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## Performing Language and Identities: Adult Immigrant Students and the Creation of a Play

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PERFORMING LANGUAGE AND IDENTITIES:  
ADULT IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND THE CREATION OF A PLAY

A Thesis Presented

by

KATHLEEN R. MCGOVERN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,  
University of Massachusetts Boston,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2016

Applied Linguistics Program

ABSTRACT

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ADULT IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND THE CREATION OF A PLAY

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## ABSTRACT

### PERFORMING LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY: ADULT IMMIGRANT STUDENTS AND THE CREATION OF A PLAY

May 2016

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Directed by Professor Avary Carhill-Poza

This thesis presents findings from a yearlong study of a classroom of adult immigrants studying English as a Second Language (ESL) in the U.S., who collaboratively created and performed plays based on their life experiences. This research is rooted in poststructuralist theories of identity in second language learning (e.g., Norton, 2000; 2013), a view of language pedagogy as a form of liberation (Freire, 1970), and the notion that theater can be used by non-actors to critically engage with issues of relevance to the community (Boal, 1979). The teacher-researcher of the class used ethnographic investigation informed by autoethnography and action research to examine: 1) how students perceived theater as affecting their

language development, and 2) how individual students' identity development was affected by participation in the class. Data included interviews, field notes, audiovisual recordings, artifacts, and journal entries. Relevant literature in the fields of immigration, second language acquisition, and drama in language teaching is reviewed and discussed. The process of engaging students in playwriting and performing is detailed in the findings section along with a discussion of the nature of theater in the second language classroom. The data analysis exhibits that creating a play had many positive effects on students' affective dimensions, second language development, classroom dynamics, and investment in the course, as well as some negative effects including anxiety amongst students at the prospect of performing in English and instances of interpersonal tensions. Classroom implications of the study include the recommendation that teachers frame theater explicitly in a positive light and make expectations of students clear from the beginning of the course.

For my parents,  
and Pepi

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

How immigrant populations are received and incorporated into American society is of great interest in the fields of politics, media and education. Approximately 41 million immigrants were living in the U.S. as of 2012 (Nwosu, Batalova & Auclair, 2014). That number continues to grow. Studies of the ways in which immigrant and non-immigrant communities interact can lend valuable insight into the changing landscape of U.S. culture and society as a whole. One aspect of particular focus in the debate on immigration is the teaching and learning of English. Because of this, research into various approaches to English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, including the use of drama in the language classroom, is central to the study of the immigrant experience in the U.S. Determining the impact of second language instruction on immigrant groups has the potential to increase its efficacy not only for language teaching, but also for valuing students' cultures and identities.

Many proponents of drama in the language classroom believe that drama has the potential to ensure students' cultures and identities are valued (e.g. Byram & Fleming, 1998) and have posited a broad variety of benefits that learners in such an environment

might be afforded (e.g. Belliveau & Kim, 2013; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Kramsch, 1998; Schewe, 2013). Both practitioners and theorists posit that drama affords learners with many opportunities to develop their second or foreign language. Because theater exists in a wide variety of forms and approaches, an equally wide variety of pedagogical and linguistic theories has been used to support its integration into the second- and foreign- language classroom. Specific arguments for its use in the language classroom are, therefore, highly diverse and stem from theories as divergent as behaviorism, sociocultural interactionism and critical pedagogy.

Such arguments include the views that drama promotes intercultural communication skills (Belliveau & Kim, 2013; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Kramsch, 1998) and enhances students' abilities in speaking, listening, reading, writing and pronunciation (Via, 1972; 1976; Lys, Meurer, Paluch, & Zeller, 2002). Another supportive argument for engaging students in the creation of a play is the view that such a play might constitute an identity text (Cummins, 2006), or text created in a pedagogical environment to support learners' expression of their multiple and varied identities. A detailed discussion of these assertions along with the challenges associated with such approaches is provided in Chapter 3. Despite the evidence of rising interest within the existing bodies of literature on drama's potential to promote intercultural communicative competence, communicative language use in the classroom, creativity, and contextually situated interaction, the approach is not widely adopted by language teachers at present (Belliveau & Kim, 2013).

As Belliveau and Kim (2013) note, few studies on drama in the second and foreign language classroom have focused on adult language learners and even fewer on adult immigrants learning English. Yet drama, as a means of holistically valuing language learners, may be of particular relevance to such a demographic as it affords opportunities in both language and identity development. Both of these areas are of import to immigrants seeking to transition across cultures. The research presented here investigates the use of drama in a classroom of adult immigrant students in the U.S.

As a teacher-researcher, I conducted a yearlong ethnographic study of my own classroom at the Institute for Immigrant Education (IIE), a non-profit educational institution in Greater Boston. The names of the institution as well as the names of the student-participants in the study have been changed throughout this text to protect participants' anonymity. At the IIE, a team of teachers, volunteers, administrators and researchers work to provide immigrants and refugees with a variety of educational services. This team also works to educate the public about the contributions of immigrants to American communities. The stated mission of the IIE is to provide free ESL classes to immigrants and refugees in order to facilitate their personal and professional advancement within their new communities and to educate the public that immigrants are assets to the U.S. (Artifact, 2015). The IIE pursues its mission through several course offerings including literacy classes, citizenship classes and ESL classes.

The Immigrant Theater Class (ITC) at the IIE was the subject of this study. As the teacher-researcher of the course, I attempted to fulfill the mission of the IIE by blending student-centered methods of ESL instruction with theater. Each cohort of ITC

students collaboratively created a play and performed it for the community. Through this approach, the class's aim was to enhance the students' English language abilities while simultaneously educating the community about immigrant experiences and contributions to U.S. society. This study examines the class' influence on students' perceived language and identity development in providing them a platform through which they were required to share their voices.

The study followed three separate cohorts over the course of one year; each cohort participated in a four-month session. In each session the students and the teacher-researcher (myself) collaboratively wrote a new play based on students' experiences; students then practiced and performed the plays for the community. This thesis presents the results of this yearlong ethnographic study of the ITC, its curriculum, instructional delivery methods, and impact on students. The aim of this study is twofold. It investigates 1) how students perceived theater as affecting their language development, and 2) how individual students' identity development was affected by participation in the ITC.



## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study of the Immigrant Theater Class (ITC) occupies a space in which the traditionally disparate fields of immigration, second language teaching and learning, and drama intersect. Insights gained from this ethnographic study are intended to be relevant to those interested in exploring praxis (Freire, 1970), that is, the intersection of theory and practice, within these overlapping fields.

The U.S. is a country whose typical creation narrative is founded on the concept of immigration, yet many folk-theorists wrongfully hypothesize that there are major differences in quality between the old and new waves of immigrants (Alba & Nee, 1997, p. 851). Opposition to immigration is voiced frequently by politicians, the media, and individuals despite the fact that the overwhelming majority of these opponents are, themselves, descendants of immigrants. The continuous incorporation of large numbers of immigrants into the U.S. has altered the society of the U.S. itself. Immigration theorists have offered conflicting and evolving accounts of why immigrants choose to migrate to the U.S. and how they are, or should be, incorporated into their receiving country. The second language classroom is an important site where, in addition to

studying language, students participate in processes of cultural negotiations and identity transformations of interest to theorists of immigration as well as Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the term “straight line assimilation” gained popularity as a reference to the canonical notion that immigrants assimilate to their new country in a static manner. Alba and Nee (1997) define straight-line assimilation as an envisioned process unfolding in a series of steps in which each generation moves further away from the culture of the immigrant’s country of origin and towards the culture of the host society (p. 832). However, in recent years theorists have begun to frame immigrants’ modes of incorporation in more complex terms (Suárez -Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Harris, 2006). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the integration of immigrants into the receiving society is seen as affecting all cultural groups involved. Rather than viewing the assimilation process as unilineal, current theorists trend towards recognizing the multicultural competencies and hybrid identities that arise in both the immigrant and non-immigrant populations (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Harris, 2006). This notion of complex and hybrid identities has been taken up by researchers and theorists in the field SLA (Norton, 2000; 2013; Cummins, 2006; Kramersch, 1998).

Block (2007) notes an increase in the number of publications on the interrelationship between language and identity since the mid 1990’s (p. 863). He describes the use of narratives and storytelling as pervasive throughout the research carried out in this area of inquiry (Block, 2007, p. 867). Norton (2000; 2001; 2010; 2012; 2013), widely regarded as a seminal scholar in the field of language and identity research,

draws heavily on the use of learner narratives to investigate the relationship between identity and language learning. Prior to Norton's (2000) study, interest in individual differences among language learners had inspired research in areas such as the effects of motivation (Dornyei, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972), multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1993), and personality (Wong Fillmore, 1979; MacIntyre, 1995) in language learning. Norton (2013), however, challenges such binary notions of learners as motivated vs. unmotivated, introverted vs. extraverted, etc. and placed such individual differences in a broader sociocultural context, positing:

such affective factors are frequently socially constructed, changing across time and space, and possibly coexisting in contradictory ways within a single individual...researchers have examined the diverse social, historical, and cultural contexts in which language learning takes place, and how learners negotiate and sometimes resist the diverse positions those contexts offer them. (p. 1)

Norton (2000) framed the construct of motivation as a psychological one, and expanded on it, coining the term *investment*, which has both psychological and sociological roots. *Investment* offers concrete implications for the classroom as “a learner may be a highly motivated language learner but may nevertheless have little investment in the language practices of a given classroom or community” (Norton, 2000, p. 33). This construct lends hope to the language teacher in that altering classroom practices might alter student *investment* in a particular learning environment.

This study also draws from the concept of *imagined communities*, a term that describes groups of people in the target language community with whom second

language learners construct a relationship primarily in the realm of the imagination (Anderson, 1991; Norton, 2001; 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2001). Because learners construct identities not only for the present, but also for the future, these communities afford students a wide range of possible identities. Student *investment* in a language classroom may be partially determined by how the class relates to the students' *imagined communities*.

Pedagogically, engaging learners in practices which value their complex identities has been theorized as beneficial to language teaching and learning. Cummins et al. (2006) recommend that second language teachers adopt pedagogical approaches that value the learners, asserting that “students will engage academically to the extent that instruction affirms their identities and enables them to invest their identities in learning” (p. 3). Cummins et al. (2006) advocate engaging learners in the production of identity texts as a means of building on their cultural knowledge and language abilities. Identity texts are defined as the “products of students’ creative work or performances carried out within the pedagogical space orchestrated by the classroom teacher” (Cummins et al., 2006, p. 5). In this definition, engaging students in the creation of texts or performances is seen as one potential avenue for affirming students’ identities and promoting their investment in language learning.

Adopting pedagogical approaches to second language teaching that value students’ cultures and identities allows for the possibility of shifting power dynamics. As learners gain access to new forms of cultural and linguistic capital, their relationship to the classroom community as well as their imagined communities shifts. Notions of

identity are, then, linked with those of power and complement approaches to second language teaching that are rooted in critical pedagogy, which “views culture as a terrain of lived experiences and institutional forms organized around diverse elements of pleasure, struggle and domination” (Leistyna, 1999, p. 218). Proponents in the field of education draw from the work of Paulo Freire (1970), among others, to encourage a critical stance in the second language classroom as well as reflexivity on the part of educators.

Freire (1970), a central figure in the field of critical pedagogy and author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, argues that there is no such thing as neutral education. He encourages teachers to engage students in dialogue aimed at provoking a critical view of the world and its workings. Rather than a teacher dictating solutions to problems, in critical pedagogy the students and teacher are encouraged to examine issues relevant to their lives and the broader society through dialogue. Through critical examination of relevant issues, proponents of critical pedagogy anticipate that solutions may be arrived at collectively.

Augusto Boal was to the world of theater what Paulo Freire was to the world of education. Boal (1979, 1992) pioneered the practice of engaging non-actors in the creation and performance of theater pieces. Just as Freire wrote *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Boal (1979) wrote *Theater of the Oppressed*, borrowing the idea of a pedagogy of liberation from Freire (1979) and applying it to theater. Boal sought to alter the traditional dynamic of theater as an elitist event typically performed by the privileged, for the privileged. Coining the term Theater of the Oppressed, which has subsequently

become a major theatrical movement, Boal began creating theater with the poor of Brazil in an attempt to incite social change. Boal wrote:

Theater is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming a society. Theater can help us build our future, instead of just waiting for it...we should be creators and we should also teach the public how to be creators, how to make art, so that we may all use that art together...We are all theater, even if we don't make theater. (Boal, 1992, pp.16-17)

His goal was to educate and empower non-actors through the medium of theater. This focus on non-actors has led his theories and techniques to be integrated into several educational spheres. Though Boal did not focus on language education, his approach lends itself readily to the language classroom because of his interest in involving those with no theater background in the creation of theater. Boalian theater has many specific techniques and approaches, some of which involve non-actors creating plays based on their experiences and perceptions of their society for performance in the community. Because the ITC incorporated several techniques from the Theater of the Oppressed, a further description of Boal's approach is included in Appendix C of this document. His work has served as both a theoretical frame and practical model for several studies on the incorporation of drama into the language classroom, including the research presented here. As Schewe (2013) illustrates, techniques and theories from the theater can bring praxis into the language classroom because in teaching language through theater there "are no clear-cut lines between science and art, theory and practice."

## CHAPTER 3

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of literature relevant to this study. Though extensive bodies of literature exist in the disparate fields of immigration theory, second language acquisition and drama in education, little has been published on the overlapping areas. This review commences with an overview of research on immigrants' modes of incorporation to the U.S., as the majority of the participants in this study were immigrants. The remainder of the chapter focuses on research in student-centered ESL education, particularly the integration of drama into language classes.

#### **Immigration**

The approximately 41 million immigrants living in the U.S. in 2012 accounted for sixteen percent of the civilian workforce (Nwosu, Batalova, & Auclair, 2014). 25% of all children in the U.S. under age 18 lived in a household with at least one immigrant parent, and of the 31.1 million American children living in poverty in 2012, 31% were living in immigrant households (Nwosu, Batalova, & Auclair, 2014). Analysts deem it unlikely that the wave of immigration will cease or significantly decrease in the near

future (Nazario, 2014); therefore, further academic inquiry into modes of reception is warranted.

Immigration is a highly controversial topic in the U.S., with both positive and negative attitudes towards immigrants voiced passionately in the public forum. Current news reports are dominated by negative attitudes towards immigrants as people and immigration as a concept, with calls to deny second-generation immigrants birthright citizenship, build walls to stem the flow of illegal immigration, deport large numbers of undocumented immigrants, and turn away refugees seeking asylum. Nevertheless, effects of immigrants on the U.S. are by no means limited to the negative.

Multiple studies assert that the current wave of immigrants may be a valuable resource to the country (Nazario, 2014; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters & Holdaway, 2008). Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) describe immigrants as a self-selected population, meaning that individuals who choose to immigrate demonstrate a strong sense of agency and motivation to find a better life. Kasinitz et al.'s (2008) ten-year study finds that regardless of their level of education or financial capital in their native country, in moving from one country to another immigrants demonstrate many positive qualities such as drive, ambition, courage and strength (p. 352). Suárez -Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) further find that the new cultural styles and hybrid identities that arise from the contact of so many different cultures heighten the creative potentials of the blending cultures (p. 159). Nazario's (2014) research also highlights the positive effects of immigration in the U.S., revealing that a disproportionately high number of the U.S.' high achievers, such as Nobel



laureates, are immigrants (p. 287). In the financial sector the presence of immigrants is estimated to lower the cost of all goods and services purchased in America by nearly 5 percent (Nazario, 2014, p. 286).

The effects of immigration are not exclusively positive, however. Nazario (2014) posits that opposition to immigration stems in part from “racism, a resistance to change, and a discomfort with having people around who don’t speak the same language or have similar customs” (p. 287), attitudes often reflected in the media and in daily life. Apart from these affective causes of negative feelings among native-born Americans towards immigrants, Nazario’s (2014) research reveals concrete ways in which immigrants may be felt as a burden on the receiving society. This burden may include their use of more government services than the native-born, a fiscal burden to taxpayers in states with large immigrant populations, and greater competition among native-born minorities who must compete with immigrants for low-wage jobs (Nazario, 2014, pp. 287-289).

Whatever their cause, multiple studies reveal that negative conceptions of immigrants by non-immigrant community members may exert lasting effects on the immigrants themselves (Suárez -Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Awokoya, 2012; Gonzales, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009). The roles that immigrants play in the U.S., be they negative or positive, are determined in large part by the opportunities presented to them on arrival. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) posit that the ambivalent atmosphere into which new immigrants are thrust deeply affects their modes of incorporation into their new society. They further claim that “rapid integration and acceptance into the American mainstream represent just one possible alternative” (p. 45), which means that many

immigrants encounter negative attitudes and find the process of gaining acceptance in their new country a significant challenge. No matter how determined immigrants may be to achieve success in their new country, a variety of external factors will determine to what degree they are able to meet with the success they seek, including immigrants' access to quality education and positive modes of reception in the receiving community (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Suárez -Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Kasinitz et al., 2008; Alba & Nee, 2007). For this reason, the language classroom may be viewed as a promising site in which more positive experiences in the receiving community may be engendered.

Multiple studies have linked English language competence with access to cultural, social and economic capital among immigrants in the U.S. (Kasinitz et al., 2008; Rymes, 2002; Gonzales, 2011). Educational sites such as public and language schools have been popular venues for analyzing such interactions (Awokoya, 2012; Gonzales, 2011; Carhill-Poza, 2014). In a study on undocumented immigrant students, Gonzales (2011) emphasizes the importance of fostering feelings of inclusion and building trusting relationships between immigrant and non-immigrant groups in shaping immigrant identities (p. 604-611). Gonzales's study illustrates that schools are important sites where such positive relationships might be fostered.

Several studies indicate that adults, particularly parents, play a large role in the life and educational trajectories of immigrant children (Kasinitz et al., 2008; Suárez -Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). For example, Suárez -Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) find that parents pass their attitudes toward education

down to their children (p. 125). Kasinitz et al. (2008) assert that family background is the most important determiner of intergenerational mobility among immigrant families, particularly the parents' level of education, work experience, and earnings (p. 44). It is clear ESL courses for adult immigrants have the potential to impact not only the students in the course, but also the larger community.

Education is one significant resource with the potential to empower both immigrant and nonimmigrant populations, augmenting the cultural and human capital available within communities and altering modes of reception. The teaching and learning of English may, therefore, act as a vehicle of empowerment, enabling students to advocate for themselves and function more effectively in the greater community (Rymes, 2002, p. 432).

### **Second Language Acquisition**

Multiple studies indicate that peers, family and role models play a significant role in second language acquisition (Carhill-Poza, 2014; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Awokoya, 2012; Portes & Rubaut, 2001). Interaction is, therefore, an important aspect of language acquisition. However, certain types of interactions may be of greater benefit than others. For example, Norton's (2000) study indicates that adult immigrant students adopted several strategies to avoid stigmatization on the part of colleagues, classmates and teachers in the language classroom.

### **Identity in the Second Language Classroom**

As discussed in Chapter 2, identity has emerged as a recurrent theme in research on second language classrooms. Dagenais (2013) describes the current poststructuralist

perspective in research on identity and language acquisition in which identities are conceptualized as “dynamic, multiple, and sometimes conflicting social constructions” (p. 3). Learners are thought to have *agency*, a notion linked closely to identity as it describes the capacity of an individual to make choices, take control, and self-regulate in order to pursue his or her unique individual goals (Duff, 2012, p. 417). In the language classroom, learners’ *agency* may lead them to resist problematic identities assigned by others and negotiate newer, more powerful identities (Dagenais, 2013, p. 3). If students lack *investment* in a given classroom practice, or wish to resist enacting an identity assigned in the classroom, they may exercise agency in altering how or if they participate in a given interaction or classroom practice. In light of this, Dagenais (2013) recommends that educators explore ways of recognizing how identities and cultural practices formed outside of the classroom may be used inside the classroom as pedagogical resources to facilitate language learning (p. 3). Much of the research on the relationship between classroom instruction and student identity has focused on innovative curricula and instructional design (Dagenais, 2013) and relies heavily on the use of narrative as a methodological research tool (Block, 2007; Pavlenko, 2001; Vásquez, 2011).

Norton’s (2000) seminal study follows the language and identity development of four adult Canadian immigrant women over the course of one year. Norton (2000; 2013) concludes that her participants found it difficult to gain access to native-speaking networks of community and describes how participants struggled in the negotiation of

their identities. Norton (2000) finds that some participants resisted assigned identities, particularly in the English classroom; whereas others embraced them.

Student resistance to assigned identities has been of particular interest to several studies (Toohey, 2000; Talmy, 2008; Canagarajah, 2004; Duff, 2002). Toohey (2000) finds that children in the K-12 setting are often assigned identities by teachers and classmates, illustrating that classrooms can be sites of struggle in which identities are constructed and resisted. Similarly, Duff's (2002) research reveals that in teacher-led discussions some adult learners resist teachers' attempts to draw on students' experiences and background knowledge, preferring to keep some aspects of their identity private in the classroom context.

Curran and Stelluto (2005) investigate the effects of bringing adult immigrant language learners into sustained contact with language education students at a university. The language students in this project studied and informally discussed literature connected to language, culture, and identity with the education students. Findings suggest that opportunities for marginalized immigrant language learners to engage critically with current research perspectives on identity, culture and language offer students transformative opportunities (p. 781). Along these lines, several studies have investigated the effect of innovative curricula on student identity and language learning. Multiple studies investigate the benefits of co-creating curricula and materials with the students (Cummins et al, 2006; Cummins, 2006; Weinstein, 1999; Welch, Tembe, Wepukhulu, Baker, & Norton, 2013; Dagenais, 2013). Dagenais (2013) asserts that such innovative projects are "promising because they examine critically whether activities in

which students and teachers share aspects of their identities and cultural knowledge enable learners to engage more actively in classroom interactions” (p. 3). The following paragraphs describe several such projects.

### **Funds of Knowledge**

Moll, Amanti, Neff and González (1992) find the incorporation of students’ experiences into the classroom to be beneficial to language and identity development in students. Describing a method of incorporating students out of class experiences into the curriculum, Moll et al. (1992) coined the term *funds of knowledge*, meaning any area in which the students possess expertise (including cooking, farming, and many areas not traditionally included in a school curriculum). Moll et al. (1992) propose that *funds of knowledge* be included in primary and secondary school curricula and recommend that teachers visit their students’ homes to gain a deeper understanding of the types of knowledge children bring with them into the classroom in order to integrate students’ strengths into the classroom materials.

### **The Multiliteracies Project**

Cummins (2006) documents the Multiliteracies Project in which several sites collaborate to encourage the production of identity texts by second language learners. Teachers, unions, school boards and literacy organizations work to implement innovative instructional techniques, encouraging students to explore and share their identities in writing for publication. The student-generated texts involved a variety of media such as sound, digital media, and written language. Cummins (2006) finds such innovative

techniques to be beneficial to students in terms of both language and identity development.

### **Learners' Lives as Curriculum**

In a similar project, Weinstein (1999) reports on how teachers in a non-governmental ESL organization co-created curricula with their students. Her article, *Learners' Lives as Curriculum*, details the teachers' approaches to incorporating students' experiences into the adult ESL curriculum through storytelling projects and other non-traditional techniques. Weinstein (1999) reports that though the process was time consuming and logistically challenging, it benefited learners.

### **The African Storybook Project**

Welch et al. (2013) describe The African Storybook Project as “one that seeks to promote multilingual literacy development for early reading through open-access digital stories in multiple African languages and English” (p. 13). Bonny Norton serves as the research advisor for the project. Bringing her expertise in language and identity to bear on the context of digital literacies, she poses questions such as: “how is learner and teacher identity implicated in the writing, reading and sharing of digital stories” (Norton, 2015, 18:53) and “are students and teachers invested in digital literacy practices?” (Norton, 2015, 20:31). She finds that incorporating learners in the creation of stories has the potential to shift learner identities in empowering ways. Each of the projects described in the four previous subsections lend weight to the concept of drama as a means of eliciting narratives from language learners and incorporating their lived experiences into the curriculum.

## **Play in the Language Classroom**

Drama encourages learners to engage in play, which multiple studies indicate as an important aspect of second language acquisition (Cook, 2000; Smith, 2006; Gee, 2004; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). In evaluating several studies, Smith (2006) drew a connection between play in the second language and SLA development in learners. Play is posited to aid in second language development due to its promotion of interaction amongst language learners and teachers (Smith, 2006; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). Gee (2004) advocated for play in the classroom, particularly playing video games, asserting that this promotes agency in language learners, identity development, higher order thinking skills, and strategy development, among other benefits. Gee (2004) argues “good games offer players identities that trigger a deep investment on the part of the player... (they) trigger deep learning that is itself part and parcel of the fun” (p. 23). He also noted that resistance to the integration of games into the classroom is prevalent and that implementing them requires “changing people’s minds about learning—how and where it is done” (Gee, 2004, p. 23).

Though the word *play* is often associated with children, Cook (2000) points out that adults also regularly engage in play in their daily lives. He points out that “many adults devote their evenings to watching images of people pretending to be other people in situations which have never existed” (p. 4), illustrating a clear link between acting and play. Cook (2000) makes the case that play in adult language learning manifests in many forms and is a fruitful area of inquiry in terms of studying both the individual and society.



Theater, as a means of storytelling, role-taking, and play, may be viewed as a natural extension to whole-person approaches to language instruction.

### **Drama in the Language Classroom**

Belliveau and Kim (2013) present a synthesis of research on drama in second language learning published in the twenty years preceding their article. In their synthesis, they illustrate that a variety of sources, including research studies, support the use of drama in second language (L2) classrooms, finding it to be advantageous in terms of engaging learners, promoting communicative and intercultural competence and interaction, increasing learner confidence, and fostering students' imagination (Belliveau & Kim, 2013). Belliveau and Kim (2013) suggest that though drama in the language classroom has been viewed in a positive light in the literature, the current bodies of literature must be augmented. They note a need for more empirical research on students' perceptions of drama in the language classroom and suggest that long-term studies be developed to address a range of issues in drama, language teaching and language learning, particularly in the adult classroom as most research to date has focused primarily on drama and young learners (Belliveau & Kim, 2013).

Though the perceived value of merging the fields of drama and language teaching has led to many teacher-as-researcher studies published in the area, those that have investigated adult language learners most often have involved English as a Foreign Language (EFL) rather than English as a Second Language (ESL) learners (Liu, 2002; Dodson, 2002; Via, 1976; Kao, 1994; Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Two basic approaches have been identified in the literatures: product-based and process-based. A product-based

approach typically includes the selection, study and rehearsal of a text for performance either in the language classroom or for the public. A process-based approach focuses on the development of a play through in-class improvisations and theater games; these student-generated creations may or may not be written down or performed for the public. In the following two subsections, I discuss these two distinctive approaches.

### **Product-Based Approaches**

Richard Via's (1972) seminal study was one of the first to investigate product-based drama in a language class. As a Fulbright lecturer, Via (1972) travelled to Japan in 1966 to teach EFL in conjunction with theater in a university setting. He argues that such an approach is beneficial to the students as a means of teaching both culture and language and advocates the use of drama as a means of introducing cultural concepts to foreign-language learners. His publications (1972; 1976) indicate that drama enhances language skills because it necessitates the use of the target language for authentic communication. He also finds that drama improves students' speaking skills, self-confidence, and spontaneity while lowering inhibitions (1972; 1976).

Lys, Meurer, Paluch, and Zeller (2002) published a study on product-based drama at Northwestern University, where the departments of Theater and German developed a longstanding collaboration. Lys et al. (2002) report that each year the departments stage a play in German for public performance. They find many benefits stemming from the collaboration, including students' increased motivation, working in a team, being involved with technical elements, and studying the cultural and historical background of the text being staged (p. 223). Both Via's (1972) and Lys et al.'s (2002) studies reflect a

larger trend in product-based approaches. This trend portrays theater as a means of studying culture and literature in the foreign-language classroom. Benefits of such approaches include familiarizing students with register and conversational strategies and introducing students to the target culture (Via, 1976; Lys et. al, 2002). It is also reported that drama provides students with prolonged and repeated exposure to both grammar and vocabulary in a meaningful context (Dodson, 2002).

### **Process-Based Approaches**

Kao and O'Neil (1998) have criticized the ways in which some teachers have used product-based drama in the classroom as “exercise-based, short-term, and teacher oriented” (p.3). Kao's frequently cited (1994) research investigates the use of process drama in the context of a first year university course offered in Taiwan. Her mixed-methods research approach reveals both positive and negative aspects of using process-drama. Kao (1994) finds that engaging in drama positively affected students' perceptions of their language proficiency despite some negative attitudes reported among students and that effective integration of drama into the language classroom requires rigorous work and planning on the part of the teacher. Despite the challenges reported in her study, Kao (1994) advocates strongly for the technique. Kao & O'Neill (1998) recommend that teachers involve students in long-term drama based projects resulting in work co-developed by students and teachers. They assert that this approach encourages students to critically examine their world and the role they occupy within it; such questioning is conducted through meaningful acts of communication, leading to second language development (Kao & O'Neill, 1998).

Schmidt (1998) documents the use of drama to teach EFL for over a decade in a “multiracial and disadvantaged suburb of Paris” (p. 193). The focus of this program was on promoting intercultural exchange and encouraging reflection on systemic power structures; therefore, the teacher in this case is described as providing no explicit language instruction or correction unless errors obstructed students’ ability to communicate their meaning. Unlike the studies previously described in this chapter, the primary goal of this program was to create theater in English with French High School students, not to explicitly teach language. Schmidt (1998) argues that this approach led to increased language proficiency as well as students’ increased awareness of their own cultural positioning.

### **Moving Beyond Product- and Process- Based Approaches**

Several studies suggest that the dichotomy between process- and product based-drama is a false one (Moody, 2002; Shier, 2002; Schewe, 2103). Moody (2002) argues that both approaches benefit language students and may be integrated within a single project (p. 139). Shier (2002) echoes this belief:

Theater, in particular, with its built-in commitment to both processes and product, provides an arena and model for learning that increases students’ confidence to reach beyond individual limitations. At the same time, it promotes students responsibility and desire to be actively engaged in their own learning process.”

(p. 184)

Regardless of the approach, practitioners and researchers have demonstrated that in exploring and creating dramatic texts, students may explore their own cultures and

identities rather than simply being exposed to the culture of the target language. Many studies illustrate drama's ability to enhance students' communication skills due to its interactive nature (Liu, 2002; Dodson, 2002; Via, 1976; Kao, 1994; Kao & O'Neill, 1998) and inherent focus on language (Via, 1972; Lys et al., 2002). Multiple studies further illustrate its potential to move beyond a simple focus on communication to an analysis of how drama affects learner identities, cultural orientations and issues of power.

Wagner (2002) argues that drama-based education is the most powerful instructional strategy in terms of allowing students to undergo a process "that has the potential of modifying them as persons" (p. 5). However, Fels and McGivern (2002) illustrate that not all dramatic approaches affect students in a positive light. Their study analyzes drama in the language classroom through a critical lens. They argue that some scenarios chosen for students to act out may reinforce dominant cultures within the target language (Fels and McGivern, 2002, p. 20). The authors encouraged teachers to adopt a critical stance by considering several key questions:

In the opening up of curriculum to the presence of our students, what learning will be realized within the interplay between the multiple world(s) of experience and identities embodied within each individual? What concerns, fears, challenges and questions will students entertain as they (re)language their world? What issues will they choose (if given a choice) to explore? How will individual melodies resonate within the presence of others? With what experiences, memories, stories will they gift us? How may we as teachers and learners engage in a meaningful dialogue that invites the sounding of all voices? (p. 21)

Such questions are meaningful in any language classroom, particularly a classroom of immigrants, who may not have a readily accessible platform for self-expression within their communities.

As previously mentioned, the majority of studies published on drama in the adult language classroom focus on EFL (e.g. Kao, 1994; Via, 1972; Lys et al., 2002; Schmidt, 1998); few studies investigate its use with adult immigrants in an ESL setting. In separate studies, Horstein (2010) and Culham (2002) document their experiences using drama in classes of adult immigrants in the U.S. Horstein (2010) undertook a yearlong project in which she taught theater in an adult immigrant language classroom. Her analysis focuses primarily on the power dynamic existing between teachers and students within the classroom along with the teacher's instructional delivery (Horstein, 2010, p. 9). Culham (2002) describes workshops he offered to students, most of whom had a high level of education in their home country and were beginning or intermediate level students of English, in which the nonverbal communication skills inherent in drama were emphasized. Horstein (2010) and Culham (2002) report both challenges and benefits encountered in implementing such an approach.

Both researchers report encountering significant obstacles in implementing a drama-based approach to English language instruction in an adult ESL context (Horstein, 2010; Culham, 2002). Horstein (2010) reports a lack of explicit language instruction in the classroom led students and administrators to voice some dissatisfaction with the program. She also concludes drama increases student anxiety (Horstein, 2010). As the teacher of the class, Horstein (2010) reports encountering significant challenges in terms

of logistics, describing the difficulty of rehearsing and performing plays in a program with many student absences.

Culham (2002) reports similar findings, detailing “problems encountered when using drama in language learning” (p. 106). He describes encountering difficulties in promoting student playfulness and reported the development of interpersonal tensions between students of different cultural backgrounds in regards to personal space and demonstrativeness (Culham, 2002, p. 106). Like Horstein (2010), he mentions instances of increased student anxiety related to participation in theater and student resistance to the student-centered methodology (Culham, 2002, pp. 106-107).

Despite the challenges documented in both studies, Horstein (2010) and Culham (2002) report several benefits associated with the integration of drama into a classroom of adult immigrant students. Both assert that drama offers students many affordances in the arena of language learning. They suggest that the teacher’s role in planning logistics, classroom management, and instructional delivery has the potential to overcome many of the reported challenges.

Culham (2002) enumerates a list of benefits associated with the approach including: increased student nonverbal expressiveness, a shift in classroom power dynamics, and the creation of opportunities for students to communicate meaningfully with one another (p. 108). Horstein (2010), in contrast with Culham’s (2002) assertion that students’ lacked playfulness in his classroom, finds that the use of theater games and props promotes student playfulness. She recommends that teachers clearly state the goals of a given lesson and provide explicit language instruction and error correction as a

means of circumventing certain of the challenges she documented (Horstein, 2010). She further finds that allowing students to use their own daily lives as fodder for dramatic performance serves as a means of reducing learner anxiety and personalizing the curriculum: “I saw my students come alive while making the scenes about their stories. They also seemed to really care about the scenes that they were creating...When students act out drama, the language that they are using is clearly about them” (Horstein, 2010, p. 116). Despite the challenges encountered, Hornstein’s (2010) conclusion indicates strong support for drama-based language teaching approaches. She recommends its continued implementation.

### **Conclusion**

The studies described in this chapter indicate that drama-based approaches have the potential to align with the creative approaches to ESL instruction discussed earlier in the chapter, such as Learner’s Lives As Curriculum, The African Storybook Project and the Multiliteracies Project. Like these ESL approaches, drama may promote a critical classroom orientation to culture and identity in second language learning. As Schewe (2002) language teachers may benefit from borrowing the techniques and approaches of theater-makers because, just as in theater, “the ability to interact and to communicate in efficient ways is, after all, at the heart of language teaching/learning” (p. 73).

Despite this potential, few studies have investigated the use of theater in the adult immigrant community as a practice of whole-person learning. Yet immigrant language learners, as a marginalized population involved in processes of transformation at the individual and societal level, may be most in need of teaching approaches that value their



cultures, identities and lived experiences. In this study, I intend to address the gap in literature identified by Belliveau & Kim (2013) by providing long-term, empirical research on drama in the adult ESL classroom, while exploring an approach to second language instruction that seeks not only to educate, but also to empower students.

CHAPTER 4  
RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

**Research Questions**

This project is an ethnographic study aimed at enhancing both theoretical and practical understanding of theater in the adult immigrant language classroom. The two research questions addressed in this study were developed through a recursive process in which questions were revisited and edited over the course of the project to focus on key themes emerging from the data. These research questions are:

1. How did students perceive theater as affecting their second language development?
2. How was individual students' identity development affected by participation in the ITC?

In order to answer these questions, data collected included: artifacts, field notes, pictures and video, journal entries, and interviews. Though much data have been collected, emerging themes were coded in accordance with their relevance to these questions, as will be further described in a later section of this chapter.

## **Context of the Study**

### **The Setting**

Data for this study were collected from the Immigrant Theater Class (ITC) at the Immigrant Institute of Education (IIE) over the course of eight months. The ITC was founded in 2003 by an ESL teacher with a background in playwriting. Facing discrimination in a post 9/11 climate, students voiced to their teacher a desire to share their experiences with the community. The original teacher of the class proposed that the students write a play based on their experiences for performance in the community and the students acquiesced with enthusiasm. The course's inception was, therefore, student-driven. Since 2003, each cohort has written and presented a play based on the students' life experiences for performance within the greater community. Three teachers have led the course over its twelve-year span, each with different backgrounds and approaches to incorporating drama into the ESL class. In September 2014 I became the ITC's third instructor and initiated this research project; I further discuss my role as teacher-researcher and reasons for taking on this class in the participant section of this chapter.

### **Program Structure**

The IIE divides the academic year into three separate classes, termed "sessions." Each session lasts for approximately four months; students enter the session either from the previous level ESL class or as a new student to the school and receive certificates of completion. The ITC has been designated "Level 5," indicating that most students are at Spoken Proficiency Level (SPL) 5, or intermediate level, according to the Massachusetts

Adult Basic Education Curriculum Framework for English for Speakers of Other Languages (Massachusetts Department of Education, Adult and Community Learning Services, 2005), meaning that among other things students should be able to use “intermediate grammatical structures (e.g. simple, continuous, and present perfect verb tenses, noun, adjective and adverbial clauses, participial adjectives, modals)...(and) converse at some length on topics of interest (e.g. cross cultural comparisons, family, work or community goals)” (p. 43-44). However, within any cohort individual students display a wide range of abilities across language skills. Because the school does not offer a Level 6 ESL class, upon graduating, students either leave the school or repeat the level. Students who are new to the school are assessed by administrators through an interview process and the analysis of a sample of the students’ writing. Students who have attended previous levels at the IIE are assessed by the Level 4 teacher and advanced into the ITC upon successful completion of the Level 4 ESL class. The IIE offers two Level 5 classes: the ITC and ESL5. The ITC meets for three hours each morning from Monday to Friday; ESL5 meets each afternoon for two and a half hours from Monday to Thursday. Because of this structure, students who wish to study ESL at the IIE in the morning and have been placed at level 5 have only one option: the ITC.

## **Participants**

### **Student Participants**

There are two types of participants in this research project, student participants and the teacher-researcher (myself). Throughout the study, student participants have been protected through the use of pseudonyms and have had the opportunity to decline

participation in the study with no consequences in relation to their grades or enrollment in the course. After several weeks of class had passed (in both sessions) to allow for a foundation and relationship of trust to build within the classroom community, I presented the students with consent forms (examples of which are included in Appendix A) written at a language level accessible to them. Additionally, I orally explained and discussed my research, my intentions, and theoretical orientations with them. I outlined for my students that their participation would require their continued participation in the course as usual, participation in interviews, and consent to being video- or audio-taped. I endeavored to make it clear that students would be welcome to continue in the course if they declined to participate and explicitly stated that students electing to participate would not receive special incentives or treatment. All students who were still enrolled in the class at the time I presented the consent forms elected to participate in the study.

The student participants in this study are enrolled in the ITC and can be separated into three distinct groups corresponding to the three distinct sessions that have been studied within the scope of this research. Each of the three sessions represents one class or cohort of students:

Session One: September 2, 2014 - December 19, 2015

Session Two: January 5 - April 17, 2015

Session Three: April 27 - August 27, 2015

Students were added to and dropped from the ITC throughout the duration of each session as illustrated in figure 4.1 on the following page.

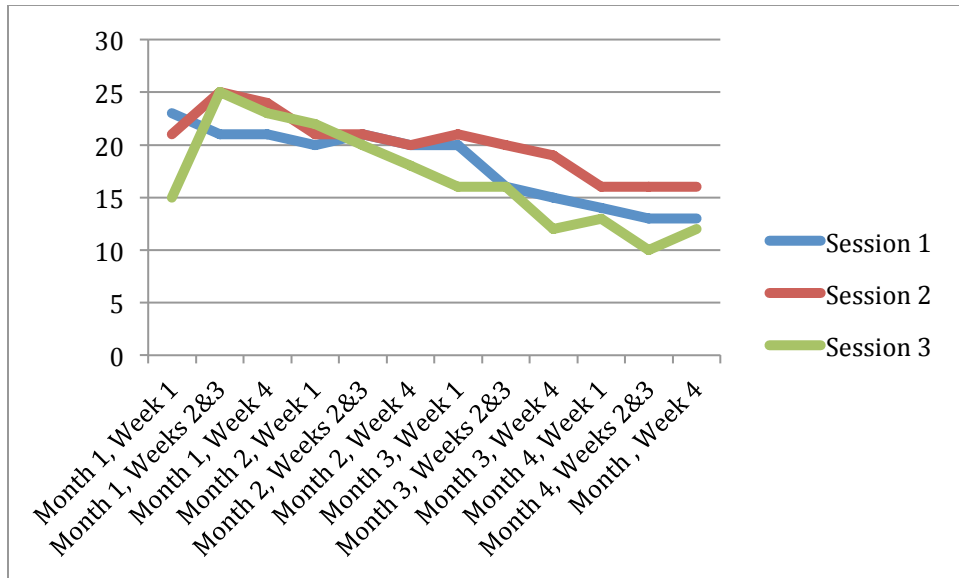


Figure 4.1. Number of enrolled students per session over time.

As illustrated in the chart above, it is difficult to determine exactly how many students were enrolled in the ITC on a given day; however, 25 total students were enrolled at some point in Session One, 26 in Session Two, and 26 in Session Three. The decision of who to include or exclude from the study was entirely determined by enrollment in the course.

All of the student participants were adult immigrant ESL learners between the ages of 25 and 63. Students' countries of origin were located across the globe in Asia, Europe, Africa, Central and South America. Figure 4.2, on the following page, shows the number of students per session from different countries or regions of origin; it includes the names of countries with the highest number of students and the regions for countries of origin with fewer students. Students entered the ITC with a very wide variety of educational backgrounds, some not having completed primary school and some holding

doctoral degrees. Most participants had prior experience in an English class either at the IIE, in their countries of origin, or at another community language center; two had never formally studied English prior to their enrollment in the ITC.

<b>Students' Countries of Origin</b>	<b>Session</b>			<b>Total</b>
	<b>One</b>	<b>Two</b>	<b>Three</b>	
Haiti	5	9	7	21
China	7	1	3	11
Morocco	3	3	3	9
South and Central America	4	7	8	18
Africa	1	2	2	5
Asia	2	3	2	7
The Middle East	1	1	1	3
Europe	2	0	0	2
<b>Total # of Students Per Session</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>74</b>

Figure 4.2. Students' places of origin.

All student participants enrolled in the IIE voluntarily because they wanted to improve their English language skills. All of the student participants attended the IIE free of charge and received training in digital literacy along with access to a college and career readiness counselor and psychological counselor in addition to studying ESL through theater in the ITC.

Student participants had varying degrees of awareness that the course would incorporate theater and require them to write and perform a play. Though all had been informed of the title of the course prior to their first day of class, implications of the title

were not fully communicated to or understood by all students before the start of any given session. Many of the students who had been moved up from the Level 4 ESL class into the ITC had attended previous ITC productions. Some had discussed their placement in the ITC with the Level 4 instructor prior to beginning the ITC. As there was no other class offered of the same level at the same time, students did not have the option to switch out of the theater class (though they could drop out of the school and several chose to). They did, however, have the option to decline to participate in the final performance and/or the research study, but continue to attend the class. Such cases are described in Chapter 5. Few of the students had participated in theater prior to enrollment in the ITC, though four had been enrolled in the ITC with another instructor before my arrival and one had participated in a school play as a child.

Because the majority of the participant population consisted of immigrant students considered to be economically or educationally disadvantaged, risks to participants have been carefully considered. I consider the risks on the part of my students resulting from participation in this study to have been minimal. In participating in the study, no changes were made to their educational environment for the sole purpose of conducting research.

### **The Teacher-Researcher**

Because I taught the ITC as well as researching it, I include myself as a participant in the research. Studies conducted by teacher-researchers are not uncommon in the field of applied linguistics (Nunan, 1992); in the specific study of theater in the language classroom, it is a method found frequently within the literature (Byram &



Fleming, 1998; Bräuer, 2002; Byram & Fleming; Culham, 2002; Horstein, 2010).

Autoethnography and action research are two methodological approaches that I have drawn from in this study. Autoethnographic research focuses primarily on the researcher as the central area of inquiry (Fetterman, 2010), whereas action research enables the participants to control and/or design the methodology of the research (Herr & Anderson, 2015, p. 1). Because all research including empirical, quantitative approaches is affected by the positioning of the researchers, no research can be considered neutral (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The strength of methodologies that include the researcher in all phases of the study lies in their inherent acknowledgement and exploration of this lack of neutrality. The researcher's preconceived notions and tendencies are collected as data and analyzed along with data gathered on all participants. I would, therefore, like to briefly examine my own positioning in relation to theater and language learning/teaching.

My educational and professional experience includes language learning, theater, and language teaching. My teaching background includes training language teachers in student-centered approaches, particularly Communicative Language Teaching. I am, therefore, predisposed to believe in the efficacy of student-centered methods of second language instruction. These views are transparent in my curriculum design and implementation as well as my judgments on effective teaching techniques.

The ITC is not the first program that I have worked in that incorporates drama into the language classroom. I taught EFL in Morocco to adolescents and adults for a year and a half. There, I began a drama club at the language school where I was

employed. In this drama club, the students and I devised plays, which they performed for the public.

Because I enjoy acting in theater and had students in Morocco who enjoyed practicing English through drama, I am predisposed to view the integration of drama and ESL in a positive light. However, I recognize that my experience teaching EFL and theater in Morocco differed vastly from my experiences with the ITC in that students who joined the drama club in Morocco did so voluntarily with the full knowledge of what theatre would require of them, unlike many of the students in the ITC. Additionally, the Moroccan students were EFL learners living in their own country and paying to attend a prestigious language institute, whereas the participants in this study were ESL learners who had immigrated to the U.S. and came from a variety of educational, national and socioeconomic backgrounds.

My role as the teacher of the ITC has afforded me an in-depth view of the classroom as a participant, rather than an outsider; of course, one drawback to my positioning as a teacher-researcher is that students may have softened their criticisms of the class due to their relationship with me. To mitigate this, the research project has been designed to draw from various sources in order to permit triangulation of data. Furthermore, it has been designed explicitly to include my voice in the analysis in an effort to address the questions posed from a situated perspective. Both my voice and the voice of my students have been included verbatim in the data collection and analysis process.

Occupying the dual role of the teacher-researcher has given me the advantage of being physically present for each day of each class (with few exceptions) for the duration of the study. Rist (1980) refers to swiftly conducted ethnographic studies as “blitzkrieg ethnography,” in which the researcher writes shallow and impressionistic accounts of participants and the setting. In contrast to this approach, I have been wholly immersed in and, indeed, an integral part of the culture of the classroom for the duration of the study, which I have conducted over the course of one year. This has enabled me to learn about their lives in depth both in the classroom and beyond. Detailed records of a multitude of data across one year have been compiled into the data set for analysis in this study.

### **Methodology**

As previously mentioned, this study was conducted through ethnographic methodology, which is concerned with “telling a credible, rigorous, and authentic story” from the perspective of the study participants (Fetterman, Chapter 1, para. 1). The collection and analysis of a variety of data create a “thick description” (Geertz, 1975) of a particular cultural context. This description then offers opportunities for grounded theory, or theory derived inductively and systematically from the gathered data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), of the particular context being studied.

Though originally conceived of as a research tool by anthropologists, ethnography has been routinely adopted as a research tool within the field of applied linguistics (Hymes, 1974; Watson-Gegeo, 1988; Gumperz, 1972). Advocating for the use of ethnography as a research method in the field of applied linguistics, Hymes (1974) argues,

It is not linguistics, but ethnography, not language, but communication, which must provide the frame of reference within which the place of language in culture and society is to be assessed. (p. 4)

Ethnographic analysis, particularly from the emic, or insider's, perspective (Pike, 1964), has often been employed in the study of drama in the second and foreign language classroom (Byram & Fleming, 1998; Bräuer, 2002). Byram and Fleming (1998) assert that ethnography is particularly well suited to the investigation of drama in the language classroom due to its methodological focus on cultural context. Furthermore, ethnography has long been established as a tool for teacher-researchers investigating their own classrooms (Byram & Feng, 2004; Watson-Gegeo, 1988; Byram & Fleming, 1998). Byram and Feng (2002) recommend that all teachers adopt the stance of ethnographers as a means of learning more about their students and managing cultural issues with understanding and sensitivity (p. 156). This study builds on a long tradition of ethnographic investigation into similar research problems in similar settings, expanding upon previous studies to address the unique context of theater in the adult ESL classroom.

### **Data Collection**

The collection of data using a variety of methods has been an important aspect of this study (as in all ethnographic studies) as it allows for triangulation in the analysis phase, comparing information from different sources to test emerging categories of coding and “strip away alternative explanations” (Fetterman, 2010, Chapter 5, Section 2, para. 1). As previously stated, data collected include artifacts, field notes, pictures and

video, journal entries, and interviews. These data were collected from all participants throughout the duration of the study.

**Artifacts.** Artifacts collected include: lesson plans, student surveys, work by students enrolled in the class (homework and classwork), work assigned by the teacher to the students (instructions, worksheets, etc.), personal communications (texts and emails sent to me from the student-participants), and photographs of the classroom environment. Because data were gathered over the course of one year, hundreds of pages of artifacts have been collected for inclusion in the data set.

**Field Notes.** Field notes primarily included jottings resulting from participant observation. These notes recorded student-student interactions observed during class as well as interactions between the students and myself and student interactions with members of the IIE and the public community. Due to my dual role as a teacher-researcher, I typically recorded the field notes within 24 hours of the observed class' end time, rather than make jottings during the class. Also included in the field notes were observational notes provided to me by outside observers. For example, on one occasion the Academic Director of the program observed the ITC and provided me with feedback, which I included in the field notes. On another occasion, a member of my cohort in the Applied Linguistics program observed the ITC and provided me with her detailed observational notes and a paper on the ITC written for one of her classes. I included these in my field notes because they provided an outsider's perspective.

**Pictures and Video.** Pictures and video were a useful data source because they enabled me to step outside of the events as they unfolded to examine data not yet filtered

through my own lens (unlike jottings and field notes) for analysis. Pictures were taken in the classroom and at the performance sites to enable thick description of the learning environment. Photos include student-participants as well as the physical environment of the class such as props, writing on the white board, and furniture.

Because I wanted to avoid intimidating students with the presence of a camera, I video-recorded only small portions of classes in which students or audience members were also taking video recordings. This occurred several times over the course of the rehearsal and performance phases of the ITC. All performances were video-recorded along with the moments leading up to and following the performances.

**Journal Entries.** Throughout the course of the study I kept a reflective journal. In this journal I recorded both my thoughts as the teacher of the ITC and my thoughts as a researcher. For example, I recorded my feelings on how the class was progressing as well as thoughts on how events unfolding in the ITC related to broader theories and literature discussed in earlier chapters. These journal entries were included in the data set for analysis to ensure that my changing perspective has been recorded and analyzed along with the rest of the data. Journal entries were typically recorded following key events.

**Interviews.** Both formal and informal interviews were conducted over the course of this study. Informal interviews with student participants were not audio-recorded. Instead of recording them, I made notes about points of interest in relation to this research project following the informal interviews.

Twelve formal, semi-structured interviews were conducted in the course of this research. All of the interviewees were student participants in the study. These interviews

fell into two categories: group interviews and individual interviews. Students who were not participating in the case study were interviewed in groups because many of the participants had busy schedules with pressing commitments outside of the ITC. I was, therefore, unwilling to ask them to donate considerable amounts of their personal time to the interview process. Eight group interviews were conducted in groups of 2-4 students. Each group interview took approximately twenty minutes. I interviewed students in small groups for brief periods of time because of student-participants' time constraints. Interviewees who participated in the group interviews were informed that the purpose of the interview was to discuss their opinions on language teaching, language learning and theater in the second language classroom. They were told that their views expressed in the interviews would be anonymously included in this study.

As described below, four individual interviews were conducted with four students selected for participation in the case study. These interviews were lengthier, between 30 and 50 minutes. They were also semi-structured. Like the group interviews, students who were interviewed individually were informed of the aims of the interview and that their names would not appear in any publication. They were further informed that I wanted to collect more detailed information about the students' background in addition to their experiences within the ITC. Selection of students to participate in the case study, which entailed individual interviews, is further discussed in the following section of this chapter.

All interviews were audio-recorded. I later transcribed each of them for inclusion in the data set. A transcription key for interview excerpts included in this thesis can be found in Appendix E; sample interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

### **Case Study**

In order to fully address both research questions, I selected four students as the subject of a case study within the broader ethnographic. The case study was intended to offer representative illustrative examples of participants in the ITC, which are essential to ethnography because they help the researcher to avoid using anecdotal evidence alone to support his or her preconceived ideas concerning the research (Watson-Gegeo, 1988). It was further intended to allow for in-depth, thick description characteristic of ethnographic studies in the attempt to tell the story of theater in the language classroom thoroughly.

The four case study students were selected primarily because I determined them to be representative of the majority of the students in their attitudes towards the integration of theater into the language classroom and in their experiences as adult immigrant language learners. Some students elected not to participate as actors in the final performance; others voiced a strong dislike or anxiety in association with theater throughout the course. A systematic analysis of preliminary data gathered from the first session revealed that upon completing the course the majority of the students found theater offered a variety of benefits. Students selected for the case study reflected this broader trend among participants. Additional criteria for selection included students' abilities to express complex ideas in English and willingness to devote time outside of



class to participate in interviews. The chart below provides background information on case study participants.

	<b>Jerome</b>	<b>Phan</b>	<b>Fares</b>	<b>Betty</b>
<b>Country of Origin</b>	Haiti	Thailand	Algeria	China
<b>Age</b>	34	57	25	45
<b>Gender</b>	M	F	M	F
<b>Education</b>	Degree in law	Degree in English literature	Degree in accounting	Completed Middle school
<b>Job(s) in country of origin</b>	Business owner, Radio host, Non-profit employee	Business owner	Accountant	Homemaker
<b>Job(s) during ITC enrollment</b>	Cashier at drug store	Unemployed	Shift Manager at fast food chain	Line cook at fast food chain

Figure 4.3. Background information on case study participants.

Data from each case study participant were collected and analyzed in the same manner as data from all student participants. Additionally, case study participants engaged in the longer individual interviews described above as well as group interviews. Case study data were recorded in a separate data set organized by each student to allow for tracking of the individual students' experiences throughout the arc of the course.

### **Data Analysis**

Robson (2002) noted the difficulties of separating the data collection and analysis phases of qualitative and interpretive research (p. 315). In this project, the selection of

which data to collect or exclude began the data analysis process. As previously described, a wide range of data was collected over the course of one year for this project. This was done in an attempt to allow me to move beyond my own impressions of the ITC to answer the research questions from the perspectives of all participants. Duff (2002) noted that the analysis and interpretation of a variety of data sources reflecting multiple perspectives may pose a challenge to the researcher (p. 294). In order to meet this challenge, one commonly accepted strategy in the field of qualitative research is the reduction of data used for interpretation, which can be undertaken through selection of representative and atypical data for analysis (Duff, 2002; Edwards & Westgate, 1994). I used this strategy throughout the data collection and analysis phases of this research project, basing such decisions on the intimate knowledge of the course that my perspective as teacher-researcher offered me. In determining what data to collect, I made judgments about relevance to the two research questions. These judgments were based on the research design (e.g. data from the case studies were used to address the second research question) and informed by my intimate knowledge of the project as the teacher-researcher. For example, I was able to mark sources of high relevance to the evolving research questions as the project unfolded and exclude most data that I did not perceive as relevant to either research question, (e.g. students' cloze worksheets on the present perfect).

The chart below indicates the relevance (as I perceive it) of each data source to the two research questions addressed in the study. Sources of higher relevance to a

particular question appear closer to the top of the chart, whereas sources of lower relevance to a particular research question appear closer to the bottom of the chart.

<b>Research Question 1</b>	<b>Research Question 2</b>
Group Interviews	Individual Interviews
Artifacts	Artifacts
Pictures and Videos	Field Notes
Field Notes	Pictures and Video
Journal Entries	Journal Entries

Figure 4.4. Data sources of relevance to each research question.

As described in the previous section, the case study, which included data from the sources listed in the above table, was instrumental in addressing the second research question.

### **Coding**

Though I have presented a breakdown of which data sources were instrumental in addressing a particular research question, the two questions are closely related. Because of this, all data sources were, in fact, of relevance to both questions. As the project unfolded, I noted tentative themes related to the research questions that seemed to emerge as the course and data collection continued. These themes were drafted and then all data were reviewed to revise the original themes. In this theme-data-theme recursive review, the initial themes were in some cases differentiated and subdivided, augmented, or

combined as more complete data from all sources were integrated to capture key dynamics that addressed the research questions. Next, the data from all sources were coded to indicate the theme that the data element best represented. Coding to secondary themes was also done. The coded data were assembled and reviewed by code as the bases for constructing the findings for each research question. Resources for this research did not allow for a second researcher replicating the thematic development or the coding assignment.

In addressing the research questions, all data collected were gathered into one comprehensive data set, which I analyzed to determine emergent themes relevant to the two research questions. Data within the set was initially coded by source (i.e. interviews, artifacts, journal entries etc.). The first data source coded was the interviews. This decision was made in an attempt to ensure that initial codes were determined based on the students' words rather than simply my impressions. Statements related to the integration of drama and ESL instruction were identified and compiled into one data set for analysis. A total of 118 interview excerpts in which students discussed the integration of theater and ESL were isolated. Data from other sources was then used to triangulate findings. Drawing from a wide array of concrete data as well as my own insight as the teacher of the course allowed for triangulation and development of thick descriptions including representative examples.

Data from the case studies were additionally coded and evaluated in a separate data set to identify emerging themes among case study participants. Primary data sources analyzed to answer this question were interviews, field notes and artifacts. Interviews

were the initial data source coded in order to ensure that emergent themes represented the students' views, rather than speaking only from my own locality as the teacher of the course. After key themes were identified in the interviews, field notes and artifacts were coded according to the initial categories taken from the interviews. New themes were identified and participants' statements were triangulated against field notes and artifacts. Themes were accordingly revised to reflect all data analyzed. Significant themes that emerged from the analysis of these data are presented in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 5  
FINDINGS: ALL PARTICIPANTS

This chapter presents findings that emerged from analysis of the data gathered from all participants in the study in order to address both questions posed in this study:

1. How did students perceive theater as affecting their language development?
2. How was individual students' identity development affected by participation in the ITC?

Before entering into a discussion of these findings, it is necessary to relate how theater was used in the ESL classroom. Analysis of the data revealed that activities fell into five broad themes, or activity types, indicated in Figure 5.1 on page 50. These activity types varied greatly in their orientation towards theater or ESL though, as elaborated below, all theater activities involve English use and, therefore, also target development in ESL. If we take the Shakespearean adage, "all the world's a stage" to heart, it is difficult to isolate theater activities from any other activity in life or in the language classroom. Making distinctions between ESL-oriented and theater-oriented activities becomes even more challenging as many ESL activities such as reading dialogues aloud or doing role-plays are standard activities in the language classroom. In presenting these findings I do not intend to imply that an activity may be focused solely on theater or ESL, nor to imply

that ESL-oriented activities in the ITC were inherently less exciting, engaging, or valuable than theater-oriented activities. It is, however, necessary to make distinctions in order to study the relationship of theater to language learning, bearing in mind that such distinctions are fluid and influenced by subjective perception.

Distinctions between activity types in figure 5.1 reflect the teacher's (my) intention, rather than the students' perceptions of the activity. Therefore, though ESL-oriented activities may have 'focus on form' connotations for some, in this breakdown I consider them to be any activity not specifically planned to incorporate theater techniques. These ESL-oriented activities included non- 'focus on form' approaches such as taking students on a walking tour of Boston in which they designed a travel guide for publication in the school's newspaper, which was interactive but did not include theater techniques. Making this distinction between theater and non-theater-oriented activities and a further distinction between types of theater activities is of import because it will serve as a basis for discussion, later in this chapter, of how the students' and teacher's perceptions of theater affected their perceptions of how drama affects language learning.

To determine an approximate amount of time spent in each activity category across the three sessions, lesson plans and field notes were reviewed. I calculated the timing of each category in the following way. By totaling the time spent in all the other activities and subtracting that from the total amount of class time, I calculated the amount of time spent on Type 1 activities. I had planned that Type 2 activities take approximately 15 minutes per class, but as they often ran longer a time of 17 minutes per

<b>Activity Type</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Examples of Activities</b>	<b>Time spent on each activity type (Average across sessions)</b>	<b>Orientation Towards Theater Or ESL</b>
1. Primarily ESL-Oriented Activities	Activities not out of place in a student-centered ESL classroom with no theater orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grammar presentation and practice</li> <li>• Essay Writing</li> <li>• Reading and Listening Activities</li> <li>• Debates and Discussions</li> <li>• Tests</li> <li>• Pronunciation Exercises</li> </ul>	63%	Strong ESL Orientation
2. Warm up Activities	Activities began each lesson, may have ESL, theater or community building orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting to know you activities</li> <li>• Character development activities/theater games</li> <li>• Language games</li> </ul>	9%	Orientation of individual activities varied.
3. Theater Activities Couched in ESL Lessons	Activities used theatrical elements to present grammar, vocabulary or content to learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role plays</li> <li>• Rehearsed Dialogues</li> <li>• Oral Presentations</li> <li>• Forum Theater</li> </ul>	5%	Equal orientation towards theater and ESL
4. Devising and Rehearsing the Play	Activities in which student co-created and rehearsed plays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improvisations</li> <li>• Script Writing</li> <li>• In-class rehearsals</li> </ul>	18%	Strong theater orientation
5. Performing the Play	Activities include dress rehearsals and performances for the public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dress rehearsals in performance space</li> <li>• Performances/talk backs</li> </ul>	5%	Strong theater orientation

Figure 5.1. Activity Types



class day was assigned to this activity type. Time spent in Type 3, 4 and 5 was determined through an analysis and tabulation of lesson plan activities. As mentioned previously, time spent on Type 1 activities was determined by totaling the time spent in all the other activities and subtracting that from the total amount of class time.

Though the activities presented in Figure 5.1 describe 5 Activity Types or themes that emerged illustrating how the Immigrant Theater Class (ITC) taught ESL through theater, these activities are interconnected and best viewed holistically. For instance, an ESL-oriented warm up in which students mime sentences to elicit the past continuous tense from the class may have students' production of the past continuous as an immediate aim. Yet this activity also encourages students to express their ideas non-verbally, requires them to think on their feet and take risks, and prepares them for devising, meaning co-creating a play through improvisation. Because ITC activities are integrated one with another, the effects of any individual activity or activity type cannot be isolated from the course as a whole. For this reason, themes that emerged are presented from a bird's-eye view of the course.

### **Course Overview**

It is necessary to first present three findings that frame other findings presented later in this chapter. These regard the overall structure of the course and are presented before entering into a detailed discussion of the impact of the ITC on students' perceived language development. These three findings are: 1) The primary focus of the ITC was to increase students' ESL abilities as described in the Massachusetts Adult Basic Education Curriculum Framework for English for Speakers of Other Languages (Massachusetts

Department of Education, Adult and Community Learning Services, 2005) and defined in the previous chapter; 2) The ITC employed a largely student-centered curriculum; and 3) Students' perceptions of what constitutes theater differed from my own.

### **Primary Focus: ESL**

A key finding which contextualizes all other findings presented in this chapter is that, as indicated in Figure 5.1, the majority of class time was spent on activities with a strong ESL orientation. Even activities with a strong theater orientation, including writing, rehearsing and performing the play were presented to students as a means of improving their English language skills. Explicit language instruction, not to mention extensive language use, was present in each activity type including Devising and Rehearsing the Play and Performing the Play, which had a strong theater orientation. The primary focus of the course from the perspective of both the students and the teacher-researcher was, therefore, to improve students' ESL skills.

### **Student-Centered Curriculum**

Throughout the course, I attempted to maintain a student-centered approach to both classroom instruction and curricular development (Journal Entry, September 19, 2014). Student input was considered in creating both the sequence and scope of the ITC curriculum. In primarily ESL-oriented activities, students determined the sequence of the curriculum through the collaborative selection of themes. The scope of the curriculum, in contrast, was in large part determined by the teacher (myself), who selected specific instructional materials within each curricular theme. For example, though students may have elected to begin with the theme, "On the Job," as their teacher, I selected which

instructional materials within that curricular theme would be covered (Field Note, September 16, 2014; January 20, 2015; April 15, 2015).

Students influenced the scope of the curriculum to a much greater extent during the process of creating and rehearsing the play than in primarily ESL-oriented activities, warm ups, theater activities couched in ESL lessons, and performances. In creating and rehearsing the plays, students generated the material dealt with in each lesson and presented in the final performances. Theater, therefore, served as a primary means of incorporating students' lived experiences into the curriculum.

### **Perceptions of the Nature of Theater**

Another key finding is that students' perceptions of what constituted theater differed from my own. In constructing Figure 5.1, I determined whether an activity was primarily theater- or ESL-oriented based on my own perceptions and motivations for implementing activities as recorded in my journal and field notes. However, students indicated the belief that only later phases of the rehearsals and performances constituted "doing theater" (Interview, April 17, 2015), this was also documented in field notes on several occasions (Field Note, November 25, 2014; March 6, 2015; June 22, 2015). The majority of students did not view the improvisation and writing portions of the course as "doing theater," nor did they view the majority of warm up activities or theater activities couched in ESL lessons as constituting theater. Because of this, students perceived a very small portion of the class to be taken up with theater. It is important to take this into account when considering their perceptions of its impact on language development as

teachers and students may have different frames of reference when discussing or engaging in theater in the ESL class.

### **Blending Theater and ESL Instruction**

As the review of the literature on drama in second language education in Chapter 3 illustrated, a variety of approaches and techniques has been used to teach ESL through theater. Rather than using only one approach or technique, The ITC drew from many. The traditional distinction between product- and process-drama cannot describe the process that ITC participants underwent as the ITC adopted both product- and process-based approaches.

Over the course of a typical session, each class began with a 5-15 minute warm-up designed to build community, apprentice students into theatrical conventions and techniques, or practice a particular language-learning point. In the first month of the course, this was often the only theater-oriented portion of the class; the remaining class time focused on explicit language instruction and the practice and use of English. However, at some points during the early weeks of the course, the class engaged in role-plays and improvisations, which centered on a theme being studied. Example of this are the integration of Forum Theater in the “Family” unit as detailed in Appendix C, the improvisation of job interviews during “Jobs” unit, and the performance of short plays written for ESL learners to introduce key topics in the “Culture and History of the U.S.” unit.

The class rarely began the devising process before the last month of the session at which time I provided students with storytelling prompts. After telling stories to their

classmates, students worked in groups to improvise scenes depicting the stories. Sometimes students altered their stories through the imaginative power of theater. Students then performed these improvisations for their classmates and received structured feedback from both me, as their teacher, and their classmates. After these initial in-class performances, I led a variety of improvisational exercises involving students' devised scenes from which the class shaped a final product for performance.

Students wrote drafts of their scenes, which I then typed and corrected. On some occasions, I wrote connecting segments to create an arc for the play; on other occasions, students wrote the connecting segments and collectively created a story arc. Students then memorized their lines, and class time was spent rehearsing the written script, constructing and decorating the set, and continuing to improvise changes to the text. On several occasions, students who were absent on a given class day were replaced by a classmate not cast in their scene. In this way, improvisation played a heavy role in the process throughout the final rehearsals and even in performances. ITC plays were performed in various settings including the school that housed the ITC, a local high school, and a summer camp for children. A detailed taxonomic description of how theater was used to teach ESL is included in Appendix C.

Clearly, both product-based approaches that emphasize the memorization and performance of a text and process-based approaches that emphasize the creation of a text were employed. Because of this, the benefits and challenges associated with both of approaches were manifest within the ITC, as will be detailed throughout this chapter.

The majority of students reported or displayed negative feelings towards the required performance element from the early weeks of the course. Integrating theater into the curriculum gradually and in increasing increments over time was a tactic I employed to combat negative perceptions of theater in the language classroom. I chose to focus explicitly on ESL instruction and draw from non-theater oriented activities in order to foster a sense of community and a positive attitude towards the learning environment before embarking on the devising process. In the final interviews, the majority of students reported contentment with the structure of the course, particularly the ESL element and the fact that explicit language instruction continued throughout the devising process. Tying drama-based activities explicitly to students' language related goals, then, may decrease affective barriers to participation in theater and, as further illustrated in the following section of this chapter, increase students' investment in their learning community.

### **Students' Identity and Perceived Language Development**

Requiring students to devise, meaning collaboratively create and perform a play, in the context of an ESL classroom affected them in a variety of ways. Key themes explored in this section include: 1) Affective Dimensions; 2) Perceived Second Language Development; 3) Investment; 4) Classroom Dynamics, and 5) Beyond the classroom.

#### **Affective Dimensions**

Swain (2011) emphasized the importance of examining emotion and affects in second language learning; the findings of this study highlight that importance. The most prominent theme was that theater clearly had a strong affective influence on student

participants in the ITC. These affective dimensions changed over time within each session. A broad trend revealed that theater initially provoked negative feelings such as fear and anxiety. Over time, however, students reported feeling increased confidence and pride in association with their participation in theater.

Of seventy-four total student participants, all but two reported feeling nervous or afraid because of their involvement in theater; however, the reader is reminded that students' perceptions of theater include primarily the rehearsal and performance. These emotions were documented in field notes as early as the first day of each session when students voiced apprehension about the theatrical element of the course and as late as the performance days (Field Note, April 30, 2015; September 15, 2014; January 30, 2015). As the time approached to perform the plays, these emotions increased, even manifesting physically in students. For example, upon entering the large theater in which students would perform the following day, one student exclaimed, "Oh, no! Teacher, please, no!" (Field Note, April 16, 2015). Another student reported feeling nervous "like my body is shaking" and deciding to "pray to God" before the performance (Field Note, August 25, 2015). Such emotions may have contributed to a small number of students deciding not to continue with the course in the first and second session, as later detailed in the Investment section of this chapter.

Despite the numerous documented instances in which students felt nervous or afraid, feelings of confidence or pride were documented in interviews and field notes in all student participants who remained enrolled through the final performance of each

session. As the following interview excerpt illustrates, even students who experienced negative emotions subsequently felt pride in their final performance:

I can like so *proud* about I write play with my classmates. *That's so good*. It feels *so good*. *Proud*. *I can tell anyone* like, I do, *I can do it*...I was so worrying about play in front of so many people but now it's *feel better than before* so that's good things. *I can speak something*, *I can play something* in front of many people. (Group Interview, April 17, 2015).

In another instance a student, Lucia, initially opted not to participate in theater, saying she felt too nervous. However, she later volunteered to replace actors who were absent in rehearsals. After one week, she decided to act in the play and negotiated for a role with the other students. In addition to playing that role, she volunteered to play roles other than her own when students were absent during in-class rehearsals in the end playing more roles (in rehearsal) than any other student. In an informal interview, she reported making the choice to do this because she felt shy when she spoke English and wanted to challenge herself (Informal Interview, August 26, 2015). She reported that her confidence in speaking had increased as a result of participating in theater.

After completing the performances, students voiced intense feelings of happiness and pride. After one show, when a student asked me how the performance was, I responded, "You were all terrible." The student laughed and said, "no, we were great" (Field Note, August 21, 2015). Of the students who had seen a previous ITC production, every student voiced the belief that the performance they had participated in was the best. It appears that the intensity of students' feelings of nervousness and apprehension



preceding the performances were in many cases equaled by feelings of intense joy and pride following them.

Data such as artifacts, field notes, and journal entries were collected from the first day of each session; however, all group interviews occurred in the week of performances across the three sessions. Surveys in the beginning of the sessions indicated that a majority of students felt nervous about acting in a play, but at the end of the sessions 91 of the 118 interview excerpts coded in analysis indicated that students perceived some benefit to the integration of theater in the ESL class. Words associated with fear occurred in 15 instances; in contrast, words associated with confidence appeared in 25. Many students reported feeling increased confidence and pride as a result of their participation in theater even though they reported feeling afraid, stressed, or nervous at some point in the process. Much of the confidence reported by students was directly related to their English language skills, as detailed in the following section.

### **Students' Perceived Second Language Development**

Student interviews were the primary data sources used in analyzing this theme. Most of the interview excerpts were student responses to the question: “what are some good things about theater in the ESL classroom and some bad things about theater in the ESL classroom?” Of the 118 interview excerpts analyzed, 47 relate to students' perceptions of the effects of theater on their second language development. Of these 47 excerpts, 46 reflected a positive view of theater's influence on developing ESL skills. One student participant asserted that theater did not aid in second language development, but did help her to develop public speaking abilities. All other students who chose to

comment on how theater affected their ESL skills reported a positive relationship.

Though 17 excerpts stated that participating in theater in the ITC improved their English in general terms, many described specific benefits, which are included as subthemes.

These student-generated subthemes are: Speaking and Other Skills.

Speaking was the skill most frequently cited as having improved because of students' participation in theater. In the words of one student, theater "has benefits because you can't learn a language without speaking it and you can't do theater without speaking, so theater can help you learning your language" (Interview, August 26, 2015).

Many students agreed. Only interview excerpts explicitly containing the root words *speaking* or *talk* were coded to support the finding that students' perceived theater as beneficial to their speaking skills. This means that many other references to communication in general were excluded the analysis that led to this finding.

Of the 47 initially analyzed excerpts, 24 excerpts indicated that students perceived theater as improving their speaking skills in English in several ways. In 13 of the excerpts, students explicitly expressed the view that theater increased their confidence in speaking. In 6, students asserted that theater helped their speaking abilities because it mirrored real life communication. In 5 of the excerpts, students related that doing theater in class increased the amount of time in class that they spent speaking, which resulted in increased practice time, leading to increased fluency. Confidence, again pointing to the importance of affective factors in second language development, was the most frequently cited area of improvement in speaking.

Though speaking was, by far, the skill students cited most as improved by theater, other skills were mentioned in the interviews. Students cited positive effects of integrating theater and ESL instruction in the following areas: writing, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Several reported viewing theater as a means of reinforcing skills learned earlier in the ITC and in previous classes. In the majority of cases, students grouped the skills of speaking, grammar, writing, and pronunciation together. A major finding was that pride and confidence, again, were frequently stated areas of improvement across a variety of ESL skills. Additionally, several students mentioned that writing and practicing the play helped them to retain new vocabulary and grammatical structures.

Theater-oriented activities also enhanced students' language skills in terms of opening up opportunities for them to experience communicative success in high stakes situations. Theater required students to negotiate for meaning and instilled in them a genuine desire to be understood, possibly enhancing several of the students' abilities to make themselves understood. One example of this occurred when the students along with several native-English speaking volunteers were working together to construct the set and props for a performance (Field Note, August 7, 2015). Several of the students had a very clear idea of what the set should look like. When they encountered difficulties in verbally explaining their vision to the volunteers, they used body language and mime to convey their meaning. Rather than capitulating to the volunteers' ideas of how best to construct the set, the students painstakingly communicated what they had in mind. In the end together they built a set that the students took pride in, while communicating

complex ideas in English. In contrast, in activities that were primarily ESL-oriented, occasions in which students painstakingly used every means at their disposal to convey an idea of great importance to them were much rarer. A more common occurrence was that students communicated only basic ideas; if an occasion arose where their English level became a barrier to expression, students did not feel strongly enough about communicating the idea to persevere, instead exclaiming: “not enough English” (Field Note, October 23, 2014).

### **Investment**

As previously described in the literature review, Norton (2000, 2013) posits that investment differs from motivation in that it takes a broader sociocultural perspective, investigating the influence of identity and the specific context in which students are learning in relation to students’ desire to participate in specific classroom practices. Though this chapter primarily addresses students’ perceived language development rather than issues of identity, investment is nonetheless a concept worth discussing. Students’ reasons for enrolling in the class and deciding whether or not and how much to invest in particular classroom practices impacted their perceived language development as described in the paragraphs that follow.

The reasons underlying students’ decisions to attend the ITC may have influenced their overall investment in its classroom practices. Students’ reasons for enrolling in an English class were varied. The majority wanted to improve their English for work-related reasons. Some wanted to find a job, others to find a better job or advance at their current workplace. Others wanted to learn academic English because they intended to get

their High School equivalency diploma, attend community college, or earn a higher degree. A third group sought to improve their English as a means of connecting with their English-speaking children or grandchildren. Many students had multiple reasons for learning English, including a desire to function well in their communities.

The ITC was a free English class, yet students made many sacrifices to attend. Several were working and raising children while in the ITC. Others gave up time they could have spent earning money at their jobs or raising their children to attend class daily. Students, therefore, exhibited powerful motivation in regards to mastering ESL, viewing it as the key to success in the U.S. Investment in the specific classroom practices of the ITC, however, varied greatly and changed over time. Very few students entered the class with an enthusiastic attitude towards writing and performing a play.

Students' positive attitudes towards the integration of theater and ESL instruction were strongly linked to the fact that many activities were not perceived by them to be theater-oriented. The majority of students expressed the view that theater was beneficial because it was undertaken in conjunction with more traditional ESL activities. One student described how she did not initially want to go to the theater class, but that over time her perception changed because of time spent in ESL-oriented activities:

*Before, I think that there is no grammar and no writing just talking and action...But when I come here I found that we have some grammar, some writing and some listening, um, and, uh, some songs to listen and I think it's very great and, uh, we always have some play some small play with our partner. I think it's like friends talking about their lives. (Group Interview, December 15, 2014)*

Many students who expressed a positive attitude toward theater did so conditionally. They expressed contentment with the fact that theater-oriented activities took up significantly less class time than ESL-oriented activities (Group Interview, December 13, 2014; August 26, 2015; April 17, 2015).

Four students reported the belief that time spent on theater took away from explicit instruction in English, but many saw this exchange of time as having both positive and negative effects:

The, um, *bad* thing is that *you don't have a lot of time for...more grammar or for speak*, but for me was very, very good because I was afraid...*When I speak I feel that nobody can understand me...* and my mouth close in the moment. I can't speak. *But in the theater I felt very good* because *I thought that the people was there can could understand me....*and was, was very, very, very, very nice for me.

(Group Interview, April 17, 2015)

Several students reported such mixed reactions. Others reported contentment with the amount of time devoted to theater. These students cited the brief rehearsal period along with the explicit error correction received from the teacher during the rehearsals as primary reasons. Only one student out of 80 reported experiencing no positive benefits in the integration of theater and ESL, voicing the belief that engaging in theater activities took too much time away from practicing other skills (Group Interview, December 18, 2014).

Students' investment in the ITC changed over time across all three sessions because the process of integrating theater into the ESL classroom differed in each session

and because each class was comprised of a different set of individual students. The main documented differences that had an effect on student investment were: students' prior experience with theater, the number and timing of students who chose to drop out of the course, and the number of students who elected to continue in the course, but not participate in the final performance.

Four students had participated in theater activities at the school prior to their enrollment in the course taught by me. They had enrolled when the ITC was designated a level 4 class and taught by a different teacher. When they graduated, the administration changed the ITC to level 5, and these students were automatically reenrolled in the theater class. All four of these students expressed a strong desire not to participate in theater from their first day in the ITC. They reported feeling that it wasted valuable class time and also that theater made them very nervous (Field Note, November 13, 2014). On the Friday before the Thanksgiving break, I announced that the class would begin rehearsing the play when the class returned from the break (Field Note, November 21, 2014). Two of the four students never returned to class. Of the two who did return, both participated in the final performance. One reported feeling that theater was beneficial to ESL students; the other reported that it was not (Group Interview, December 18, 2014). Of the other students, some reported previous theater experience in other places, such as performing school plays as children, but no data were gathered to support findings on how previous theater experience outside of the IIE affected students' investment in the ITC.

A small number of students dropped out of each of the three sessions of the ITC for which data were recorded (Artifact, April 18, 2015; December 19, 2014; August 27, 2015). Students were also added over the course of each session. As confirmed by a school administrator (Field Note, August, 28, 2015), students regularly drop out of all courses at the IIE over the course of a session and the number of drop outs from the ITC was not significantly greater than any other course at the institute.

The number of enrolled students varied from session to session, as indicated in figure 5.2.

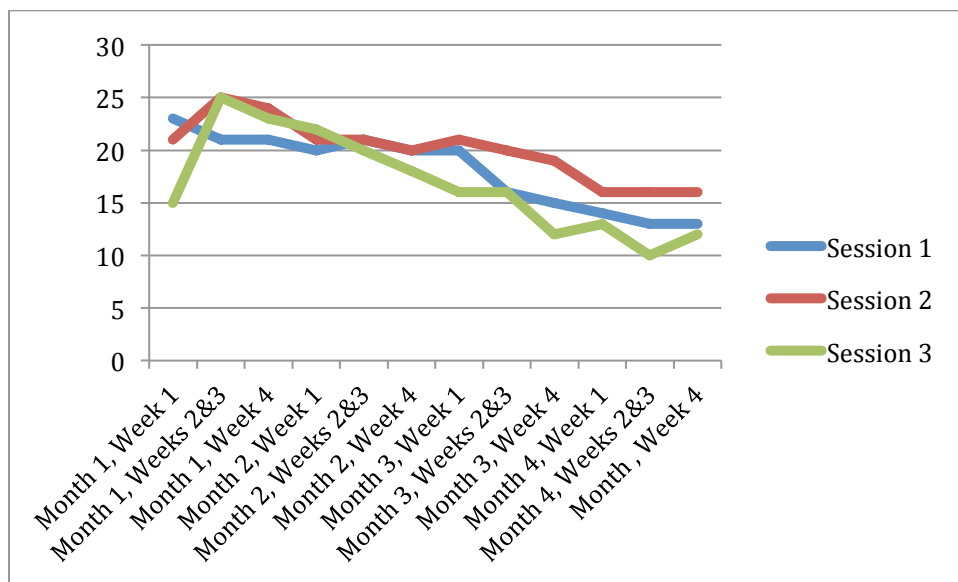


Figure 5.2. Number of enrolled students per session over time.

There were three types of dropouts in the ITC. The first group consisted of students who reported that their decision to leave the course was motivated by another commitment. Such commitments included: moving, getting a new job, starting at a new



school, suffering medical problems, or family reasons (such as having no daycare or giving birth). The second group consisted of only one student, Willi, who explicitly reported that she did not wish to continue the course because she did not wish to participate in theater (Field Note, July 24, 2015). This attitude was voiced on a day following a serious miscommunication. I had allowed students to choose their roles in the play, but Willi was absent on that day. I asked the class if they knew whether she was nervous about theater and whether she wanted a large or small role. The class said she was nervous and did not want a big role, so I assigned her a small role. The following day I told her about the role I had assigned her and explained that I would give her a larger role if she wanted one. Her response was that she was a single mother going to school and that if her classmates did not think she was good at theater, she would not do theater. Though I explained this was not the case, she opted to leave the course. However, she did return for the set construction day (Field Note, August 7, 2015).

The third group did not report their reason for leaving the class. The following chart indicates the percentage of each type of dropout in each session and on average. Though a longitudinal comparison across the three sessions falls outside the scope of this thesis, I include detailed information on the number of dropouts in each session to highlight the factors that may have caused students to drop the course and to allow for a later analysis of how differences in approaches to integrating theater into the adult ESL classroom may affect students' perceptions of theater and willingness to participate.

Type of Dropout	Session			Ave. of All Sessions
	1	2	3	
<b>Reported – Other Commitment</b>	77%	44%	56%	59%
<b>Reported – Unwilling to Participate in Theater</b>	0%	0%	1%	0.3%
<b>Unreported</b>	23%	56%	27%	35%

Figure 5.3. Number and types of dropouts per session.

It is impossible to determine the reasons behind unreported students dropping out.

However, from their statements and actions prior to discontinuing the course it is possible to infer that at least some students did so because they did not wish to participate in creating and performing a play.

The fact that the class would create and perform a play was introduced to students in different ways across the different sessions. How the performance element of the class was introduced to students affected students' perceptions of theater and their investment in the practice of teaching ESL through theater. Across all three sessions on the first day of class I explained that the class would incorporate a theatrical performance, but rehearsals would not begin immediately, so it would not be further discussed until later. After approximately two months of class, I showed a recording of previous ITC productions, informed students of the dates and locations of the performances and answered student questions. The performance element was contextualized in the ITC's dual mission to teach ESL to adult immigrant students and educate the public about

immigrant experiences. Students were asked to brainstorm what they might want to teach the audience about their experiences as immigrants while creating the play.

A student in the second session commented on the connection between students' decision to drop the course and the way that theater was introduced to students. When asked what changes she would suggest in the course, the student recommended that I explicitly explain the benefits of theater before starting the devising process. She explained:

When, uh, all students *finish the grammar...they leave*, they leave the level...Why? Because *he think the theater is*, uh, *is nothing* is a, a boring thing...But...is good thing to improve English....You can, I think, you can *explain that before to start the theater...*I think all students I talk with think, no, theater is nothing...(but) theater is good, uh, experience to, uh, to improve English...But *student didn't understand that*. (Group Interview, April 17, 2015)

The two other students participating in this group interview concurred. This illustrates that the way theater is framed to students may affect their perception of its value and the importance of communicating both the expectations and reasoning underlying the theatrical element of the course early on.

In Session Three, I followed this advice and spoke with the class at length of the benefits students in previous sessions had experienced (Field Note, April 29, 2015; May 27, 2015; June 21, 2015). Additionally, two former ITC students who were currently teachers at the school spoke of what they gained from the class (Field Note, July 16, 2015). They described the experience as challenging, but worthwhile and of benefit to

their English. A marked difference in dropouts occurred in this session. Though several students dropped the class to pursue other jobs or courses at the time that rehearsals began, four of these students returned to class periodically to help their former classmates construct the set and props. Two of them practiced monologues in their homes and performed them in the play, skipping class at their new school to return to the ITC (Field Note, August 11, 2015). One student who had to drop out to take care of her child when school was released for the summer reenrolled in the ITC in the following session and returned to watch the play and participate in set construction, to which she brought her child (Field Note, August 28, 2015). Two students expressed a strong desire to repeat the ITC and “do theater” again (Field Note, August 3, 2015). No students had expressed such a desire in previous sessions. Framing theater positively may, therefore, induce some students to adopt a positive attitude towards theater in the ESL class.

Not all students who attended the class until the final day performed in the play. In the first two sessions some students elected to continue attending class but not perform; in the third session all students who continued their enrollment from the first to the last day of the course performed in the play (artifact, September 29, 2014; field note, March 30, 2015; April 1, 2015). One student chose not to participate because she felt her religion did not permit her to perform in theater. The other two students cited anxiety as the main reason for declining to act in the performance. They informed me that they feared that the anxiety associated with performing in a play would have a negative effect on their health.

Despite declining to perform, these students attended classes through the end of the session and actively participated in the productions in ways other than acting (Artifact, April 18, 2015; December 19, 2014). They directed scenes, created props lists, participated in the process of making artistic decisions about the play and assisted with technical elements during performances. All three students reported a belief that participating in theater improved their confidence in communicating in English.

For students who remained enrolled for the duration of the course, the impact of theater on their investment in classroom practices of the ITC changed over time. The imminent goal of a final, public performance seemed to generate significant overall investment in the theater-oriented activities of the ITC. Students actively argued for what they believed to be the best choices for the final performance and worked diligently to ensure they could take pride in the final result. In fact, in the third session there was a one-week interval between the first and second performance. Students voted to focus on ESL-oriented activities rather than continuing to rehearse the play for four days out of that week (Field Note, August 19, 2015). However, on average only 5 out of the 12 students attended those four days of class. In contrast, when the class began rehearsals again, all students attended. In another session, a student reported not visiting the hospital for a bladder infection because she did not want to miss any rehearsals for the play (Informal Interview, April 17, 2015). Students who remained in class through the final performance overwhelmingly exhibited increased investment in theater-oriented activities, texting or calling their classmates to remind them to come on time and practicing their lines after class and during breaks. In contrast, theater appears to have

had a negative impact on investment in students who dropped out before the rehearsals began.

### **Classroom Dynamics**

The use of theater in the classroom affected the ways students participated in their English class in terms of: a) student interaction, b) students' sense of play, c) student agency, and d) classroom community. While these are described separately, they are frequently overlapping and embedded. For example, most instances of students exhibiting playfulness co-occurred with students interacting, and several instances in which students demonstrated agency in the classroom were interconnected with instances of students displaying a strong classroom community, which is by nature interactive. However, for the purpose of clarity of exposition, these themes along with detailed examples are described separately below.

The integration of theater into the ESL classroom increased the amount of time during which students interacted with one another as well as how those interactions unfolded. Students spent much more time engaging in group work in theater-oriented activities than ESL-oriented activities. This time was spent collaboratively playwriting, planning blocking (meaning where and how actors move in a scene), giving feedback, and constructing sets and props. I provided minimal input while students worked in groups devising the play. On many occasions, students spoke with their classmates informally in English about topics of their choice while they waited for other groups to finish.

These collaborations resulted in significantly more interaction in theater-oriented activities than in purely ESL-oriented activities. Several students remarked on this in their interviews:

*you have more time for talk with each other because sometimes in class you have just break time. It's too fast. And then when you are practicing, for example one scene one or two you can talk with your partners for the next one and then you can have more contact with another peoples.* (Group Interview, December 18, 2014)

Several students expressed the opinion that they were able to learn more about their classmates and their cultures because of their participation in theater (Group Interview, December 17, 2014; December 18, 2014; April 17, 2015; August 26, 2015). This increased interaction also led to an increased sense of community, as discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Students' sense of play also increased as their participation in theater-oriented activities increased. For instance, a Mexican student wrote a scene about serving lasagna at a dinner she was hosting at which none of the guests could eat lasagna for various reasons. The party members decided, instead, to drink tequila that the student had recently brought back from Mexico. Sara, one of the students portraying a guest in the scene, was Muslim and had never drunk alcohol. I explained to Sara that she did not have to participate in that scene if she felt uncomfortable depicting someone who drank alcohol, but Sara expressed enthusiasm about playing a member of the party. When the students mimed drinking tequila, Sara drank it slowly and said "delicious." The other

students in the class explained that that was not a typical reaction to taking a shot of tequila. The class mimed taking shots and stumbling around the room. Sara laughed and said, “Is my first alcohol!” (Field Note, April 9, 2015). Later in the rehearsal process, that group was practicing at one end of the classroom; at the opposite end of the room I sat on the floor with my back to Sara’s group, watching a different scene. Sara’s group was heard to say “We surprise the teacher,” upon which they linked arms and can-canned across the room miming a tequila influenced party. The students decided to integrate this into the play by having the whole class dance onstage at the end of the scene.

This increased sense of play began to manifest during warm up activities and increased as students began to use props and improvise their scenes. On some occasions, I had to remove props that distracted from students’ abilities to focus, such as a toy machine gun that students posed with on several occasions and a basket full of star-shaped glasses that some students decided to wear in scenes in which I felt them to be incongruous (Field Notes, February 23, 2015; March 9, 2015). In the examples described above, students who were demonstrating a sense of play were clearly also demonstrating high levels of interaction, a strong sense of community, and agency.

In the rehearsal and performance phases of the class, students demonstrated agency in decision-making and self-directed work. Students regulated classmates, texting them to remind them to come to class early on dress rehearsal days (Field Note, August 7, 2015; August 25, 2015; April 15, 2015; December 17, 2014). In the days leading up to the performance, during break time students were observed to be working together to



practice their lines. Several students also brought props from their homes for use in the play.

Making decisions about how the play would be staged and what props would be used was largely the students' initiative. Even when I attempted to impose a choice, the class sometimes overrode my decision. For instance, in one rehearsal a decision needed to be made about what gift one character should give another (Field Note, March 31, 2015). The scene was about a student who felt very lonely after arriving in the U.S., but whose neighbors helped him to feel at home by inviting him to play soccer. In the scene the neighbor brought a gift. The student playing the actor decided to give him men's cologne, but several other students voiced the belief that this was an inappropriate gift for a man to give another man. They wanted him to give a basketball, instead. Students argued for their choices passionately, after which I took a vote. The class voted to use the basketball, but the student-actor refused to abide by the vote. He used cologne in all rehearsals and performances.

On another occasion props had been accidentally thrown away by a custodian immediately preceding the performance (Field Note, August 27, 2015). I asked the class what they thought should be done as the props were integral to the performance. The students informed me that they would find a solution and that they wanted me to direct scenes that had not been practiced the previous day while they figured it out. They organized themselves into groups to find materials and reconstruct all of the props. Student agency and initiative in decision making increased over time as the final performance approached and stakes grew higher.

In this high stakes environment, the class formed a strong sense of community. Analyses of both field notes and interviews indicate that the incorporation of theater into the ITC affected students' sense of their classroom community in mostly positive but some negative ways. Students reported feeling a stronger sense of classroom community due to theater, but they also reported, to a lesser degree, some instances of interpersonal tensions due to theater. This was evident across all three sessions.

Perhaps because each cohort participated in a process that initially provoked feelings of anxiety, followed by pride, students invested heavily in their sense of community. In interviews, several students explicitly voiced the opinion that doing theater in class increased their sense of community. At the end of one group interview, after I had thanked the students for their time, one student, Lina, interjected in order to make it clear that theater increased the class' sense of closeness with one another:

Lina: And, I just add theater *make us close*.

Rani: Oh, yeah that's true.

Lina: Even like two weeks but *we feel like we know each other a long, long time ago*, but I think, yeah.

Rani: I think that's close us.

(Group Interview, December 18, 2014)

It was not uncommon for students to feel emotional when the course came to a close, with several students crying. On the last day of one session, a woman cried at the prospect of the class disbanding, while her classmates patted her shoulder and assured her that they would keep in touch (Field Note, April 17, 2015).

This strong sense of classroom community that had developed in the ITC was most apparent towards the later stages of the course, which were strongly theater-oriented, but was also evidenced prior to the rehearsal stages. For instance, students complimented one another on their work in the rehearsals, volunteered to fill in for absent students during in-class rehearsals, helped each other get into and out of costume, and fixed props that had been broken. Warm up activities enabled students to learn about their classmates in a light-hearted manner. For example, in one activity students had to silently group themselves according to categories that the teacher called out such as “people who like the same music” or “people who like the same time of day” (Field Note, September 26, 2014). After silently making groups, they discussed whether the groups were correct. This encouraged students to take risks, as there is no accurate way to know what time of day a person likes without speaking, and to learn about one another in the discussion following each grouping.

Many illustrative examples of students caring for one another arose from moments of crises that were unplanned portions of the ITC. For example, in the winter several classes were cancelled because of blizzards. One of the students brought bread for the class in case of power outages (Field Note, January 23, 2015). On another occasion a student told the class that his mother’s cancer had been diagnosed as malignant; several students in the class hugged him and offered him words of comfort (Field Note, August 21, 2015). It is, of course, impossible to pinpoint any specific cause of such community sentiment; there may in fact be no causal relationship with the instructional methods, curricular design, or theater-orientation of the ITC. However, I

believe that the structure of the course and its inclusion of theater was a contributing factor. It encouraged students to examine their lives, to bring their lives outside the walls of the classroom into the English class for meaningful discussion, and to communicate in meaningful ways with one another.

Interpersonal tensions did, of course, come into play in each session. Some students reported such tensions developing among classmates, particularly in activities in which students worked in groups independently without my supervision. Tensions typically included students' dominating the group, monopolizing conversations, or being unwilling to compromise. One student explained his discomfort with the collaborative aspect of the ITC:

We need to discuss, uh, something. I don't like it...sometimes *I have to make other people agree with me, right?...It's hard, right?* And *I need argument with other people. I don't like it*, so that part is bad things...Example...like my, my idea like, 'oh you, you just show up left side', but they don't want show left side, they want right side...or something. (Group Interview, April 17, 2015).

An atypical example of interpersonal tensions was the case of Willi, described previously, who dropped the course when she felt slighted by the role the class had negotiated for her (Field Note, July 24, 2015). However, Willi's is the only case to my knowledge of a student becoming so disgruntled by interpersonal tensions that she refused to participate in the activity. On the whole, misunderstandings in the ITC tended to be of a minor nature, occasionally requiring intervention on my part to resolve a difference of opinion about what should happen in a particular scene. Misunderstandings

and interpersonal conflicts in the ITC were documented to a much lesser extent than instances indicating a strong sense of classroom community. This may serve as an indication that students' achieved communicative success within the classroom context.

### **Beyond the Classroom**

The final theme that emerged was that many students felt doing theater had an impact on their lives and language skills outside of the classroom. The positive sense of community students reported feeling within the ITC was not always reflected in the larger community. The majority of students reported having felt disempowered in the broader community because of their language abilities or status as immigrants. One student described that as an immigrant she felt if she had problems at work she had no power to solve them (Individual Interview, August 26, 2015). Several scenes in the play reflected these feelings of discomfort in the broader community.

In one scene, a Cuban student, Linda, portrayed how a woman at the Department of Motor Vehicles made her cry when she couldn't understand the instructions on a form (Artifact, April 17, 2015):

#### Scene 16: Linda's Story

Linda: You know when I came here, I had to pass the test to get my driver's license so I went to the DMV.

Clerk: Can I help you?

Linda: Hello. I want to take the test.

Clerk: Do you have a bill, ID, or social security number?

Linda: Sorry, I don't understand. I don't speak English very well. Can you repeat, please?

Clerk: (Very harshly) If you don't speak English, go back to your country, learn English, and then if you want to, come back.

Linda: (Walks away. Almost crying)

Man: (Goes to Linda). What language do you speak?

Linda: I speak Spanish and I understand a little English but she speaks very fast.

Man: Don't worry. I can help you.

Linda: Gracias.

Man: (Returns to the clerk with Linda). If you speak a little more slowly she can understand you or I can translate for her.

Clerk: I already told her what she has to do. I don't need to repeat anything.

Man: You are very disrespectful. Maybe it's time for you to retire. This is a country of immigrants.

In creating this scene, like most of the scenes written by students in the ITC, the students were reflecting on their experiences in their communities. In theater they had the opportunity to alter these experiences retroactively, reimagining a better relationship with the community at large. In Linda's actual experience the stranger who helped her did not tell the clerk that she was disrespectful or that the U.S. is a country of immigrants. Linda added that to her scene for the performance.

In an interview Linda and a classmate, Jerome, who is described in greater detail in the following chapter as a case study participant, reflected on how performing that scene affected them:

Linda: *My story in the play was very hard and happened in the real life. And I*

*don't want that that to happen / to*

Jerome: To someone else.

Linda: *To other immigrants.*

Jerome: It's / sad

Linda: Because it's sad. Very, very very sad. *Now, I want to go to the hhh*

*DMV and say the woman / hhh*

Jerome: hhh / hhh

Linda: *I can speak English now (shouting happily) / hhh...I'm here, not my*

*country*

(Group Interview, April 17, 2015)

For Linda, rewriting her experience and presenting it to the public was empowering.

Students reported the perception that doing theater in their ESL class improved their speaking skills in the broader community as well as their confidence interacting with strangers. This was particularly true of the skill of speaking. In the words of one student:

Theater, tout simplement, *it's like the community outside*. If you speak, for example (in front of) 60 or 100 people, *you can do great outside with your community*. When you go shopping, when you pay your bill, you can do great because *you have technique that you speak with people*. You don't have that afraid. (Group Interview, August 26, 2015)

Improvements in the skill of speaking were only one beneficial aspect of participating in the creation and performance of a play. One student described her experience with theater in more holistic terms:

*Theater can help you learning your language. You, you, you read first, now you memorize. You practice and you perform the play in front of a public. It helps you, uh, morally and physically and in too many, many, many aspects of your life. Because man is a human being had to be in a society and theater is a society thing, so it help you. Maybe when you are doing it you can't realize all of the benefits you had in doing it, but after you will realize you, you win or you gain a lot of benefits in doing theater so I like it. (Group Interview, August 26, 2015)*

This illustrates that on some occasions, at least, the effects of theater on student participants extended beyond the walls of the classroom.

The ITC also brought students physically outside the walls of the classroom to perform. For example, in the third session students performed the play three times in two locations. The first performance was held at a summer arts camp for elementary children in grades K-5 in a city approximately a half hour away from the IIE (Field Note, August 14, 2015). The performance lasted for approximately 40 minutes, after which a talk-back session was held in which the children asked the students questions about how they created the play and their personal histories. After the talk back session, some of the children talked to the students backstage, with one child requesting that the students autograph her cast. On the bus ride back to the ITC, students were in high spirits. They were thrilled that the children enjoyed the play and treated them like real actors, asking



for autographs. Across all of the sessions, the students were highly attuned to the reactions of the audiences. Several voiced the opinion that audience members' laughing at their jokes was a sign that they understood the students' English. At the end of each performance, the students gave small speeches thanking the audience, the ITC, their teacher, their families, etc. for their support. On several occasions, these speeches were (in my opinion) the most moving portions of the performance (Journal Entry, August 27, 2015). One student, whose husband was in the audience, said only, "I want to thank my husband," and began to cry (Video Recording, August 27, 2015). In another session, the students gave such long, heartfelt speeches describing the story that they added an additional 30 minutes to the play (Video Recording, December 18, 2015). For the students, clearly the immediacy of an audience was an influential factor in their experience with theater, intensifying the emotional edge of the performance and also driving a strong desire for authentic communication.

## CHAPTER 6

### FINDINGS: CASE STUDY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of both research questions in light of data gathered from the case study. As previously mentioned, the research questions addressed in this study are:

1. How did students perceive theater as affecting their language development?
2. How was individual students' identity development affected by participation in the ITC?

Data used to investigate these questions in this chapter were collected from case study participants, as described in the next section of this chapter, and primarily included interviews, artifacts, field notes, and journal entries. Conducting case studies on four ITC students has enabled me to present a more in-depth discussion of individuals' experiences within the course in terms of their identity and perceived language development by following and examining each individual's unique trajectory.

Before entering into a discussion of the trajectories of case study participants, I present a brief description of the typical ITC student. As previously detailed in the methods chapter of this thesis, all ITC students were adult immigrant second language

learners coming from a wide range of countries of origin and levels of education completed. Students typically enrolled in the course not out of a desire to participate in the creation of theater, but out of a strong desire to improve their English skills for primarily functional reasons. Individuals' motivations to learn ESL varied, but fell into the following broad categories: communicating with children or grandchildren, advancing on the job or getting a job, furthering their education, functioning in daily life (e.g. taking the bus, communicating with native speakers at the gym, store, etc.), and establishing a community network. The typical ITC student immigrated to the U.S. in search of more opportunity in terms of employment, education or offering a better life to their children. A smaller group immigrated to be reunited with family members who had previously moved to the U.S. As discussed in the previous chapter, ITC students made sacrifices to attend the course. Although the course was free, it met daily and most students were working and/or taking care of their families at the same time. The majority of students described themselves using adjectives such as "shy" when it came to speaking ESL with native speakers and "nervous" regarding performing a play. This nervousness was connected both to the performance aspect of the class and students' lack of confidence speaking English. As described in the previous chapter, in general students' attitudes towards theater in changed over time, with students perceiving it to have improved their ESL skills and confidence levels both inside and outside of the classroom by the time the performance was completed.

## **The Case Study**

As in any course, individual learners had different trajectories over the course of the ITC. As described in Chapter 4, I selected four students to participate in this case study. Jerome, Betty, Phan, and Fares were selected because I determined their attitudes towards theater in the ESL classroom to be representative of the class as the whole in that all four voiced the perception that theater was beneficial to them in some way. Another criterion for their selection was that their backgrounds and experience as adult immigrant language learners represent the spectrum found in the ITC across all three sessions; they have varying levels of education in their country of origin, jobs in the U.S., and goals for themselves and their families. Finally, all students in the case study participated as actors in the final production of their session. In these ways, these students were representative of the class as a whole in their attitudes towards theater, the diversity of the participants, and their participation in creating and performing a play.

The following descriptions of the four case study participants provide background information including: their reasons for immigration, experience of the ITC, and how their perceptions of the ITC changed over time. Following the descriptions of each case study participant, findings will be discussed in connection with the themes developed in the previous chapter.

### **Jerome**

Jerome is a thirty-four year old man from Haiti, who immigrated to the U.S. in 2014. He had been in the U.S. for less than one year when he enrolled in the ITC, his first ESL class in this country. Jerome had earned a college degree in Law. In Haiti, he

worked several high-status jobs that he spoke of with enthusiasm including owning his own company and hosting a popular radio show in which he gave on-air advice on manners as well as appropriate usage of the French language.

Jerome immigrated to the U.S. to join his wife. He believed he and his nine-year old son would have more opportunities here in terms of employment and education. His long-term plan was to earn a Master's in Law in Boston after mastering English. In the short term, he planned to improve his English by continuing in another ESL school after graduating from the ITC.

In the U.S. Jerome got a job as a cashier at a pharmacy, which he found very stressful at first due to his self-perceived lack of English skills. He described feeling afraid in his early days of employment in the U.S.:

to come to this country with *no English it's very, very, very, very sad...* I was very, very *afraid to go to the job training*. And when the trainer was speaking, oh my goodness! I was like in sky because *I couldn't understand nothing*. I passed 3 days, I didn't capt<sup>1</sup> n# almost nothing... I was very, very, very nervous because I didn't know before how to use the cashier and then one... hour with the cashier and that's not sufficient enough (but I thought) I will try. *Whatever will cost me, I will try*. (Individual Interview, July, 23, 2015)

English was the first challenge that Jerome encountered in the U.S., but as time went on he faced several others.

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<sup>1</sup> In French, Jerome's native language, "capt" means catch, or understand (e.g. I didn't catch that; could you repeat it?)

Jerome also struggled with cultural differences in the U.S. In the first month of class, he was investigated by the Department of Social Services (DSS) after his son reported to his teacher that he had been spanked. His home was visited by the DSS on five occasions before the case was closed, which caused Jerome considerable stress (Field Note, February 10, 2015). Jerome had subsequently decided to send his son back to Haiti: “because I can’t take care of him now because it’s very difficult for me to take care about my school and no one is here for him after me you know, that’s my worst problem here” (Individual Interview, July 23, 2015).

Jerome participated enthusiastically in the theater-oriented activities at the ITC, despite his part-time job and caring for his son (Field Note February 10, 2015; April 16, 2015; January 23, 2015; Video Recording, April 16, 2015; April 17, 2015). He had no more than seven absences over the course of the session despite the fact that he worked the night shift and came to school straight from work (Artifact, April 17, 2015; Individual Interview, July 23, 2015). After class, Jerome had to pick his son up from school, which on several occasions involved walking for miles in the snow in the harshest winter recorded in Massachusetts (Individual Interview, July 23, 2015). Jerome described these after class walks as the worst experience of his life. When he arrived home, he cared for his son. This meant that on some days he got only two hours of sleep. During primarily ESL-oriented activities, he fell asleep in class on several occasions (Field Note, January 23, 2015; February 10, 2015). He was, in contrast, very active during theater-oriented activities, particularly rehearsals involving improvisation (Field Note, April 16, 2015; April 1, 2015, March 30, 2015). Jerome volunteered to play many roles in the play,

improvising his scenes in a new and often humorous way in each rehearsal and performance and volunteering to serve as a stand-in actor when other students were absent. The scene Jerome wrote is included in Appendix D.

Reflecting on the integration of theater and ESL, Jerome noted, “there is *no advantage without disadvantage*... You lose the grammar but you learn something else that’s gonna help you in the future” (Individual Interview, April 17, 2015). Jerome’s attitude towards theater was overwhelmingly positive. I believe this stems in large part from the self-esteem he brought to the class, having been a successful professional and radio host in his country of origin.

### **Betty**

Betty was a forty-five year old woman from China who had immigrated to the U.S. three years prior to her enrollment in the ITC (Individual Interview, August 24, 2015). This was the second time Betty had moved. As a young woman, she left Mainland China to marry and live in Hong Kong. As a child, she dropped out of school before beginning High School to work in her home because her family did not have enough money to send her to school (Informal Interview, August 4, 2015). In Hong Kong, she did not speak the same language as her neighbors, and was busy raising her children in her house. She had few friends and spent little time with people outside her immediate family (Informal Interview, August 4, 2015). She reported feeling that she lacked speaking skills in her native language as well as English (Informal Interview, August 4, 2015).

Betty and her husband decided to immigrate to the U.S. because they wanted to give their children more opportunities and a “great education” (Individual Interview, August 24, 2015). At first, she found life in the U.S. to be “*so very hard because I can’t find job and I don’t understand English*, but now I feel better. *I have a job and I can understand a little bit English*” (Individual Interview, August 24, 2015). When Betty began working and studying, she grew to be very happy with her decision to move. Her children described school here to be “like heaven” (Field Note, July 24, 2015) because teachers were less strict than in Hong Kong.

In the U.S., Betty found a job working in the kitchen of a fast food chain. Her two daughters enrolled in colleges with good academic reputations (Informal Interview, August 6, 2015). Her primary goal at the time of her enrollment at the ITC was to become a cashier at the fast food chain where she worked in the kitchen (Artifact, May 26, 2015). However, her boss, who was also Chinese, told her that her speaking, listening and pronunciation skills in English were not good enough (Informal Interview, August 6, 2015). She hoped that at the ITC she could improve her oral skills enough to work as a cashier, a job of higher status as it involves interacting with customers in English and handling money and possibly go on to do her High School Equivalency Diploma (Hi-Set) (Artifact, May 26, 2015).

In both my opinion and Betty’s, her processing time in producing spoken and written English was very long (Journal Entry, May 28, 2015). She experienced difficulty in placing into a higher-level English class at other institutions (Informal Interview, August 6, 2015). Betty felt very comfortable in both the IIE and the ITC and asked to



repeat the ITC even when she was finally accepted into a Hi-Set program (Informal Interview, August 6, 2015; Artifact, September 1, 2015). When it was explained to her that she would have to do another play if she repeated, her answer was, “it’s very good!” (Informal Interview, August 6, 2015).

Betty was very shy in the early weeks of class (Journal Entry, May 28, 2015; Field Note, May 8, 2015; May 28, 2015). She never volunteered to answer questions in front of the class and rarely spoke in a group unless she was asked a direct question. When asked if she was excited to do theater, she said, “I am shy” (Field Note, July 16, 2015). She showed significant investment in succeeding in the theater project, however. Unlike the other students, she wrote three drafts of her scene, included in Appendix D, for the final script and revised her written work throughout rehearsals (Field Note, August 11, 2015; Artifact, July 28, 2015; August 13, 2015). Betty narrated an entire scene, meaning she had to speak in large chunks for an extended period of time, something she had expressed discomfort in throughout the course until that point (Field Note, July 16, 2015; Journal Entry, May 28, 2015). Though she was given the option to read her narration, Betty was the first student in her cohort to be off-book and on several occasions asked the teacher to coach her in pronunciation of her lines after class (Field Note, August 11, 2015).

Betty was also actively invested in the creation of the set and props. With several other students, she volunteered to plan how to construct a set for the play (Field Note, August 11, 2015). She also planned and oversaw the construction of shadow puppets for her scene. This was a marked difference and major increase in her participation in the

ITC compared to her participation in primarily ESL-oriented activities earlier in the course. In rehearsals, performances, and set construction Betty demonstrated high levels of agency in making decisions and communicating them to her classmates and teacher in English (Field Note, August 11, 2015; August 26, 2015; Journal Entry, August 27, 2015). She argued for what she believed should be done when the ITC experienced moments of crisis when, for instance, the custodian accidentally threw away the shadow puppets an hour before a performance (Field Note, August 27, 2015).

On the integration of theater and ESL, Betty voiced the following opinion:  
the good things are I can *learn, um, a lot of things*, uh, example we can, um, *play in group* and um I, I can *confident myself more than before...the theater is, um, good for the shy people...They can learn how to in the group and practice the talking*. (Group Interview, August 24, 2015)

Other students also commented on the change that Betty had seemingly undergone in the ITC. In a group interview in which Betty was present, a classmate said of her,

*she couldn't speak in front of other people... like even three people. In front of three people she couldn't say something loud, right? But now she can speak... (she) changed, I can tell* (Group Interview, August 24, 2015).

When asked if Betty agreed with this statement, she laughed and replied that it might be true a little bit; that she felt less shy than she had before.

### **Phan**

Phan was a 57-year-old woman from Thailand who had immigrated to the U.S. with her husband 16 years prior to her enrollment in the ITC when a recession in the Thai

economy caused her business of importing clothing to go bankrupt (Individual Interview, April 29, 2015). At that time she owed more than 1 million baht in debt, and a friend who owned a restaurant in the Greater Boston Area had offered her work that would enable her to remit income to her family. Phan and her husband left their 2-year-old son in Thailand with family in order to work in the kitchen of her friend's restaurant. Phan was not able to move her oldest son to the U.S. to join them for several years, during which she communicated with him exclusively via the internet: "I see with a computer camera...*I cry everyday*...think about him and he think about me. He ask...for his dad and his mom...He waving" (Individual Interview, April 29, 2015). After arriving in the U.S., Phan and her husband had a second son, who has never been to Thailand.

At university in Thailand, Phan had completed a BA in English literature and enjoyed studying novels and Shakespeare, but felt that her oral communication skills were poor (Individual Interview, April 29, 2015). In fact, she never mentioned her English degree until the ITC came to an end because she felt embarrassed that her English was not better. She enrolled in the ITC because she wanted to improve her oral skills to better communicate with her younger son's teacher and both of her sons' friends as well as to get a less physically demanding job. She had worked in several restaurants, but had to quit because she was experiencing back problems. It was during this period of unemployment that Phan had enrolled in the ITC.

Phan had mixed feelings about participating in theater. She found theater to be a novel experience that allowed students to explore and share their identities and cultures with the audience as well as with their classmates:

for me, uh, the theater class very important because uh we have experience to help, uh, do the theater that...we never did before. Like, *we can write and we can make a conversation...and uh everybody can show them to the audience...who you are, what you're doing, what you from and what you think about, and what the, the experience in your life. The people enjoy it and they know about you, but from another country they have...different traditions...different customs...and the audience have fun.* (Group Interview, April 17, 2015)

Phan recommended that future ITC plays include more content related to students' countries of origin. She saw the plays as a way to teach Americans about immigrants' experiences: "because...here, people like Americans they, they can know about them (ITC students) and, uh, *they know about that (it is) very hard for them to live here or they have problems from their country... so maybe they need help*" (Group Interview, April 17, 2015). The scene Phan wrote deals with intercultural misunderstandings and is included in Appendix D. She also noted some interpersonal tensions that arose in the class and suggested the enforcement of "stronger rules...(because) sometimes they talk, uh, they talk a lot... But the another, one another people... cannot focus" (Individual Interview, April 29, 2015).

Phan participated actively in the devising and performance process (Field Note, April 1, 2015; April 14, 2015). She acted in several scenes of the play including the one she wrote. Before her first performance, she asked me to feel her chest to feel how fast her heart was beating (Field Note, April 17, 2015). I told her she did not have to do the performance if she didn't want to, but she said she wanted to, she was just nervous. After

completing the course, Phan expressed pride in the production and was happy with her own performance and the audience's reaction to the show. Phan asked me if she could work as a volunteer in future sessions of the ITC, and at the time of this writing, we are planning for her to work with me as an assistant director on the next ITC performance.

### **Fares**

Fares was a 25-year-old from Algeria. He had been in the U.S. for under a year when he started the ITC. Fares had earned a BA in accounting in Algeria and worked at a high level in an accounting firm before immigrating. Fares described how, from childhood, his dream had been to live in the U.S. and how that, coupled with economic factors motivated his decision to immigrate:

Um... *So it was... my dream to live here in the United States...* I like watching American movies and, uh, hh listening to American music... I like Rock and Roll music... and I know that here *we have more opportunities* like to find a better job.

(Individual Interview, April 23, 2015)

Unlike many of the other students in the ITC, Fares did not find his English level to be an obstacle to daily communication. After graduating, Fares was accepted into another language school at a much higher level than any of his classmates. He wanted to improve his language skills to eventually complete a Master's degree and become an accountant.

While at the ITC, Fares worked in the afternoons and evenings as a shift manager at a fast food chain, returning home each night at midnight: "*I wake up early to come here but it was great* hh because... I felt like *I improved my English here* when I came, so, and also the pronunciation and I learned more vocabulary" (Individual Interview,

April 23, 2015). Fares expressed optimism about his prospects in the U.S.; when asked about his experience working in fast food, he responded, “Ummm (sound of uncertainty) *for now it helps me to pay bills and, um, it’s ok. I have more experience...And I can work and go to school at the same time...But, if I find a better job hh I will quit this one hhh*” (Individual Interview, April 23, 2015).

His positive attitude extended towards the creation of theater in the ITC.

Concerning his experience with theater, Fares remarked

You know, um, I like theater...Before I was watching theater and I like it, but I never imagined hh that one day I will perform hh, I will be actor hh ... *It was very interesting and I think it helps to learn English...When we had to write script, so we can practice writing, um, get more vocabulary. Also how to form sentences, so we practice grammar and everything, and also when we practice, when we perform, we improve pronunciation ...And...I think we feel more comfortable to talk after that so that’s why I think it’s a good thing...I really like it. If I will have another opportunity to do it, I will.* (Individual Interview, April 23, 2015)

Fares, like most students, volunteered to play many roles in the final performance and often volunteered to fill in for students who were absent in rehearsals (Field Note, April 1, 2015; April 14, 2015). In one scene of the play, included in Appendix D, that Fares’ class created, a student shared a story of watching an elderly Asian woman being treated rudely at the supermarket. Students in Fares’ cohort were interested in discussing and sharing experiences in which they had witnessed or experienced discrimination as immigrants. However, few students felt comfortable re-enacting this scene because they

did not want to “be mean” (Field Note, April 1, 2015). I assigned Fares the role of the employee. However, in rehearsals he changed the lines to be helpful towards the Chinese Woman. During one rehearsal, he negotiated with another student and switched roles, taking the role of a less offensive employee instead (Field Note, April 1, 2015).

Unlike most other students in the course, Fares reported that he did not feel nervous about performing. Instead, he felt excited. Of his performance he remarked, “*I felt happy hhh...Because, uh, I think I think it was good hh. The play was good and...also the, the audience I think they enjoyed the play hh because they were laughing hhh*” (Individual Interview, April 23, 2015). Although Fares’ trajectory differed from the majority of the students in that he did not experience strong feelings of anxiety or nervousness around performing, in the end like the majority of students he felt pride in his work. His positive attitude towards his positioning in the U.S. may be rooted in his desire to be part of the culture of the U.S., clear goals of achieving a Master’s degree, and belief that his goals are achievable. This positive attitude may have extended towards his experience of theater, with his lack of anxiety about integrating into the U.S. or speaking English enhancing his confidence in performing a play.

### **Themes**

The following broad themes have been developed from an analysis of group interviews, artifacts, field notes, media, and journal entries gathered from the whole class and presented as findings in the previous chapter: 1) Affective Dimensions; 2) Perceived Second Language Development; 3) Investment; 4) Classroom Dynamics, and 5) Beyond the Classroom. The case study participants lend more detailed insight into each of the

themes developed previously and allow the elaboration of the additional theme: 6) Identity Development. Norton (2013) argued that identity should be conceptualized as a site of struggle that changes over time and space and argued that “prevailing power relationships between individuals, groups and communities impact on the life chances of individuals at a given time and place” (p. 399). In this section I will detail how a study of the case study participants enhances the findings discussed in the previous chapter before discussing students’ identities in relation to power structures.

### **Affective Dimensions**

None of the case study participants enrolled in the class in order, specifically, to participate in the creation of a play. Phan and Betty felt very nervous about participating in theater, while Jerome and Fares did not appear to experience strong negative emotions concerning the creation and performance of a play. Despite the different starting point of each student’s trajectory, the end point appears to have been the same. Each student was proud of his or her performance. They were each confident in their own performance when reflecting on it afterwards and confident that the process of creating, rehearsing and performing the play was beneficial to them as language learners. As the teacher-researcher of the ITC, it was challenging to require students to undertake a process that clearly induced nervousness and anxiety. However, analysis of the case study participants indicates that even students who suffer from anxiety or stress in relation to theater experience strong positive emotions, among other benefits, after the performance. Though anxiety may be one element to contend with inside of a theater-based ESL class, it is not grounds to abandon the approach. However, as mentioned in the previous



chapter, it is important for the teacher to frame theater positively to the students from the beginning of the course and provide them with adequate emotional and academic support throughout the process.

### **Perceived Second Language Development**

The case study participants had differing backgrounds concerning their previous experiences studying ESL and confidence in their English abilities. Fares and Phan had both studied English intensively in their countries of origin whereas Betty and Jerome had not. However, Phan's feelings of shame around her BA in English literature reveal that previous study is not a predictor of confidence in second language performance. Like most students, all four case study participants voiced the opinion that theater helped them to develop their English skills. They perceived additional benefits such as reinforcement of grammar and vocabulary. A key finding arising from the case study, then, is that students of different levels of English perceived theater as improving their English skills. Further, individual learners perceived the benefits of theater in terms of Second Language Acquisition differently. Theater, therefore, has the potential to augment students' confidence across many skills; students' perceived improvement in the areas that they felt they needed to improve. Betty, for instance, primarily wanted to improve her speaking and confidence and perceived these to have been augmented through participation in theater. Fares desired to attend college and, therefore, wanted to improve his academic skills in English; he found that theater improved his writing and retention of grammar and vocabulary.

## **Investment**

Each of the case study participants displayed high levels of motivation concerning learning English and saw furthering their English skills as a means of obtaining better employment. All but Phan wanted to return to school in the U.S., and saw English as essential to achieving that goal. Fares enjoyed learning English as a means of connecting with American music and movies. Phan, Betty and Jerome saw English as essential to maintaining relationships with their children and helping their children to succeed. Phan and Jerome saw mastering English as a means of strengthening their ties to the community in the U.S. It is clear, then, that each of these students was strongly motivated to study English.

Additionally, each was invested in the particular classroom practices of the ITC, that is in learning English through theater. This investment was manifest despite the fact that none of them had enrolled in order to participate in theater. Betty, in particular, illustrates how investment in the ITC increased over time, particularly in regards to theater-oriented activities. Before beginning the devising process, Betty had indicated she was nervous about the theater element of the course on several occasions. However, as described previously, she invested considerable time in memorizing her lines and agency in realizing her vision for the set. Jerome and Fares worked late nights, but continued to attend the class despite their fatigue. In the first month of the course, which was primarily ESL-oriented, Jerome fell asleep during class on several occasions. From my observation, theater seemed to energize him; he became a much more active participant during the devising process than in primarily ESL-oriented activities. In these

students, writing, rehearsing and performing a play for the public appeared to increase investment in classroom practices regardless of students' level of interest in participating in theater in the initial stages of the course.

### **Classroom Dynamics**

The theme of Classroom Dynamics included the following subthemes: student interaction and sense of play, student agency and classroom community. All four of the case study participants displayed a sense of play in their classroom interactions. Jerome and Fares displayed elements of playfulness on more occasions than did Betty and Phan. Betty and Phan were both Asian women, so students' individual differences such as country of origin and gender may play a role in students' willingness to engage in playfulness. Generally speaking, China in particular is considered a country in which the education system has traditionally gravitated towards more teacher-focused activities. Fares, though, also mentioned a marked difference in teaching style between the ITC and learning environments in his country of origin in Algeria. Despite coming from an educational background in which elements of playfulness or creativity were not central to modes of instruction, Fares engaged in playfulness to a great extent in the ITC. On these different approaches to teaching, Fares remarked, "*It was uh hh very interesting, yes, cuz it's very different from Algeria, the system how to teach and everything. I found that very creative*" (Individual Interview, April 23, 2015). Jerome was observed to be at ease with the playful element of the ITC, and on several occasions I had to intervene to keep groups that he was working in on task (Field Note, April 8, 2015). Betty and Phan did engage in playfulness, but to a lesser extent and usually in the context of improvisations

within their scenes. Student playfulness, like classroom interaction and community, may be best fostered through structured guidelines and clear expectations provided to students who are participating in a learning environment in which they may be encountering playfulness as a value for the first time. Given that all the students were present in the same context, but exhibited playfulness to different degrees and in different ways, individual learner difference plays a role in whether particular students will engage in playfulness and to what extent.

In terms of agency, students who displayed more agency in the devising process appeared to be happier with the final product. Jerome exhibited considerable agency, even improvising and adlibbing in the final performances. Betty took agency in participating in the design and construction of the set, voluntarily drafting several versions of her scene, and choosing to memorize her lines. Fares took agency in dressing the set of each scene and swapping roles with his classmates. Each of these three students were pleased with the final product that was performed. Phan did take agency in rehearsals, improvising and adlibbing, but indicated a desire that the final script should contain more detail about students' native countries. Had she advocated for this in class, her vision would have been feasible to achieve, but she did not voice this until after the performance. It may be that the prompts used to elicit student narratives for the plays inherently limited what students felt they could contribute. Phan's group largely improvised from personal stories based on the storytelling activity Two Truths and One Lie, described in Appendix C. Though this improvisational process was student-centered, I supplied a prompt. Phan's comment about wanting the play to contain

different content indicates that the teacher-provided prompt may have limited student agency in the phase of the class in which scenes were generated and that the more the teacher can encourage students to exert agency in shaping the play, the more pride will be taken in the final product.

Students' sense of classroom community was informed by student-student interaction as well as teacher-student interaction. Phan and Betty were both quieter students who initiated speaking turns less than Fares or Jerome. Jerome, in fact, had a tendency to emerge as the leader in most group situations in which he participated. Fares took leadership roles when explicitly assigned them. Betty assumed the role of leader only when she felt passionate about a creative vision. Phan, though outspoken, rarely took the lead. Phan and Betty indicated a desire for a more structured classroom environment with stronger rules because they had trouble focusing when other students were speaking. Fares and Jerome did not indicate any perception of interpersonal tensions. This illustrates that individual differences in personality play a role in how students interact during group work and that in order for students who do not naturally seek out leadership roles to feel their input and ways of interacting are valued, more structured guidelines provided by the teacher may be beneficial. Despite Betty and Phan's stated desire for a quieter classroom environment, all students expressed a strong sense of classroom community, exhibited consideration for their classmates and teacher as whole-beings, and engaged in playfulness.

Having a strong community network of support was a theme that Jerome spoke of often, both in class and in interviews, which emerged from his positioning as an

immigrant in the Greater Boston Area. The scene he wrote for the play was also connected to this theme and can be read in Appendix D. A sense of community was something Jerome struggled with outside of the ITC. In the U.S., he deeply felt the absence of the strong community support network he had developed in Haiti. He described how his class encouraged him

to stay in the track and to be friendly and mix together...*like a family*...Like a coffee and milk, like coffee and milk. I really like that because I...like to live with somebody, to love somebody too, yeah, *to live like a family*. Because the world is one world, but we are all human. *You supposed to live together, to help*. Linda (naming a classmate), *Linda can help me*...we can be friends. What you do *it's not the same in America*, but in my country the neighborhood are always here for whatever...whatever trouble...whatever what I've got, I can to call (my neighbors) to help me. Whatever what he does he has to come to help me because it's like that we live, but *here it's different*. *Nobody care about nobody*...*you got some trouble on the street? Call 911*. (Group Interview, April 17, 2015)

As Jerome's quotation illustrates, the fact that sense of community was important within the walls of the classroom stemmed from a desire for a greater sense of community beyond those walls.

### **Beyond the Classroom**

In an immediate sense, the ITC brought students into contact with the greater community through performances. Each of the case study participants mentioned interpreting the audience's reaction to their performance, particularly laughter at the

humorous scenes, to be indicative of their successful communication in the target language. The immediacy of the audience in performing theater was, therefore, instrumental in the development students' confidence and pride.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in creating, performing, and rehearsing theater, the students had an opportunity to imagine and reinvent their positioning in relation to communities beyond the classroom. Fares resisted assuming the role of a native speaker discriminating against an ITC student because of his status as a non-native, immigrant speaker of English. Betty also resisted my insistence that she did not have to memorize all of her narrator lines. Instead, she assumed the identity of a competent actor and English speaker, staying after class to practice her lines with me. Phan chose to explore an aspect of American culture that confused and upset her, public displays of affection. Jerome, as described in the previous paragraph, shared a scene in which he evaluated differences in community relations between Haiti and the U.S. Apart from actually interacting with the audience, participating in theater offered students a platform to explore their identities and positioning outside, while drawing from a classroom community that would support them. Betty's decision to narrate her scene off-book was applauded by her classmates and teacher. Jerome and Phan's stories of intercultural differences sparked conversations among the class about similar intercultural differences that they had struggled to adjust to, enabling the class to share strategies and find support. In resisting against a particular role that he felt was cruel, Fares displayed solidarity with the student whom the story was about, creating a new community in which that student was valued as a whole person rather than discriminated against. In

this way, performance may account for only a small amount of the influence of theater on students beyond the classroom. Re-enacting, sharing, and reimagining experience inside the classroom has the potential to impact students outside the classroom.

### **Identity**

Following four case study participants throughout their involvement in the ITC has afforded me an opportunity to analyze the relationship between how students' identities were shaped by their involvement in the class and how their identities shaped the class itself. Because the play was collaboratively created by students through a devising process led by the teacher, students had significant agency in shaping the devising process and final performance. To a large extent, they chose which aspects of their identities they shared with their classmates and with the audience. The creation of the play was, to some extent, the creation of identity texts. That students were proud of the final product indicates that they took pride in themselves. Betty was proud of overcoming her shyness and performing in a second language towards which she had previously displayed a lack of confidence. Each of the students was proud of their work in both the creation and performance of the play. Jerome described how, months after the performance, when a former IIE student recognized him on the street and praised his acting in the play, he felt "like a superstar...like you were in Hollywood" (Individual Interview, July 27, 2015).

I believe that these feelings of pride do not stem from theater giving students a voice in the community because the students already have voices. What participating in theater affords them is a supportive platform to amplify their voices with confidence in



their second language. To learners who have experienced discrimination, difficulty advancing on the job, and difficulty communicating with native speakers because of their language abilities or status as immigrants, theater can be empowering. Their status as immigrants becomes a position of power from which students can share their experiences and become role models. They are able to take pride in their accomplishment of navigating the boundaries between cultures to such an extent that they have successfully created a performance piece about it in their target language.

Power enters into the discussion of teaching ESL through theater at two levels. One level is that of the power dynamics within the classroom; on another level hegemonic structures embedded in the society that contextualizes the classroom also exert influence. Power dynamics in the classroom can be viewed in terms of the teacher exerting power on students. In the ITC Phan and Betty, the only case study students who commented on this power structure, voiced a desire for the teacher to set stronger boundaries and rules for students. As discussed above, allowing students to take agency and influence curricular content and structure enables students to explore issues of relevance and meaning to them. Simultaneously, it creates instances of interpersonal tension in which students with shyer personalities may have less power in the classroom than those who are outgoing. In fact, when the teacher exerts power in terms of structuring students' ways of interacting, students may benefit in terms of greater equality in decision-making and talk time. In the classroom, then, giving students a relatively free rein may not be the best means of empowering all students.

On a societal level, the case study participants, like all ITC students, were immigrants, who have been systematically denied access to power. Jerome and Fares were relatively recent immigrants to the U.S., who had both constructed high status identities in their countries of origin and whose imagined identities in the U.S. were of similarly high status. Phan also had a position of status in her country of origin as a business owner, but she decided to emigrate from Thailand when her business failed. Betty, who had voiced feelings of disempowerment in her country of origin where she had limited interaction with people from outside her family sphere, had not attended High School or held a job. Each of these individuals viewed their own positioning in American society through different lenses informed by their multiple, changing identities. Fares was optimistic about his experience in both the ITC and the greater community. Though he went from being an accountant in a large firm in Algeria to a shift leader in a fast food chain in the U.S., which is undoubtedly a position of lower status, Fares viewed this change in status as a temporary and necessary step towards his goal. He was not discouraged. On the other hand, in Haiti Jerome had constructed a high-status identity giving on-air advice about culture and language as a popular radio host. In the U.S. he worked the night shift as a cashier in a convenience store and his language skills, which had in part given him access to his high status position in Haiti, were an obstacle in his daily work as a cashier here. Three months after leaving the ITC, Jerome was strongly considering immigrating to another francophone country where he believed language would not be as much of an obstacle. Jerome experienced his shift in status that came hand in hand with immigration as frustrating. Betty, on the other hand, was optimistic

about her chances of furthering her education, making friends, and getting a better job in the U.S. She was happy to have found employment and self-advocating for advancement on the job. Both Betty and Phan had wanted to offer their children a better education in the U.S. and were satisfied with the fact that their college age children were accepted into what they considered to be good colleges.

In the collaborative creation of theater, the ITC students were able to critically examine and reimagine relations of power experienced within and beyond the walls of the classroom. In a learning community that attempted to welcome students' experiences, students were able to learn strategies not only in the realm of communicative competence or intercultural competence; they were encouraged to critically examine their own positioning in relation to society and given a platform in the form of theatrical performance intended to promote empowerment.

## CHAPTER 7

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the results of the research will be discussed in five sections. First, the major findings related to both research questions are summarized. Second, issues and insights related to the findings are discussed. In the third section limitations of the study are described followed by a presentation of implications for further study. Finally, conclusions are discussed.

#### **Summary of Key Findings**

The first question posed in this study was: how did students perceive theater as affecting their language development? The second question was: how was individual students' identity development affected by participation in the ITC?

A review of the literature revealed that few studies had focused the teaching of English through drama in the context of an adult immigrant classroom. This study of the ITC resulted in several findings related to this important, under-researched topic of inquiry. It indicated that students' perceptions of what constitutes theater differed from the teacher's perception. One major finding was that the amount of time spent on primarily ESL-oriented activities was much greater than the time spent on primarily

theater-oriented activities. Activities that were primarily theater-oriented constituted less than 25% of all coded activities. In the ITC theater was integrated into the ESL class gradually over the course of each session. An important related finding was that there was no clear dichotomy between the theater and ESL activities since theater-based activities had a strong ESL focus, particularly in the beginning stages of the class. As each session progressed, the class moved toward theater-oriented activities that did not always include specific focus on explicit English instruction. A final major finding was that both a product- and process-based approach was adopted in the ITC. Through participating in a process and creating a product, students interacted in English to create a play based on their own life experiences for performance in the community.

While each individual student was affected differently, broad trends did appear. A major finding was that the integration of theater into the ESL class increased students' levels of confidence and pride, while at the same time provoking anxiety and stress in the majority of students. These conflicting feelings co-occurred in most students, with the more positive emotions documented as manifesting themselves at the end of the course closer to the performance. A related key finding was students' perception that theater augmented their language skills. Students used affective terms such as "confidence" and "pride" to describe their perception that theater had improved their ESL skills. They reported the perception that this improvement extended beyond the walls of the classroom.

This study also found that student investment, that is, their desire to participate in a given classroom practice, was affected by theater. Though all students demonstrated

investment in the ESL-oriented activities with which the class began, over time students demonstrated a stronger investment in the rehearsal and performance process. Further, how theater is introduced to learners may impact their investment in participating in drama-based activities. A small but significant number of students decided to drop the course shortly before the rehearsal process began, suggesting that the prospect of engaging in theater was a barrier to their participation in the learning of the class.

Classroom dynamics were affected by the integration of theater into the ESL course as well. Engaging in theater-oriented activities increased student-to-student interactions along with their sense of play and agency. For instance, students participated actively in playful improvisations throughout the rehearsal process and volunteered to collaboratively construct the set and props as the performance approached. This influenced the classroom community in both positive and negative ways. Students reported a strengthened sense of community in connection with theater, but with an occasional presence of interpersonal tensions.

Finally, this study found that the effects of an approach that blends theater and ESL instruction in an adult ESL context extend beyond the walls of the classroom, affecting students' identities. Students perceived that the language and social practices developed in the classroom affect their "real-world" interactions and reported viewing a connection between the theater activities from the ITC and the community outside the classroom. Students acknowledged theater as a mirror of the larger society, and felt that theater empowered them in their lives outside the classroom.

## **Discussion**

Engaging ESL students in the creation of a play for performance opens possibilities on several fronts. For the teacher-researcher, it can serve as a means of augmenting current theory on drama in language education and offer a unique opportunity for understanding students' lived experiences. For students, it is an opportunity to engage in critical reflection on their social positioning in relation to one another and their communities beyond the classroom while practicing their target language skills. These themes are presented for discussion in this chapter.

### **The Nature of Theater in the ESL Classroom**

As discussed earlier, a review of relevant literature revealed that different researchers and teachers referred to very different processes when they discussed the integration of theater and ESL. One teacher or researcher might refer simply to students reading a dialogue aloud in class; another might refer to rehearsing a script written by a native-speaker, yet another might refer to student-devised work. There is a broad spectrum of possible meanings and approaches associated with the term "theater in an English class." While multiple approaches are to be expected and even valued, the current body of literature on drama in language education does not provide an adequate framework to discuss these differences. Differences in understanding of the nature of theater in a second or foreign language class may influence perceptions of its classroom applications as well as its influence on students. Several of the ITC activities were taken directly from ESL textbooks, such as role-plays and dialogues. These activities are standard in theater as well as other fields such as counseling and job training. Other

activities, such as adult language students' devising and performing a play are documented with much less frequency in the literature. Moving beyond the process/product dichotomy that Moody (2002) critiqued might reveal that many ESL classes, in fact, already engage in theater-oriented activities, though in significantly differing degrees. Differences in approaches may produce varying effects on the learning environment.

Broadening understanding of what teaching ESL through theater means may help theorizing about drama in the language classroom and provide useful methodological possibilities for teachers. Building a framework that makes clear distinctions between varied approaches to using theater in the second language class would allow researchers, in turn, to make such distinctions in discussing how such approaches influenced their findings. Such specificity would then enable teachers to draw on research to make informed decisions about which approaches may be more appropriate for their situated context, thereby engaging in praxis.

### **Instructional Method**

As described previously, the approach to integrating theater into the ITC was not uniform across all sessions. These differences in instructional approach were informed by feedback received from students over the course of the study. Based on this feedback, instructional methods were altered in two main areas: how the theater element of the course was introduced to students and the amount of explicit instruction provided on group process skills (such as how to come to a group consensus).



In the second session of the ITC, students suggested in their interviews that explaining the benefits of theater to students before beginning the process of devising the play might prevent students from leaving the course. They suggested that some students dropped out because they saw little value in doing theater. Because of this feedback, the benefits were explained at length on several occasions, beginning early in the third session. The teacher explicitly explained the reasons behind creating and performing a play along with the benefits that previous students had reported before the devising process began. Additionally, former students were invited to class to explain their own experiences participating in the ITC, focusing on the benefits they gained. Students were also informed early in the class that they had the option not to act in the play. Unlike previous sessions, students in the third session demonstrated enthusiasm about the performance aspect of the class early in the process, and all students who remained enrolled opted to act in the final performance. Furthermore, some students who had to drop out of the course because of issues with childcare or enrollment in a different program opted to return to participate in performances and rehearsals. This might demonstrate that the way theater is introduced to students affects their perceptions of the value of theater. It also illustrates the value of teacher-conducted research in informing classroom practice. It shows that incorporating students' perspectives and suggestions may be one way to develop a process of integrating theater into specific ESL contexts that is suited to students of the particular context.

In their end-of-course interviews, several students indicated that working in groups sometimes resulted in interpersonal tensions. This suggests that explicit

instruction on how to engage in group processes is called for in future sessions. ITC students were heterogeneous in terms of countries of origin, educational background, socio-economic status, among other cultural categories. In devising the play, they were required to negotiate socially as well as linguistically with others of extremely varied backgrounds. This is not unlike social or work settings outside of the classroom. Providing explicit instruction on how to negotiate high-stakes social situations in a heterogeneous cultural setting could be of significant benefit to students not only as a classroom dynamic, but also as an important skill for use outside the classroom.

### **Theater as Narrative**

Engaging students in the creation of narratives has the potential to enhance the research process as well as classroom instruction. Multiple researchers (e.g. Pavlenko, 2001; Block, 2007) have argued for the power of narrative as a research tool. Pavlenko (2001) asserts that learner's stories are rich in information regarding the relationship between Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and identity:

It is possible that only personal narratives provide a glimpse into areas so private, personal, and intimate that they are rarely—if ever—breached in the study of SLA, and at the same time at the heart and soul of the second language socialization process. (p. 167)

Theater, with its inherent emphasis on narrative, is an effective means of engaging students in creating and analyzing their own narratives. This is particularly true of theater that has been created by students reflecting their own personal narratives and identities. For teacher-researchers, providing students with a platform to share and

reimagine their own experiences has the potential to bring to light elements of students' identities that are often excluded from the language classroom. In creating a play, students explore their second language socialization processes. They also share their narratives with their classroom community and the spectators who attend performances. Of course, theater is not the only way of engaging students in the creation of narrative. It is, however, unique in that it engages students with a live audience. This creates a high stakes environment in which students are strongly committed to the prospect of creating a product in which they can take pride.

### **A Student-Centered Curriculum**

Students in the ITC generated the topics and scenes for the plays based on their life experiences and cultural knowledge. This process is similar to Weinstein's (1999) model of Learners' Lives as Curriculum and Moll et al.'s (1992) Funds of Knowledge. Unlike Weinstein's (1999) model, however, the ITC's curriculum was only partially student-generated. Unlike Moll et al. (1992), the teacher at the ITC did not visit students' homes. However, students were encouraged to bring their own unique systems of knowledge into class, particularly during the creation of the play, and contribute to the creation of the curriculum.

Students influenced the scope of the curriculum to a much greater extent during the process of creating the play than in ESL-oriented activities. The ITC, therefore, demonstrated both a teacher-centered and student-centered approach to curriculum development. The former in large part reflects the approach to primarily ESL-oriented activities and the latter primarily theater-oriented activities.

The fact that the students rather than the teacher largely determined the content and form of the plays may have influenced students' experiences of the course. Had a topic been imposed upon students, they may not have felt the pride and confidence reported by many upon completing the course. This may also have influenced their investment in the course and their strong sense of classroom community.

### **Identity and Imagined Communities**

Block (2007) posited that, "when individuals move across geographical and psychological borders, immersing themselves in new sociocultural environments, they find that their sense of identity is destabilized and that they enter a period of struggle to reach a balance" (p. 864). In the ITC, students reflected on this process of border-crossing and its effects on their changing identities. Because of the student-centered nature of the devising process, students chose which aspects of their identities to present to the public. They collaboratively constructed ways of understanding their assigned identities as immigrant ESL learners and negotiated new identities similar to the way in which Cummins (2006) described students' constructing identity texts in the Multiliteracies Project, as earlier detailed in Chapter 3.

The ITC plays were framed to students as a platform for sharing their knowledge and experience with others, both in and outside of the IIE. Several students, such as Linda (described in Chapter 6), chose to share aspects of their experiences that they determined to be of benefit to other immigrant ESL students. Linda wanted others to benefit from her negative experience at the DMV. In the ITC Linda retroactively transformed her identity within the DMV scene, assuming the identity of a mentor and

role model, someone who didn't back down in the face of difficulty or discrimination. In this way, Linda had reimagined herself as someone whom other IIE students could look up to, placing herself as a member of, in effect, an imagined community.

Participating in the ITC provided students with the opportunity to reflect on their identity and positioning in relation to *imagined communities* (Anderson, 1991; Norton, 2001; 2010; Norton & Toohey, 2001). For some students, the ITC became an imagined community itself. One student, Angel, described wanting to enroll in the ITC after watching the performance of a previous class:

I, I like th# theater class because when I saw the last class theater I feel, wow, these people is, uh, are confidence, uh, speaking English. Uh, they feel good, they improve your English. I want to feel that. I want to feel good speaking English and I think the theater class is good for that. (Group Interview, 2015)

For this student and several others, performing was an empowering experience. For immigrant students who have felt disempowered by their socio-economic positioning in the U.S., theater may be one way of fostering the feelings of power and inclusion as advocated by Gonzales (2011).

Though many students took pride in their new role as ambassadors of the immigrant population, this role was assigned to them upon enrollment in the class. As discussed in the review of the literature, researchers investigating identity in SLA have noted that students may resist being assigned identities. Even assigning students the identity of non-native speaker, one determining factor of enrollment in ESL classes, can lead students to engage in acts of resistance (Lamarre & Dagenais, 2003; Nero, 2005).

Students in the ITC were assigned the identities of non-native, immigrant students by virtue of their enrollment in the class. Though they had a vast amount of input about what to include in the play, they had very little power to influence the fact that the class would write and perform a play. This was not a choice stemming from the students themselves, but was, rather, imposed on students by structure of the school. The identities assigned to students in the ITC may not be desirable for some students. Norton's (2013) study described how some students resisted assuming the assigned identity of immigrant in their English class. In the ITC, resistance to theater was documented, but because this study did not collect detailed data on students' self-perceptions and identities to the extent that Norton's did, it is difficult to determine a connection between resistance to assigned identities and resistance to theater. This is an important area of consideration for teachers implementing the technique and researchers studying it in the future.

Theater did not positively affect all students and would not be appropriate across all contexts. Students' primary reasons for enrolling in the class were associated with language learning rather than community building or identity exploration. Some students did not view theater as appropriate or beneficial to their language goals. Students who discontinued participation in the course did not experience the feelings of empowerment described previously. In fact, it could be argued that theater was detrimental to the language learning of some students as it caused a select few to drop out of their language course. This would undercut the view of theater as an empowering mode of language teaching in some cases.

Student resistance to theater is one area of concern in implementing the approach. The majority of the students did perceive benefits and take pride in their accomplishments in the end; however, many also expressed a desire not to engage in theater in the beginning of the course. Horstein (2010) and Culham (2002) found the integration of theater into the ESL class to be challenging. They cited student anxiety as being increased by theater. This study supports that finding. Horstein (2010) also found the technique to be time consuming and often stressful, but nonetheless rewarding for the teacher. Though the research questions posed in this paper did not address this, as the teacher of the course, my personal opinion coincides with Horstein's (2010), particularly in cases in which students demonstrated strong resistance to the technique.

The fact that students experienced negative emotions in association with theater is not necessarily a negative aspect of the approach. For example, a small number of instances of interpersonal tension were reported, but, as discussed earlier, learning how to function effectively in diverse groups is a valuable life skill that extends beyond the classroom. Developing tools to overcome interpersonal conflicts is important to the goals students' expressed of advancing their education and careers. Stress and anxiety are also emotions that students encounter beyond the walls of the classroom. The majority of students reported feeling stressed, nervous or shy when interacting with native-English speakers. Though performing is a high-stakes activity that generated anxiety in many students, many "real world" situations are similarly high-stakes and stress-inducing. Learning how to navigate stressful situations in a second language provides students with useful skills for the world beyond the classroom.

## **Limitations**

As in any study, the research presented in this thesis was bound by several limitations. As Byram and Fleming (1998) note, “although there is common ground and mutual influence from one teaching situation to another, conceptual developments and curriculum changes are never context-free” (p. 3). This study examined the integration of theater and ESL instruction in a highly specified context, which differs considerably from other ESL programs. This results in limitations on the generalizability of findings across different contexts. Within the context of this study, student-participants were volunteers and the majority had enrolled in the class with a weak desire to undertake the creation and performance of a play. They had no option to change to another course at the school if they did not wish to participate in theater.

Further, as a teacher-researcher participant, I undertook to examine my own classroom. This insider’s perspective provides unique insight not accessible to an “objective observer.” Of course, this teacher-researcher perspective renders neutrality impossible. As there was only one teacher-researcher, inter-rater coding of various data was not feasible. Due to time constraints on the part of the student-participants, I was unable to engage student participants in a review of key findings. Finally, because of the close relationship established between myself and the student-participants, it is possible that students were less willing to discuss negative affects or opinions of the class than they might have been with an outsider. Stake (1995) and Usher (1996) claim subjectivity is not limited to the negative, but rather can become a strength especially when



researchers are aware of their own bias rather than suspending it and use it as the essential starting point for understanding and acquiring knowledge.

### **Implications for Further Study**

Implications for further study stemming from this research project fall in two categories: methodology and focus of research questions. This project was carried out through the use of ethnographic methodology. However, a mixed-methods approach might yield more in terms of both data collection and analysis. Techniques from action research might augment the broader ethnographic approach. Action research could involve participants in the design of the project as well as the presentation of the findings, ensuring that their perspectives were reflected throughout the process. Multiple researchers might enhance all phases of the research. Further, integrating discourse analysis into the research methodology would provide an in-depth analysis of how students' speech, particularly their interactions, was affected by the integration of theater. Research-based theater, which Prendergast and Belliveau (2013) describe as intended to "theatricalize data-collection, and/or analysis and/or findings" (p. 204) is another methodology that might enrich future studies by involving research participants in the process of presenting findings to a broader audience.

Future studies might further investigate how ESL may be taught through theater from either a broader or more focused perspective. The first research question addressed in this thesis focused on the "how" aspect of theater. One implication for future work in theater-based ESL instruction is that students need explicit instruction in group processes. This instruction might provide group dynamics strategies about how consensus is

reached, the role of the individual and the need to listen to and respect the views of others.

In addition to investigating how theater is incorporated into adult ESL classrooms, future research might attempt to develop a framework for discussing theater in an adult ESL context. The constructs of “theater in ESL instruction” are defined differently across different contexts as well as among different participants in the ITC. Further research might investigate the varied nature of theater and how varying theatrical approaches might influence findings. Studying several classrooms would enable the development of findings that could be relevant to the praxis of practitioners and researchers across a broader variety of contexts. An additional area of inquiry of future studies might be the effects that integrating theater into the ESL classroom had on the teacher.

Posing more focused questions would allow for a more detailed investigation of each theme presented in this study. For example, revisiting her seminal study on identity in adult immigrant language learners in Canada (Norton, 2000), Norton (2013) advanced further questions:

What opportunities for interaction exist outside the classroom? How is this interaction socially structured? How do learners act upon these structures to create, use or resist opportunities to speak? To what extent should their actions be understood with reference to their investment in the target language and their changing identities across time and space? (p. 161)

Theater has often been framed, both colloquially and academically, as a means of identity exploration. This study supports the notion that participants identities affect theater and theater in turn influences participants identities; therefore, developing detailed and focused data collection methods concerning the effect of theater on students' identities in the greater community seems warranted. This, in turn, would result in further alterations in methodological approaches, drawing on scholars in identity and language, such as Norton (2000; 2001; 2010; 2012; 2013) and Cummins (2006). Further research questions might be generated to address various relationships among the three main fields of this study: second language acquisition, immigration theory, and drama in education.

### **Conclusion**

This study found that in the particular, situated context of the ITC, theater was integrated into a classroom of adults in small increments over time. Though the class did create and perform a play, the majority of class time was focused on ESL activities that had no explicit theater orientation. Participating in such a course had many positive effects on students' affective dimensions, second language development, classroom dynamics, and investment in the course. Some of these effects extended beyond the walls of the classroom into students' identities in the larger community.

It is important to note that the findings of this study are not intended to encompass all approaches to integrating theater and ESL instruction. Certainly, alterations in the approach would result in differing effects on student participants, as would alterations in the context in which it is implemented. Future studies may wish to incorporate the methodological adjustments described in the previous section. In addition, further study

is needed to determine how theater affects students across multiple contexts and approaches.

Investigating my classroom as a teacher-researcher has had an enormous impact on my own classroom practice. It has altered the way that I approach using theater in my classroom in that I now frame theater in a positive light throughout the session and inform students clearly of their options and my expectations of them from the beginning of the course. More importantly, this study has opened my eyes to benefits of teaching ESL through theater that I had not previously imagined. I have seen my students struggle with passion to use English, the language that they want so dearly to master, but that causes many of them to doubt their own abilities to make their voices heard. In participating in theater they do not simply learn language, but use it to tell incredible stories of their experiences-in the U.S., in their countries of origin, stories of love, laughter, fear, immigration, a desire to make friends and have a strong sense of community. The sense of pride that students display after a successful performance is due to more than a justified sense of having communicated successfully in English; I believe it is pride in themselves, that their stories were worth telling and made the audience laugh or, sometimes, cry. Often ESL students are viewed from a deficit perspective; that is, the skills that they lack are emphasized and honed in on, but the skills and qualities that they already possess are de-emphasized or ignored. Adult ESL learners bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the classroom regardless of their level of formal education. Creating theater with them is one way to access and display that

knowledge. I believe that further study of classrooms that use theater to teach ESL has much to offer to researchers and practitioners in the field of language education.

APPENDIX A  
CONSENT FORM EXAMPLES

**Example A: Student Participant Consent Form (Participation in the Study)**

University of Massachusetts Boston  
Department of Applied Linguistics  
100 Morrissey Boulevard  
Boston, MA. 02125-3393

Consent Form For: Theater and Adult Language Learning: A Case Study

This form asks you to **give consent** (agree) to participate in a research project that will study how theater is used to teach adult immigrants ESOL. Your teacher, Kathleen McGovern, a graduate student of Applied Linguistics will be doing this research. If you have questions, Kathleen will discuss them with you. Kathleen's telephone number is 617-688-4747 and her email is [kmcgover@gmail.com](mailto:kmcgover@gmail.com). Kathleen's advisor is Dr. Avary Carhill Poza, an Assistant Professor in the Applied Linguistics Department of the University of Massachusetts. You can also contact Dr. Carhill Poza at 617-287-6893 with questions about the research.

The study will begin as soon as everyone who is willing gives consent. Your participation will finish on December 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015. If you decide to participate in this study, Kathleen will take and analyze notes on the ESOL5 Theater class. Your participation in the class will not change because of the research. In addition, Kathleen may also ask to interview you or take an audio-visual recording of an interview or the class.

Because you will continue with the ESOL5 Theater class, the risk involved in participating in this study is not more than the risk involved in participating in the class as usual. Your participation in this study is **confidential**, which means that your names will not appear in the research materials or the publication. The name of the Immigrant Learning Center will not be used either. Instead, your names and the school's name will be changed to try to make sure that no one can identify you. No information about your address or social security number will be collected for any reason during this project.

Your decision to participate in this research is **voluntary**, which means you do not need to agree to participate. You can continue to be in this class or any other class at the ILC even if you decide not to participate in this study. If you decide you want to participate, but change your mind later you can stop participating with no penalty or problem. If you do decide to stop participating please contact Kathleen in person or by phone or email to sign a new paper that will stop your participation. Your decision to participate or not to participate will in no way affect your grade or participation in the ESOL 5 Theater Class or the Immigrant Learning Center.

You have the **right to ask questions** about this research before you sign this form and at any time during the study. You can contact Kathleen McGovern or Dr. Carhill Poza at the numbers given above to ask questions at any time during the study. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The Institutional Review Board may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building-2-080, University of Massachusetts Boston, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or e-mail at (617) 287-5374 or at [human.subjects@umb.edu](mailto:human.subjects@umb.edu).

*I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM MEANS THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

### **Example B: Student Participant Consent Form (Audio- or Videotaping)**

#### CONSENT TO AUDIO- OR VIDEOTAPING & TRANSCRIPTION

This study may involve the audio taping of your interview with the researcher or the videotaping of the ESOL5 Theater Class. Your name will not be used on the videotape, audiotape or transcript. Only the researchers will be able to listen to or watch the tapes or read the transcripts.

The tapes may be transcribed (written down) by the researcher and erased after the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview or transcripts of the videotapes of the ESOL5 Theater class may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or picture) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

Right after any audio or videotaped session, you will be given the opportunity to have the tape erased if you wish to withdraw your consent to taping or participation in this study.

**By signing this form you are consenting to (INCLUDE ONLY THOSE OPTIONS THAT ARE BEING USED):**

- having your interview or ESOL5 Theater Class taped;
- to having the tape transcribed;
- use of the written transcript in presentations and written products.

**By checking the box in front of each item, you are consenting to participate in that procedure.**

This consent for taping is effective until the following date: May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. On or before that date, the tapes will be destroyed.

**Participant's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX B

### SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### **Part One: Group Interviews**

These interviews were semi-formal and took place in groups. Therefore, students responded to one another's comments as well as my questions. After asking questions about students' names and ages, the main content questions I posed included some variations on the following questions:

- 1) Why did you come to the U.S?
- 2) Why did you choose the ITC of all the other schools?
- 3) Why did you feel that it was important for you to study English?
- 4) This class was not just grammar and writing and reading and speaking, but you also wrote and performed a play. There are some positive things about theater in an English class and some negative things about theater in an English class. I want to hear what you think about some positive and some negative things.
- 5) If you could recommend to the Director if the theater class continues, would you recommend that it continue or that it become a class with grammar and reading and speaking and listening but not theater? Why?

#### **Part Two: Individual Interviews**

These interviews took place with the Case Study Participants. They included the questions outlined in Part One, but asked for more information connected to students' lives. Because of this, each interview asked some basic key questions to elicit biographical information from participants, but follow up questions changed according to the course of the conversation. Below are some sample questions.

- 1) You don't have to answer questions that you're not comfortable answering,

but could you tell me a little bit about what your life is like in the U.S. and what it was like in your country of origin?

- 2) Why did you decide to come to the U.S.?
- 3) How do you feel about your decision to come to the U.S.?
- 4) Can you tell me a little about what your goals or plans are?
- 5) Was this the first English class you've taken? What were your other classes like?
- 6) Do you feel like you have enough English to do the things you want to do or is English an obstacle?
- 7) What is a typical day for you like?
- 8) What was a typical day like for you in \_\_\_\_\_ (country of origin)
- 9) Is there anything else you want to tell me about your experience? In your country? In the U.S., or in the ITC?

## APPENDIX C

### DESCRIPTIVE TAXONOMY OF ITC ACTIVITIES

#### **Activities Designed to Augment Students' ESL Skills**

The primary aim of an activity designed to augment students' ESL skills was presented to students as the development of their ESL skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) rather than the development of their theater skills. Activities that would not be out of place in a non-theater-based classroom would also be placed in Category One. Such activities, broadly considered, address the following elements of ESL: Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Grammar. Because of my background in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), most lessons in this phase were approached communicatively and structured in some variation of a Presentation-Practice-Production (PPP) framework, as illustrated in the following lesson plan.

Theme/Content Area:
Family
Objectives: <b><i>What will students know or be able to do?</i></b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SWBAT will improve pronunciation of Ship/Sheep vowel sounds</li> <li>2. SWBAT complete their resume outlines and review them with the T</li> <li>3. SWBAT discuss family values through comparing family practices in their countries in discussion using comparatives</li> <li>4. SWBAT complete and discuss a reading and comprehension Q's on Child Abuse</li> </ol>
Assessments: <b><i>How will students demonstrate that they know or are able to do it?</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Through Monitoring Activities.</li> <li>• Through whole class correction and comparison of the Grammar Exercise and Conversation Grid</li> <li>• Through Peer and Whole Class correction of the Reading Comprehension Qs</li> </ul>
Materials and Resources:
Worksheets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pronunciation Practice Worksheet Ship vs. Sheep</li> <li>• Conversation Grid</li> <li>• Future 5 pg. 154-155</li> </ul>
Activities:
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Before Class: Meeting with Ming and Roxie</li> <li>2. Attendance 9:00-9:05</li> <li>3. Circle game-Where the West Wind Blows (with question format). S's step into circle and ask a question. Everyone who answers yes has to step into the circle.</li> <li>4. Go over test</li> <li>5. Pronunciation: Ship vs. Sheep</li> <li>6. Grammar: Comparative/Superlatives. Brief T explanation and sentence Corrections</li> <li>7. Conversation Grid: Ss circulate to discuss differences between their families</li> <li>8. Break 10:30-10:50 (meeting with Ss)</li> <li>9. Future 5 Reading pg. 154. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocab match pg. 155</li> <li>• Ss read "Child Abuse" and answer comprehension Q's. While Ss read, T conferences with Ss about resumes</li> </ul> </li> <li>10. Ss discuss differences in groups of 3-4. Group students from different countries together. Are these things against the law in your country? Should they be?</li> <li>11. After Class: Conference with May and Dhood</li> </ol>

To determine themes of interest to students, a list of themes covered in the textbook along with others suspected to be of interest were given to students. Students discussed the themes in small groups, generated new ones, and then ranked them in order of interest. Themes covered included: On the Job/Getting a Job, Family, Health, Education, Culture and History of the U.S, etc. The amount of time spent on each theme varied, with a typical theme lasting for approximately two weeks. From the second week of a given session until the class began creating and rehearsing the play, themes were worked through in class in order of interest to the students.

The structure of the course for the first several weeks was similar across the three sessions. Because of the student-generated themes, content covered in each of the three sessions differed slightly, primarily with regards to sequence rather than scope. One unifying trait across this theme was that the primary goal of activities was to enhance students-real world communication skills in English and that the activities were typical of a student-centered ESL class with no element of theater along with activities in which all classes at the IIE participated.

### **Warm up Activities**

Warm-up activities were coded as such for primarily logistical reasons: the warm-up, or as students and teacher in the ITC called it, “The Circle,” began every class immediately following attendance when the students and teacher typically formed a circle and spent between 5 and 20 minutes (approximately) participating in activities of various types and aims. The aims of these activities can be divided into three main types according to their orientation towards community building, ESL or theater, but despite

this possible division of activities, most drew from multiple orientations towards community building, ESL or theater.

### **Community Building Warm-Up Activities**

Community building warm-ups encompassed activities designed primarily to enable students to learn about their peers and develop an interest in their classroom community. For instance, in one game, students and teacher stood in a circle, one person stepped into the circle and said the sentence: “step into the circle if...,” finishing the sentence with something that is true about themselves. For example, “step into the circle if you are from Haiti.” Anyone in the circle for whom the statement was true was required step into the circle. Participants discussed the sentence for a brief moment, then stepped back to reform the circle. When another person had an idea, he or she stepped into the circle, repeating the process until the teacher ended the warm-up.

### **ESL-Oriented Warm Up Activities**

These warm-ups consisted of activities that may have been borrowed from the theater, but which were presented to students as activities designed to enhance their mastery of ESL. They included tongue twisters, grammar-games and pronunciation practice and typically tied in with the subject of the day’s lesson and comprised the majority of warm-up activities, beginning in the first month and continuing through the third month of each session.

An example of this type of warm-up is the game “Making the Familiar Strange,” Which mixed ESL grammar with theater skills. In this game, the class stood in a circle and the teacher gave one student an object, for example, a hat. The student had to use the

hat in any way other than its intended daily use. One choice might be to row an imaginary boat, using the hat as an oar; another might be to serve an imaginary tennis ball using the hat as a racket. The other students in the circle had to watch and guess what the activity being performed was and what the hat was functioning as. The student then passed the hat to the adjacent person, who had to use it in a new manner. This activity targeted the past progressive and simple past tense as well as vocabulary. For instance, students had to produce sentences such as “She was rowing a boat. The hat was an oar.” This game borrowed from the theater, in which it is considered to promote creativity and specificity of pantomime.

### **Theater-Oriented Warm-Up Activities**

Theater-oriented warm-ups were introduced when students began creating, rehearsing and performing the plays. The primary aim of these warm-ups was to enhance students’ theater skills for rehearsals and performances. They included relaxation-focused activities, energy-building activities and activities connected to character development.

For example, in one activity students had to improvise being monkeys because a scene of the play included a parable with several monkey characters. Many of the students were having difficulty expressing the physicality required to indicate they were monkeys. I paired students and gave one student in each pair a yellow highlighter, which represented a banana. The other student in the pair was assigned the role of a monkey. The monkeys were instructed to do everything in their power to get the banana; the banana-holders were instructed to prevent the monkey from getting the banana. After the

activity, the class discussed the students' performances. The class then elected three students to perform the roles of the monkeys in the play.

### **Theater Activities Couched in ESL Lessons**

Several language-teaching methodologies include drama-based activities such as role-plays, presentations and practice dialogues. ITC activities that incorporated elements of theater to primarily enhance students' language learning rather than to write and perform their own play have coded as Theater Activities Couched in ESL Lessons. These activities had the dual goal of enhancing students' language abilities and scaffolding students' toward the creation and performance of a play. Such activities include: text based dialogues, student-written texts, role-plays, improvisations, and student presentations.

#### **Text-Based Dialogues**

Across the three sessions, Category Three began with students performing dialogues taken from ESL textbooks. The language-related purpose of this was to practice pronunciation, grammar and listening. The theater-related aim of these exercises was to familiarize students with basic elements of theatrical conventions. These include blocking, which is where actors move on stage (e.g. actors don't stand with their back to the audience), and public speaking skills (e.g. speaking loudly enough so the spectators can hear).

#### **Student-Written Texts**

Students wrote and performed texts relevant to the theme or language point being studied. For example, in the "Health" theme, all three sessions wrote a script of a



dialogue between a doctor and patient. Students were required to include the grammar point being studied and a minimum number of target vocabulary words from the vocabulary board. The language aim of this exercise was to allow students to apply the target language in a personalized manner. The theater aim was to familiarize students with the conventions of script writing (e.g. using a colon after the character's name to introduce what is said, enclosing stage directions in parentheses).

### **Role-Plays**

Role-plays were introduced later in Phase Three. They involved students interacting spontaneously, having been assigned a character or a context different from their actual lives. The language-related aim of these activities was to practice the target language spontaneously, with no dialogue to follow. The theater-related aim was to enhance and assess students' improvisational abilities, awareness of theatrical conventions, and ability to create and embody a character other than themselves. One example of role play was the use of Forum Theater, a style of theater developed by Augusto Boal with the goal of engaging members of a community in structured dialogue. In typical forum theater, non-actors are engaged in theatrical skits meant to allow them to act out possible solutions to problems faced in their community, becoming actors themselves. The actors create a skit containing at least one protagonist and one antagonist in which a conflict relevant to their lives is presented. The skit is then performed for the community, but unlike typical theater pieces, a key element of Forum Theater is that the protagonist fails. A third person facilitates the scene; this person is termed "The Joker." The Joker calls the scene to an end at the moment of conflict and

asks the spectators (whom Boal calls “spectators”) for feedback along the lines of, “why did the protagonist fail?” When an audience member offers an alternate action the protagonist might have taken to alter the course of events within the scene, the Joker invites the person onto the stage to replace the protagonist within the skit. The skit is then replayed with the audience member as the protagonist; again, the antagonist does his/her best to ensure the protagonist does not succeed, the Joker stops the skit and the process repeats. Forum Theater is designed to generate possible solutions within a community.

In the ITC, students and teacher engaged in forum theater during the “Family,” theme. Students created skits, portraying the protagonist and antagonist as family members. The protagonist failed, and the Joker (the teacher of the ITC) called on students for alternate possibilities. Students then replaced the protagonists attempting to alter the course of the scene. Between scenes, discussion ensued about the choices made by the actors. In one Forum Theater scene at the ITC, a mother tried to get her son to help her around the house. Possible solutions lead to the mother eliciting empathy from her son, describing her hardships and finally kicking her son out of the house. In the discussion portion of the class, students shared the difficulties they faced trying to work, go to school and take care of their family.

### **Presentations**

Presentations were directly linked to the devising process because across all three sessions the creation of the student-generated play began with a presentation, usually a storytelling exercise. For example, after completing the storytelling activity, Two Truths

and One Lie, classes began the devising process by improvising stories generated in this activity.

### **Devising and Rehearsing the Play**

These activities embodied the expressed purpose of devising and rehearsing the play for performance and were characterized by a strong theater orientation, but also aimed at developing students ESL skills through explicit error correction and language-related feedback.

#### **Devising**

Inherent in the nature of devising is the fact that the process will be informed by the participants in a particular context at a given time. Therefore, each class underwent a different process. The following example provides an illustration of one particular process.

After engaging in Two Truths and One Lie, a group improvised the story of a student who got lost at the airport. In the student's story, she didn't speak English and when the plane arrived in New York, she had to change planes. She couldn't understand where she had to go, so she followed a passenger from her first plane. The passenger asked what she was doing and she tried to explain through gestures that she was lost and trying to find her gate. The passenger led her to her gate and in the end she boarded the correct plane to Boston.

The students improvised the scene by creating an airport waiting area and posting a sign on the wall that said "Gate 3." They then self-assigned roles in the scene and practiced several times in one corner of the classroom. As they practiced, three other

groups practiced in the other corners of the classroom, simultaneously. Some students opted to write their lines on notecards, while others simply improvised. After twenty minutes, each group performed the improvisation for the class. In the feedback session, student spectators praised this group for speaking loudly and expressing emotions clearly; they also recommended more specificity in terms of blocking. The class also had an in-depth discussion in which other students shared their experiences arriving at the airport. Some student-spectators were inspired to change the stories that they wanted to perform for the class to a story about their own arrival in the U.S. One student made the comment, “you see, our problems begin as soon as we arrive in America.” This scene, other student-generated airport scenes inspired by it, and the student’s comment, “our problems begin as soon as we arrive in America,” were all included in the final script.

### **Rehearsing the Play**

After a script was devised, rehearsals began. In the early rehearsal stages of all three sessions, the teacher divided the class into groups. Working in these groups, students in attendance on a given day could perform scenes with few missing characters. As in the devising stage, groups rehearsed in different corners of the classroom simultaneously. They selected and arranged props and materials needed to set the stage for their scene. After approximately 20 minute rehearsal periods, they performed their rehearsed scenes for the class, which provided feedback on theatrical conventions and acting choices. At this stage in the rehearsal process, students were discouraged from giving one another language-related feedback. Instead, I took notes on errors in

pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary usage and corrected students after they had finished the scene.

In the final week before the performance, the class rehearsed in this manner before the break and after the break ran through the play from beginning to end, including props and scene changes. At approximately this time, students were typically prohibited from holding the script in their hands during rehearsals and encouraged to improvise and help one another if a student forgot their lines. Students who opted not to perform in the plays were assigned the roles of assistant directors, properties managers (responsible for finding, creating and keeping track of all props), and rehearsal actors (who filled in for missing students during rehearsals).

### **Performing the Play**

Performances and dress rehearsals varied greatly from session to session. The first cohort performed only within the IIE, for an audience primarily of IIE staff and students. The second cohort performed at the local High School for a similar audience; this performance was also videoed by the local access television station for broadcast. The third cohort performed at the local High school as well as at a summer arts camp for children.

## APPENDIX D

### ITC PLAYS

#### **Description of Plays Created in the ITC**

The ITC plays were basically a series of vignettes. Though, as described previously, the play created by the students in Session Three had a main arc, the first two plays created in the ITC had little overarching storyline. The vignettes of all three can be divided into three basic types: 1) stories about students' experiences in the U.S.A.; 2) folk tales; and 3) stories about students' experiences in their native countries. The following excerpts illustrate each of the three types, respectively.

The play created in the first session primarily dealt with students' experiences in their native countries and the U.S.A (types 1 and 3). The second play focused primarily on students experiences in the U.S.A (type 1). The third portrayed immigrants experiences in the U.S.A. (type 1) in a more generalizable level. Students' own stories were modified by the class to fit the characters and story line they had created. The third play also had a strong emphasis on folk tales (type 2) because the class created the performance for an audience of children.

## Excerpts from ITC Scripts

### Example 1: Jerome's Scene

This scene is an excerpt from the play created by Session Two. It details an experience Jerome had in the U.S.A shortly after arriving in the country.

Jerome        I spoke English when I arrived here, but you know, sometimes there can be cultural differences that cause misunderstandings too. Let me show you.

Narrator:    Once upon a time, Jerome decided to travel to the USA. He was looking forward to spending some time with his friend Jose who had lived over there for a long time. Jerome didn't know anything about the rules in the USA. When he arrived, Jerome misunderstood the culture and the rules in the USA because he comes from Haiti. Listen to what happened to John on his first day in the country.

(Jerome knocks on the door. Josiah opens it. They are both very happy to see each other and they embrace!)

Jerome:       Hello!

Josiah:        Hey man!

Jerome:       How are you? I haven't seen you in a long, long time!

Josiah:        I'm wonderful. How about you Jerome? How is Haiti? Your family?

Jerome:       Everything is ok. It's great to see you!

Josiah:       Welcome to America! And what's your plan for today? Do you want to go to the beach?

Jerome:       Great idea! Take me somewhere we can also play basketball!

Josiah:       Don't worry my friend. I know a beach where we can play basketball too! Let's go.

Narrator: And so the two friends went together to play basketball. It was a beautiful day and they were happy to be together after such a long time.

Jerome: This beach is very nice. Let's play a game before we get in the water.

Josiah: No problem. Heads up! You got the ball. (he throws the basketball to Josiah).

(The two play basketball together for a little while. They are having fun)

Jerome: It's been so long since I've played! I'm thirsty, my friend. I'm going to go get a drink in the car.

Josiah: Ok, my friend. Go get it and come back quickly. I want to beat you at this game!

Jerome: Don't worry! I'll be back soon.

(Jerome goes to the car, opens a beer and starts drinking it. Suddenly a police officer walks to the car and looks at him)

P.O.: Hello, sir.

Jerome: Hello.

P.O.: Can you tell me what you are drinking, sir?

Jerome: A beer, officer.

P.O.: Don't you know it's unlawful to drink alcohol in public places?

John: No, officer. I didn't know. It's my first day in the country. If I had known that I would never do it! I'm sorry, sir.

P.O.: Can I see your ID please. This is against the law. I have to give you a ticket.

Jerome: I'm sorry officer. I didn't know and I'll never do it again. Please do me a favor.

P.O. No. I can't do anything. You could put your drink into a cup but it's illegal to have an open beer in public places. Give me your ID. You're going to get a ticket for 25 bucks. You will find the address to pay it on the back of the ticket. (exits).



Narrator: Jerome, was disappointed, depressed unhappy and went back to his friend to explain what happened.

Jerome: Hey, my friend. I just got a ticket from the police!

Josiah: What happened to you, Jerome? Why did he give you a ticket?

Jerome: You should have told me that drinking alcohol in public places is unlawful. That's why he gave me a ticket. You know in Haiti we don't have that law.

Josiah: I'm so sorry my friend. I didn't think about that. Don't worry I'm going to fix it. I'll pay it for you.

Jerome: Cool. Thank you, brother.

(Jerome and Josiah continue playing basketball, happily).

### **Example 2: Betty's Scene**

This scene was written by Betty and illustrates a traditional Chinese folk tale about the origin of the sun. In performance, students used shadow puppetry to illustrate the story.

Narrator2: Once there was a God. He had ten children. The children were suns. Together they lived in a tree in heaven. Each day one sun would travel around the world making the day bright. But after some time the suns got bored of doing the same thing every day. They wanted to go play in the sky all together.

Suns: Let's all go together. Come on, it will be fun! Let's go! (Etc.)

Narrator2: All ten suns jumped out of the tree together and played in the sky.

Suns: Woo hoo! Yay! Hahaha (etc.)

Narrator2: They were having a great time, but they brought great disaster to the earth. Everything was dying. People were so hot they almost couldn't breathe! There was no food and monsters came out of the forests.

Monster: Mwaaa haa haa!

Narrator2: The god tried to make his sons come back

The God: Come back – you are destroying the earth!

Suns: No, father. Woo hoo! It's so much fun!

Narrator2: but he did not succeed. So, he went to find a hero, named Hoa Yi.

The God: Hoa Yi, I need you to take your arrow and shoot the suns from the sky. They will not listen to me and they are killing everything on earth.

Hoa Yi: I will try. But they are your children, so first I will try to scare them, not kill them.

The God: Thank you.

Narrator2: So, Hoa Yi shot his arrows and tried to scare the suns, but they were not afraid.

Suns: Hahaha! You'll never catch us! Woo hoo! Heee heee!

Narrator2: Hoa Yi became angry. He aimed his arrow and shot one of the suns. After a while, a ball of fire fell silently from the sky. (the suns begin to fall). Hoa Yi shot the suns one by one. In the end he left the last sun alone in the sky to keep daylight on earth. Hoa Yi became a great hero for saving the world from the 10 suns.

### **Example 3: Phan's Scene**

Phan: Yes, it is not only learning a different language that is difficult. When I first came to the USA, I realized that there are so many different customs here than in my country. One day my husband and I were going out. We were in the train station. It was the weekend so there were a lot of people. While we were waiting for the train we saw a couple standing in front of the crowd. They were really, really in love with each other. They were sweet-talking, hugging and kissing.

Man: I love you so much.

Woman: I love you, too!

Phan: My husband and I were very surprised because in Thailand people don't do that in public.

Husband: Do you see that couple?

Phan: Yes, I do. It's ridiculous.

Husband: Why isn't anyone paying attention?

Phan: I don't know. It's so awkward. They shouldn't do that in public.

Husband: If we were in Thailand, people would be angry. They'd even be yelling.

Phan: Yes, but I think it's different here.

Man: Here comes the train baby.

Husband: Let's not get in the same car as them.

Phan: Good idea. It's too disgusting.

#### **Example 4: The Scene in which Fares Swapped Roles**

Narrator: I have seen some people here be very rude to immigrants because they don't speak the language well. Let me tell you. On a normal morning, a Chinese woman went to the market. She didn't speak English and wanted some customer service. She was waiting in line when the employee asked...

Employee: How can I help you?

C.W.: (Speaks Chinese. She wants change).

Employee: What did you say?

C.W.: (Again, speaks Chinese).

Employee: (Impolitely) I can't understand you.

C.W.: (Again, speaks Chinese. This time she tries to put money in the employee's hand and reaches over the counter)

Employee: Don't touch me!

C.W.: (Apologizes in Chinese. Again tries to give the employee money).

Employee: I said don't touch me! What are you doing?!?!

(A coworker hears and comes to help).

Coworker: What's happening? Is everything ok?

Employee: She's trying to touch me!

Coworker: Why?

Employee: I don't know, but she's trying to touch me.

C.W.: (Again speaks Chinese and tries to give the employee money).

Employee: See!

Coworker: Don't touch her! We will remove you from the store. What are you doing?

Employee: She doesn't even speak English.

Coworker: That's it. Get out of here. (They take her by the arm and remove her from the store.). What's he problem?

Employee: She shouldn't be here if she can't speak English.

Coworker: I know.

Employee: Thanks for your help.

Coworker: Any time. Don't worry about it.

APPENDIX E  
TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

I transcribed Individual and Group Interviews according to the following transcription conventions:

<i>Symbol</i>	<i>Represents</i>
/	Overlapping speech, placed at the point in discussion where the speech began to overlap
=	Interruption
<i>italics</i>	Emphasis added to call reader's attention to main points
hh	Short burst of laughter
hhh	Extended laughter
(words)	Addition of expository information by transcriber
...	Segment of speech omitted in final text for purposes of clarity or brevity

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