

**THE BELIEFS OF A GROUP OF COLLEGE STUDENTS CONCERNING  
THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

Doctoral Dissertation presented to the  
Department of Graduate Studies  
Faculty of Education  
University of Puerto Rico  
Río Piedras Campus  
as a requirement to  
obtain the degree of Doctor in Education

By

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Doctoral Dissertation presented as a partial requirement  
to obtain the degree of Doctor in Education

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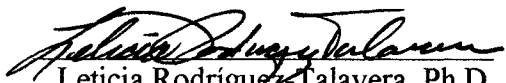
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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents, Mateo and Nilda, for encouraging me to love studying since I was a child.

I also dedicate this work to my wife, Janet, for all her unlimited love, reinforcement, understanding and – most of all – patience throughout all the seven years that took the completion of my doctorate degree and especially during the eighteen months that took the completion of the this investigation. Surely, I could not have finished it without her unconditional support.

Last but not least, I dedicate this investigation to my daughter and son, Natalie and Matthew, for accompanying me along with their mom during the trips from Arcibo to UPR-Río Piedras and for waiting for me in the lobby of the Faculty of Education while I took classes. The two of you are my inspiration.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I must thank my Dissertation Committee, Dr. Leticia Rodríguez-Talavera, Dr. Marco A. Martínez, and Dr. Aida Andino, for their never-ending patience, honest understanding, unfailing encouragement, availability, and noteworthy guidance. It was truly an honor to have you all as members of my dissertation committee.

In addition, I want to acknowledge the valuable cooperation given by my colleague and friend Prof. Carlos González for his voluntary help given many times.

To conclude, I must give acknowledgement to the students who participated in this study.

# **THE BELIEFS OF A GROUP OF COLLEGE STUDENTS CONCERNING THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

Mateo Garcés Valencia

Leticia Rodríguez-Talavera, Ph.D.

The purpose of this study was to obtain information about the beliefs of a group of college students concerning the teaching-learning process and what occurs in the English language classroom – particularly in the INGL 3102 course. By means of action research, the researcher used conversations, reflexive diaries and participant observation in order to know the students' suggestions to improve both the way the INGL 3102 is offered and the English curriculum at UPR-Arecibo, and the implications of their beliefs in their performance in the teaching-learning process of the English language in order to adjust his teaching methodology in a way that would benefit his students' learning. After analyzing and discussing the findings of the study, the researcher was able to offer recommendations and developed his own grounded theory.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

From the first Education Commissioner of Puerto Rico Dr. Martin Brumbaugh to today's Education Secretary Dr. César Rey several educational methodologies have been implemented in order to improve the performance of Puerto Rican students in English. Though there is currently a new pilot project that began with the 2003-2004 school year (Fajardo, 2003a), this researcher believes that for more than fifty years the current English curriculum has not been seriously revised by the Education Department. It has only been subject to superficial changes. In addition, he has also noticed that politicians manipulate Puerto Rico's language dilemma only to use it to advance their own political agendas, not necessarily to solve the issue and help their constituents (Garcés, 2003a). This manipulation, however, has its effects in the classroom given that partisan politics is a yearlong issue in Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico maintains a social, political and economical relationship with the United States that dates back to the last decade of the nineteenth century, which depends and requires the use of English. Unfortunately, curricular changes take place in papers most of the time responding to what is stated in political platforms. These are subject to change every four years depending upon the results of the election process. Most of the time, the students are not consulted in terms of classroom issues. The researcher considers that students' beliefs and experiences are valuable and can provide a lot of input to any curricular reform. For example, teachers and administrators at Yukon High School in central Oklahoma solicited recommendations from students on how to solve a tardiness problem given that the school has two campuses located a five-minute walk

apart (Waldsmith, 2003). The students' advice helped to solve the problem by linking the two campuses' separate public address and bell systems. The local school board members were unaware that the schools' public address and bell systems were not linked, so they decided to purchase a costly unified announcement and bell system. The students, on the other hand, did notice the lack of coordination between the two systems and thanks to their input the tardiness problem was solved.

According to the researcher's experience as a student from kindergarten to twelfth grade and as an English teacher in the public school system, a resident of Puerto Rico for more than 30 years and an English professor at University of Puerto Rico, Arecibo Campus (UPR-Arecibo), there is an array of beliefs concerning the teaching-learning process of the English language in Puerto Rico. This should be considered when making decisions regarding the teaching methodology of a course and the curriculum. Even though Puerto Rican students receive English instruction for twelve years, the performance of many of them in that language is not as good as the outcome. For example, the results of the 2003 Puerto Rican Test for Academic Achievement reflect that more than fifty percent of public schools students flunked the standardized tests (Bliss, 2003; Fajardo, 2003b; Viglucci, 2003), which includes English. This issue could also be perceived when students take English courses at the college level. It is worth mentioning that the expected results of the pilot project mentioned on page 1 will not have an impact for a while at the college level given that it was implemented just in 84 schools (Bliss, 2004).

English as a second language (ESL) has been a widely studied field all over the world. It is generally acknowledged that a number of factors contribute to success in

second language acquisition and among these are those that lie within the affective domain (Chawhan and Oliver, 2003). They also include learners' beliefs about how language is learned. Therefore, by researching the beliefs of a group of college students concerning the teaching-learning process of the English language within an action research perspective, this study will help to assess what can be done to enhance the way English is taught and would help the researcher improve his current approach to teaching English in his classroom. Systematic inquiry into the learning strategies employed by second language learners captured the attention of researchers following the publication of observations by both Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975). Their articles and other follow-up efforts (Naiman et al., 1978; Rubin, 1981) suggested that more effective language learners might differ from less effective learners primarily in terms of the respective ways that they approach learning. Effective learners, for example, engage in a variety of activities that help them better learn, retain, and use what they have learned. This insight subsequently generated a large quantity of research on the role of strategies in second language learning.

Extensive research has been conducted on how to improve second language (L2) learning strategies. For example, there are several L2 strategy classification systems, which may be divided in the following groups:

1. systems related to successful language learners (Rubin, 1975),
2. systems based on psychological functions (O'Malley and Chamot, 1990),
3. linguistically based systems dealing with guessing, language monitoring, formal and functional practice (Bialystock, 1981; Tarone, 1983),
4. systems related to separate language skills (Cohen, 1990), and

5. systems based on different styles or types of learners (Sutter, 1989).

Considering the various types of L2 learning strategies, ESL teachers should not use the same approach with their students every semester given that they serve a diverse universe of students. Teaching strategies vary according to the group of students teachers have in front of them. Research has repeatedly shown that a conscious, tailored use of learning strategies is related to language achievement and proficiency (Oxford, 1994). Students themselves can provide feedback to their ESL teachers with regards to which methodology is the most appropriate for them. In addition, there are several factors that influence the choice of the methodology (e.g., learning styles, cultural background and beliefs).

Sometimes, teachers and students are the last ones who are aware of official curricular reforms. Apparently, they are merely the recipients of the curriculum. For example, in the latest curricular change done by the Education Department intended for the 2003-2004 school year, Education Secretary César Rey admitted publicly that “most teachers were unaware of Education’s new curriculum change until the governor’s press conference” (Albertelli and Miranda, 2003).

Teachers and students need to be the primary participants in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the curriculum. After all, they are the ones who would deal with it more directly. According to Ortiz (1997), both teachers and students have been ignored at times in terms of their contributions to curricular change and decision-making process.

### *Statement of the Problem*

The researcher's experience teaching English, both in public school and at the college level, for nearly a decade has helped him become aware of the fact that even after twelve years of English instruction some students still struggle when they have to write, read, listen and speak this language at the college level. Some research has to be done in the college classroom in order to improve the students' performance in English, the curriculum of the English courses at the college level and the methodology used. In addition, the researcher believes that teachers ought to start doing some research in their own classrooms. After all, they are the ones who have the most holistic and comprehensive view of their students. With that in mind, the researcher believes that it is important to follow a line of investigation about the beliefs of a group of college students regarding the teaching-learning process of the English language.

### *Justification*

For more than a century, English has been a persistent issue in Puerto Rico that has unleashed a debate from 1898 until present times (Garcés, 2003c). The results of this study will hopefully benefit the researcher's teaching methodology, decision makers, policy makers, and other college professors who deal with the English class at the University of Puerto Rico in Arecibo (UPR-Arecibo) particularly with the Basic English II course (INGL 3102). This course, by the way, is designed for students who need to further develop their command of the English language. Its main goal is to improve their writing skills and have them write essays. This study will contribute with substantial information about the students' beliefs concerning the teaching-learning process of the English language. After all, they are the ones who have participated in the English



curriculum of our school system for twelve years in which English is taught five hours a week. It is worth mentioning that, unfortunately, these twelve years of English instruction are full of interruptions (e.g., holidays, faculty meetings, shortage of certified English teachers, etc.) that affect the teaching-learning process. What happens in the English classroom and what it means to both students and professors should be taken into account when revising the teaching methodology and the English curriculum.

According to the Puerto Rico and Latin America Office of the College Board, in the last ten years, the students' scores in the English section of the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) have declined. In 1992, the Puerto Rican students who took the CEEB averaged four hundred and forty-nine points in the English section, while in 2002 averaged four hundred and forty points (Martínez Mercado, 2003). The aforementioned statistics are somewhat impressive given that after ten years the scores should have improved. One can say that for a decade achievement in the English part of the CEEB has been idling or maybe declining, which provides for further research on the matter.

Additionally, data from the *Proposal Submitted to the U.S. Department of Education for Title III Funding for Strengthening Institutions Program Hispanic-Serving Institutions* (University of Puerto Rico, 1995) showed that from 1990 to 1995, approximately three thousand freshmen students of a population of an estimated three thousand five hundred students who were admitted to UPR-Arecibo were classified below the standards of the CEEB. More than two thirds of those students were enrolled in Basic English courses, and at least fifty percent qualified for remedial English courses to prepare them for university level courses. Even the students who were enrolled in the

most advanced Basic English courses also lacked English language skills. As a result of these deficiencies, official documents demonstrate that the percentage of students who withdrew from Basic English courses averaged approximately fifteen percent, and the grade distributions indicated that twenty-five percent of the students who were enrolled in Basic English courses did more than a “C” level work. The aforementioned data are significant due to the fact that UPR-Arecibo is the setting of the present investigation and its participants are currently attending this university.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to obtain information about the beliefs of a group of college students concerning the teaching-learning process and what occurs in the English language classroom – particularly in the INGL 3102 course – through action research. By means of this study, the researcher also wanted to know the students’ suggestions to improve the way the INGL 3102 course is given and the English curriculum at UPR-Arecibo, and the implications of their beliefs in their performance in the teaching-learning process of the English language in order to adjust his teaching methodology in a way that would benefit his students’ learning. Once the information was obtained and analyzed, it would be used to improve the way the course is taught and at the same time to provide curricular changes at the college level freshmen courses (mainly the INGL 3102 course) and feedback to policy makers and decision makers at the English Department in UPR-Arecibo.

### *Research Questions*

This study attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of a group of college students regarding the teaching-learning process of the English language?
2. What are the implications of their beliefs in their performance in the teaching-learning process of the English language?
3. What do they suggest to improve the teaching-learning experiences in the INGL 3102 course?

### *Definitions of Terms*

*Action research.* Is a deliberate, solution-oriented investigation that is group or personally owned and conducted. Spiraling cycles of problem identification, systematic data collection, reflection, analysis, data-driven action taken, and, finally, problem redefinition characterize it. The linking of the terms “action” and “research” highlights the essential features of this method: trying out ideas in practice as a means of increasing knowledge about and/or improving curriculum, teaching, and learning (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1982).

*Beliefs.* Refer to learners’ assumptions about themselves as learners, about factors influencing language learning and about the nature of language learning (Victori and Lockhart, 1995).

*INGL 3102.* This course is designed for students who need to further develop their command of the English language. The focus is placed on the writing process to develop written communication skills. Paragraphs, essays and/or novels are used to strengthen the reading and writing skills. The fundamentals of grammar, edition, diction and syntax are covered incidentally. A weekly one-hour laboratory period provides opportunities for supervised listening and oral practice.

*Triangulation.* Typically, this process involves the researcher's corroboration of evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective (Creswell, 1998).

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### *Historical Background of English Instruction in Puerto Rico*

Christopher Columbus discovered Puerto Rico on his second voyage in 1493 (Viñas de Vázquez, 1973). The Spanish colonization process began in 1508 when Juan Ponce de León was appointed governor. Puerto Rico was of great military value to the Spanish government and was used in defense of the Spanish Empire in the New World. Overall, Puerto Rico spent four centuries under the Spanish rule. Until 1898, Spanish had been the only official language of the island. It is worth mentioning that in those days the island was plagued by many problems. For example, 79.6% of the residents of Puerto Rico were illiterate (Oficina de Investigaciones Pedagógicas del Consejo Superior de Enseñanza, 1965; Rodríguez Bou, 1947). But in that year, the island became a possession of the United States as a result of the Spanish-American War and the Treaty of Paris. For the new American government, the language problem was by far the most challenging in the educational field (Herndon and Manuel, 1951; Osuna, 1949). The American government tried to impose the English language on Puerto Ricans and to Americanize them by means of the public school system during the first three decades of the 1900s (Garcés, 2003d; Negrón, 1975; Osuna, 1949; Torres González, 2002). In Puerto Rico, the use of Spanish and English has been an enduring issue and has unleashed a language debate since the summer of 1898.

The English language had been one of the island's two official languages since 1902. In 1991, the government enacted a "Spanish Only" law making it the sole official language in Puerto Rico. Two years later, as a result of the 1993 Language Act, Spanish

and English became the official languages of the island. It is worth mentioning that historically the English language has stirred contention among Puerto Ricans. Sherwood (2003) believes that people who do not live in Puerto Rico would find this law incomprehensible because English is not the language of the island's culture. Interestingly, others do not necessarily find the current law incomprehensible. After all, in other countries English is also an official language, but not native. This is the case in Fiji, Ghana, Gambia, India, Kiribati, Lesotho, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Malta, the Marshall Islands, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, the Solomon Islands, Samoa, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe (Garcés, 2003c).

Between 1898 and 1947, the Education Department had handled the teaching of English in six major ways. The Commissioners of Education of that time, who were political appointees, were in charge of implementing the use of English in the curriculum. Some of them were Martin G. Brumbaugh, Samuel McCune Lindsay, Roland P. Falkner, Edwin G. Dexter, Edward M. Bainter, Paul G. Miller and Juan B. Huyke (Negrón, 1975). These Commissioners of Education demonstrated interest in the teaching policies of English from the standpoint of the government. Prior to the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year, the island's public school system had six approaches to teaching English. In keeping with Negrón (1975), Torres González (2002) and Garcés (2003b), Dr. Martin Brumbaugh implemented the first language policy in the local school system in 1900. He provided for the use of Spanish as a medium of instruction in grades 1-8 while English was to be used as a medium of instruction in grades 9-12. Spanish was to be taught as a school subject in the secondary level. Roland Faulkner put into operation the second language policy in 1905. He aimed at the use of English as a medium of instruction in all

grades of the public school system. Paul Miller established the third language policy in 1916. He provided for the use of Spanish as the language of instruction in grades 1-4 and English and Spanish became the language of instruction in grades 5-12. The study of both languages as school subjects continued in all levels. Dr. José Padín launched the fourth language policy in 1934. He made Spanish the language of instruction in grades 1-8 and doubled the time devoted to English as a subject from forty-five minutes to ninety minutes in the seventh and eighth grades. In grades 9-12, English was used as a medium of instruction. Dr. José Gallardo inaugurated the fifth language policy in 1937. He introduced the use of both English and Spanish as the medium of instruction at all levels. Teachers taught some subjects in Spanish and taught others in English. This policy didn't affect the elementary school where Spanish was the only medium of instruction. Finally, Mariano Villaronga introduced the sixth and last language policy in 1947. He made Spanish the medium of instruction at all levels while English was taught as a subject. This policy is currently in use in almost all English classrooms of our public school system although a new approach is being implemented.

#### *The English Program of the Education Department*

At present, the teaching of English has a purpose, which is not a political one exclusively as in the early decades of the nineteenth century (Negrón, 1975; Torres González, 2002). According to the English Program Curriculum Guide (Education Department, 1994b), there are several reasons for the teaching of English as a subject in the public school system of Puerto Rico. The first one is the island's economic, political, social and cultural relationship with the United States that demands the utilization of the English language for its growth and economic development. The second one is the

migration of different segments of the Puerto Rican population to the United States for various reasons among which the poverty issue of the 1920s and the professional exodus during the last eight years could also be considered. Those who migrate need English as a means of communication. Finally, the Education Department considers that a command of the English language is a worthwhile educational goal and visualizes it as potentially one of the greatest resources of the cultured person in Puerto Rico. In other words, Puerto Ricans learn English for utilitarian reasons, including the large range of technological global competencies.

In addition, in keeping with the new Curricular Framework of the English Program (National Institute for Curriculum Development, 2003), students ought to learn English because it is considered an international language due to the constant globalization generated by the information age. Furthermore, English has become a language of social empowerment. Learning this language serves as a measure for increased enlightenment, social, emotional and moral development, value development and appreciation, self-awareness and self-confidence. Finally, critical thinking, creativity, and mental flexibility are enhanced and intellectual ability is increased in the process of second language learning. It is worth mentioning that the aforementioned curricular framework includes information obtained from the latest research trends.

#### *English Program Curriculum Guide*

In the Circular Letter #15-94-95 (Education Department, 1994a) it is formulated that “the Public School System of Puerto Rico recognizes the importance and relevance of the English language and in consequence has included it as an integral part of the curriculum from kindergarten to twelfth grade...” In addition, the Education Department



created a new English Program Curriculum Guide in 1994, which is the result of the participation of various educators: central level technicians, general supervisors, district level supervisors, university professors and other professionals with expertise in education (Education Department, 1994b). Juan Rodríguez, English Program Director in 1994, indicated in his educational message of the curriculum guide that “the general goal of the English Program is to develop in our students’ oral and written communication skills so that they are communicatively competent.”

The English Program Curriculum Guide is a product of the Organic Act of the Education Department (Education Department, 1991). Article 1.02 decrees that education will be imparted in Spanish and that English will be taught as a second language in Puerto Rico, which is the policy that has existed since Mariano Villaronga implemented it in 1947. This curriculum guide is an official document. It displays the official policy of the government, as interpreted by the Education Department, concerning the teaching of English in Puerto Rico. In the introduction of the curriculum guide (Education Department, 1991), the Education Department pursues to cultivate the following characteristics in students:

1. An identification with the Puerto Rican culture and language, and appreciation and respect for the American culture and language.
2. A desire to learn English.
3. A desire to use English to communicate orally and in writing.
4. The capacity to use English effectively in oral and written communication.

### *Action Research*

Action research is known by many other names, including participatory research, collaborative inquiry, emancipatory research, action learning, and contextual action research, but all are variations on a theme (O'Brien, 1998). In addition, it is also known as teacher-initiated, school-based research (Gay, 1996). To put it simply, action research is "learning by doing." It is an investigation carried out by teachers in order to improve their own practice or to test an educational theory (Bravo, 1998). The teacher-researcher will identify a problem, will do something to solve it, will see how successful his efforts were, and, if not satisfied, will try again. While this is the essence of the approach, there are other key attributes of action research that differentiate it from common problem-solving activities that we all engage in every day. Much of the researcher's time is spent on refining the methodological tools to suit the demands of the situation, and on collecting, analyzing, and presenting data on a continuing, cyclic basis. Several attributes separate action research from other types of research. For example, the most unfortunate aspect of traditional educational research is that it is extremely difficult to apply its findings to classroom practice (Hopkins, 1996). Its focus is crucial on turning the people involved into researchers as well. People learn best, and more willingly apply what they have learned, when they do it themselves. It also has a social dimension: the research takes place in real-world situations, and aims to solve real problems. In addition, what separates this type of research from general professional practices, consulting, or daily problem-solving is the emphasis on scientific study, which is to say the researcher studies the problem systematically and ensures the intervention is informed by theoretical considerations.

Traditionally, the usual approach to research in education uses coding forms and outside researchers, involves the testing of hypotheses, relegates the teacher to a passive role, and culminates in an academic paper or research report (Hopkins, 1982). Sometimes, teachers have educational issues in their classrooms that need to be dealt with, and they cannot wait for the random good fortune of having a researcher or the school principal coming to their classrooms to investigate the root of their issues and provide them potential solutions. For example, some of them would just wait for an official from the Education Department to help them. But there is a more effective way of getting to the bottom of classroom issues that empowers teachers at the same time: action research. It enables them to research their own educational problems and find alternatives to solve them by themselves.

Action research has been employed for various purposes: for school-based curriculum development, as a professional development strategy, in pre-service and graduate courses in education, and in systems planning and policy development. Some writers advocate an action research approach for school restructuring (Holly and Southworth, 1990; Jacullo-Noto, 1992; Lieberman, 1988; Oja and Smulyan, 1989; Sagor, 1992). Action research can be used as an evaluative tool, which can assist in self-evaluation whether the “self” is an individual or an institution. Action research pursues action and research outcomes at the same time (Dick, 2000). It looks forward for the teacher to reflect about his/her teaching methodology in order to transform the teaching-learning process in such a way that the students benefit from it. By doing so, other colleagues would find it much easier to identify themselves with the results of research that has been conducted by other peers, in an intact classroom, in a real school setting,

than it is to accept and identify with the results of research conducted far away, in a clinical setting by an unknown researcher (McIntosh, 1984). In addition, action research pretends to achieve an understanding and interpretation of the teaching practice. It is a way of doing research to develop knowledge while at the same time acting to improve a situation. “Action” to solve real-world problems or improve professional practice is combined with “research” to generate new knowledge.

Promoting the use of action research in the teaching practice is an important source of learning for teachers and of benefit for students beyond the fact that it implies changes in the view of the decision makers in other domains. The history of action research has been well documented and debated (Adelman, 1993; Gunz, 1996; Noffke, 1994). While the concept of action research can be traced back to the early works of John Dewey in the 1920s (Johnson, 1993), in 1949 Stephen Corey and other professors at Teachers College of Columbia University also introduced the term action research to the educational community. Action research approaches to educational issues were also adopted in the late 1960s and early 1970s by the “teacher researcher” movement in the secondary education sector (Riding et al., 1995). But Kurt Lewin is frequently credited as the creator of the term “action research.” He used this methodology with his work with people affected as by post World War II social problems (McKernan, 1991). After a series of practical experiences in the early 1940s, he came to visualize action research as a practical process that “gives credence to the development of powers of reflective thought, discussion, decision and action by ordinary people participating in collective research on ‘private troubles’ that they have in common” (Adelman, 1993, p. 8).

The many “descendants” of early action researchers follow different schools of action research thought, including American action research groups with their roots in the progressive education movement. For example, they particularly followed the work of John Dewey (Noffke, 1994) and the efforts of the United Kingdom toward curriculum reform and greater professionalism of teaching (Elliot, 1991). As is evident, the geographical locations and socio-political contexts in which action research efforts have taken place continue to evolve. Nevertheless, the primary focus of all such efforts, regardless of the context, is enhancing the lives of students in our schools by conducting research in the classroom. Action research methodology offers a systematic approach to introducing innovations in teaching and learning. It seeks to do this by putting the teacher in the dual role of producer of educational theory, and primary user of that theory. This is both a way of producing knowledge about learning and teaching, and a powerful way of improving the learning and teaching practice. No separation needs to be made between the design of the teaching methodology and its delivery, and the process of researching these activities. It is a matter of bringing theory and practice closer together in a more practical manner.

Practitioners of action research not only look for ways to improve their practice within the various constraints of the situation in which they are working, but are also critical change agents of those constraints and of themselves. Teachers themselves, not education officials, are the ones who should provoke change in the classroom. Teachers who become action researchers are accountable in that they aim to make their learning process and its results public, both to each other and to other interested practitioners. Their practice is self-evaluated in that the reflective and analytical insights of the

researcher-practitioners themselves form the basis of the developmental process. Mills (2000) believes that over the past decade the typical “required” research course in schools of teacher education has changed from a traditional survey class on research methods to a more practical research course that either focuses on or includes the topic of action research. That is why action research is an attempt to better understand and deal with the real life problems of classroom and school life (Carson et al., 1989). The findings of teachers’ action research should help them solve their classroom issues without the need of relying on external sources, such as, school principals, supervisors, etc. After all, teachers themselves are the ones who know what exactly is going on in their classrooms on a daily basis. Solutions to their classroom issues cannot be imposed on them by someone else, which is usually the case in Puerto Rico. Though through the literature there are several models of the action research process, the basic process of doing it consists of four steps:

1. Problem or topic identification;
2. Data gathering;
3. Decision making;
4. Resulting action (Gay, 1996).

It is also important to realize that, according to Mills (2000), the components of a practical perspective of action research are:

1. Teacher researchers have decision-making authority.
2. Teacher researchers are committed to continued professional development and school improvement.
3. Teacher researchers want to reflect on their practices.

4. Teacher researchers will use a systematic approach for reflecting on their practice.
5. Teacher researchers will choose an area of focus, determine data collection techniques, analyze and interpret data, and develop action plans.

### *Curricular Reform*

Over the past decades, educators have witnessed a slowly growing but significant change in the way they approach their work (Beyer and Apple, 1988). Considerable time and effort have been spent on reforming the formal curriculum of the local education system as though this curriculum would have an immediate impact on or connection with what goes on in public school classrooms. Reams of paper and countless hours of staff time at state level usually go into the development and dissemination of curriculum guides that set forth educational philosophy statements, general goals, objectives, learning activities, teaching strategies and assessment procedures. However, there is still much debate in terms of the transformation of curriculum theory and practice from a concern with *what* should be taught and *why* it should be taught in the local school system. There are also some concerns regarding *how* to organize, build and evaluate the curriculum. The difficult ethical and political questions of content, of what knowledge is of most significance, have been pushed in an effort to define methods that will “solve” educational problems once and for all. Those who deal with them everyday (the teachers) could solve these problems by means of action research.

The word “curriculum” means many things to many people. When educators and members of the lay public use the word “curriculum,” it is often with different meanings in mind (Marshall, 2004). Some define it as “scope and sequence,” others as instructional activities, whereas others want specific content, and still others mention

texts and additional teaching resources. In fact, many scholars have written numerous definitions of the term “curriculum.” But a simple one would be that a curriculum can be defined as a plan for action, or a written document, which includes strategies for achieving desired goals or ends (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1988). Some people believe that no curriculum is complete without information on the evidence that indicates that the content to be learned has in fact been learned. It provides teachers with a detailed chart for helping students reach the standards. Unfortunately, much of the curriculum that is planned and developed often does not get implemented. Many new programs do nothing more than gather dust on shelves. They get blunted at classroom doors.

The curriculum should satisfy the interests and necessities of the students (Taba, 1974). Since students are the main beneficiaries of the curriculum, all educational experiences should be appealing to them. It is known that not all individuals learn effectively in the same manner by the same method, educational activity or means. In the ESL classroom, some students can read a short story with no problems, while others would have a difficult time doing it. That is why curriculum change is so important so that it could be adapted to the students’ learning needs as they evolve from generation to generation. Such change cannot occur in a vacuum. Aside from an adequate evaluation process, some research has to be done prior to implementing any curricular change in order to justify it. Action research provides teachers the means to do research on their own without having to wait for other external researchers.

Every curriculum should be subject to a summative evaluation every five years (Ortiz, 2002) in order to justify a curricular reform. Reforms cannot be done without a justification. Decision makers should know it given that curriculum design and



evaluation has been a well-studied field in Puerto Rico and the United States. Nevertheless, educational authorities in Puerto Rico seem to act as if they simply do not know the due process of curricular change. Several attempts to reform the local curriculum have been made without any apparent justification. For example, at the beginning of the 2002-2003 school year the Education Department announced the launch of a curricular experiment in which students would be able to graduate from high schools taking fewer credits in the core courses (Millán Pabón, 2002). Such curricular experiment was never fully implemented in the entire public school system because it was subject to critics since it was not clear if the Education Department followed the due process of curriculum design. Eventually, there was no change and local high school students had to continue to take the same quantity of core credits as it was stated in Circular Letter 9-2001-2002 (Education Department, 2001). A similar situation took place at the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year in which a curricular renovation was implemented (Fajardo, 2003a). This time, many teachers in local public schools stated that they did not know anything about such renovation. The new curriculum was supposed to be implemented starting the first day of class, but teachers were not familiar with the new educational resources. Others claimed that they had not received any official notification indicating the implementation of the new curriculum, which is a common practice in the public school system of Puerto Rico.

The teacher is at the center of any curriculum reform because he or she will be the one who would implement the curriculum in the classroom though some people might think it is just easier to keep things as they are. Unfortunately, sometimes the teachers' feedback is not taken into consideration (Ortiz, 1997) and they end up being the mere

receivers of a curriculum reform even though they were not involved in the design of the reform. In addition, students play an important role in any curricular reform too. Since they are the beneficiaries of the curriculum, they can provide substantial information regarding the effectiveness of a curriculum or what needs to be done to improve it. Such information could be obtained by means of action research and eventually provide the ground for some curricular reform at least at the classroom level, which is more practical to the teacher.

However, analyzing curriculum reform in terms of development is the traditional and most common approach. Those in charge of curricular reform must clarify their philosophical and social views of society, which are commonly known as the sources of the curriculum. Ornstein and Hunkins (1988) believe that in order to determine the influences of curriculum design attention should be given to how such sources will influence education. How curriculum reformists respond to the question “What are the sources of ideas for education?” will impact their views of curriculum reform. For this reason, it is essential for them to identify their philosophical and social orientation. If they ignore philosophical and social questions, their curriculum will have limited rationales. Taba (1962) notes that much of the distance between theory and practice may be caused by just such lack of rationale. Sometimes, teachers learn about an alleged curricular reform through the press. They are rarely consulted even when they are the ones who deal with students on an everyday basis and know whether or not a curriculum is effective. Unfortunately, Education officials are the ones who know the specifics of the reform and they do not work directly with the students. A curricular reform could be

implemented and in progress, but it might not be relevant to the students of a particular teacher.

The researcher firmly believes that students are a valuable source for curriculum reform. That is why the present research is student-centered. In part, the curriculum should be derived from what teachers know about their students. In other words, how they learn, form attitudes, generate interests and form values. Progressive curricularists and educators who favor student-centered and experience-centered curriculum reforms consider the learner as the primary source (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1988).

### *The Importance of Beliefs*

How students learn has always been a subject of debate. Education experts do not agree conclusively in relation to what is learning or how it occurs. Psychologists, anthropologists, linguists, neurophysiologists, philosophers, and others are still trying to understand how the mind works and how people learn (Phillips and Soltis, 1998). The literature goes all the way back to Plato's "recollection" theory and John Locke's "blank tablet" theory to Dewey, Vygotsky, and Bandura's social dimension of learning and the cognitive science approach. The point is that students are seen these days as human beings that need more than just a stimulus to learn. The teaching-learning process is no longer considered as a passive progression in which impressions are made upon the receptive soul or mind. For example, humanism presents both an objection to what is sometimes interpreted as the mechanistic, dehumanizing, and inhumane emphasis of "traditional" approaches to psychology and education, and a plea for the adoption of new attitudes, concepts, and approaches in these areas (Lefrancois, 1982).

People's beliefs are very important because they guide learning. Their beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives is also known as perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). It is a context-specific assessment of competence to perform a specific task in a particular domain (e.g., when a student says that he or she can write an essay without grammatical errors or when a student says that he or she can give an oral presentation in English without getting nervous). Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Such beliefs generate these diverse effects through four major processes. They include cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes. They influence the choices people make, the efforts people put forth, how long people persist when they face obstacles, and how people feel.

Self-efficacy beliefs have also received increasing attention in educational research, primarily in studies of academic motivation and of self-regulation (Pintrich and Schunk, 1995). Researchers have focused on three areas. Researchers in the first area have explored the link between efficacy beliefs and college major and career choices, particularly in science and mathematics (Lent and Hackett, 1987). This line of investigation has important implications for counseling and vocational psychology theory and practice, given that findings have provided insights into the career development of young men and women and can be used to develop career intervention strategies. Findings from the second area suggest that the efficacy beliefs of teachers are related to their instructional practices and to various student outcomes (Ashton and Webb, 1986). In the third area, researchers have reported that students' self-efficacy beliefs are correlated with other motivation constructs and with students' academic performances

and achievement (Pajares, 2004). Constructs in these studies have included attributions, goal setting, modeling, problem solving, test and domain-specific anxiety, reward contingencies, self-regulation, social comparisons, strategy training, other self-beliefs and expectancy constructs, and varied academic performances across domains.

A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well being in many ways. People who have high confidence in their capabilities move toward difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. Such an effective outlook promotes inherent interest and deep engrossment in activities. They set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them. Besides, people strengthen and sustain their efforts in the face of failure. They quickly recover their sense of efficacy after setbacks, attribute failure to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skills, which are attainable and approach threatening situations with assurance that they can exercise control over them. Such an efficient outlook produces personal accomplishments, reduces stress and lowers susceptibility to depression. If people experience only easy successes they come to expect quick results and are easily discouraged by failure. A resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort. Some setbacks and difficulties in human pursuits serve a useful purpose in teaching that success usually requires sustained effort. After people become convinced they have what it takes to be successful, they persist in the face of adversity and quickly rebound from setbacks. By sticking it out through tough times, they emerge stronger from adversity.

On the contrary, people who doubt their capabilities shy away from difficult tasks, which they view as personal threats. They have low aspirations and weak commitment to

the goals they choose to pursue. When faced with difficult tasks, they dwell on their personal deficiencies, on the obstacles they will encounter, and all kinds of adverse outcomes rather than concentrate on how to perform successfully. They relax their efforts and give up quickly in the face of difficulties. They are slow to recover their sense of efficacy following failure or setbacks. Because they view insufficient performance as deficient aptitude it does not require much failure for them to lose faith in their capabilities. They fall easy victim to stress and depression.

In keeping with Pajares (2002), the assumption is that the beliefs that individuals create and develop and hold to be true about themselves form the very foundation of human agency and are vital forces in their success or failure in all endeavors (e.g., school). Moreover, researchers have demonstrated that self-efficacy perceptions are also good predictors of reasonably generalized performances such as obtained grades (Bandura, 1993; Zimmerman et al., 1991). They are also a good predictor of choice of academic majors (Hackett and Betz, 1989).

#### *Studies About Beliefs and Language Learning*

Many speculations have been made concerning what contributes to success in learning a second language. Studies about beliefs toward learning English have been conducted in several countries around the world. The researcher found information on studies about beliefs that range from elementary school to college. It is important to bear in mind that language learning is an active and integrated lifelong process whose foundation begins in oral language. Children begin to develop literacy long before they come to school. It is in the home environment where they first hear spoken language. This occurs particularly with their first language. For example, some children learn that

the word *casa* means home. Additionally, they are exposed to their second language informally through cable TV and billboards. For instance, some children learn that the sentence [We did it!] means [*¡Lo hicimos!*] in Spanish by watching the cartoon series *Dora The Explorer* or that a *Happy Meal* is a particular food for children by watching TV ads. Children's preschool experiences with language and stories have a profound effect on their subsequent learning. Through listening and speaking, people share and communicate their thoughts, feelings and experiences. Throughout the literature there are numerous studies about beliefs and language learning.

Li (2003) examined language learning beliefs and learning strategies of a group of 34 ethnic Chinese ESOL students. His research attempted to identify to what extent the students' language learning beliefs affect their learning strategies. It also tried to establish if the students' age and gender, English level, prior education and the length of time they have been in New Zealand produce any significant differences in their learning beliefs and learning strategies. Data were gathered by two questionnaires translated into Chinese and biographical information was also elicited. The huge numbers of Chinese students who have come to New Zealand to study and the problems and frustrations that ESOL teachers have experienced with many of them were the motivation for this research. The aim of the study was to find out Chinese students' language learning beliefs and learning strategies so that ESOL teachers can understand the students' learning difficulties and learning behaviors better and make their teaching more effective.

Tanaka (2003) conducted a similar study using a total of 63 adult Japanese students studying English at two private language schools in Auckland, New Zealand. They had studied English as a foreign language for at least six years in Japan and had no

prior experience in staying overseas more than two months. His research attempted to discover to what extent do Japanese ESL students' beliefs about language learning change as a result of their study experience in New Zealand over a period of twelve weeks. In addition, it also aimed to find out to what extent does the English proficiency of the Japanese ESL students improve as a result of their study experience in New Zealand during the same period of time, and if there was any relationship between the changes in their beliefs about language learning and improvement in their English proficiency. Data were gathered through a questionnaire and a proficiency test. Socio-demographic information was also obtained.

Welsh (2003) investigated the perceptions of international students studying English in Auckland with respect to how homestay helps them improve their English language proficiency. By doing so, he wanted to inform homestay providers who enroll international students about the perceptions that international students have about living in homestay. His study aimed to learn why do students studying English in New Zealand choose to live in homestay and what expectations do they have regarding these homestays. Besides, he wanted to know if age, gender and ethnic origin have any influence on the relationship between homestay interaction and the students' perception of its value in terms of language learning and if there was any association between satisfaction with homestays and the perceived improvement in English. The participants were from various countries (mainly North-east Asia). Data were gathered by two questionnaires, case studies and pilot studies. Individual differences, opportunity to learn English, interaction in homestay, homestay as a language learning center and support for international students were considered as implications for homestay providers.



Fan (1999) investigated the beliefs and strategies of Hong Kong students in the learning of English. Two of the factors involved were the learner's opinions of what is important to success in learning English as a second language and the strategies they employed. This study was an attempt to find out if there is any relationship between the students' beliefs and learning strategies and whether they are related to language proficiency. The subjects under study included 529 freshmen students at one of the tertiary institutions in Hong Kong, and the instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. The findings of the study have revealed a consistent relationship between language learning beliefs and strategies as well as other complicated relationships between them. Moreover, language learning beliefs and strategies related to high English proficiency were identified. These findings provided valuable information to Hong Kong teachers in improving their teaching.

A study by Goto and Bousquet (2003) investigated "learning climates" among fourth-grade students in an English-only school district in California. A student's learning climate was defined in this study as a learner's perceptions of his or her own abilities and behaviors, as well as the learner's perceptions of others' beliefs about their abilities and behaviors (or "externalized perceptions"). This study aimed to understand how such learning climates might relate to students' reading performance among English language learners (ELLs) as well as native English-speaking (NE) students. A structured interview was conducted to gather data. Positive perceptions toward bilingualism were observed by both students who read English well and those who struggled with reading English. However, these two groups differed in their language-mixing behavior, first-language literacy skills, fathers' level of English proficiency, and views of the influence

of their first language on their English reading. Strong ELL readers tended to have more positive externalized perceptions of NE peers' attitudes toward their first languages and their language-mixing behavior. NE students' perceptions toward bilingualism were also revealed.

Wang (1996) sought to investigate the beliefs that Chinese adult learners, specifically college English majors, hold about English language learning and the learning strategies they employ for learning the language. He also investigated the differences between the successful and the unsuccessful learners regarding their beliefs about language learning and their learning strategies. Furthermore, his study attempted to learn the differences between the successful and the unsuccessful learners in their strategy use for specific tasks. Twenty English majors of Qufu Teacher's University of China were selected for the study. They were requested to complete a questionnaire containing the Beliefs About Language Learning Instrument (BALLI) and the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), participate in a 20-minute interview, and complete a supplementary questionnaire. The study revealed that the subjects as a group hold positive as well as negative beliefs about learning a foreign language. In terms of strategy use, it was found that they made fairly frequent use of the learning strategies in the SILL and those brought up in an interview. However, they seemed to underuse certain strategies that could lead to opportunities for naturalistic practice and use of the language. The study also revealed that more successful learners seemed to hold positive beliefs about learning English whereas more unsuccessful learners seemed to hold misconceptions or negative beliefs.

Gahin and Myhill (2001) paper discusses Egyptian EFL teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the communicative language approach (CLA) in language teaching and learning. It describes the features and context of EFL and ELT in Egypt and the recent political imperative to encourage fluency in English. Support is cited from an empirical study in which an attitudes scale was designed, piloted and administered to a sample of 120 EFL teachers in Egypt to explore their attitudes towards the CA. The study highlights the importance of the social and cultural context upon teachers' attitudes and practices and draws attention to some of the constraints, which have impeded the successful implementation of the CA. An interpretative-constructivist research paradigm was adopted since the aim of the study was to come to grips with how reality is seen through the teachers' eyes, how teachers construe reality, view their world and make sense of it. The purpose of the study was to ascertain Egyptian EFL teachers' attitudes towards the CA, in the light of their personal histories and the contextual constraints they face. Hence, the research questions of the study were:

1. What are teachers' attitudes towards the communicative approach in language teaching and learning?
2. What are the constraints that act against a successful application of the communicative approach in the Egyptian EFL context?

Data collection took place within five educational zones in two areas in the eastern region of the Nile River. The sample of teachers was drawn from preparatory stage (age range of students 12-15) teachers, who teach using the textbook *Hello!* by Don Dallas. Since data collection was randomly conducted, the sample of teachers included variations in teaching experience, specialization and gender of teachers, and school

location. More specifically, the sample included experienced teachers (n.57), semi-experienced teacher (n.35) and newly qualified (n.25). The teaching experience recorded ranged between one year and seventeen years. Also, the sample included specialized teachers (n.92) and non-specialized teachers (n.28). Male teachers were 78 and female teachers were 42. The sample also included teachers working in urban areas (n.52), suburban areas (n.35) and rural areas (n.33). As far as in-service training is concerned, the sample included teachers who were trained (n.78) and those who have never been to in-service training (n.42). Though the findings of this study can, by no means, be generalized to include all EFL teachers in Egypt or even those working in the preparatory stage, they imply that the CA is being faced by myriad of constraints. The inconsistency exhibited in responding to the Attitudes Scale throw doubts related to whether teachers are aware of the philosophy underpinning the CA but at the same time cannot apply it in their context. Another possible explanation is that they might not be aware of it but they were keen to throw blame on constraints outside themselves (which can, also, be a third possibility) instead of exposing themselves as having deficient or insufficient knowledge of it. The data obtained from the interview analysis helped a great deal in clarifying the rather-dim state of understanding, though the sample of the interviewees is far less compared to that of the Attitudes Scale. An attempt to dissolve dilemma can be through direct observation of teachers followed by teachers' reflections on their performances, or by getting teachers to justify their responses to the questionnaire. This might help to explore whether their responses are grounded in genuine beliefs or not.

In keeping with Jiang and Fu (2003), there has been an increasing amount of interest in the interrelationship of motivation and strategy use in L2. However, little has

been known about the relationship between achievement motivation and strategy use in foreign language learning (FLL) context. Causal attributions are another type of beliefs that affects learners' motivation to select and use effective learning strategies. Because there exists shortage of empirical studies on attributional beliefs' influence on strategy use in L2 learning, their study tried to explore the influence of achievement motivation and attributional beliefs on learners' strategy choice. Three hundred seven university students in non-English majors from six different cities in answered the English Learning Questionnaire. The study found that compensation and metacognitive strategies are used more frequently, while social strategies are the least. The study indicates significant levels of associations of proficiency with memory, cognitive, metacognitive, and compensation strategies. Both achievement motivation and attributional beliefs are correlated to the use of learning strategies. Ability-success attribution, effort-success attribution, luck-success and luck-failure attribution are the powerful predictors of the learning strategies. The context in which Chinese students learned English was typical of a foreign language learning environment. The findings of this study provided some implications for English teaching and learning in China.

Stepp-Greany (2002) surveyed data from beginning Spanish classes in Florida State University using a combination of technologies: Internet activities, CD-ROM, electronic pen pals, and threaded discussions. The goals of the study were to determine students' perceptions of the role and importance of the instructor in technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), the accessibility and relevance of the lab, the individual technological components in student learning, and the effects of the technology on the foreign language learning experiences. Students attributed an important role to

instructors and perceived that cultural knowledge, listening and reading skills, and independent learning skills were enhanced but were divided in their perceptions about the learning or interest values of the individual components. Implications are presented that may be useful to universities developing technology enhanced instruction. This study elicited information about students' perceptions in five categories:

1. teachers' usefulness and facilitative behavior in the TELL environment,
2. the usefulness and/or accessibility of the online resources or the lab environment itself,
3. the effect of TELL on learning subject matter and skills,
4. the effect of TELL on student interest and enjoyment of Spanish or the relevance of the activities to their present or future study of Spanish, and
5. the effect of TELL on students' confidence as learners, technical skills, and performance on class assessments.

Detaramani and Chan Shuk-im (1994) worked on a research project that sought to investigate the language needs of students in City University of Hong Kong with a view to supplying data to make the Self-Access Language Learning Centre suitable for all students. The main purpose was to find out the interests of students, their expectations, motivations and their language needs. The information obtained enabled the Language Institute to better cater to the needs and interests of students, by designing appropriate learning materials for self-study. It enhanced the students' English proficiency.

Chuan Kung and Whei Chuo (2002) investigated the potential role of ESL/EFL websites as a means to supplement in-class instruction at a technical college in Southern Taiwan. It evaluated a program in which forty-nine students enrolled in a high-beginner

EFL class were introduced to five websites and instructed to use them for a homework assignment and for self-study. Data collected revealed that despite some difficulties encountered, students had an overall positive attitude to using the teacher-selected websites in their learning of English. The students found that learning English through ESL/EFL websites was interesting and that the teaching strategies used by the teachers were effective and necessary. A follow-up study was conducted a year later after the initial study and the results supported the original findings. The participants were a class of 49 students (10 males and 39 females) majoring in French and minoring in English at a technological college of languages in Southern Taiwan. The first language of all of the students is Mandarin Chinese and their ages range from 17-18. They placed at the high-beginner level in language ability and had received at least four years of formal instruction in the English language. At the time of the research project, they were taking three required English courses: Conversation and Writing, Reading, and Listening. This project was implemented in the students' Conversation and Writing course, which aimed to enable students to speak fluently on a variety of conversational topics as well as to write accurately in well-organized paragraphs. Vocabulary, including idioms and phrasal verbs, and grammar structures are two of the major foci of the class. The results of this study affirmed that students consider the Internet a useful tool to supplement in-class instruction. The students deemed it appropriate to learn English through teacher-recommended ESL websites. However, students needed instruction regarding where the sites are and in how to use them. The strategies used by the teachers (constructing a web page with links to recommended sites, instructing students in online navigation, introducing the contents of the selected sites) were helpful and necessary. Satisfaction

with the strategies that the teachers used and the contents of the websites outweighed dissatisfaction due to difficulties accessing and using the assigned websites. Spending too much time and getting disconnected were perceived as the main problems for the students to complete their assignment. Analysis of the data also indicated that this particular group of students is not likely to use ESL websites for their further learning unless they are assigned to do so. These findings were confirmed by a follow-up study a year later. The results showed that students do not currently access ESL websites on their own because they believe they do not have time and there are more convenient media that they can use to learn English.

Kavaliauskiene and Užpaliene (2003), who are two professors from the University of Lithuania, addressed the ongoing analysis of learners' perceptions of needs, wants and lacks on a tertiary level and its role in learning English. They posit that learners have their own, internal needs in addition to external demands imposed by teaching institutions, which complicates the issue of interrelated needs, wants and lacks. Teachers are not authorized to prolong or shorten scheduled courses, but they can foster students' language skills by employing more effective techniques and encouraging learners to plan their learning by setting realistic aims. For successful learning, the incorporation of learners' future needs, or what is known as "real world" needs, the development of learner ability to transfer language knowledge to novel situations and the usage of acquired skills in real life communication are considered to be vital parts of the curriculum. They advocated the ongoing needs analysis as a valuable tool to anticipate the learners' future demands. The thorough analysis of ongoing learners' needs, wants and lacks allows teachers to adjust the curriculum to students' changing demands by



providing meaningful experience with language and placing emphasis on tasks and activities that will benefit learning. Needs analysis is influenced by the institutional constraints and the students' perceptions of what is being expected of them. The recognition that learners have their own, internal needs (e.g. to use a language in a specific situation) in addition to external demands imposed by teaching institutions (e.g. students must study language for a limited period and pass exams) complicates the issue of interrelated needs, wants and lacks. Teachers are not authorized to prolong or shorten the scheduled courses, but they can foster students' language skills by employing more effective (for an individual student) techniques and encouraging learners to plan their learning by setting realistic aims. A current implication for successful learning and teaching requires the incorporation of learners' future needs, or what is known as 'real world' needs, the development of learner ability to transfer language knowledge to novel situations and the usage of acquired skills in real life communication. The ongoing analysis was a valuable tool to anticipate these future demands and adjust teaching to cater to them.

Swierzbin et al. (2000) presented the findings of an investigation of the perceptions, beliefs, and expectations of English as a Second Language (ESL) educators as they worked toward including students with limited English proficiency (LEP) in Minnesota's High Standards. At that time, more and more states were implementing standards-based educational systems in which all students, including LEP students, were expected to participate. Standards implementation was a challenging process for all educators and particularly for those who worked with linguistically and culturally diverse student populations. This study is one of the first in Minnesota to look at emerging

efforts toward standards-based reform for LEP students. It is part of the Minnesota Assessment Project, a four-year, federally funded effort to promote and evaluate the participation of students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities in Minnesota's Graduation Standards.

Murphey (1995) studied the influence of identity and beliefs in language learning. He gave an example of a Japanese girl who believed that in order to learn English you have to pretend you are an English speaker. Interestingly, the girl, who is now an English teacher, is trying to teach her students how to become "English hungry." He noticed that we may get students to behave a certain way in a classroom and yet often they have not generalized the behavior into a capability, a skill, which is readily available elsewhere. In addition, he observed also that students could acquire skills at a certain level, yet if they don't have the supporting beliefs that the skills are worthwhile, or that speaking English is good, the skills probably won't be well developed and generalized to other behaviors in other contexts.

The studies mentioned above demonstrate that beliefs play a vital role in learning a language. Specifically, learning approaches, strategies, experiences and achievements could be considered. Cotterall (1999) stated that a growing body of evidence supports this previous inference. Flavell (1979) reported that communicating information orally, understanding written and spoken information, and writing are all related to one's beliefs. Horwitz (1999) commented that a learner's beliefs have the potential to influence both their experiences and actions as language learners. When discussing "learner strategies," Rubin (1987) pointed out that some students are more successful in second and foreign

language learning because of their cognitive and metacognitive behaviors, the application of which is determined by their language learning beliefs.

For the benefits of the readers, the researcher has created a summary of the results of the preceding studies in Table 1.

Table 1

*Major Findings of Previous Studies About Beliefs and Language Learning*

<i>Authors</i>	<i>Setting</i>	<i>Emphasis</i>	<i>Major findings</i>
Li (2003)	New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ learning beliefs</li> <li>▪ learning strategies</li> </ul>	The researcher was able to understand the students' learning difficulties and learning behaviors better in order to improve his teaching.
Tanaka (2003)	New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ language beliefs</li> <li>▪ learning strategies</li> <li>▪ improvement in English proficiency</li> </ul>	The researcher found out that his students' language learning beliefs changed as a result of their study experience in New Zealand for 12 weeks.
Welsh (2003)	New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ believes about perceptions</li> <li>▪ beliefs about homestay</li> </ul>	The researcher offered homestay providers substantial information about the perceptions of international students with regards to how

Table 1 (continued). *Major Findings of Previous Studies About Beliefs and Language Learning*

			homestay helps them improve the proficiency in English.
Goto and Bousquet (2003)	California	▪ learning climates	The researchers discovered that learning climates relate to students' reading performance. They also found out students' perceptions toward bilingualism.
Jiang and Fu (2003)	China	▪ beliefs about motivation ▪ beliefs about strategy use	The researchers found out that compensation and metacognitive strategies are used more frequently than social strategies. The findings of this study provided some implications for teaching English and learning in China.
Kavaliauskiene and Užpaliene (2003)	Lithuania	▪ students' perceptions of needs and lacks	The researchers were able help teachers adjust the curriculum to satisfy the students' changing demands by providing meaningful experience

Table 1 (continued). *Major Findings of Previous Studies About Beliefs and Language Learning*

Chuan Kung and Whei Chuo (2002)	Taiwan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ beliefs about the role of Web sites as a means to supplement in-class instruction</li> </ul>	<p>with language.</p> <p>The results showed that students did not access ESL Web sites on their own. They believed that there were more convenient media to help them learn English.</p>
Stepp-Greany (2002)	Florida	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ perceptions of the role and importance of the instructor in technology-enhanced language learning</li> </ul>	<p>The researcher found out that students attributed an important role to instructors and perceived that cultural knowledge, listening, reading, and independent learning skills improved.</p>
Gahin and Myhill (2001)	Egypt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ teacher's beliefs about the communicative language approach</li> </ul>	<p>The researcher found out valuable information regarding the teachers' attitudes toward the communicative language approach and about the constraints that act against a successful application of this approach in the</p>

Table 1 (continued). *Major Findings of Previous Studies About Beliefs and Language Learning*

			Egyptian EFL context.
Swierzbina et al. (2000)	Minnesota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ teachers' perceptions, beliefs and expectations</li> </ul>	This study was an effort to promote and evaluate the participation of students with limited English proficiency and disabilities in Minnesota's Graduation Standards.
Fan (1999)	Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ beliefs about learning English</li> </ul>	The researcher provided valuable information to Hong Kong teachers in improving their teaching.
Wang (1996)	China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ beliefs about language learning</li> <li>▪ belief about learning strategies</li> </ul>	The researcher found out that students have positive and negative beliefs about learning a foreign language, and that the more successful students seemed to hold positive beliefs about learning English.
Murphey (1995)	Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ self-identity and beliefs in language learning</li> </ul>	The researcher found out that students might behave a certain way in the classroom and often

Table 1 (continued). *Major Findings of Previous Studies About Beliefs and Language Learning*

			they have not generalized the behavior into skill.
Detaramani and Chan Shuk-im (1994)	Hong Kong	▪ beliefs about students' learning needs	The researchers found out information about the interests of students, their expectations, their motivations, and language needs.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Research Design*

The researcher used action research as his core methodology. Action research is considered a powerful tool for teachers as they investigate, assess, and refine their teaching. Thus, it represents an appropriate method to address the research questions. It does not, however, have to be a burdensome process that overwhelms an already overstretched teacher (Hopkins, 1996). Action research can be a simple endeavor. The goal of this research design was to identify problems in the classroom and teaching methodology through reflections. In turn, these reflections lead to new writing and the development of new strategies and solutions to bring into the classroom. It is worth mentioning that the framework of the present study was qualitative in which outcomes were emergent. It means that it was an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 1994). The researcher interacted with the participants of the study. In short, he tried to minimize the distance between him and those being researched (his students).

#### *Action Plan*

Essentially, the researcher wanted to obtain information about the beliefs of a group of college students concerning the teaching-learning process and what occurs in the English language classroom – particularly in the INGL 3102 course – by means of action research. He had conversations with his students regarding the topic of this investigation,



asked them to write a reflexive diary and observed them at all times. In addition, he wrote in his reflexive diary. As a result, he attempted to answer his research questions:

1. What are the beliefs of a group of college students regarding the teaching-learning process of the English language?
2. What are the implications of their beliefs in their performance in the teaching-learning process of the English language?
3. What do they suggest to improve the teaching-learning experiences in the INGL 3102 course?

The context of this study was a Basic English classroom at the college level. The participants were freshmen students attending a public university located in the northern part of Puerto Rico. The researcher used triangulation (conversations, reflexive diaries and participant observation) as his strategies of data collection and as a way to neutralize any bias inherent in a particular data source. His sources of data collection are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Sources of Data Collection*

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Data Source 1</i>	<i>Data Source 2</i>	<i>Data Source 3</i>
What are the beliefs of a group of college students regarding the teaching-learning process of the English language?	Conversations	Reflexive Diary	Participant Observation
What are the implications of their beliefs in their performance in the teaching-learning process of the English language?		Reflexive Diary	Participant Observation
What do they suggest to improve the teaching-learning experiences in the INGL 3102 course?	Conversations	Reflexive Diary	Participant Observation

*Setting and Participants*

The present study was conducted during the second semester of the 2003-2004 academic year in UPR-Arecibo, which is a branch of the UPR system and has a population of 4,200 students. Most of the students of UPR-Arecibo live in towns of the north-central region of Puerto Rico. Those students can enroll in the following academic programs: Animal Health, Business Administration, Communications, Computer

Sciences, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, Education, Humanities, Industrial Psychology, Nursing, or Office Systems. The population pertinent to this study is composed of approximately 800 students of UPR-Arecibo who registered in INGL course during the second semester of the 2003-2004 academic year. These students were enrolled in approximately 25 sections of the INGL 3102 course. A natural group of 28 students from one of the aforementioned sections were the participants of the study. The course was offered to students who scored less than 580 points in the English achievement section of the College Entrance Examination Board and approved the INGL 3101. This course followed a process approach to teach students to write essays using modes such as description, narration, process analysis, cause-and-effect, and/or comparison/contrast. Additionally, INGL 3102 helps students to develop their reading skills by teaching them to read and analyze essays composed using the aforementioned approaches. All regular classrooms at UPR-Arecibo are equipped with a chalkboard, a desk for the professor, and chairs for the students. They also have air conditioning systems and can accommodate a maximum of 28 students although the number of students per classroom may vary.

#### *Strategies of Data Collection*

To comply with current research strategies, the researcher used various strategies of data collection. Specifically, he used conversations, reflexive diaries and participant observation. He followed the schedule, topics, activities and strategies to collect data described in Table 3. By doing so, he was able to answer his research questions.

Table 3

*Course of Action*

<i>Weeks 1-4</i>	<i>Weeks 5-7</i>	<i>Weeks 8-11</i>
First Stage	Second Stage	Third Stage
<i>Getting Acquainted with Students</i>	<i>Expanding Paragraphs into Essays</i>	<i>Definition Essay</i>
Activities:	Activities:	Activities:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Meeting the students</li> <li>▪ Collecting personal information</li> <li>▪ Discussing the syllabus and course requirements</li> <li>▪ Explaining the purpose of the study</li> <li>▪ Introducing the Essay (Chapter 12)</li> <li>▪ Revising Essays (Chapter 13)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introduction (hook, engaging support sentences and thesis statement)</li> <li>▪ Body Paragraphs (topic sentence with connector)</li> <li>▪ Overall Development (examples, details explanations, etc.)</li> <li>▪ Conclusion (connector, summary and expanded thought)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Defining Formally</li> <li>▪ Creating Extended Definitions</li> <li>▪ Models for Definition Essays</li> <li>▪ Discovering Ideas</li> <li>▪ Organizing Ideas</li> <li>▪ Drafting</li> <li>▪ Revising and Editing</li> </ul>
Strategies of data collect:	Strategies of data collection:	Strategies of data collection:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conversations</li> <li>▪ Reflexive Diaries</li> <li>▪ Participant observation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reflexive diaries</li> <li>▪ Participant observation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Conversations</li> <li>▪ Reflexive journals</li> <li>▪ Participant observation</li> </ul>
<i>Research Question #1</i>	<i>Research Question #2</i>	<i>Research Question #3</i>
What are the beliefs of a group of college students regarding the teaching-learning process of the	What are the implications of their beliefs in their performance in the teaching-learning process of the	What do they suggest to improve the teaching-learning experiences in the INGL 3102 course?

Table 3 (continued). *Course of Action*

English language?

English language?

In keeping with Mills (2000), it is generally accepted in action research circles that researchers should rely on multiple sources of information (data). The data collection process in the present study took place by means of triangulation. Thus, the strength of qualitative research depended on its triangulation, collecting information in many ways rather than relying solely on one (Wolcott, 1988). By doing so, the researcher tried to neutralize any bias inherent in particular data sources, methods and in the researcher himself by using different data collection strategies.

As the researcher usually does at the beginning of every semester, he got acquainted with the students during the first days of class. He collected the students' personal information (i.e., name, student number, address, phone number, e-mail address, socio-demographic information, etc.) and distributed the syllabus of the INGL 3102 course, which is prepared and provided by the course coordinator in the English Department at UPR-Arecibo. The syllabus was thoroughly discussed in order for the students to know what the course was about. In addition, the researcher explained to the students the purpose of the study. He made clear that the students' participation in the research was strictly voluntary and that it would not influence, in any way, the grade they obtain in the class at the end of the semester. The first topics discussed in class were Introducing the Essay (Chapter 12) and Revising Essay (Chapter 13). As the discussion of the aforementioned topics took place, the researcher applied the four steps of action research suggested by Gay (1996), which are problem or topic identification, data gathering, decision making, and resulting action. These four steps lead to insights about Research Question #1 using conversations and participant observation throughout the

research process. The topics that guided the conversations were about their beliefs about learning English in grade school, such as:

1. what do they think about the way English is taught in schools,
2. what do they think about the strategies used by their English teachers from K-12, and
3. what do they think about the instructional materials they had.

These conversations took place in the classroom while the students worked in groups and/or at the end of the class. In the meantime, the researcher observed the students' nonverbal language (by means of participant observation) as they engaged in the conversations about the issues at hand during the semester.

The Second Stage began once the first exam was given. At this stage, the students should have begun to process the learning involved in the parts of the essay and writing strategies for the development of essays. As they learned about the introduction, body and conclusion, the researcher gave them a notebook that would be used as reflexive diaries in which they would write the implications of their beliefs about their performance in the teaching-learning process of the English language. The topics to be used in the diaries included:

1. what recommendations would they offer in order to facilitate the writing of essays,
2. what do they suggest to improve the teaching of writing,
3. how do they compare the way they are supposed to write at the college level to the way they used to write in grade school, and
4. how prepared do they think they are to write in English at the college level.

In addition, the researcher also kept a reflexive diary in order to write from his standpoint about his beliefs on the subject of the students' performance about the teaching-learning process of the English language. Furthermore, the researcher collected data by means of participant observation. In other words, he was attempting to visualize the classroom routine in new ways. He tried to enlighten new perspectives by approaching the scene as if he were an outsider. In other words, the researcher himself was the main research tool. He set a sort of radar, scanning constantly for whatever it was that his students were doing in the classroom to keep his class operating smoothly and to keep track of every single classroom situation that would provide substantial information for the study.

By the time the researcher reached the Third Stage, the students had begun to work with the Definition essay. This type of essay requires the knowledge of the following topics: Defining Formally, Creating Extended Definitions, Models for Definition Essays. The writing process will integrate strategies used for learning how to write essays as mentioned on Table 2 of this document, which includes Discovering Ideas, Organizing Ideas, Drafting, Revising and Editing. The researcher was constantly gathering data by means of conversations, reflexive diaries and participant observation. The topics to enrich the aforementioned data were the following:

1. what does it mean for them to learn English in a participatory way,
2. what is their opinion about their experience in the class, and
3. what do they recommend to improve the way the class (INGL 3102) is given.

### *Procedure*

Since the first day of classes, the researcher started to interact with his students. Before starting to collect data, he established rapport with the participants in order to know them and be able to determine which data collection strategy is more appropriate for each student. Early in the semester, the researcher briefed his students about his research study. Prior to getting any students involved, the researcher asked them to provide their expressed written consent (Appendix B) and that of their parents or tutors (Appendix C) in order to participate in the study. In addition, the researcher took the Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams online course (Appendix D) and submitted the *Formulario de Certificación para la Protección de Seres Humanos en la Investigación* (Appendix E) to the Department of Graduate Studies. After the commencement of the INGL 3102 class, the researcher selected the students that were more willing to express themselves orally in order to use them in the conversations. These conversations took place in the classroom. The researcher recorded the conversations, so that he did not have to spend too much time taking notes. By doing so, he was able to pay close attention the students' nonverbal messages during the conversations. The researcher memorized the topics of the conversations to minimize losing eye contact.

The reflexive diaries were used with students who felt more relaxed expressing their thoughts and ideas in writing. As it was mentioned earlier, the researcher issued the students a notebook that would be used as reflexive diaries. To safeguard them, the researcher kept them in his office and would bring them to class during the period of time in which the reflexive diaries were going to be used for data collection purposes. The



students were asked to write freely about the topic given by the researcher. While the students were writing, the researcher would also write his ideas in his own reflexive diary.

Before the researcher started collecting data by means of conducting an observation as a participant, he selected the site in which the students were going to be observed, which was in the classroom. He observed the participants in this study while they were taking the INGL 3102 class, writing their journals, and participating in the conversations. He kept a record of his observations by writing both descriptive notes (i.e., records of a description of activities and a drawing of a physical setting) and reflective notes (i.e., notes about the process, reflections on activities, and summary conclusions about activities).

#### *Data Analysis Techniques*

A tabulation of the emerging categories from students' conversations and reflexive diaries, and from the researcher's participant observation was tallied using the Tabulation Sheet (Appendix A). This information was transcribed in order to keep an accurate track of the way data were collected and as a way of documenting the gathered information. After interpreting the information obtained from the aforementioned data sources, the researcher organized the data into categories. As a result, he was able to triangulate the information obtained from the conversations, reflexive diaries and participant observations in order to get meaning out of the emerging outcomes of the study. The researcher made a list of the emerging themes and created a concept map to visualize the major connections for categorization purposes.

Based on the collected data, the researcher generated his grounded theory, which is abstract analytical schema of a phenomenon that relates to a particular situation (Creswell, 1998; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). In other words, the researcher himself created his own theory about how students learn English better. Eventually, this theory would help in the improvement of his teaching methodology and the curriculum with regards to the INGL 3102 course in UPR-Arecibo.

#### *Data Interpretation Techniques*

In order to be able to interpret the outcomes obtained from the sources of data collection, the researcher extended the analysis by making questions about the study to determine if the implications that emerged were not taken into account in the study. He also connected the findings with his personal experiences as an ESL educator in Puerto Rico and with the revised literature. He is looking forward to sharing his findings with decision makers at the English Department at UPR-Arecibo in order to improve the way the INGL 3102 is offered. He will use the findings to improve his own teaching practice as well, which is one of the reasons why educators should conduct action research (Bravo, 1998).

## CHAPTER IV

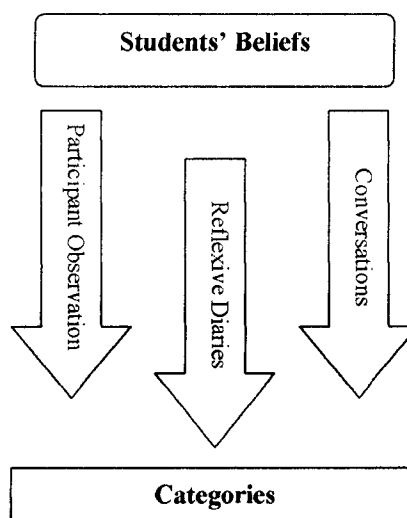
### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and the discussion of the answers to the research questions that guided the study. The purpose of the present study was to obtain information about the beliefs of a group of college students concerning the teaching-learning process and what occurs in the English language classroom – particularly in the INGL 3102 course – through action research. The following research questions lead to results of the study:

1. What are the beliefs of a group of college students regarding the teaching-learning process of the English language?
2. What are the implications of their beliefs in their performance in the teaching-learning process of the English language?
3. What do they suggest to improve the teaching-learning experiences in the INGL 3102 course?

The results of the study were organized and triangulated. The results of the study demonstrated that the students' beliefs provided substantial information that would help in the improvement of the way the class is conducted and can help in the curricular revision of the course. The research questions were answered and interpreted in order to reach general conclusions from each question. The researcher was able to categorize the students' beliefs by means of his sources of data collection. Figure 1 illustrates how the sources were triangulated in order to reach conclusions from the categories that emerged in this study.

Figure 1

*Sources of Data Collection*

The learner is one of the primary sources of the curriculum (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1988; Ortiz, 1997). The results demonstrated that the students' beliefs led to new inquiries. These will guide the researcher to formulate new research questions for future action-research in the area of students' beliefs and language learning. The sources of data collection provided substantial information regarding methodology, instructional materials, self-concept and perceptions. This information is of great importance for the improvement of the researcher teaching methodology and the curriculum of the INGL 3102 course.

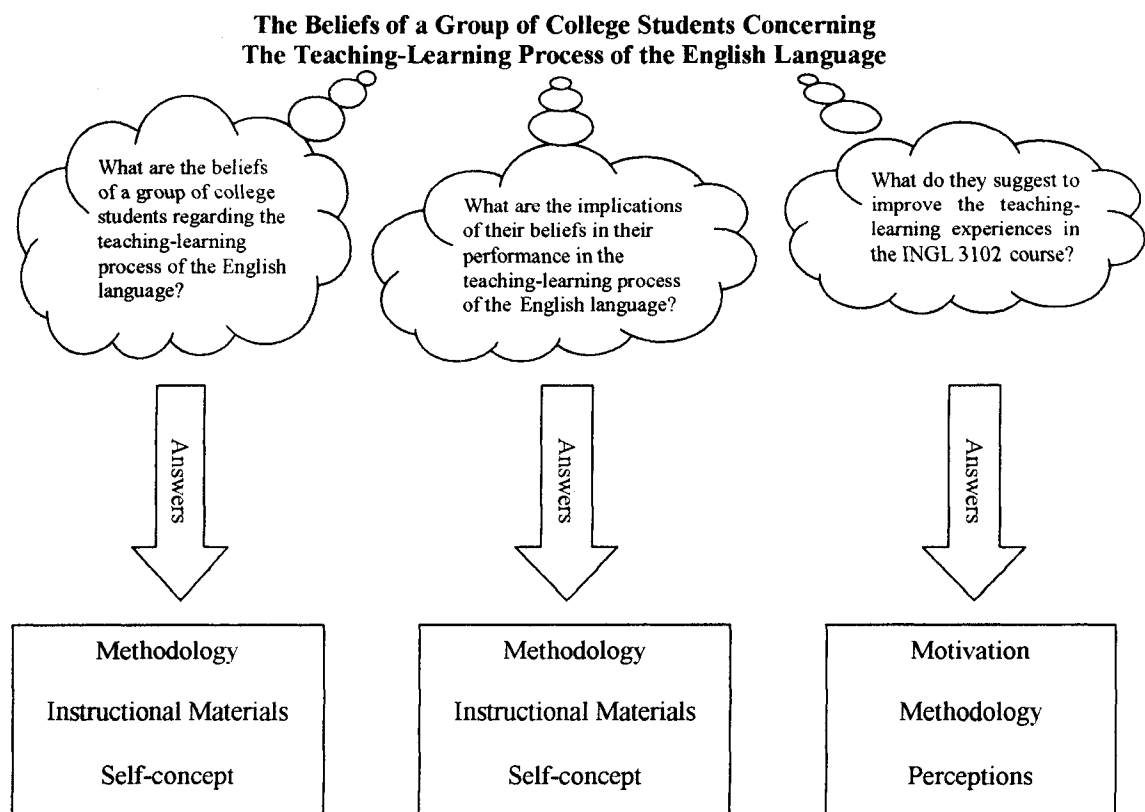
The researcher was able to improve his teaching practice by taking into account the students' beliefs about the teaching-learning process of the English language. These beliefs invited the researcher to monitor the way he teaches the INGL 3102 course in order to satisfy his students' needs and improve the curriculum. He did not have to rely on any external resource to deal with issues that were pertinent to his class. In keeping with Bravo (1998), teachers should conduct research in order to improve their own

practice. That was exactly what the researcher was able to do by means of action-research.

As a way of introducing the reader to the findings and conclusions, the researcher will present the categories that emerged from each research question. The researcher was able to divide the emerged categories in order to facilitate the answering of the research questions. Figure 2 illustrates the categories from each research question.

Figure 2

*Categories*



*Research Question 1***What are the beliefs of a group of college students regarding the teaching-learning process of the English language?**

From the students' comments the researcher was able to create three categories: methodology, instructional materials and self-concept. These categories emerged from what they thought about the way English is taught in public schools, what they thought about the strategies used by their English teachers in grade school, and what they thought about the instructional materials they had. To begin with, it is worth mentioning that the participants provided several interesting answers to the first research question, which is based on the teaching-learning process of the English language prior to enrolling in college. Sometimes, English teachers are unaware about the way they conduct their class. For example, among the most frequent comments was the fact that many of the participants' English teachers spoke Spanish while giving their classes. Some of the students' comments were the following:

*Of all my English teachers, only one of them taught me English as I expected.*

*The others spoke Spanish or a combination of Spanish and English. For days, they would give the class in Spanish.*

*The English teachers gave their classes in Spanish.*

*They [the English teachers] used too much Spanish.*

*Some of the teachers used "Spanglish."*

*My English teachers gave their classes in English and in Spanish.*

*In high school, our English teachers would explain the class in Spanish whenever necessary.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*At the beginning of the conversations, the students looked a little bit distrustful.*

*Apparently, they were nervous, but then they were able to relax.*

*The students' comments reminded me of my middle school students when I was teaching in grade school. They used to tell me that some English teachers would use Spanish in the classroom. They wanted me to do the same.*

*I remember that some of my colleagues in grade school used to tell me that using Spanish was the only option to develop their classes. Otherwise, they would find themselves talking to the walls.*

*An English teacher once told me that he was a "Language teacher." Therefore, he was allowed to use Spanish in his classroom.*

The students themselves consider the use of Spanish in the ESL classroom to be out of place. The researcher agrees with them. Using both English and Spanish in the classroom is an example of code-switching. It is the alternate use of two or more languages in the same utterance or conversation (Grosjean, 1982). It is also known as the human being's ability to change the register of the language he/she uses depending on the social situation (Finocchiaro, 1989). The researcher believes that the excessive use of the native language in an ESL classroom goes against the fundamentals of the teaching of English as a second language. If students do not practice English in class, they are likely to forget what they have learned at that moment (Ausubel, 1968). The English teachers are the ones who set the example in the classroom and promote the use of English among the students in their class. By doing so, they will be able to develop in their students oral

communication skills, so that they can become communicatively competent citizens (Education Department, 1994b; National Institute for Curriculum Development, 2003). The emerged comments concur with the findings of the studies conducted by Li (2003) and Tanaka (2003) in the sense that students' beliefs affect their learning of a second language.

The methodology used by the teacher also plays an important role in the development of a class. The students also expressed some concerns about the non-motivating teaching methodology they received in the English class in school. The following comments reflect the students' stance on the methodology used by their English teachers:

*They [the English teachers] didn't motivate me to speak English.*

*My English teachers didn't motivate me in the class.*

*We had little discussion in class.*

*We just had to read and answer some questions from the board.*

*In high school, we were required to copy questions from the board and answer them.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*When I give my class, I always try to use different approaches, so that my students do not get bored.*

*I think it is important to always keep students involved in the class.*

*I always try to motivate them by including interesting topics in my classes.*



*I always avoid using a "lecture approach." It prevents students from getting involved in class.*

*As the semester goes along, the students tend to get more involved in the class.*

There has been an increasing amount of interest in the interrelationship of motivation and strategy use in the teaching of a second language (Jiang and Fu, 2003). Teachers ought to motivate their students to learn English using varied strategies in order to encourage their students to learn English. Teachers must be committed to new ideas (Eisner, 1994). Not all students are necessarily motivated when they walk into their English classroom. In accordance with Brown (1987) it is easy in second language learning to claim that a learner will be successful with the proper motivation. Motivation is a key to learning. Performers with high motivation generally do better in second language acquisition (Krashen, 1981, 1995). If students are not motivated to learn, they get uninterested in class. They need to have a desire to learn English and a desire to use English to communicate orally and in writing as is stated in the English Program Curriculum Guide (Education Department, 1994b). The emerged comments are in agreement with the findings of the study conducted by Jiang and Fu (2003) and Detaramani and Chan Shuk-in (1994) in the sense that motivation and the strategy used by the teacher play an important role in learning a second language. It is important for teachers to be aware of the Input Hypothesis given that they play an important role in helping students move from stage  $i$  (the current competence) to  $i + 1$ , which means the next level (Krashen, 1995). By promoting the use of English in the classroom, they help students move on in their learning.

The students also expressed that they were uncomfortable with the instructional materials in the English classroom and with the way they were used. These materials are considered an important tool for teachers given that they have an important role in the development of the English class. Some of the responses regarding the instructional materials used in the English class are the following:

*Our textbooks didn't help me learn English. I think they were too childish.*

*We didn't use that many books, but when we did we would be asked to read and answer questions from the board.*

*Some of the books were too old.*

*As far as I remember, I used English books only in high school.*

*Our books were about reading short stories only.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*I always thought that the books I used in school [when I was a middle school English teacher] were not relevant to my students. They used to tell me that they did not like them.*

*Having to leave the textbooks in the classroom was an inconvenience for my students.*

*Unfortunately, a blackboard and a piece of chalk are the best educational resources I have in my classroom.*

*I remember that using videos has always been an effective strategy in my class [at a middle school].*

*I think students didn't take care of the textbooks in school.*

*I think my [college] students like their textbook.*

If instructional materials are supposed to help students in language acquisition, they should supply input that is comprehensible and interesting (Krashen, 1995). Evidently, the most used educational materials the students had in school were the chalkboard and textbooks. These are good educational resources. The problem relied on how these materials were used and on their quality. The students were not pleased with the type of books they had and with the reading of many short stories. They also did not like the excessive use of the chalkboard. Teacher should move away from the traditional “copy-from-the-board” approach. As of the books, their content should be pertinent to the students, so that they get interested in using them. The emerged comments agree with the results of a study conducted by Chuan Kung and Whei Chuo (2002) in the sense that teachers ought to use innovative strategies (e.g., the Internet) to supplement in-class instruction.

It is worth mentioning that some students believe to have learned English through other means other than the classroom. Comments reflecting the alternative means the students had that helped them learn English include the following:

*My father taught me English because he knows how to speak it.*

*I also learned English using the closed captions in my TV. I listened to the correct pronunciation as I read the lines.*

*What I know about English I learned it from watching cable TV and with a girlfriend that I had who only spoke English. She didn't know any Spanish.*

*I used to watch videos at home.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*I think reading magazines, watching cable TV programs, using the dictionary, and listening to music in English helped me learn English.*

*The closed caption on my TV also helped me [learn English].*

*I think cable TV helped me acquire the English language.*

Some students believe that they “learned” English using other means rather than the ones provided in school. English teachers ought to consider the students’ strategies to “learn” English. Probably, English teachers can incorporate into their classes some of these strategies that are appealing to students. For example, the use of cable TV programming could be very useful because of the varied options available. It is important to clarify that in this case, the students acquired the language, which is a process similar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language (Krashen, 1995). This is clearly stated in the Acquisition-Learning Distinction Theory in the sense that acquiring a language is a subconscious process, while learning a language is a conscious process.

In the review of literature, the researcher presented evidence with regards to the students’ self-efficacy. Some students believe that they are skilled in listening and reading, but not in speaking and writing. It has been proven that students’ beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance exercise influence over events that affect their lives is also known as perceived self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). This is very important because these beliefs guide learning. The following qualitative responses elaborate on these points:

*I believe that I am good at listening in English.*

*When someone speaks to me in English I can understand him/her, I am afraid to speak it.*

*I think I can read in English. I can understand spoken English if the person speaks slowly.*

*I understand spoken English.*

*I understand spoken English better if they speak to me slowly.*

*I think I know how to read in English and listen to it.*

*I believe I am good at listening in English rather than at writing.*

*I feel more comfortable when I read in English rather than doing anything else in that language.*

*I feel more comfortable reading in English. If I read slowly, I understand it.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*Considering the resources I had in school, reading appeared to be the only skill that I would teach.*

*I had no audiovisual aids in my classroom, but I would try my best in bringing them to my class. In the end, it was worth the effort because I proved them that they were able to understand spoken English.*

*I think that they were exposed to a lot of reading when they were in school. That is why most of them feel relaxed reading in English.*

*Most of my students, understand my instructions in English.*

It is important that students feel comfortable using the four language skills, not just a few of them. Our education system – at all levels – should provide the means for students to master these skills. The emerged comments harmonize with Bandura (1994) and Pajares (2002) in the sense that people’s beliefs influence their performance and are vital in their success or failure in all endeavors. They are also consistent with Bandura (1993) and Zimmerman et al. (1991) in the sense that self-efficacy is a good predictor of generalized performances. Students with self-confidence and good self-image tend to do better in performing in a second language (Krashen, 1981). These comments also revealed the students’ learning climates. These are defined as the learners’ perceptions of their own abilities and behaviors (Goto and Bousquet, 2003).

Another important aspect that should be taken into account is the students’ beliefs regarding how much English they learned in school. This issue is very important given that students receive English instruction for more than 12 years (Education Department, 1994b; National Institute for Curriculum Development, 2003). In keeping with the researcher’s experience teaching ESL at the college level, students somehow tend to struggle when they are required to perform in English. The aforementioned beliefs were well captured in the following comments:

*Overall, I don't think I know English after studying it for 12 years.*

*I didn't learn a lot of English considering the fact that I studied it for 12 years.*

*I wasted 12 years in the English class in school.*

*After 12 years taking English in school, I expected to have learned more.*

*After 12 years taking English, I only learned the basics.*

*After 12 years, I didn't learn that much [English]. What I learned in school isn't useful for the university because they didn't teach me enough writing. That is what we do here [at the college level]."*

*I learned only the basic in school – verbs, vocabulary words, sentences, etc.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*Some of my students do not seem to have self-confidence to perform at the college level.*

*I think they are either shy or get too nervous.*

*While I was giving the class, some of them [the students] would tell me that they understand what I say in English, but they do not dare to speak English.*

These comments one way or another reflect the results of the 2000 Census in which only 28.1% of Puerto Ricans could speak English "very well," while 71.9% could speak it "less than very well" (Serrano, 2003). These comments also demand a serious analysis of how English is taught in Puerto Rico. If students believe that they are not ready to deal with English at the college level, they are very likely to perform poorly. This requires the English curriculum to be revised at all levels, so that the students' needs are satisfied. Evidently, the students had negative beliefs regarding how much English they learned. The emerged comments concur with the findings of a study conducted by Wang (1996) in the sense that successful learners seemed to hold positive beliefs about learning English whereas more unsuccessful learners appeared to hold misconceptions or negative beliefs. They also concur with the study conducted by Kavaliauskiene and

Užpaliene (2003) in terms that learners have their own needs in addition to external demands imposed by teaching institutions.

In summary, the most frequent comments with regards to the researcher and his students' beliefs regarding the teaching-learning process of the English language were that during their English instruction prior to the one they were receiving at the moment, English teachers:

- should not have spoken Spanish while giving the class,
- used non-motivating teaching methodology, and
- had few instructional materials available,

Besides, they also believed that:

- they learned English by using means other than the ones provided in school,
- they feel that they are skilled in listening and reading, but not on speaking and writing, and
- that they didn't learn enough English in school.



*Research Question 2***What are the implications of their beliefs in their performance in the teaching-learning process of the English language?**

From the students' comments the researcher was able to create three categories: methodology, instructional materials and self-concept. These categories emerged from the recommendations they offered to facilitate the writing of essays, their suggestions to improve the teaching of writing, a comparison between the way they are supposed to write at the college level and the way they used to write in grade school, and how prepared they think they are to write in English at the college level. The participants provided several interesting answers to the second research question, which is based on the implications of their beliefs in their performance in the teaching-learning process of the English language. As it was mentioned earlier, people's beliefs are very important because they guide learning. In addition, in order to determine the influences of curriculum design, attention should be given to how such sources will influence education (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1988). Students are one of those sources.

The researcher wanted to know the students' recommendations to facilitate the writing of essays, which is what the INGL 3102 course is about. These recommendations belong to the categories of methodology and instructional materials. Representative comments in this area are the following:

*We need enough time to write our essays.*

*It would be good if we practice writing an essay in class in order to have a better idea about the writing process.*

*We need enough time to get ideas about the topic and to follow the entire writing process, not just an hour and a half.*

*We should have computers in the classroom with programs like Microsoft Word.*

*I think we ought to have a dictionary handy because not everybody knows English...*

*We should have more group activities and more practice writing essays.*

*I also like the idea of working in pairs. This way we could help one another.*

*Also, the class would be more dynamic and interesting.*

*I suggest the use of computers.*

*Give a lot of practice.*

*I recommend that the first essay be written in groups of 5-6 students, so that everybody contributes with ideas. All professors should let us use the dictionary while we write the essay.*

*We should have a lot of practice in class.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*I encouraged my students to bring their dictionaries to class, but only a few of them would do it.*

*I wish I had computers in my classroom.*

*I think a word processor can help my students write better.*

*I notice that students like working in small groups.*

*While monitoring group work, I saw students explaining what we discussed today to their classmates.*

*I think group work is good for the revising stage of the writing process.*

Decision makers, curriculum planners and English professor ought to consider the students' input while planning and giving the class (Ortiz, 1997). The students are the ones who can tell them if teaching methodology and the instructional materials are effective. As it was mentioned earlier, they are the beneficiaries of the curriculum. When giving exams, teachers usually give achievement tests. It is important that the content of such exams be limited to a particular material covered in class within a particular time frame (Brown, 1987). Learning about the most appropriate methodology and instructional materials is something that can be done at the beginning of the semester and does not take much time. This would help in the selection of adequate teaching techniques and instructional tools that would help satisfy the students' linguistic needs. It is worth mentioning that students favor the use of collaborative work in the classroom. This strategy has proven to be effective in academic settings (Felder and Brent, 1994; Johnson and Johnson, 1999; Morris, 1990; Slavin, 1987). On the other hand, some students stated that they would recommend the use of computers in the classroom. They believed that computer could be a writing tool. The use of computer in the classroom has had great impact in language learning (Simic, 1994; Warshauer, 1996; Warshauer and Healey, 1998; Warshauer and Kern, 2000). For years, researchers have investigated the use of computers in the classroom. Computer assisted instruction improves the teaching-learning process in academic areas (Berner, 1993; Williams et al., 1989). The emerged comments agree with the studies conducted by Stepp-Greany (2002) in the sense that the use of technology is useful in language learning.

Additionally, the students even compared the way they are supposed to write at the college level to the way they used to write in grade school. The comparisons were often reflected in comments such as follows:

*The teachers in my school never explained to me the writing process. Here [in college] I learned about it, and acquired more vocabulary and writing techniques.*

*While I was in school, I wrote just a few essays and they weren't evaluated so rigorously as in college. Our teachers only evaluated our efforts, not our writings. In college, our paragraphs have to be longer than the ones we wrote in school.*

*Now in college, the professors are more specific in the writing process, not just on brainstorming.*

*In college, the professors demand a lot from us and we have to write much more.*

*In college, our professors emphasize writing and that is better.*

*In grade school, the teachers don't worry too much about writing, but in college the professors are worried about it. It is good because it helps us write better.*

*In school, my teachers taught me the meaning of a paragraph and an essay, but they didn't teach me how to write them. How am I supposed to write well? In college, I was explained very well how to write a paragraph. Then, they [the professors] explained me how to write an essay. In school, they expected us to write an essay without teaching us how to write a paragraph.*

*In school, teachers aren't as strict as our professors in college.*

*In college, we write at a higher level. In school, we didn't practice much writing and here we practice it very often.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*While discussing the writing process, some students were impressed by all the steps they had to follow prior to writing an essay.*

*I think the writing process helped them organize their ideas.*

*Having to use the writing process caught them [the students] by surprise. They wanted to write right away.*

*Some students wanted to write their essays using a one shot approach (i.e., write their essays without doing any pre-writing activity, outline, drafts, etc.).*

*I noticed that some of my students had a hard time following basic grammatical rules.*

*I think my students have good ideas for their writing, but they have a hard time expressing them correctly.*

In keeping with the students' comments, there is a great difference between the way in which English teachers and college professors approach the teaching of writing. The former appear to be more flexible in the use of the writing process and allegedly overlook grammar. On the contrary, the latter gives emphasis to the writing process and stress the importance of grammar. The emerged comments agree with the study conducted by Goto and Bousquet (2003) in terms of the effects a learning climate has on learning a second language. Without a doubt, the learning climate while teaching writing in grade school is different than the one at the college level.

As in Research Question 1, the researcher wanted to learn about the students' self-efficacy on the subject of how prepared they believed they were to write in English at the college level. This is an important aspect given that the students are conscious of the fact that they took at least 12 years of English instruction before they were enrolled in college and that they are expected to know English. These beliefs were well captured in the following comments:

*I don't think I am prepared.*

*Due to the poor practice that I have in high school, I think I am not well prepared to write in college.*

*I don't feel I am prepared because they didn't teach me good writing in high school. They only taught me the verbs.*

*I am not well prepared.*

*I don't write correctly in English.*

*I am not well prepared to write in English at the college level.*

*I think I need too much knowledge and practice to write at the level expected in college.*

*I think I still need to learn a bit more about writing because I sometimes get confused with certain words.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*I think my students will need a lot of practice before asking them to write their first essay.*

*I notice that my students have good ideas for their writing, but they do not seem to be able to put them into words.*

*I had to help my students believe they are capable of writing a five-paragraph essay.*

*I think I will have to go back to the basics of sentence writing.*

*They need to believe in themselves.*

Interestingly, many students believed that they were not ready to write at the college level even though the four language skills are included in the K-12 curriculum. This is an interesting aspect that should be further analyzed because usually the local education system and the universities rely on the results standardized tests to determine the students' proficiency in writing in English, not on qualitative responses provided by the students. The emerged comments match the findings of studies conducted by Bandura (1994) and Pajares (2002) in the sense that people's beliefs influence their performance and are vital in their success or failure in all activities. They also correspond to Bandura (1993) and Zimmerman et al. (1991) in the sense that self-efficacy is a good predictor of generalized performances.

In summary, the researcher and the students' most frequent comments concerning the implications of their beliefs in their performance in the teaching-learning process of the English language were that the professor should:

- give enough time for the writing process,
- give more practice on the writing process,
- use collaborative work,
- use computers, and

- let them use dictionaries.

In addition, the students seem to appreciate and believe that the professors at the college level are stricter and demand a lot of quality and organization during the writing process. Also, most students believe that they are not prepared to write at the college level and that they need a lot of practice in order to improve.



*Research Question 3*

**What do they suggest to improve the teaching-learning experiences in the INGL 3102 course?**

From the students' comments, the researcher was able to create three categories: motivation, methodology and perceptions. These categories emerged from what it meant for them to learn English in a participatory way, their opinion about their experience in the class, and their recommendations to improve the way the class (INGL 3102) is given. The students expressed their satisfaction with the participatory approach used by the professor. This feeling was well captured in the following comments:

*We were given the opportunity to collaborate in the way the class was developed.*

*The ideas I wanted to share were taken in consideration.*

*In this class, we were given the opportunity to express ourselves and to be listened.*

*We were able to express our opinions freely.*

*It was good that the professor took our opinions into consideration when he was giving the class.*

*It was good because our suggestions were considered to improve the class.*

*It motivated me to participate in class.*

*I was able to contribute to the class.*

*It was good because our opinions counted. I was surprised when the professor asked us our suggestions.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*My students like the idea of being involved in the preparation of the class although some of them didn't expect it.*

*They were very enthusiastic about letting me know their ideas for the class.*

*I think it helped them feel more relax in class.*

*I believe this approach helped pave the way for more participation in class.*

*In general, most of my students' suggestions made a lot of sense.*

*This helped me plan my class with the students' perspective in mind.*

*I have noticed that students are more willing to ask questions in class.*

The participatory approach used by the professor helped the students get more involved in the class given that they were able to express their ideas freely. By no means, this means that the researcher is implying that the class should be offered the way the students determine. The professor will always have the last say in terms of how the class will be conducted. The difference is that the students are able to contribute to the development of the course given that they can provide substantial information about the curriculum (Ortiz, 1997). That is why they felt motivated in the class because they were active participants of the teaching-learning process. Students tend to get bored with repetition (Brown, 1987). If they are exposed to the same methodology in every level, then they would not feel motivated to get involved in the teaching-learning process. The emerged comments harmonize with the study conducted by Gahin and Myhill (2001) in which teachers' beliefs toward the communicative language approach in language teaching and learning were discussed. In the present study, the researcher's beliefs about the input students could provide to the enhancement of the INGL 3102 course was also illustrated.

In addition, the students were able to provide their opinions about their experience in the class, which reflected the effectiveness of the methodology used by the professor.

Relevant comments included the following:

*The professor provided time to work in groups.*

*I was able to learn in a cooperative manner.*

*I liked my experience in the class because it wasn't like in one of those classes in which the professor talks and talks and students don't participate.*

*It was good because one could work in groups and developed main ideas.*

*I was a very good experience because I was able to share my knowledge and way of thinking with other classmates to be able to do a good job and write the essays.*

*It was good because along with other classmates, I was able to communicate in English.*

*It was a very enriching experience.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*I notice that my students got involved in the class.*

*I think the best approach for this group is using group work.*

*I was able to implement good ideas from my students.*

*I have become aware that my class flows smoothly.*

*Since the methodology was used knowing how the group would learn better, planning the class has become an easy task.*

*I save a lot of time planning my class.*

Teaching methods are the applications of theoretical findings and positions (Brown, 1987). The methodology used by the professor had a positive effect on the students. They enjoyed taking the class and perceived that they learned mainly because they liked the way the class was offered and because of the collaborative activities in which they were involved throughout the course. These are good alternatives to the traditional conference approach used at the college level. The emerged comments harmonize with the study conducted Chuan Kung and Whei Cuhuo (2002) in the sense that students were pleased with the way the researcher conducted his class.

Regardless of the students' positive experience taking the class, the researcher wanted to learn about their recommendations for the improvement of the class. By doing so, he would obtain substantial information that would be available for decision makers at the English Department in UPR-Arecibo in order to evaluate the INGL 3102 curriculum and for himself as a means to improve his teaching practice. The following comments reflect their perceptions of what according to the students is needed for the improvement of the way the class is offered:

*We should practice more writing in the classroom.*

*Students should have more time to work on their essays.*

*Provide more activities for students.*

*Maybe we should analyze more essays. This is a way of practicing how to identify the parts of the essay.*

*We need more practice of writing and tutoring.*

The researcher's comments from his reflexive diary and observations were the following:

*I came to the conclusion that practice is essential in writing an essay.*

*I think I should ask my students to write only when they are ready to do so.*

*Bringing them examples of essays helped them visualize the parts of the essay.*

*Writing exams cannot be given in just one day. They [the students] need more time, so that they can follow the whole writing process.*

*Letting my students practice how to write a good thesis statement helped them write their essays.*

Decision makers and educators should be open to receiving and analyzing students' suggestions. The students' input should be considered when revising the curriculum (Ortiz, 1997). The students are the ones who are expected to benefit from it. Since the groups of students who are taking a class are different from one to another, the inquiring process should be followed in the future in order to get to know the beliefs of the students who will take this course (INGL 3102) in the future. The emerged comments agree with the findings of the study conducted by Fan (1999) in the sense that they provide valuable information to teachers in improving their teaching. The students' comments can help the researcher greatly in the way he teaches writing.

In summary, the researcher and the students' most frequent comments relating to the students' suggestions to improve the teaching-learning experiences in the INGL 3102 course were that they:

- felt motivated in the class because they were active participants of the teaching learning-process,
- perceived that they learned mainly because of the collaborative activities, and
- would like more practice in class

## CHAPTER V

### IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The intention of this study was to obtain information about the beliefs of a group of college students with reference to the teaching-learning process and what takes place in the English language classroom – particularly in the INGL 3102 course – through action research. By way of this study, the researcher also wanted to know the students' suggestions to enhance both the way the INGL 3102 course is given and the English curriculum at UPR-Arecibo, and the implications of their beliefs in their performance in the teaching-learning process of the English language in order to revise his teaching methodology in a way that would benefit his teaching methodology and his students' learning. Once the information is obtained, it will be used to improve the way the course is taught and at the same time to provide curricular changes at the college level freshmen courses (mainly the INGL 3102 course) and to provide feedback to decision makers at the English Department in UPR-Arecibo.

#### *Theoretical Implications*

Among the theoretical implications, the findings of this study confirmed that students' beliefs have an important role in the teaching-learning process of the English language. English teachers should get to know them in order to adjust their teaching methodology. It is well known that each group of students in a classroom has unique characteristics that might not necessarily be the same in other groups. Therefore, English teachers should learn about their students' beliefs and approach each group differently.

In addition, the findings of this study demonstrate that students have a desire to learn English and a desire to use English to communicate orally and in writing as stated

in the English Program Curriculum Guide (Education Department, 1991). However, apparently English teachers did not take advantage of such desires. Instead of using them to invigorate their classes, many of them end up using non-motivating methodology in the classroom that eventually leads students to become uninterested and lag behind the levels expected in an English class at the college level. In the case of the present study, the students felt motivated in class because they were active participants of the teaching-learning process. In keeping with Intrator (2004), nothing deflates a teacher more than bored students. English teachers need to reflect on their teaching methodology, so that they can get their students energized about learning. English classrooms should be active settings that delight minds, not boring places that reduce the desire to learn.

In addition, to a certain extent some students indicated that they “learned” English using alternative means other than the ones used in school, which is similar to the way children develop ability in their first language (Krashen, 1995). It is important that they develop their abilities in the four language skills, not in a couple of them as has been discovered in this study. The main goal should be to help students become balanced bilinguals, and it involves using the four language skills in both languages. Probably, that is why many students in the present study expressed that they had not learned enough English in school and that they were not ready for the college level. Students have to change from behaving as passive recipients of the knowledge offered by the teacher to become active learners who can take responsibility for and manage their own learning (Black et al., 2004).

Interestingly, many students believe that the English professors at the college level are stricter than the English teachers they had in school and that they demand a lot

of quality and organization during the writing process. The approach to writing both in school and in college ought to be harmonized in such a way that students further develop their writing skills when they get to college. At this level, English professors should not be teaching how to write grammatically correct sentences. Instead, they should be guiding students in expressing their ideas without restraint.

### *Methodological Implications*

The methodological implications of this study evidenced the usefulness of action research for a better understanding of the teaching-learning process. By using a qualitative approach, the researcher was able to become more conscious of the value of action research given that he was able to obtain substantial information from his own sources of information (participant observation, reflexive diary and conversations). As a result, he is going to incorporate his findings and the use of these sources to his teaching practice. This experience will help him mature as an educator.

Another methodological implication of this study was that action research helped the researcher obtain firsthand information with regards to the student's beliefs concerning the teaching-language process. It represented a major contribution to ESL research in Puerto Rico since the researcher was able to get all the information on his own without the need of external resources. This way, he can improve his teaching methodology by himself. For example, the researcher confirmed that it is important to follow one of the fundamentals of ESL instruction: avoid using the native language in class. In other words, English teachers need to avoid using the alternate use of two languages (both the target language and the native language) in the same utterance (Grosjean, 1982). By avoiding this practice, they will set the example in the classroom



and students will be encouraged to practice the target language. This is a great technique to help students become communicatively competent citizens as suggested by the Education Department (1994) and the National Institute for Curriculum Development (2003).

Moreover, English teachers need to become aware of their use of time in class. For example, research has shown that, after asking a question, many teachers wait less than one second and then, if no answer is forthcoming, ask another question or answer the question themselves (Budd Rowe, 1974). It is important that teachers allow longer time wait time in the English class. This way, they can provide enough time and more practice for the writing process. They should focus on enhancing students' learning by considering the use of collaborative learning, computers and dictionaries. The latter is an essential tool that ought to be handy in every ESL classroom. It is important to bear in mind the effects a learning climate has on learning a second language (Goto and Bousquet, 2003).

#### *Curricular Implications*

The curricular implications included students' beliefs about the teaching materials used in the English class. The need to consider the input of students when designing the development of an English class, as suggested by Ortiz (1997), is crucial when deciding upon which instructional materials are more appropriate for a particular group of students. Evidently, these days a blackboard, a piece of chalk, and a textbook might not be enough to get students involved in the English class. Teachers ought to get feedback from their students with regards to the materials that can facilitate the teaching-learning process of the English language. As has been noticed in the present study, students

provide substantial input that can help greatly in developing or revising a curriculum. Students tend to tune in when they feel they are in a safe place to share their ideas (Intrator, 2004). This would help to engage students and yield meaningful, lasting learning than traditional textbook instruction. That is why it is essential to consider the use of modern technology (computers, the Internet, etc.) in the English classroom as several students suggested in the present study. New technologies can make learning more interactive, engaging, collaborative, and linked to the world outside the classroom (Wiske, 2004). Through technology, students can approach a topic from more entry points than traditional textbooks. Just learning to read and write in English is not enough. Students must also be able to use English to communicate with networked, hyperlinked technologies.

Another curricular implication pointed to the use of curricular revisions as a means to improve the INGL 3102 course at the English Department in UPR-Arecibo. This implication suggested that the course should provide for teaching strategies that provide for enough practice of the writing process. This can help students produce in such a way that they can develop a perception of themselves as academically competent learners. In addition, the process of curriculum revision would help in making sure students learn the four language skills as well. The researcher firmly believes that poor outcomes are attributable in part to poor strategies.

### *Recommendations*

As a result of the students' beliefs about the teaching-learning process of the English language and those of the researcher as well, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Conduct future action research studies so that English educators can share their findings with their colleagues, decision makers and policy makers.
2. Encourage English educators to refrain from code-switching in the ESL classroom in order to make certain that students are exposed to the target language during the whole period of the class.
3. Supervisors and administrators should make sure they evaluate classroom instruction as a way to provide feedback to English educators in terms of their teaching methodology.
4. Administrators ought to provide the means for English educators to incorporate the use of modern technology (e.g., the Internet) and innovative strategies (e.g., satellite TV programs) in the ESL classroom.
5. Schools and colleges must make sure they promote the teaching-learning process of the four language skills.
6. The English curriculum at the Education Department and at the college level should be aligned in order to facilitate the teaching-learning process.
7. Dictionaries should be available in the English classroom.
8. English educators must make sure they manage wait time wisely in class, so that they provide enough time for students to work on the writing process.
9. English educators should receive in-service training on the use of collaborative work as a teaching strategy.
10. Students should be active participants in the teaching-learning process of the English language.

11. English educators should consider using cooperative learning, peer review and peer editing as strategies to be used in the teaching of writing.

### *Grounded Theory*

By means of this study, the researcher has realized why action research is acknowledged worldwide as a powerful form of learning (McNiff, 2004). Teachers can benefit from it greatly without the needs of external sources. The researcher believes that action research is more applicable than conventional research methods in situations requiring responsiveness, flexibility and action. In other words, it helps him address classroom issues in a more direct way. In addition, action research may perhaps be more relevant for English educators than conventional research. The best reason for choosing this type of methodology for this study is that it fits the research setting, and suits the researcher's preferences and his career aspirations. The researcher has also realized that he is only at the initial stage of learning from his students with regards to his remaining teaching years. Much of what he learned in the past or emulated from his own student days must be deconstructed and reconstructed. He is looking forward to release himself as much as possible from the constraints imposed on him by people's expectations of his teaching (McNiff, 1988). He will try to appreciate his teaching practice as part of a living educational theory generated from his own critical enquiry (Whitehead, 1993). This study will help the researcher to further conduct more action research in order to improve his teaching. As a teacher-researcher, he can create his own knowledge through a combining practice, personal creativity, intuition, theoretical frameworks, and critical judgment in various degrees at different times. This would help to form communities of students, parents, teachers, and teacher-researchers, which provides the life-situations in

which he can create his own knowledge and make every effort to identify and put into practice his own educational standards.

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## Appendix A

<b>Tabulation Sheet</b>		
<b>Date</b>	<b>Observation</b>	<b>Comments</b>

## Hoja de Consentimiento Informado

Las Creencias de un Grupo de Estudiantes Universitarios con Relación al  
Proceso de Enseñanza-Aprendizaje del Idioma Inglés  
(M. Garcés, 2004)

Yo \_\_\_\_\_, padre, madre o tutor (ra) legal de \_\_\_\_\_, le autorizo a participar en el estudio titulado *Las Creencias de un Grupo de Estudiantes Universitarios con Relación al Proceso de Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés*. Se me ha informado que el propósito de este estudio obtener información acerca de las mencionadas creencias a través de la estrategia de investigación en acción para ayudar al investigador a ajustar su metodología educativa y ajustar, de ser necesario, el currículo del curso Inglés Básico II (INGL 3102).

Me consta que la participación de mi hijo (a) o encargado (a) será de carácter confidencial y voluntario. Por lo tanto se puede retirar del estudio en que el momento que así lo desee sin penalidad alguna y sin que se afecte su rendimiento académico en el curso INGL 3102 o en algún otro curso en la UPR-Arecibo. La participación del estudiante no conlleva riesgos físicos, psicológicos o de otra índole ni tampoco habrá beneficio marginal alguno. No será necesario divulgar su nombre ni su número de estudiante. En caso de que se utilicen comentarios hechos por los participantes, no se indicará la identidad del estudiante.

En algunos momentos durante el estudio será necesario el uso de una grabadora, de un diario reflexivo y de la observación participativa por parte del investigador para recopilar información de parte de los estudiantes que participarán en el estudio. Todas estas estrategias serán utilizadas durante el desarrollo del curso sin que se afecte el mismo. Estoy de acuerdo en que se utilicen los hallazgos para que estos sean utilizados por la comunidad académica con el propósito de fomentar más investigación-acción en la sala de clases que conduzcan a mejorar la metodología educativa y el currículo del curso INGL 3102.

El estudio lo dirige el Prof. Mateo Garcés y el mismo es parte de su disertación doctoral en Currículo y Enseñanza en Inglés en la Escuela Graduada de la Facultad de Educación en la Universidad de Puerto Rico en Río Piedras. Puedo comunicarme con el Prof. Garcés al teléfono 787-815-0000 ext. 3813 en el Departamento de Inglés de la UPR-Arecibo o al correo electrónico profgarcés@yahoo.com para aclarar cualquier duda o preocupación.

He leído cuidadosamente el contenido de esta hoja de consentimiento informado y mi firma en este documento certifica que mi hijo (a) o encargado (a) participe en el estudio *Las Creencias de un Grupo de Estudiantes Universitarios con Relación al Proceso de Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés* a cargo del Prof. Mateo Garcés como requisito de su tesis doctoral.

Firma \_\_\_\_\_

Firma del estudiante \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

Nota: Favor de traer esta hoja de consentimiento informado debidamente firmada.



## Hoja de Asentimiento Informado

Las Creencias de un Grupo de Estudiantes Universitarios con Relación al  
Proceso de Enseñanza-Aprendizaje del Idioma Inglés  
(M. Garcés, 2004)

Yo \_\_\_\_\_, estudiante de la UPR-Arecibo estoy de acuerdo en participar en el estudio titulado *Las Creencias de un Grupo de Estudiantes Universitarios con Relación al Proceso de Enseñanza del Idioma Inglés*. Se me ha informado que el propósito de este estudio obtener información acerca de las mencionadas creencias a través de la estrategia de investigación en acción para ayudar al investigador a ajustar su metodología educativa y ajustar, de ser necesario, el currículo del curso Inglés Básico II (INGL 3102). Además, el mismo forma parte de la disertación doctoral del Prof. Mateo Garcés.

Me consta que mi participación será confidencial y voluntaria. Por lo tanto me puede retirar del estudio en que el momento que así lo desee sin penalidad alguna y sin que se afecte mi rendimiento académico en el curso INGL 3102 o en algún otro curso que esté tomado en la UPR-Arecibo. Entiendo que mi participación en el estudio no conlleva riesgos físicos, psicológicos o de otra índole y que tampoco habrá beneficio marginal alguno. Se me ha informado que no será necesario divulgar mi nombre ni mi número de estudiante. En caso de que se utilicen comentarios hechos por mí, los mismo no serán identificados.

En algunos momentos durante el estudio será necesario el uso de una grabadora, de un diario reflexivo y de la observación participativa por parte del investigador (el Prof. Mateo Garcés) para recopilar información de parte de los estudiantes que participarán en el estudio y que estos su utilizarán durante el transcurso de la clase sin afectar la misma.

He leído cuidadosamente el contenido de esta hoja de asentimiento informado y he escuchado la explicación ofrecida por el investigador acerca del estudio y los métodos para recopilar información. Se me ha dado la oportunidad de hacer preguntas y de aclarar mis dudas. Las mismas han sido debidamente aclaradas a mi satisfacción.

Mi firma en este documento certifica que asiento a participar en estudio para los propósitos antes mencionados. Estoy de acuerdo con los métodos de recopilación de información que serán utilizados en el estudio.

Firma del participante \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

He informado al estudiante acerca del contenido de este documento.

Firma del investigador \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha \_\_\_\_\_



## Completion Certificate

.....  
This is to certify that

**Mateo Garcés**

has completed the **Human Participants Protection Education for Research Teams** online course, sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), on 11/09/2004.

This course included the following:

- key historical events and current issues that impact guidelines and legislation on human participant protection in research.
- ethical principles and guidelines that should assist in resolving the ethical issues inherent in the conduct of research with human participants.
- the use of key ethical principles and federal regulations to protect human participants at various stages in the research process.
- a description of guidelines for the protection of special populations in research.
- a definition of informed consent and components necessary for a valid consent.
- a description of the role of the IRB in the research process.
- the roles, responsibilities, and interactions of federal agencies, institutions, and researchers in conducting research with human participants.

.....  
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 FACULTAD DE EDUCACIÓN  
 DEPARTAMENTO DE ESTUDIOS GRADUADOS

F-07

<b>Maestría</b>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Doctorado</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

(Marque el grado correspondiente)

11/8/04  
 Fecha  
Ris Jirón  
 Director(a) DEG

**FORMULARIO DE CERTIFICACIÓN PARA LA PROTECCIÓN DE SERES HUMANOS EN LA INVESTIGACIÓN**

Certificamos que la propuesta de  tesis,  disertación,  proyecto con el

título The Beliefs of a Group of College Students Concerning the Teaching-Learning Process of the English Language

sometida por Mateo Davis Valencia, (840 - 88 - 3309),  
Núm. estudiante

cumple con la reglamentación establecida en la Universidad de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Río Piedras para la protección de sujetos humanos que participarán en la investigación de la siguiente manera:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><input type="checkbox"/> Fue aprobada por el CAPSHI</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Se relaciona con prácticas educativas convencionales</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Involucra encuestas, entrevista y observaciones de conducta pública en la que los(as) participantes no pueden ser identificados.</p> | <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No involucra temas sensitivos</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Involucra pruebas educativas en las que se garantiza confidencialidad de los datos</p> <p>Otra _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> |
|--|--|

Director(a) Comité de Tesis, Proyecto o Disertación

<p><u>[Signature]</u>                  Miembro del Comité</p>	<p><u>[Signature]</u>                  Miembro del Comité</p>
<p><u>[Signature]</u>                  Miembro del Comité</p>	<p>_____                   Miembro del Comité</p>

c Estudiante  
 Original expediente estudiante

## BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY OF THE AUTHOR

Mateo Garcés Valencia was born on August 6, 1970, in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. He received his elementary education in the Dolores Gómez de Román Elementary School in Arecibo, and his middle school education in the Luis Muñoz Rivera Middle School and the Thomas Jefferson Middle School in Arecibo. In 1988, he graduated with honors from the Trina Padilla de Sanz High School in Arecibo. That year, he began his college education in the University of Puerto Rico, Arecibo Campus and then, in 1991, he transferred to the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, where he obtained his Bachelor of Arts in Secondary Education with a major in Teaching English as Second Language in 1993. In that year, he was accepted by the Department of Graduate Studies of the Faculty of Education in the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, where in 1997, he obtained his Master of Education with a major in Teaching English as a Second Language. In that year, he was admitted by the Department of Graduate Studies of the Faculty of Education in the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus, to pursue his doctorate degree.

From 1995 to 1999, Mateo Garcés Valencia worked as a certified English teacher in the Dr. Cayetano Coll y Toste Middle School in Arecibo, Puerto Rico. Then, in 2000 and from 2002 to the present time, he has worked as an English professor in the University of Puerto Rico, Arecibo Campus. In 1999 and 2000, he interned in the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research in Bethesda, Maryland as part of the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) Internship Program. During his 10-year teaching, he has had the opportunity to teach a variety of courses focusing on the four English language skills, such as English 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, Business

Communication, Business Translation, Grammar, Reading and Composition, Basic English, Basic Conversational English, Conversational English for Secretaries, Oral Communication, Grammatical Characteristics of Modern English and Technical Writing.

The author has published articles and letters to the editor in *The San Juan Star*. He has also published articles in *TESOLGRAM* and in the *Boletín Kappan*. He has offered workshops in the Northern PRTESOL Annual Conference and in the PRTESOL Annual Convention. Finally, he is an active member of the following organizations: Phi Delta Kappa International - Arecibo Chapter, PRTESOL - Northern Chapter, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, HACU National Internship Program Alumni Association and Alpha Omicron Sigma Fraternity. He could be reached at [profgarces@yahoo.com](mailto:profgarces@yahoo.com).