factors were important to my research. But I also realized that they deserved a less intuitive anecdotal telling and a more formal investigation. Therefore, I made sure to embed these topics in the questions I posed to the study's participants about their language learning and teaching histories.

As I near the end of writing, it is now clear that the state of the economy in transition and the isolation of the past had an effect on English teachers' professional lives. However, I argue that each factor had varying degrees of effect. My data bore out my earlier suggestion that the economic collapse caused teachers and students to suffer material deprivation and environmental difficulties. The study participants also supported the idea that the market economy that followed the collapse of the economy of the communist era radically changed the face of the English language teaching profession,

allowing teachers to leave the profession for other jobs, or to supplement their income with private lessons and interpretation/translation work.

However, of the two factors, the data suggest that it was the isolation of the past that had the most impact on teachers' learning and teaching of English. The impact of isolation was more far reaching and ran deeper than the economic factor because it touched on the more intimate and personal aspects of their teaching lives. Not only did the isolation deprive teachers of material and human resources that would assist them in their teaching of English, it robbed them psychologically, culturally, pedagogically, and linguistically in their attempts to learn and teach English. The study participants stated that a life of isolation was the only one they had known until the transition so they did not recognize its negative effects. However, in hindsight and as the teachers had a chance to reflect on their lives as English teachers – in isolation from the rest of the world - it dawned on them how the government's policy had delayed and stunted their professional growth and development. Interviews gave them an opportunity to crystallize these feelings and looking back to give vent to their frustrations, anger, and disappointments.

### **A Re-Review of Related Literature**

In the initial design of this research proposal, and before I conducted the interviews, analyzed the data, and started writing the report, I chose those areas of the literature that I assumed would be most helpful in organizing, analyzing, and understanding the study's data. Now in the last stages of the process, I have realized that a qualitative study, like mine, depends on its literature review to assist researchers in finding their way through the morass of study participants' perceptions, and the

researchers' own understandings of those perceptions. However, it begs the question. How does the literature review actually assist researchers in interpreting and explaining the study's findings? Therefore, I have chosen to revisit the literature in light of the data analysis and discussions of chapters four and five. In doing so, I examine and report on how my initial understanding of the literature in the end contributed to or detracted from my findings.

### **Outside Impact: Language and Pedagogy**

I think it is useful to preface this discussion with an explanation of the struggles I had in separating the study's main research question from what I initially thought was a competing question, a question that often occupied my thoughts while carrying out this research. The study's main question asked what impact the transitional era had on Albanian English language teachers' professional lives. As an outsider to Albania, and as a foreigner who worked for American English language teaching aid projects, however, I also questioned how much (or if) foreign aid projects (and their native-speaking representatives) were effective in assisting local English teachers' professional lives. As I write these final thoughts however, I see that these two questions are neither unrelated nor in competition with one another. Rather I have realized that the latter issue was a core element to my central question all along. In other words, foreign English language aid projects and their representatives were a part of the transition and did have an effect on Albanian English teachers' professional life.

In fact, the presence of foreigners, in the end, was central to the transition in Albania. In the past when strict isolationist policies governed the Albanian people's



freedom of movement and forbade them to have contact with foreigners, teachers held little hope of using their English for purposes other than to teach a limited syllabus from a restricted set of materials and, for the lucky few, to guide tourists. However, when the doors opened and the government lifted its sanctions against foreigners entering the country, the teachers' professional lives changed unequivocally. From the data and from my own observations and experiences, contact with foreigners was critical to the revival and development of Albanian English teachers' language skills. However, this area of teachers' professional growth was not intentionally planned or orchestrated by foreigners, but grew out of a natural curiosity and desire to know one another and through the necessity of working relationships. One aspect of this question lingered though. Besides having someone with whom they could practice English, it was not apparent that foreign English language teaching professionals had greatly affected other areas of local teachers' professional development, or their pedagogical lives.

By examining the literature on English language teaching aid projects I got an overall picture of English language teaching on the programmatic level. This literature, which focused on non-native English teacher concerns, also indicated that local teachers put a high premium on English language proficiency. As I suspected, though, it did not contribute to a deeper understanding of classroom teachers' perceptions of how the isolation and subsequent contact with and collaboration with foreigners affected their professional lives, in a pedagogical sense. I decided to frame my research by questioning whether other variables, besides contact and work with foreigners, had had more of an impact on transitional teaching lives. For example, I looked at such concerns as the past

context of learning and teaching English, language learning histories, opinions on the changing role and status of English, etc.

In the introduction, I laid the groundwork for this important area of literature by providing the statistics, reconfirming the large number of professionals who work in English language teaching foreign aid projects in the world. With such high numbers of people and projects, they have the potential to influence a local teacher's practice depending on the depth, length, and breadth of the program. It was made clear to me when I listened to the teachers' voices describing their teaching lives both before and during the transition, and when I analyzed the subsequent data that emerged from these interviews that a similar approach to teacher development is not appropriate in all contexts. Country specific teaching contexts must be examined carefully before programs are drawn up and implemented. Although Albanian English teachers shared common problems with their colleagues in other former communist countries in Central and Eastern European, English teachers in Albania had their own unique qualities and challenges. For example, the effects of years of isolation - although felt by other countries - was not felt to the extent that Albanians experienced it. Although other former communist countries also suffered economically during the transition, Albania's situation was especially serious. After almost fifty years of living under a cruel and controlling totalitarian regime, the psychological effect on Albanians - although maybe it can't be qualitatively or quantifiably determined – was certainly considered one of the most damaging in the post-communist countries.

Second, researching this area of literature made me acutely aware of the inaccurate emphases that foreign English language teaching aid projects put on certain

areas of teacher knowledge and development in Albania. The literature reports and my data support the argument that non-native English language teachers are very interested in raising the level of their language proficiency. This study's findings have also determined that language teachers without strong language confidence, competence, and ownership in the language they teach and who teach language for purposes other than solely gaining grammatical competence and spreading political ideology will either avoid or experience difficulty in planning and participating in interactive and communicative methods in the language classroom. Foreign aid English language programs tend to not target language development except indirectly and usually at the teacher pre-service education level. My data strongly suggested that this was critical to the transitional teacher's language and pedagogical development. It is also something that I go in to in some depth later in this chapter.

### **Self-Image and Self-Assessment**

In the literature that synthesized the research on non-native English speaking teachers, I looked at two related issues. In the first, the myth of the native English-speaking teacher, I emphasized the importance of the non-native English-speaking teacher to the larger field of English language teaching. As the number of non-native English speaking teachers grows daily, the power and authority that native English-speaking teachers once had in the field is slowly diminishing. I duly bore this in mind throughout my study. Reminding myself of this fact helped to re-focus my research energies away from myself, the native English language speaker, and away from the aid projects in which I worked. Not wanting to focus on the view of the native-speaker and

the aid projects from the West, these reminders helped me to direct myself back to the central research question and the English teachers whom I interviewed. I fully acknowledge the central role that I played in this study. The impact of my thoughts and experiences cannot be eliminated from the story, but they can be reduced. My hope is that the focus of this study would be in keeping with what the study participants would want. Moreover, I trust that my interpretation of their words has done justice to their thoughts and opinions and I have captured and portrayed their views as accurately as possible.

The second area of research surrounding this topic addressed the relationship between non-native English speaking teachers' perception of their English language proficiency and the effects that that perception can have on a teacher's self-image. In the beginning stages of my study, I hypothesized that Albanian English language teachers' language proficiency would be inadequate. I surmised that feelings of inadequacy would have stemmed from the profound isolation and the resultant teachers' lack of opportunities to practice English orally and aurally, especially in authentic communicative situations. Indeed, study participants placed a heavy emphasis on accuracy and proficiency in oral speech and were apprehensive when first encountering native English language speakers. However, the data suggests that teachers' initial feelings of inadequacy and lack of language confidence, although strong, neither shaped, nor adversely affected their identities as English language teachers. Furthermore, their feelings of anxiety did not overshadow a positive self-image that they had of themselves as hardworking students and teachers of the English language. Their efforts at learning and teaching were highly prized and respected. Teachers also exhibited a great deal of

pride in their own English teachers' knowledge of the language, which they felt had been imparted to them, and which provided them with a solid base for later development

Study participants also expressed a deep commitment and responsibility to the development and self-assessment of their language proficiencies, all in spite of (perhaps because of) the material and human deprivation and isolation in which they had grown up learning and teaching English. Maybe the problem of isolation played a somewhat paradoxical role in that it stunted teachers' language development but, at same time, fueled their energies to work even harder to make up for lost time when opportunity knocked on the door that had been closed for so long.

Thinking, as young learners and teachers, that they may never encounter a native speaker of English, study participants reported high levels of excitement and satisfaction about their language development as they had more opportunities to practice, learn from their errors, ask questions about language and culture, and continue the cycle of practicing and learning. This kind of behavior, the data suggest, signals a great strength in professional character and an eagerness to develop their skills and knowledge. Perhaps more importantly, it indicates that the teachers had the ability to self-assess their linguistic skills and to find pathways to develop them according to what they thought were weaknesses or failings. It also presupposed a capacity to seek out and put into action self-directed language learning and improvement strategies. Thus, Albanian English teachers turned away from "bookish" English and the belief in error-free, native-like language. Instead, teachers slowly came to the realization that the world of English was not only the domain of the native speakers. As they traveled, encountered other native and non-native speakers of English, and were encouraged to express themselves freely

(without undue stress on correctness) Albanian English teachers finally began to own that for which they had worked long and hard.

### **Competence and Self-Motivation**

Closely related to the concept of teachers' language ownership is the theory of communicative competence and the approach to teaching that it spawned, communicative language teaching. In chapter two, I looked at the literature on English teachers' language competence in its broader sense and the probable effect of a language teacher's communicative competence on pedagogical choices, such as the communicative language teaching approach to instruction. My initial hypothesis was that if Albanian English teachers failed to have developed all four components of communicative competence, then they would be limited in their instructional practice. Moreover, I assumed that this form of deficiency in competence would also prevent teachers from implementing meaningful and authentic communication in their classrooms.

It was extremely rare, especially in the early transitional years, to find teachers who had had exposure to natural language or what I will call in this case, language found outside the classroom. Therefore, in the many observations that I made in Albanian English teachers' classrooms it was highly unlikely to find teachers who could create authentic type situations or interactions for language learning. At that time, English teachers excelled in grammatical competence. They had a profound knowledge *about* the language, but not the experiential knowledge, or *use* of the language. Admittedly, the sample for this study of five women was small but study participants corroborated my initial assumptions. Before teachers could reach high levels of sociolinguistic, discourse,

and strategic competency teachers needed to use and experiment with English in various settings, with a wide range of interlocutors, and use it for several purposes. In order to implement communicative language teaching methods in their classrooms (something that they were being highly encouraged to do from external, foreign sources) teachers also needed to use the four skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening, not only in textbook-based situations in the classroom, but in a variety of situations outside the classroom.

However, as I elaborated on in chapter five, during the transition, the kinds of language situations that I mentioned in the previous paragraph began to present themselves to teachers. I have already discussed in this chapter that once given the chance teachers were keen on seeking out communicative situations and in activating self-assessment strategies for developing and perfecting atrophied language skills. Thus, although the presence of other speakers of English, both native and non-native to whom they could interact, provided teachers with language practice opportunities, the teachers were self-motivated and self-reliant enough to take advantage of those opportunities in myriad ways. Furthermore, years of isolation had honed their skills of self-access to whatever language that had presented itself, and instilled in them a capacity to exploit that language in everyway possible.

### **Role of English: Politics and Economics**

In my original proposal for this study, I chose to investigate the role and status of the English language in Albania as a line of inquiry because I was drawn to the role that English had played in Albanians' lives and to the changing status of English during the

transition. I looked primarily at the social and political role that English had played in the past and in the lives of Albanian English teachers in the transitional era and I set out to explore how the role and status of English had, or had not, affected English teachers' identities.

The first line of inquiry was the past role of English in the sociopolitical life of Albania and Albanian English teachers. This turned out to be a difficult task, hard to get at, and very illusive in nature. Notwithstanding the challenge, this topic has always been compelling to me. The challenge to clarify the issues surrounding this topic in the context of Albania and utilize it in the context of this study is two fold. At the outset, I drew largely from one article in which Jennifer Helm's small study of six science teachers questioned to what extent the subject matter of science had on teacher identities. I later decided to drop the notion of identity, primarily because I realized that issues of identity were not central to my question (although the first title of this study contained the words "teacher identities").

Second, I had little support in this area of the literature to help guide me in my data analysis and writing up of the report. As mentioned earlier, the research on identity in this field mainly deals with non-native English speaking learners learning English or non-native English speaking teachers teaching English in an English language dominant environment, (e.g. the United States, the U.K., etc.) not non-native English speaking teachers teaching English as a foreign language. Nonetheless, I decided to continue pursuing the role and status of the English language in Albanian society and the Albanians' attitudes toward the language, in a more generalized way. Although I did not have the literature to back it up, after having lived in Albania for five years, I intuitively



knew this would be a fascinating subject to explore and that it would invariably shed light on the political changes that were affecting English language teachers' professional lives.

Thus, I embedded questions in my interviews that directly or indirectly addressed these issues hoping that I would be able to build a case for its significance to teachers' professional lives. Study participants found these questions, more than others, difficult to discuss. They had never thought about or been asked to articulate the political implications of learning and knowing English, or at first were reluctant to discuss it. A few teachers denied that there were political implications for those who learned and taught English. Others seemed eager to share evolving ideas and feelings on this topic. As the interviews progressed however, most participants seemed more comfortable with the topic. The culture of fear was in the past and far away. And the study participants began to realize that it *was* an engaging and captivating topic to explore. Another factor that facilitated this discussion was when, in the course of the interviews, the teachers understood that there were no right or wrong answers to the interview questions (even though before the interviews I had assured all the teachers that this was the case) they became more relaxed and free with their thoughts on this delicate subject.

On the other hand, the topic of the economic and sociocultural impact of English during the transition was concrete and easy to articulate for study participants. Whether they welcomed or criticized the new opportunities that the change to a market economy had brought to English teaching, teachers all agreed that it was clearly present. It had unquestionably influenced both the field of English teaching and the individual lives of English teachers, as they encountered foreigners who spoke English, as they took on

private lessons, and as they participated in professional development workshops, sessions and programs both in and outside Albania.

Thus, I argue that the political role of English during the communist regime had a negative socio-psychological effect on English language learning and teaching. Teachers of English, though highly motivated lacked the right resources - both material and human - to gain the full competence in the language that befitted a language teacher. Although their teaching had an easily defined focus and the goals and purposes for learning were relatively straightforward, teachers were held back in ways that were not clear to them until after the doors opened. The sociopolitical and economic role of English during the transition had, on the other hand, a mixed effect on English teachers' professional lives. It created stress and fatigue for those who took on private lessons. It also was a blow to the profession when many good teachers and would-be-teachers left the field for more lucrative positions, demoralizing those left behind, and adding to the number of students in their classrooms. Students had new needs and multiple purposes for learning the English language, making the job of teaching English more complicated and messy. On the other hand, teachers, if they wanted, could supplement their incomes, sometimes handsomely, by teaching private lessons and by interpreting and translating. In addition, English teachers' took on a new more important, visible role in the market economy and were sought after in ways unheard of in the past. As one study participant mentioned, some students took private lessons because learning English was trendy. English teachers, a part of this trendy equation, also basked in the popularity sunshine of English.

### **Democracy and Communicative Language Teaching**

In this study, I have found that English teachers' professional development during the transition was not only the result of in-service teacher training funded by foreign governmental or non-governmental agencies, at least insofar as the teachers in this study reported. Although study participants spoke in positive terms about these experiences, the content of in-service training programs, I argue, did not rank as high for Albanian teachers as the connections they made with professional colleagues from outside Albania while participating in professional development and in-service programs. Furthermore, these connections with foreign professional colleagues did not compare to the interest that teachers had in getting a glimpse of life outside Albania when they crossed its borders to attend professional development activities. Opportunities to see the world outside Albania, both through people and places, gave Albanian English teachers an opportunity to leave behind the professional isolationism they had endured for almost half a century, to join the larger world of English teaching, and to lead the way for other subject-matter teachers in pedagogical development in Albania.

In the budding associations with English teaching colleagues from democratic nations and from the experiences of traveling to these countries, an awareness of and a curiosity in things democratic began to take hold in the minds of the teachers. These links to the outside also provided a means for English teachers to begin taking slow but incremental steps away from the ideologically bound tightly prescribed lessons of the past and put them on the path to teaching lessons that reflected a more diverse methodological approach to teaching language, including those principles found in communicative language teaching.

Communicative language teaching does not necessarily embody the principles of democratic teaching. However, for the purposes of explaining this study's contribution to the field of English language teaching, I would like to suggest an interesting connection between the two. Especially in the early years of the transition, talk of democracy entered into almost every conversation in the political, social, and cultural lives of Albanians. Moreover, some English teachers had begun visiting countries where they had a chance to see first hand democratically functioning governments and how classrooms reflected the larger system of government. Albanian teachers had begun working with westerners and therefore had become familiar with democratically oriented collegial relationships and similar ones between students and teachers. At this time, English teachers were also exposed to communicative language teaching approaches because the foreign English-language teaching professionals with whom they worked had been educated in the principles and practices of this model of teaching. New materials brought into the country promoted such activities and foreign colleagues supported the use of meaningful language in their local colleagues' classrooms.

Combined, these factors put English teachers in a frame of mind where they could start experimenting with and integrating their own nascent understandings of democracy and communicative language teaching in their classroom teaching and into their relationships with students. Traditional teacher-centered, grammar-based lessons, marked by few resources, although still the norm, were showing the strains of the transitional era. Teachers saw that communicative approaches required more equitable and transparent relationships between teachers and students. I argue that teachers also began to understand that by incorporating meaningful communication and the interests of their

students into the lesson that they were supporting more democratically inspired classrooms, classrooms that value openness, flexibility, and tolerance. A spirit of inquiry and debate amongst students and between teachers and students also revealed both groups' desire to open up the lessons to spontaneous language. Finally, space in the curriculum for topics heretofore forbidden reinforced this openness to creative speech.

### **Transitional Teachers and Student Relations**

Because a researcher cannot predict beforehand what the data, the analysis, and writing will reveal, as a novice researcher I soon realized that to understand an important theme in my data better I would be obliged to explore a topic that I had not previously anticipated. As I have mentioned previously, while writing the two chapters containing the analysis, the data began to reveal something unexpected and vital to my research. Whereas before, understandably, I had concentrated my attention on teachers, I became cognizant that another important piece of the transitional puzzle in the classroom was becoming central to my analysis. When first sifting through study participants' responses and as my analysis of the interviews progressed, it became clear to me that the teachers had not only been responding to questions about their earlier lives as students of English, but also had been highlighting many stories about their own students when they were teachers. I began to question how changes in the wider society had resulted in changing and sometimes conflicting relationships between students and teachers. I further investigated the link between these changing relationships with teachers' professional developments, both in pedagogical and linguistic ways. It turned out that the role of the student was a critical element left out of my initial thoughts on the causes for change in

English teachers' lives during the transitional period. So, one of the driving forces behind English language teachers' professional development was the English language learners whom they taught. Thus, I argue that, although both helpful and supportive of local teachers' professional development, native English language speakers did not have the same kinds of impact as the teachers themselves had or their students had on teachers' linguistic and pedagogical development.

When the balance of authority between students and teachers began to change, these relationships took on greater significance to the changes occurring in English language classrooms. Although teachers sometimes perceived their relationships with students as worsening during the transitional years, these feelings were generally a result of teachers and students trying to ground themselves in a new social, cultural and political milieu, one that was grappling with and experimenting with the values and freedoms of democracy. Nonetheless, their emerging understanding of how a democratically organized educational system operates gave rise to confusion, disruptive and disrespectful behavior, new demands (both fair and unfair) on teachers, and frustration on both sides.

Some students reacted to the change in positive ways in the classroom. Although they demanded more, their intentions and motivations were apparent. These students showed an increased interest in the role of English and the learning of English to their own future lives. Other students reacted to change in negative ways in the classrooms. They bucked authority by disrupting class or quitting school. Whatever the motivation behind the students' behavior and attitudes towards the learning of English, teachers tried to reach both sets of students as best they could. In doing so, teachers did two things.

First, they attempted to satisfy their own and their students' appetite and curiosity for what would take some time to understand, democratic English language classrooms. At the same time, English language learners' new expectations and demands and the subsequent behaviors and attitudes unwittingly raised the caliber of English language teachers' language skills, put new strategies into motion, and increased the diversity of their pedagogical skills.

### **Final Thoughts**

I argued at the beginning of this study, and I still contend, that English language teaching professionals - local and foreign - in transitional teaching contexts must not ignore the affect that past sociopolitical and economic influences can have on a teacher's present professional life. In spite of the many restrictions on and challenges in their lives during the years of isolation, Albanian English teachers worked hard to retain the language they had learned in their years in school and at the university. Furthermore, they looked for ways to learn new language by making connections to the outside, all without endangering themselves, their families or their students. Neither must we ignore present sociopolitical and economic influences on teachers' lives. In transitional teaching situations, these influences when contextualized enter into different aspects of a teacher's professional life both in and outside the classroom. In Albania, when the doors finally opened, forces, both intrinsic and extrinsic to the teacher, affected English teachers' lives and drove pedagogical and linguistic development.

In order to make my findings more palpable, in the remainder of this chapter, I revisit the concluding remarks that I made above and organize these findings into three

simple headings: the teacher factor, the student factor, and the native English- speaking factor. Finally, to generalize my study's findings to other transitional teaching contexts, I end with a brief discussion of different venues in which this study may be useful.

The first is the teacher factor. English teachers who had a realistic self-image about their language knowledge and language use were proud of their strong language foundation. However, teachers - versed in the ways of self-reliance - were highly motivated to catch up after years of isolation and thereby appraised their language skills and proficiency. They sought ways to assess the areas of where they felt they were lacking. In order to do this, teachers reached out to the media, print materials, their students, and native or other non-native speakers of English. The many vignettes and stories about teachers' efforts in isolation and in the transition to upgrade and assess developing language skills helped me see something important. These kinds of conversations should not only occur on an individual basis, once a teacher has been removed from the context, and when the most difficult transitional years are in the past, as they were for this study. As my research has revealed, it is beneficial for teachers as a group to articulate what strategies they are using to assess their language proficiencies in intentional, organized ways, when in the throes of transition. This helps ensure that already existing pathways to communicative competence, language confidence and ownership are encouraged and supported.

The second factor was the student factor. Albanian teachers felt the need to upgrade their language abilities so that they could live up to their own inner expectations and to gain a feeling of personal satisfaction and enjoyment. When purposes for learning English changed - as they did in the transitional years - not only did teachers see the need



to make changes in their language and pedagogy, but also society, parents and, especially, students saw and acted on this need. Students and teachers alike were trying to make sense of the new freedoms that had come with the collapse of the communist regime. Teachers made blind attempts to meet the new needs and expectations of their students, with varying levels of success. Identifying, clarifying, and exploiting the role that students play in teachers' development eases the transitional period. This also paves the way for more democratically inspired classrooms, in which shifting authority patterns are understood and facilitated, and where more meaningful language learning can take place.

The third factor, the native English-speaking teaching factor, is also critical to transitional teaching contexts. A premise in this study has been that foreign English language teaching aid projects, to a point, influenced the professional lives of Albanian English language teachers. However, native English speaking teaching professionals, and the projects in which they worked, although having good intentions, inadequately addressed some apparent needs, one of them language development. Despite the evidence that teachers' had strong language awareness which was brought on by their own and their students' efforts and needs, native English speaking teachers can more coherently address the language needs of the local teachers with whom they work. This sets into motion higher levels of language ownership, competence, and confidence and thus aids teachers' pedagogical development.

Finally, I want to provide some preliminary ideas about generalizing this study to other settings. Although one may be hard pressed in today's world to find former communist countries in transition, there are lessons to be learned from the present study

that would be helpful to comparable settings, if and when current political regimes end or for some reason government policies change. Two specific places come to mind: Cuba and North Korea. Cuban English language teachers, although probably having more contact with the outside (I was able to attend the Cuban Linguistic Association's annual conference in 2001) have been very isolated from the west since the early 1960s. Very few English teachers have had opportunities to travel or have frequent contact with their neighboring colleagues. A second setting that has even more powerful similarities is North Korea. The North Korean government's policy of self-reliance is firmly entrenched. Their isolation from much of the world has been almost complete for close to fifty years, not at all unlike Albania. Their citizens are affected economically –and most likely psychologically - from this isolation. To my knowledge, North Korea has no English teachers' associations that are linked to affiliations in other countries - with the possible exception of China or Cuba. Moreover, there is no North Korean English teacher presence at international conferences in the west. Although technological advances such as e-mail and the Internet may give Cubans and North Koreans more access to the outside world than Albanians had, the chance to use such technology is most likely scanty, sporadic, and only accessible to a few citizens. Other English teachers who are isolated as a result of their country's physical isolation or who have little access to outside resources because of poor economic conditions could be in the same situation as Albanian English teachers were in the early 1990s. Moreover, English language teachers who live in nations that are in the throes of radical change or torn by war may be similarly affected.

If those of us in the field of English language teaching stay mindful of the various aspects of a transition – both extrinsic and intrinsic to a teacher's classroom - that affect

English teachers' lives, the English language teaching profession will clearly benefit. Understandings will increase between students and teachers, working relationships between native and non-native English speaking teachers will improve, more democratically-oriented classrooms will be created, communicative competence, language ownership and confidence will be strengthened, and the new needs of English language learners will be more readily met.

## **APPENDIX**

Following are two interview protocols. The first protocol consists of the four general topic areas (with 3-4 main questions each) that I investigated while speaking to each study participant. The second protocol consists of three general topic areas with several sub-questions under each area. Sub-questions were originally designed as back up questions if responses to main questions were not yielding rich enough conversations. All study participants were provided with all questions at least a week prior to the interviews. As the interviews progressed and I had had more experience with both sets of questions I eventually used them out-of-order and interchangeably, depending on the topic under discussion and what direction the interview was heading. Doing this created a more natural flow of conversation between the five women who participated in this study

### **Main Questions**

#### **Language Learning and Role of English**

- 1) Tell me something about your own background, your family, your parents' history foreign language learning.
- 2) Will you tell me something about yourself as a learner of English in elementary and high school and as a student at the university.
- 3) How did the isolating conditions in which you learned English and first taught English influence you as a learner and teacher?
- 4) How did you reconcile the position that the Albanian communist party took toward the U.S. and other western nations' politics with your own feelings or attitudes toward the language?

### **Teaching Experiences**

- 1) When did you start teaching?
- 2) Tell me what a typical day as an English teacher was like for you in Albania before 1985.
- 3) Tell me about a typical day after 1990 or 1992.
- 4) How was life the same or different for you as a teacher during the transition?

### **Contact with the outside and perceived effect**

- 1) When did you first have contact with a native-speaker or someone else with whom you communicated in English (whose first language was not English or Albanian)?
- 2) What was that experience like for you?
- 3) If you had regular experiences speaking and/or working with native speakers how do you think those experiences influenced your English language, your teaching practice/profession of teaching, your thoughts about the language itself, and the native-English speaking people?

### **Looking Back and Wrapping Up**

- 1) Tell me about some of your thoughts or feelings about English and your life as an English language teacher in Albania now (or if you have moved to Canada or the U.S.).
- 2) If you are currently teaching, how has this recent experience colored your ideas about your teaching practice in Albania?

3) If you are no longer teaching or if you have moved into another aspect of ELT or education how have the experiences we have talked about influenced your life and work as it is now?

### **Sub-Questions**

#### **Prior to Transition**

1. What are your fondest memories of teaching in the initial years of your practice?
2. If you were a foreign language high school or university student or teacher during the Albanian government's friendly relationships with the Russian, Chinese, Vietnamese what was that like for you as students or teachers of English?
3. What was it like to teach the English language when chances are that you had never seen or talked to a native speaker of English? Did that make you more motivated or less motivated to learn the language? Why or why not?
4. What were your family's thoughts on becoming an English language teacher? Was it a personal, family, or state decision?
5. Knowing that Albanians are proud of their long, excellent history of foreign language learning, what are your personal views of language learning and its contribution to an individual's growth and development?
6. What are your thoughts about the texts that you used in your first years of teaching? Did they provide you with enough stimulation to teach? Why, or why not? How did they fall short or live up to your expectations?
7. What was the role of foreign languages in your family? Did they know them and how did they come to know them and why? How do they think this affected your attitudes toward language learning/teaching?

8. Did the English language and its connection to the “enemy” during the years of the socialist state have an effect on your personal life? Did you or your family ever tune into VOA and the BBC or foreign television channels that could have gotten you in trouble with the authorities? How did the forbidden-ness of those things western, i.e. English, affect your attitude/ideas about the language, your role as an English teacher and/or your self-identity?
9. Did you ever act as an interpreter to travel groups who came to Albania prior to the transition? Did that motivate you? What was that experience like for you linguistically, psychologically, culturally, emotionally?
10. Where did you learn the most English: In class, out of class, through literature, directly from your teacher, from your school texts, etc.?

### **Transitional Years**

1. Did the images of yourself as a teacher change during the transitional years? If so, how did it change? Did you feel a loss for something you once had? Did you feel you benefited from the new teaching life?
2. What were your motivations to teach? Did they change much over the transitional years? Were these motivations diminished or strengthened by the changes? Why?
3. Did your thoughts about students’ language learning change? What were your ideas about the language of English itself? Did you view it differently than you had when first entering the profession?
4. What, if anything, in being a teacher got easier in the transitional years? What, if anything, got more difficult for you?

5. Do you believe you were viewed differently by the public or by your colleagues in different disciplines when Albania opened its doors to foreigners? (i.e. both native and other non-native speakers of English)
6. How did the status of teachers, in general, and English teachers in particular, change in these transitional years? If so, why did it change? And how did it change?
7. Do you think you had expanded opportunities after the government aligned itself with the west?
8. Seeing that Russian had been thrust on the Albanian people in the late 1940 and the 1950s, (like many other languages had in the past in Albania's history) how did you view the growth of English in the 1990s? Did it feel as though it was coming to have too much influence on the nation or its children? If so, how did you deal with those feelings as a professional
9. How did you feel when you first started socializing or working with other native speakers or NS teachers? What areas of language/culture did you feel most directly challenged with when doing so? How did you find ways to improve in those areas? Was it awkward to speak English with other Albanians in front of native speakers? In what areas (pedagogically or linguistically) did you consider yourself stronger in comparison to the NEST (Native English Speaking Teacher) colleagues? Do you think the exposure worked toward improving your English language skills or worked against developing these areas (e.g.. became shyer, prouder, more assertive, etc)? How did it have an effect, if any, on your classroom teaching?



### **Pre/Post Transition**

1. How were the relationships between teachers and administrators in the old system and do you perceive that that changed at all during the years of transition? If so, how did it change?
2. Was the pay of a teacher adequate to live on during Enver Hoxha's regime? Did that continue to be the case and how did that affect, (if it did) your professional self-esteem, self-identity, etc.?
3. Did your pupils exhibit high motivation for learning, prior to the fall of the socialist state? What about after? Were these changes gradual or abrupt in your view? Which ones were? Which ones were not? Why?
4. Was there stress in your teaching life? Could you describe what that was like? What were your pupils like? In what schools did you teach, the same, or different ones? Why? Did you have options as to where you'd teach and which grade you'd teach? Who made those decisions? Did those decisions of where and which level you taught effect your feelings about being a teacher of English or the quality of your teaching?
5. Was knowing English in Albania during the transitional years a benefit to you, both personally or professional (economically and socially, etc.), in what capacity? Did this affect your attitude (either negatively or positively toward the language itself or the native speakers of the language)? If so, in what ways did it affect your attitude?

6. During the transitional phase, did you enjoy more or less autonomy? For example, could you now choose where and what grade you taught; what texts you taught; how you taught?
7. Did administrators (principals or inspectors) heavily control your teaching? In what way and did that influence change in the transitional years?
8. Did you hold private English lessons when it became legal? Did that positively or negatively affect your practice in the state schools? How so? Why did you teach privately and did you enjoy it? Why, why not? Did you ever consider quitting the state school teaching position and just teach privately?
9. How did new textbooks and materials that entered the country change your practice, if at all? How so? Which of those would you have most liked to have had access to in the years previous to them being available? How much do you think the party political ideology influenced what/how you taught and what/how your pupils learned English?
10. What kind of influence did parents of your pupils have on you as a teacher? If so, what ways did they affect your practice, grading of pupils, etc.? Did this change any during the transitional years?
11. Can you tell me something about the physical environment (conditions) in which you worked? Were they adequate? What was lacking? How do you think these conditions affected your teaching or your pupils learning
12. Could you describe what professional development (INSETT) was like prior to the early 1990s? Where did it originate? What did it consist of? Who managed it? What were its strong points? What were its weak points?

**13. How did professional development change (if at all) in the early 1990s and after?**

**What new or different opportunities could you take advantage of? Were they helpful to your teaching and/or to the changing teaching climate that was going on around you at the time?**

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