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A Deeper Semiotic Richness: Empowering English Language Students Through Digital Storytelling

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University of San Francisco

**A Deeper Semiotic Richness:
Empowering English Language Students
Through Digital Storytelling**

A Field Project Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Second Language

by
Karah Parks
December 2015

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Empowering English Language Students
Through Digital Storytelling**

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MASTER OF ARTS

in

TEACHING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Karah Parks
December 2015

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Under the guidance and approval of the committee, and approval by all members, this field project has been accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Approved:

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ABSTRACT

The current philosophies underpinning TESOL higher education curricula and classroom practices still reinforce the essentialized narrative of the *native speaker* and teach English as an objective, disinterested, linguistic system of static signs (Blommaert, 2010; Kramsch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Pennycook, 1997). This has significantly limited the development students' identities, and agency within English language speaking communities. To address this issue, this project contains a supplemental, online digital storytelling curriculum for intermediate to advanced adult learners at the university level in U.S. colleges as a means of scaffolding intentional identity development through multimodal, symbolic competence in the English language. Entitled *Creative ESOL: Digital storytelling and English language development*, the curriculum develops symbolic competence proposed by Claire Kramsch (2009) to promote positive student and teacher identity formation through greater ownership of and intentionality with the English language. The project offers a series of nine modules, scaffolding the basic skills to create a digital story within the first four modules and giving teachers of college ESOL courses, whether online, offline, or hybrid, the option to use any of the digital story projects in the last four modules as midterm or final assignments. Throughout the learning process, *Creative ESOL* offers learners an array of options to promote their agency within supportive virtual communities. As language development is a lifelong process, this project delivers a clear pedagogical framework that teachers and students can apply throughout their lifetimes to engage, reinforce, reject and transform the English language and develop positive identities of authorship and ownership.

CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

With the rise of virtual communities composed of “digitally mediated transnational, multilingual identities and lives,” the society within which people reference and symbolically position themselves is constantly shifting and expanding (Duff, 2015, p. 35). According to a 2015 survey by *Global Web Index* of 200,000 people across thirty-four worldwide markets, internet-users spend an average of 1.77 hours networking online per day, and this number continues to rise (Mander, 2015). Alongside this rapid virtual expansion, physical movement of international students, led by China, seeking higher education degrees in the United States has increased by more than 40% over the last decade, and is growing rapidly, making international student programs core sources of funding for many universities as post-recession government support dwindles (Furman, Goldberg & Lusin, 2009; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Murphy, 2014). These two factors have significantly blurred the boundary lines of individual identity and language: research shows that language students’ identities are spanning transnational and virtual boundaries, and that the English language is a constant, symbolic flow of negotiated meaning rather than a static code (Blommaert, 2010). However, the current philosophies underpinning TESOL higher education curricula and classroom practices still reinforce the essentialized narrative of the *native speaker* and teach English as an objective, disinterested, linguistic system of static signs (Blommaert, 2010; Kramsch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Pennycook, 1997). This has significantly limited the development students’ identities, and agency within English language speaking communities.

Central to the problem is that English language curriculum still lacks critical pedagogy and agentive spaces that empower English language students (ELTs) to recognize and resist the language's unequal power relations and creatively shape its discourses. In their four year study of international student curricula within a Canadian university-level English program, Ilieva and Waterstone (2013) cite Beck et al. stating, "Higher educational curriculum and pedagogy are complicit in a narrative of acculturation to the practices of western educational institutions" by not scaffolding critical awareness of English language socialization practices in international student programs (p. 346). In English education worldwide, the methodologies that privilege western values and modalities, such as valuing group work over individual work in communicative language teaching (CLT) often go unacknowledged (Tsui, 2007). This lack of critical pedagogy and space for student agency subtly perpetuates embedded values that promote identities of marginalization in English language students, both domestic and international (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch 2009).

One of these specific embedded values within English language teaching practices and discourses that is particularly disempowering to the identities of learners and teachers is the privileging of *native* identities and modalities over *non-native* ones (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2015; Motha, 2006; Moussu & Braine, 2006; Norton, 1997; Pennycook, 1989). Ilieva and Waterstone (2013) discuss the negative impact that "native-speakerism" within English language curriculum has on students as they enter university, curtailing their ownership of English and reducing or denying the accompanying agency afforded to native English speakers (p. 16). Motha (2006) cites multiple recent studies in which race granted certain people more legitimacy as English speakers than others who speak with

the same proficiency. Spina (2006) discusses the “devaluation of ESL students’ native language skills,” or symbolic resources, in order to maintain dominant speaker “status quo” within classroom practices and educational institutions, thus disintegrating the students’ multimodal identity development, and lowering student motivation and agency (p. 100). By not educating students and teachers to recognize the embedded western biases, TESOL curricula short-circuit the academic and creative potential ELs bring to the English language as they synthesize it with their other multilingual perspectives.

Teachers from other languages and races also face the same discrimination from these embedded ideologies and, therefore, the same identity-formation barriers as their students, impacting their teaching philosophies and classroom performances (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Tsui, 2007). *TESOL Inc.* (2006) included the following in a position statement: “nonnative English-speaking educators have found themselves often implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, discriminated against in hiring practices or in receiving working assignments in the field of teaching ESL or EFL” – a practice TESOL as an organization rejects, yet still uses the subordinating labels (p. 1). Braine and Moussu (2006) found that “the native English speaker’ criterion was a factor” in hiring practices, though several studies have shown that international students have a largely positive attitude about “non-native” teachers (p. 46). According to these studies, there remain a significant number of TESOL curricula, hiring institutions and classroom practices that do not recognize the store of linguistic resources ELs and teachers bring to English in higher education at a time when technology and globalization make it a valuable asset to navigate an increasingly complex world with its shifting meanings (Kramsch, 2009; Moussu & Braine, 2006; Murphy 2014; Pinnow, 2011).

One of the greatest means of enhancing the meaning-making resources of ELLs and combating normative, essentialized practices of status quo English, the aesthetic or creative practice within a social environment, is also undervalued (Chao, 2009; Kramsch, 2009; Spina, 2006). As spaces of language play in which students can “act out the social subjects they might want to become,” aesthetic practice within the classroom community allows students agency to transform English as a symbolic medium with all its emotional resonances (Kramsch, 2009, p. 195). However, the aesthetic practices (including art, music, drama, and video) that act, according to Vygotsky, as zones of transformation that “occur at the boundary of art and life” are consistently devalued in western education (as cited in Kramsch, 2009, p. 198). According to Murphy (2014) and Spina (2006) these practices are also arguably under-researched, especially for adult ELLs. They argue that current educational emphasis on testing and the privileging of math and sciences continues to account for lack of research, time and funding given to aesthetic education (Murphy, 2014; Spina, 2006). Predicting the dual problems of continued funding cutbacks and the resulting rise in interested motives within university curricula design, Merrion (2008) states, “In a decade, the decrease in government support will affect higher education and the arts---a double deficit for the profession” (p. 8). ELLs’ access to aesthetic means of transformation and agency within English language practice in higher education remains uncertain due to low or possibly interested support.

In summation, the western-centered pedagogy of English language curricula and classroom practice continues to debilitate the necessary agency, and therefore, identity formation and motivation of ELLs and teachers. Perpetuation of these underlying pedagogies obstructs the potential for the creative growth of the English language, which

is mediated through the semiotic richness that multilingual students and teachers offer. As constant innovation in technology is fundamentally shifting and transforming students' and teachers' identity negotiations within real and virtual academic environments, the complex linguistic resources and modalities of these multilingual communities is increasing in size and value (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Spina, 2006). There is now a significant need for rigorous, higher education curricula that challenges reductive narratives and labels, and cultivates ELLs' and teachers' identities as creative, multimodal and legitimate shapers of the English language.

Purpose of the Project

The purpose of this project is to create a supplemental, online digital storytelling curriculum for intermediate to advanced adult learners at the university level in U.S. colleges as a means of scaffolding intentional identity development through multimodal, symbolic competence in the English language. As TESOL education moves further towards learner-centered curricula and technological competence fostering post-education professional marketability, students and teachers need supportive Communities of Practice (CoPs) in physical and virtual spaces that holistically recognize and activate their multimodal identities. This project engages this important need by creating an agency rich space of language play within a range of projects, built on the digital story.

Through critical discussion and synthesis of multilingual symbolic practices, students can examine how their personal narratives reveal, reinforce, resist their internalized and imposed identities as well as how those identities are influenced and legitimized within English speaking CoPs (Vinogradova, 2007). By reflecting on their own and others' practice of English from the vantage point of their other linguistic

perspectives, ELSs can gain insights into how symbolic systems mediate their identities, through linguistic sign, body language, tone, and so on, and how their communities perceive and reflect these signs back (Block 2007; Kramsch, 2009).

The digital storytelling format is ideal for realizing and aesthetically showcasing the symbolic competence of ELSs as both participant and viewer of their own identity formations within the language learning process (Morris, 2013; Vinogradova, 2007). Designed to be flexible, the curriculum can be adapted to a variety of university-level situations and contexts with the goal of fostering student identity development within the ecology of supportive CoPs. Belonging and aligned with a supportive local or virtual CoP, ELSs can be further empowered as a language shapers who can symbolically mediate their identities more intentionally and, therefore, mindfully change the lenses through which people see the world.

Theoretical Framework

This curriculum creates negotiable spaces through project-based learning that holistically engage of students within their virtual and local CoPs. It activates their creative identities and agency to transform, with intentionality, the paradigms, values, and perceptions embedded within multiple symbolic codes of western meaning-making through reflection, criticism, and creativity. It also presents a flexible, negotiable curriculum structure for teachers, also multilingual subjects undergoing identity formation, which is shaped in and by their classroom practices. Theories of symbolic competence proposed by Kramsch (2009), project-based learning described by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), and the role of the community of practice theorized by Wenger (2002) comprise the central philosophy of this curriculum.

Language mediates people's identities by coding objective and subjective perceptions; therefore, the more languages people internalize, the larger and more flexible their symbolic repertoires. ELSs' ability to explore the symbolic relationships of words through reflexive criticism and aesthetic synthesis of the languages they know/are learning and embody within their own particular histories, memories, and cultures, gives them greater semiotic resources to navigate transglobal interaction as well as greater creativity to define their place within that world symbolically (Kramersch, 2009). Based on poststructuralist theory, symbolic competence posited by Kramersch (2009) scaffolds teacher/student identity formation through the criticism and synthesis of the symbolic use of language(s). Symbolic competence "does not invalidate the need for boundaries", such as grammatical rules or denoted meanings, but rather examines them in order to find the most intentional projection of the individual self (Kramersch 2009, pp. 198-199). This competence "emerges from the need to find appropriate subject positions within and across the languages at hand" (Kramersch, 2009, p. 200). It regards the learner as a multifaceted, subjective identity and language as a symbolic form that "mediates our existence through symbolic forms" (Kramersch, 2009, p. 7). By developing symbolic competence, ELSs examine how their multilingual repertoires shape their perspectives in order to more intentionally mediate their identities.

Project-based learning as defined by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), provides an agentic learning structure for the development of symbolic competence. It is student driven as it "derives from the nature of a particular project students elect to do" and "bridges the gap between language study and language use" (pp. 157-158). During the project, students engage in a variety of linguistic interaction between themselves in

negotiating a project through its stages, which allows for the sociocultural Vygotskian practice of co-constructing knowledge through “collaborative activity, [to] create new ways of meaning” (Brown, 2014, p. 42). The co-constructing of knowledge within a project increases participation, self-regulation and motivation (Tsui, 2007; Vinogradova, 2007). Therefore, project-based methodology in which “learners work closely together to help each other accomplish a task [or project] and to problem solve” is an ideal strategy to build a motivated community in which students have agency to more richly develop their symbolic competence (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 156).

Community, both online and analog, is essential for the formation of both ELSs’ identity and for the learning process. ELSs are not as impactful in re-imagining their identities and instigating change without others legitimizing and confirming their practices (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kramsch, 2009; Tsui 2007). Acting as incubators and catalysts of identity development forms a key function of CoPs as they are “organized around what matters to their members” (Wenger, 1998, p. 6). A sense of belonging is therefore a crucial element in determining how well students can develop their identities within their CoPs (Wenger, 2002). In tandem with belonging, students also have the ability to negotiate meanings within the CoP. Tsui (2007) cites Wenger by saying, “The negotiability of meanings... determines the extent to which one is able to contribute to and shape meanings in which one is invested. It is fundamental to identity formation” (p. 661). The community member’s identity is formed both by alignment with the CoP as well as the agency to function within it (Tsui, 2007; Wenger, 1998). This project provides a framework for CoPs where all members have the ability or

the possibility of functioning as experts within the group, valuing the linguistic resources contributed by all to the empowerment of all.

With the goal of increasing the agency of the learner, symbolic competence proposed by Kramersch (2009), project-based learning described by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), and CoPs proposed by Wenger (2002) constitute the complimentary philosophies that underpin this project and shape its outcomes. Symbolic competence empowers the ELS to both critique and synthesize internalized and imposed linguistic identities, and a project-based methodology provides a framework for aesthetic exploration. CoPs carve out the ideal social space in which students can test and strengthen their ongoing practice of identity formation and contribute their knowledge intentionally, meaningfully and legitimately to the formation of the English language.

Significance of the Project

ELs are entering North American Universities in increasing numbers, hoping to gain access, and therefore power through participation, to the academic discourses occurring in English as lingua franca (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Merrion, 2008). Within these programs, however, the native speaker ideology, racism, and the very *west-as-center* myth that drove them there is often uncritically and often very subtly embedded in the curriculum, thus reinforcing the marginalization of their identities as *non-native* who have purchased English-as-commodity, often at great cost, what little legitimacy they have (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramersch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Motha, 2006). This project offers a supplemental, flexible, online curriculum, offering a thematic exploration of students' linguistic identities through the creation of digital stories. The creative act of storytelling offers an authentic means to critically examine students'

experience of language as an outsider and to synthesize their visions of *what could be* in the future into a symbolic artifact, an act of agency in shaping English through the creation of a multimodal text.

The main goal of this project is promote the agency of ELSs within the language learning community to negotiate their identities, which are “inseparably tied” to their agency and therefore, learning, as learning based on a person’s ability to negotiate meanings within a community (van Lier as cited in Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013, p.33). Lindgarden and McDaniel (2012) define agency as “the power to choose what happens next” and narratives as “the causal sequence of events that defines experience” (p. 344). In this definition of both agency and its connection to narrative, digital storytelling is an ideal site of identity formation and regulation as it offers both narrative and creative choice in “what happens next” in the story (Vinogradova, 2007). By allowing ELSs room to critically examine their multiple linguistic identities as both viewers and participants, the projects in this curriculum scaffold learner reflexive practice, greater intentionality in English language use, ability to self-assess and other metacognitive skills valuable in higher education environments (Morris, 2013; Vinogradova, 2007).

Furthermore, digital storytelling promotes agency in that it is a multimodal text, and does not rely only on linguistic sign only to create meaning. This creates a level playing field for ELS to use other symbolic resources to “clarify and organize their thinking” where they may lack the language (Spina, 2006, p. 101). Opening up other means of meaning-making within the context of English language curriculum is not only an authentic reflection of actual language use, which is itself embodied and multimodal, but it engages more learning styles and more ways to mean through aesthetic practice in

symbolic expression (Block, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Spina, 2006). The variety of modalities thus expands “the framework upon which English language is built” (McGuire as cited in Spina, 2006, p. 103). By fostering a unique narrative voice, and conveying meaning through symbolic use of visual imagery and audio, ELSs can create from a wide berth of options, which is an essential part of project-based learning.

As an agency-rich practice of creating and examining personal narratives, storytelling, digital and otherwise, is a multimodal, narrative design, and an intentional, aesthetic performance which promotes other cognitive skills and abilities, while fostering the global communicative capitol of the multilingual subject (Kramsch, 2009). As virtual and online learning communities are significant spaces of interaction and identity negotiation, digital storytelling, as a digital artifact shared within a CoP, scaffolds greater meaning-making abilities across a multiplicity of symbolic resources within these virtual environments, which is a marketable skill within today’s globalized, and virtually expanding society (Kramsch, 2009; Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012; Vinogradova, 2007).

The practice of crafting a digital narrative directly engages and motivates students as both creators and audience (Morris, 2013). As they reflect outwards their lived experience of dual, sometimes multiple identities that abide between the languages that mediate who they are, and how they see the world, ELSs makes English semiotically richer, more agentive space (Kramsch, 2009). Their creative impact on English language as ever negotiated structures and layers of meanings will only continue to grow as transformative technological innovation and transnational movement reveals the boundaries that both divide and liberate us all (Kramsch, 2009; Morris, 2013; Vinogradova, 2007).

Definition of Term(s)

English language student (ELS):	Unlike the traditional English Language Learner (ELL) label, the definition of a “student” here implies a temporal role one chooses to occupy. “Learner” denotes a life-long role, and is therefore, not definitive of the specific group of people studying English at university for a limited time that this paper describes.
Multimodality:	The ability to competently use other communicative tactics, such as gesture and tone, besides language, in order to negotiate meanings.

CHAPTER II REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

International students are migrating to universities in the United States, hoping to gain, a better grasp of the English language, as well as access to its discourses and socialization practices (Furman et al., 2009; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009). However, for many of them, this access remains beyond their grasp, as they are not taught to recognize, criticize, resist or recreate the very embedded discourses within TESOL program curricula of *native-speakerism* and western-centered pedagogy that can deny their legitimacy as users, and therefore, shapers of the English language (Blommaert, 2010; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Motha, 2006; Pennycook, 1997; Spina, 2006).

This project seeks to remedy this problem through the creation of an accessible, supplemental, higher education curriculum. Utilizing current methods and theories of online learning, it engages the multimodal identities of English language students (ELs) and provides them with a wider choice of spaces to develop their identities as agentic and legitimate practitioners within academic English-speaking communities. Moreover, it equips them to intentionally and meaningfully utilize their multilingual and multimodal symbolic resources to resist narratives of inequality embedded in English language and TESOL curricula by creatively engaging and changing them through the act of digital storytelling. The literature reviewed here underpins the core philosophies of this curriculum by describing the following concepts as they relate to English Language Development (ELD): student identity formation through language development, student

agency through symbolic competence and symbolic narratives of student identities through digital storytelling (Larsen-Freeman, 2015).

Student Identity Formation Through Language Development

Researchers and theorists from the poststructuralist school of thought agree that there is a connection between language use and identity formation. According to University of California Berkeley professor, Claire Kramsch in her book *The Multilingual Subject*, people's identities are constructs of the self. Kramsch (2009) defines the *self* as a "psychological entity," a reflection of how people perceive their own identities in a given context (p. 17). The self, according to Kramsch (2009), is not separate from the society in which it is both constructed and negotiated. In agreement with Kramsch, professor of TESOL, Hayriye Kayi-Aydar, in her (2015) study on learner identity and agency, defines identity as a "projection of self" which is demonstrated through actions and emotions within society (p. 138). Patricia Duff, a preeminent scholar from the University of Columbia, also agrees with these definitions of identity in her (2015) discussion on globalization and identity, draws from the work of Hornberger, Block and Norton to confirm that identity, as a presentation of self within a context, is dependent on the society in which it is constructed. Both Bonny Norton (1997), who has conducted significant studies on learner identity at the University of British Columbia, and Etienne Wenger (2002), author of extensive research on identity development within communities, concur that identity relies on community for its development and legitimacy. According to these scholars, identity and selfhood are connected bodies; identity is like a section of a stained glass window with interchangeable panes of glass within a larger grid, a construct based on a person's ever growing and changing

perceptions of self within and inseparable from society, and imposed by that society (Duff, 2015; Early & Norton, 2012; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kramersch, 2009; Wenger, 2002).

Duff (2015), Kramersch (2009) and Wenger (2002) support the idea that people use language to negotiate their identities in specific societies and communities. Aligned with these scholars, Roumiana Ilieva and Bonnie Waterstone, whose (2013) study on university student identity development provides strong support for this project, demonstrate that language, as a symbolic system, is a significant means through which people negotiate and project their identities within academic communities. Viewed through a postmodern, constructivist perspective, Kramersch (2009) states that language, like any other tool, does not have objective meanings, but is connected to how, when and where it is used in order to negotiate meanings within a given context. As a tool defined by how it is employed, language usage can take infinite forms to suite the needs of individual people in an array of contexts (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramersch, 2009).

Duff (2015) and Kramersch (2009) both suggest that for those learning and using a new language, this identity positioning process through the new language is conscious and felt on every level, not only in the symbolic perceptions of the mind influenced by emotions, but also in the body. In agreement with Kramersch (2009) and Duff (2015), David Block (2013), from the University of London, in his publication titled “Moving Beyond Lingualism: Multilingual Embodiment and Multimodality in SLA” states that language is inseparable from people’s bodies with all their histories, desires, acculturations, and abilities. It cannot be produced without the body, whether the language is written or spoken, and so it is, not only constructed of words with agreed upon meanings and grammatical structures, but also embodied, such as through tone,

volume, and gesture, in ways that have relevance within the context the language is used (Block, 2013). In this way, identities are negotiated, enacted and imposed through words and dialogues, as well as through the symbolic aspects of language that are not words (Block, 2013). Duff (2015) and Wenger (2002) explain that gesture, tone, the way people dress, and the physical postures they adopt in order to align themselves with certain beliefs and values and others who share them, among many other symbolic acts, all constitute discourses which underpin identities.

To understand, construct and convey who they believe they are, Wenger (2002) posits that people bend and shape their meanings through words and other meaning-making practices as discussed above, much as light is bent and shaped through stained glass windows, into subjective meanings based on their contexts, histories, audiences and feelings in order to convey their thoughts and perceptions to others. He does not go as far as Kramsch (2009) in the notion that the identity of the tool changes given its use, but he does state that people use communication, including language, as a tool to mediate their identities. In turn, the language or discourses from others, which people subjectively interpret and internalize, shape their identities (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Wenger, 2002).

Citing Bakhtin, Kramsch (2009) defines this symbolic identification of individuals within society as *subjectivity*, a construction of self that is constantly in process of being shaped through discourses. Consciously and unconsciously, people depend on or are subject to having opportunities to symbolically construct and reconstruct their identities through the discourses, or the negotiation of meanings, with others, that they most align with their own sense of self or that they accept as

authoritative (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Wenger, 2002). In the Bakhtinian theory of *addressivity* cited by Kramsch (2009), internalized discourses are a powerful force of identity construction, because a person's response in real-time dialogue is always formulated by unique constructions of internalized dialogues from past others who may or may not be present. In other words, people carry with them pieces of meanings constructed from past dialogues with others to reconstruct new meanings (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009). Because of all the imagined present and potential meanings that these dialogues have externally and internally, Kramsch (2009), Wenger (2002) and Ilieva and Waterstone (2013) agree that people, in an ideal situation, participate in a dance of active meaning negotiation within their communities in which they have agency to symbolically construct their own identities through discourses within those communities.

Agency in Identity Construction

Kayi-Aydar (2015) and Wenger (2002) agree that the concept of agency and its connection to symbolic identity formation through language becomes significant in connection to identity within community, as people both have and do not have control over how they are perceived and how much access they have to shape the shared knowledge and practices of those they align themselves with. Kayi-Aydar (2015) cites Rogers and Wetzel's definition of agency within community as people's ability to act reflectively and intentionally in their contexts. In her study on teacher identity formation, professor at the University of Hong Kong, scholar and researcher Amy Tsui (2007) emphasizes that this ability to act within communities is essential; students and teachers both need access to perform their identities in meaningful ways, or in ways that align

with their own wishes and goals (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Wenger, 2002). Indeed, Wenger (2002), upon whose theories Tsui (2007) bases her research, states that identity formation includes agency, as it requires that an individual to actively participate within communities of practice (CoPs) in its construction and negotiation.

Agency, or the ability to act together with others to shape identities that are meaningful to an individual, can therefore be denied or granted through the opportunities a community grants its individual members to participate in and thus take ownership of its meaning-making practices (Kramsch, 2001; Wenger, 2002). To return to the stained glass illustration, identity formation depends on people's agency to color and shape meanings, as the light needs the colored panes of glass to refract its own colors, within the larger framework of the community. The levels in which the subjects' communities in Tsui's (2007) study and Kayi-Aydar's (2015) study allowed them to participate, or to embody and explore their *subjectivity* within the new language, as defined by Kramsch (2009) above, either significantly benefited or harmed the symbolic identities that the subjects mediated through language, inhibiting their ability to achieve their goals in reality and lowering their motivation.

In these studies, language, as a shared artifact within a CoP, had an important role in identity formation and marginalization (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Tsui, 2007). Kramsch (2001) agrees, saying that language rules are formed within communities, and therefore must be followed in order to convey meaning, but also that individuals must have the ability to own it, to imbue it with their own voice. Diane Larsen-Freeman (2015), who has conducted extensive studies on the nature of language development, confirms the importance of language as well by stating that ELLs take ownership of the language by

using it to symbolically mediate their identities, and must be able to participate in the communities that shape its rules of usage in order to maintain and perform their identities with and through it (Kramersch, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). These researchers agree that the language learning community forms an essential, performative space of agency for ELSs, much as the grids support the form of a window, in shaping their identities through language use and normative practices surrounding it.

According to several studies cited by Kramersch (2009), the more languages ELSs internalize, the more ability they have to act with agency within their communities. She states that the ways language learners, whom she defines as *multilingual subjects*, use their agency to embody a new language reveal and shape their *subjectivity*, also defined as identity above (Kramersch, 2009). Kayi-Aydar (2015) and Norton (1997) agree that language learners' identities are always shifting, even in ways that seem opposing, within the same individual because that individual is embodying a larger array of resources within which to define himself and that define him in turn. This is because multilingual subjects have a greater awareness of the flexibility and arbitrariness of their own language by relating to it from the alternative perspectives offered by the new language and the culture embedded within it (Duff, 2015; Kramersch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Stephanie Urso Spina, whose (2006) study highlighted the importance of incorporating more modalities in English language education, agrees with Kramersch (2009) and Norton (1997), stating that language learners have access to many subject positions, or projections of identity, because of their abilities to use another symbolic

system to mediate the self. Based on the number of languages with which one's identity is constructed and performed, the multilingual subject can more intentionally occupy more subject positions, or symbolic identities, than a monolingual speaker or someone who has not identified with another language (Kramsch, 2009). In the stained glass window metaphor, they have more colors and shapes to work with.

Thus, these scholars agree that the self-in-process-of-discovery is symbolically projected from perceptions in constant flux, based on the languages, contexts, communities, and audiences it encounters (Duff, 2015; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kramsch, 2009; Wenger, 2002). New languages act as new symbolic mediums of identity negotiation and construction, and thus impact how people perceive, which in turn impact their behaviors in reality based on those perceptions (Kramsch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). The more languages a learner has, the freedom or agency to choose the perspectives that best define his or her identity, and the more agency he or she has to change those realities based on those definitions (Early & Norton, 2012; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kramsch, 2009).

Complexity of Learner Identity and Agency in Globalization

Duff (2015), Kramsch (2009) and Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) agree that language, as a symbolic, embodied resource, formed and negotiated within communities, is constantly transformed because of globalization, and, therefore, so are the identities of the learners. Jan Blommaert (2010), scholar of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguist with an extensive repertoire of research, defines globalization as “transcontextual networks, flows and movements” rather than linear movements of easily identifiable people groups one way or another across clearly-defined, national borders (p.

1). Duff (2015) echoes Blommaert (2010), stating that the increase of language education itself allows people to travel mentally as well as physically across borders, creating new identities and possibilities in the language use. Television, the internet, and other cultural media radiate across the globe, change cultures within their own borders and provide new virtual spaces for cultural development (Duff, 2015). In the metaphorical sense, the stained glass window has just become much larger and more multidimensional.

This multidimensionality is what Duff (2015) defines as “increasingly flexible, often digitally mediated forms of citizenship (or non-citizenship),” meaning that a person can now define himself and be defined by virtual communities whose members are contextualized all over the world (p. 76). In this light, Blommaert (2010) states that the languages a person knows and owns, e.g. his symbolic repertoire, are no longer understood in linear stages of mastery, but are rather “truncated,” reflecting people’s continued engagement with many different kinds of language practices in which they do not need to master the language entirely, using it more for specific purposes in particular places (p. 8). These pieces of language, intimately connected with global virtual and physical migrations and thus unstable, construct the identities of the users in new and creative ways, as they are negotiated within unique combinations of local and global contexts (Duff, 2015; Larsen-Freeman, 2015).

To illustrate what she defines as the *transnational* negotiation of identity, Duff (2015) cites two significant studies. First, she discusses a study by Alim, Ibrahim, and Pennycook, that demonstrated the complexity of identity construction in how youth in many areas of the world mediated and creatively transformed their truncated linguistic

repertoires so that they served as a means of symbolic and creative identity enactment in ways that debunked essentialized and static views of cultural heritages and national identities (Duff, 2015). Duff (2015) also cites a study by Schneider which demonstrated how the “Latin” culture, particularly, salsa, has become popular amongst German and Australian youth, mediating “another kind of self” for individuals blending the Latin culture and language within their own local communities (p. 60). These studies confirmed the idea, also discussed in other studies, that expanded cultural and linguistic repertoires provide transnational individuals with more choices, or greater agency, to uniquely shape themselves and their role within the local and global community (Duff, 2015; Kramsch, 2009; Spina, 2006).

However, these scholars caution that language use, as inseparable from the bodies that compose society, is based on the agreed on norms of that society and symbolically reinforces them (Blommaert, 2010; Kramsch, 2009; Norton, 1997). Thus along with flows and movements, certain communities and identities can be defined by their inability to move or flow, or negotiate their identities within language communities (Blommaert, 2010).

Globalization and Agency in English Language Education

Concerning language, Blommaert (2010) states that language use moves on a trajectory that is both vertical as well as horizontal, and that its users rank and are ranked within the vertical scale called the “sociolinguistics of distribution” (p. 5). The distinctions, based on class, gender, social status, etc., between vertical layers, Blommaert (2010) argues, are “indexical” distinctions people embody to signify their value based on “social, cultural, and political” paradigms within their contexts (p. 5). He

suggests that language users may or may not have access to positions of power based on their status, confirmed through the performance of their linguistically mediated identity, and based on what is considered the *norm* by their communities, both local and global. In agreement with Blommaert (2010), Duff (2015) cites the Kramsch and Whiteside study of multiethnic communities in San Francisco, which demonstrated that some linguistic codes were more privileged than others within certain groups. Returning to the stained glass window metaphor, the grid of the larger window determines which shapes of glass fit. Linguistic identity, with all its embedded narratives of race, culture and values, is, therefore, a significant means of signifying and indexing an individual's position within a community, and a community's position within a nation, etc. (Blommaert, 2010; Duff, 2015; Kramsch, 2009).

Individuals and communities can participate in others' and their own marginalization by internalizing and perpetuating the embedded discourses that maintain the imposed inequality within language use (Kramsch, 2009). As a result, English language education can perpetuate inequalities by maintaining embedded cultural norms within classroom practices and the language itself (Blommaert, 2010; Spina, 2006). Kramsch (2001) states "Language is both culture and voice" (p.4). Norton (1997), along with Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, agree with Kramsch (2001) that language symbolically mediates identities, so it is symbolically transformed and imbued with the values, beliefs and normative practices of the users and their culture. Alastair Pennycook (1997) world-renowned researcher and scholar of critical pedagogy, along with other researchers, asserts that people and organizations in power that regulate and shape language education and the cultural norms and practices within educational spaces

participate in imbuing the language with ideologies that maintain the status quo or sanctioned norms (Kramersch, 2009; Norton, 1997).

As English spreads, its global currency as a resource of mobility on the vertical scale described by Blommaert (2010) rises. However, the embedded cultural beliefs and norms within English education and language practices, which include using reductive labels and positioning of native accent as an ideal, continue to marginalize certain identities, indexed based on western-centered cultural norms, denying their agency as participants in the larger English language community and its authoritative discourses (Blommaert, 2010; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramersch, 2009; Spina, 2006).

As identity is, symbolically speaking, an open discourse between multiple presentations of self and society, and identity formation requires agency to participate within communal practices of meaning negotiation, then higher education, as sites of meaning negotiation to build knowledge, are significant spaces of professional identity formation for English language students (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramersch, 2009; Pennycook, 1997; Tsui, 2007; Wenger, 2002). There are several studies that demonstrate how higher education and professional English language communities of practice can either marginalize or promote positive identity formation.

Ilieva and Waterstone (2013) conducted a four-year study at a Canadian university in which they sought to implement a curriculum that empowered ELSs to identify and engage the embedded authoritative discourses within English language teaching and use, as many of their students had an “uncritical acceptance of native speaker ideology and English linguistic imperialism associated with it” (p. 17). They define *native speaker ideology* as the privileging of so-called native speakers over non-

native ones based on unrealistic ideals of language proficiency and emphasize that their international students' assimilation of this ideology within their home-countries placed them at a disadvantage to native English speakers within the professional communities these students sought to participate in (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013).

This professional context, Tsui (2007) argues, is extremely important in identity formation, as this context provides the arena in which identity is shaped. Tsui's (2007) study of the Chinese English teacher, Minfang, in the People's Republic of China, elucidates his incredible struggle for professional legitimacy which led to the disowning of his own English teacher identity when he was denied access to participating in discourses of his CoP, comprised of the Chinese university faculty, due to their marginalization of his identity as someone from rural China. She concludes her study stating, "participation is central to identity formation" (Tsui, 2007, p. 678).

Also commenting on the denial of teachers' professional identity development, Lucie Moussu of Purdue University with George Braine of the Chinese University of Hong Kong conducted a (2006) study that confirmed the discrimination teachers from non-English-speaking countries face based on the same kind of idealized *native-speaker* norm described by Ilieva and Waterstone (2013). They found that discriminating hiring practices against *non-native* teachers still existed, even though many of their subjects reported an overall positive attitude regarding these teachers (Moussu & Braine, 2006).

Other studies confirm the importance of participation in professional identity formation. Suhanthie Motha (2006), known for her research on race and teacher identity, and Zappa-Holman and Duff (2015) also conducted studies focusing on teacher identity and student identity formation in higher education respectively, and had similar results

illustrating how the successes or struggles of their subjects in taking ownership or participating agentively within their communities impacted their identity formation and therefore their motivation and commitment to their professional identities within academic English-speaking communities.

These studies point to the idea that the ability to negotiate identity within the English speaking community, both local and global, impacts the important connection between identity formation in, agency with and *ownership* of English, which leads to successful acquisition or learning of the language (Duff, 2015; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2001; Tsui, 2007). The definition of agency here is participation, which is a central method of both forming identity and negotiating meaning, which is the learning process (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kramsch, 2001; Tsui, 2007; Wenger, 2002). All these studies agree that a successful English language education program is one that promotes students' English language ownership by giving them the means to become experts in the understanding, negotiating and performing of its authoritative discourses (Early & Norton, 2012; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009 and 2001; Wenger, 2002). In the stained glass window illustration, there must be room and flexibility within the grid to fit the many shapes of glass within the window.

In summation, the literature shows that as language symbolically mediates identity, successful English language education classes within college or university settings are those that create agency-rich spaces within CoPs that scaffold ELLs' and teachers' ability to recognize and criticize the current authoritative discourses within the TESOL field, as well as actively, reflectively and intentionally participate in the construction of classroom practices and socialization processes that draw from the rich

plurality of perspectives in their multilingual subjectivity (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Norton, 1997). In other words, teachers and ELLs learn to recognize and engage the boundaries of the community through which their identities are being framed as an important outcome of their language learning process. As a result of building a positive English-speaking identity, Kramsch (2001) states, ELLs, who successfully “appropriate” English, increase the “diversity of discourse and purpose” within the English-speaking community (p. 8). This in turn creates even more agency-rich spaces of exploration and creativity for the next wave English language students, some who become English language teachers themselves, empowering more people participate in negotiating their identities as owners and authorities of English discourse and practice, without discriminating against their race and backgrounds (Spina, 2006).

Student Agency Through Symbolic Competence

The developing of students’ symbolic competence, as proposed by Kramsch (2009), provides a framework for intentional identity formation and agency for the multilingual subject, defined above, through “critical/reflexive” and “creative/narrative” approaches (p. 192). Before delving into these approaches, I will first discuss the definition of symbolic competence with its underlying theories, and its importance to identity mediation and negotiation specifically within the language teaching/learning context as this context is a social space with embedded power relations (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). I will then examine how the literature demonstrates whereby these two approaches to symbolic competence, as it relates to identity formation, can empower the multilingual subject to change reality by changing the symbolic systems that determine how reality is perceived.

Language Use as Symbolic Power

In order to highlight the importance of symbolic competence within the competencies of language learning, Kramersch (2009) elucidates upon three main arguments for the potency of language to either empower or marginalize people within power relations inherent in social contexts. Language, according to Kramersch (2009), is inherently performative, ritualistic, and mythical, reinforcing cultural paradigms and values. Through these three qualities of symbolic language use, Kramersch (2009) argues people reinforce, disrupt or recreate existing power structures.

Citing Austin, Kramersch (2009) describes how performative language use can reinforces or subverts the power of dominant institutions as it “changes reality through words” (p. 8). Marriage vows and graduation ceremonies are examples of sites where words themselves perform a symbolic function of changing peoples’ status within society from single to married, uneducated to educated (Kramersch, 2009). In other words, performative language creates new spaces within the organic grid of society for people’s identities. Kramersch (2009) cites two studies, one by Yurchak, and the other by Butler, that reveal how marginalized groups re-appropriated performative utterance, of allegiance to a certain political group or of reinforcing racism or sexism to perform acts of subversion and redistribution of power in reality. This is significant for ELLs as they have more symbolic resources to engage unequal power relations performatively due to their wider linguistic repertoires (Kramersch, 2009).

Alongside performance, language can also reinforce dominant values and paradigms and subvert them through ritual. Citing Bourdieu’s work as a foundation for language as ritual, Kramersch (2009) discusses how various rituals reinforce cultural

structures. In one example, she discusses how advertisements, as incorporated into our daily rituals of reading or watching the news reinforce capitalism (Kramersch, 2009). These rituals are methods by which people align themselves with groups, ideas or values, as part of their identity negotiation (Wenger, 2002). They are like repeated patterns of glass shapes that maintain a specific structure within the larger window. Thus identities through these rituals, as Tsui (2007) and Wenger (2002) also note, can be either reinforced or delegitimized, as not fitting the standard shape or pattern. Many of the scholars reviewed state that language learners' knowledge of language's symbolic power through rituals, even within simple greetings or accepting or rejecting an invitation, is important because they are taught these speech rituals as part of their curricula, and often do not understand the embedded cultural norms that these rituals perpetuate (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramersch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Beyond performance and ritual, language is also a means by which people form and perpetuate mythologies or culturally normative narratives that represent one perspective that may or may not be accurate to lived experience (Kramersch, 2009). Kramersch (2009) cites Roland Barthes' work on the nature of how everyday ways of thinking and expressing experiences reinforce mythologies, defined as a symbol that describes a larger referent or metaphor. Barthes' (1972) acclaimed collection of essays in *Mythologies* gives many examples of how cultures create and reinforce larger myths from small, everyday occurrences, for example, how a wrestling match can signify the struggle between good and evil. Elaine Scarry (1985), professor of English language at Harvard University, in her book *The Body in Pain*, also describes how language is used to create mythical narratives in war: "one's army may become a single gigantic weapon, a

‘spearhead’ or a ‘hammer’ . . .” (p. 70). The myth is the larger metaphor that obscures the nuances of individual experience of meaning and reality within these constructs, often creating generalizations that support the status quo cultural beliefs, and, as in Scarry’s (1985) examples, obscure the negative or essentialized aspects of the events, values or practices to which they refer. For language learners, knowledge of this symbolic use of language through myth, often used by advertisers and politicians, forms an important competency, as it is an understanding of the connotations of language as they refer to and index larger cultural mythologies (Kramersch, 2009). These myths can stand as metaphors for real human experiences, or they can be a method of positing subjective beliefs as objective truths, influencing the perceptions which influence actions (Kramersch, 2009).

In myth-making, as well as through performance and ritual, Kramersch (2009) states that language learners find themselves as subjects within the indexicalities of power, in agreement with those described by Blommaert (2010), embedded within symbolic structures of the languages they are learning. Many scholars agree that ELSs ability to recognize the performative, ritualistic and myth-making functions of language as well as utilize their power to negotiate their positions within these indexes increases with each new language added to their repertoire, much as new colors of glass increase the artistic possibilities of the stained glass window (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramersch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Norton, 1997).

As power is embedded within the language itself, learners need access to the symbolic tools of language to negotiate their identities within their CoPs, who also wield this symbolic power to both enable or deny participation in meaning making practices (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramersch, 2009). Wenger (2002) calls this process of

creating tools, such as language, to negotiate meaning in CoPs *reification*. Reification is both the object and the process of making the object through which learners negotiate meanings (Wenger, 2002). In the stained glass window metaphor, reification is both the process of making the window, including the bending of its open spaces and edges, the pieces of the window, and the window itself. Language, including embedded and embodied practices of tone, accent, and body language, with all its symbolic power as described above, significantly falls into this category of reification, the empowering or disempowering identities in how it shapes them through the normative practices of ritual, performance and myth-making of the CoP (Kramersch, 2009; Wenger, 2002).

Kramersch (2009) states that ELSs, as multilingual subjects, can have an increased ability to navigate how these performances, rituals and mythologies as reifications, or symbolic norms, within communities as they have a more multifaceted awareness of how language, as a tool shared within communities, has symbolic power to either reinforce or rectify the inequalities they experience, either creating fulfillment of desire or lack within their identities. This makes the fostering of a multilingual person's symbolic competence a vital component to all language teaching and practice as a means of creating more agentive spaces for English language development (Kramersch, 2009).

Theory of Symbolic Competence

Essentially a means of seeing and negotiating linguistic boundaries, *symbolic competence* is a competence that allows multilingual subjects to step between identities and observe how their perceptions are shaped by their use of one language through the lens of another language and how this usage positions their identities in relation other identities in the context (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kramersch, 2009; Spina, 2006). Since words

have arbitrary meanings, symbolic competence develops ELLs' abilities to see through the seemingly static labels of language by exposing ELLs to how these meanings can shift between the symbolic boundaries their alternative languages (Kramsch, 2009; Spina, 2006). With symbolic competence, learners become like artisans, who understand that colors, like words, gestures, tone, etc., change depending on their placement in relationship to each other and their context, and that there are degrees of color that mediate the same light source in many different ways, some of which fit the grid within which they occur, some which are obscured or absent.

According to Kramsch (2009), language learners, as multilingual subjects, are empowered by their symbolic competence, as they have a heightened flexibility in their understanding of the different meanings words can offer. From that perspective, they can more intentionally reposition and transform meanings to make new ones, and through their actions upon meanings, they have the power to reposition themselves in reality (Kramsch, 2009). As ELLs become more aware of the boundaries between languages, their agency is increased as they determine which boundaries to reinforce and which to transgress (Early & Norton, 2014; Kramsch, 2009). Spina, in her (2006) study of the relationship between visual and linguistic symbols and how encoding both promotes language acquisition and identity formation indicates that the translation between symbolic systems of communication deepens the understanding of the learners, allowing for "cognitive flexibility" (p. 116). This flexibility, which aligns with Kramsch's (2009) definition of symbolic competence, empowers the multilingual subject to act with greater agency in the real world. Through their many linguistic repertoires, ELLs have the performative power to position, convey and shape their identities in the classroom where

they are socialized into the new language, its systems, rituals, mythologies and practices which are in turn positioning them (Block, 2013; Kramersch, 2009; Spina 2006).

Kramersch (2009), among others, critiques the lack of acknowledgement of the symbolic power of language and language curricula to position certain identities in both privileged and marginalized positions, particularly with the rise of globalization which disrupts many of the outdated fictions upon which TESOL curricula is based because it ignores the real complexities of identity and communication (Duff, 2015; Early & Norton, 2012; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013). In particular, Kramersch (2009) engages the mythology of the monolingual speaker, echoing Blommaert's (2010) discussion of truncated linguistic repertoires and Ilieva and Waterstone's (2013) critique of native-speakerism. Because of the internet and increased ease of world travel, students more overtly develop identities that draw from a variety of symbolic resources, not just one (Blommaert, 2010; Duff, 2015; Kramersch, 2009). These multilingual resources, Kramersch (2009) states, have significantly changed how people mediate their identities within a much larger array of contexts.

Context, especially an educational one where meanings are symbolically negotiated to produce learning, remains a key facet of identity development through peoples' alignments and participation (Wenger, 2002). Larsen-Freeman with Marti Anderson, education and teacher-training consultant, in their (2011) book *Techniques & Principles in Language Teaching*, posit that education is not neutral, but is based on the values of the society in which it occurs. In light of this reality, Kramersch (2009) and Ilieva and Waterstone (2013) both make a case for curricula designed for students and teachers that is *ecologically* oriented, meaning that language is taught, not only with its rules and

norms, but also as an activity connected to students' experiences, histories and memories within the power relations of a given context. The roles of both teachers and students, as multilingual subjects within a language learning context, should not be a broadly defined one based only on overarching practices, rituals and myths, but one contextualized in relationship to the context of the community and its symbolic cultural resources and embedded power relations within a certain period of time (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramersch, 2009). In other words, the academic ecology, like the stained glass window, while certainly full of defined boundaries, should be a very flexible one, allowing its participants to recognize and to reframe its meanings, changing the overall picture.

In this vein, it is important to look at the embedded *symbolic* power relations within the English education that students and teachers encounter and position themselves in relationship to (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramersch, 2009). Different cultures, curricula and pedagogies position teachers and students within different levels of authority and agency within the classroom space (Tsui, 2007). As multilingual subjects, both teachers and students actively engage and revise their perceptions in order to find agentic spaces to symbolically, through language or other multimodal and embodied forms of communication, resist or redefine established norms using the performative, ritual and myth-making power of language (Block, 2013; Early & Norton, 2014; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). There are several studies that demonstrate both the positive and negative effects that uneven symbolic power relationships and their symbolic expression in language can have in education.

In one (2011) study, Rachel J. Pinnow (2011), scholar of language education and semiotics at the University of Missouri, demonstrated how the multilinguals engage symbolic power relations within academic settings. The study centered on one particular middle school teacher and her relationship with a pupil, Enrique, and revealed the multimodal symbolic resources Enrique deployed including “gesture, gaze and proxemics” to protect his identity in light of his teacher’s positioning of him as “deficient” within a classroom disagreement (pp. 385, 386). Interestingly, Pinnow notes that Enrique’s multimodal “fluencies actually preserve the status quo” as he reenacted the role of the “good learner” within a U.S. context in order to placate his teacher by symbolically recognizing her identity of authority while preserving his agency to go ahead with some of his own ideas (p. 390). Enrique discovered and occupied the social grid, but his ability to do so was not valued by his teacher as part of his linguistic competence because it was so subtle (as cited in Pinnow, 2011).

In their (2012) study, Margaret Early, professor of Language and Literacy at the University of British Columbia along with Norton also comment on several narratives regarding how learners engage symbolic structures that position them. One of the studies they conducted illustrates how the symbolic practice of labeling, a form of reification discussed above, made the subject feel like being labeled “ESL” was the equivalent of being a “second class citizen” (Early & Norton, 2012, p. 196). This subject had experienced the obscuring of his identity within the linguistic grid through labeling, and therefore noticed when another teacher gave him a greater linguistic space and agency by which to negotiate his identity into a more meaningful light.

Like Pinnow (2011) and Early and Norton's (2012) studies, Tsui (2007) and Kayi-Aydar (2015) demonstrated in their studies how CoPs marginalized identities by denying participation, through the reification of language practices, such as labels and the non-negotiability of normative rituals and myths, in the shaping of the communities' authoritative discourses as experts or potential experts within their community discourses. Participants in the studies, both language teachers-in-training at the university level, ended up changing their career paths and, one of them entirely rejecting the additional language, due to the toll their constant struggle for validation within their CoPs (Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Tsui, 2007).

In contrast, Ilieva & Waterstone's (2013) study revealed how increasing student awareness of and agency in making choices about socialization practices in TESOL higher education led to higher ownership of English and therefore stronger motivation to continue participating in English speaking communities. Enabling students to engage the symbolic structures that maintain the status quo has therefore proved exceptionally effective in increasing motivation and positive identification within the CoP, based on years of survey findings both before and after the course (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013). By examining how they are symbolically projecting themselves into the world in an array of contexts or ecologies, as well as how those ecologies impose identities and norms on them, the ELSs in Ilieva and Waterstone's (2013) findings, by participating in the pedagogical approaches Kramsch (2009) describes as part of fostering symbolic competence, gained greater agency to intentionally resist or reinforce the way the language is used in both physical and virtual worlds to marginalize or empower them. In order to engage symbolic structures that maintain performances, rituals and mythologies

of inequality effectively within classroom practices, Kramersch (2009) proposes two methods for developing symbolic competence: a critical/reflexive approach and a creative/narrative approach.

Critical/Reflexive Approach

In symbolic competence, criticism and reflection go hand in hand as they are both forms of considering and deconstructing something present or past from a certain level of distance as a means of understanding it (Kramersch, 2009). Citing Luke's research on language and literacy, Kramersch (2009) states that criticism is a means of looking closely or deconstructing the components that make the rules for social exchange. Reflection is, what Rebecca J. Morris (2013), a scholar and researcher at the University of North Carolina-Greensboro, calls, the ability to self-assess, which includes the "self-monitoring" question of "How am I doing?" and metacognitive question of "How am I thinking?," which she argues, form learning skills for life (Wiggins & McTighe as cited in Morris, 2013, p. 56). Reflection combines an intentional criticalness, with a distancing oneself from that process of criticism to see if the critical process itself reflects the best approach, thus inviting a deeper level of intentionality towards and ownership of the learning process (Morris, 2013). As symbolic competence, defined above, is the ability to reflect on language, including its embedded culture and indexes, through the distance afforded by the other languages one knows, reflection and criticism naturally fall into the practice of building symbolic competence.

While the value for critical and reflective practices is certainly not a foreign one to academia, Kramersch (2009) states that there needs to be criticism and reflection on the language used to construct course content and the socialization practices inherent within

the educational context itself (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013). This means that learners must not only have access to a variety of competing discourses, but must be able to distance themselves from the discourses they have already internalized in order to reflect on them more critically (Luke as cited in Kramsch, 2009). The critical/reflexive approach invites learners to instigate the disequilibrium to their own identities in order to see and critique the meanings they have constructed, just as an artist will step back from his work to examine if the realities he has observed in the work within close proximity are reflected from a distance. According to current constructivist learning theory, this stepping back and inviting disequilibrium instigates learning or understanding based on the negotiation of meaning within a social context (Kramsch, 2009; Wenger, 2002).

Ilieva and Waterstone (2013) illustrate the integration of a critical/reflexive approach in their two studies of forty-three and fifty-one students respectively in an international student program, including its curricula and socialization practices in a Canadian university. Intentionally seeking to integrate this approach into their writing program, they exposed their students to various viewpoints drawn from critical pedagogy throughout the semester, asking them to critique and reflect on them based on their experiences. Complications arose in this process as they discovered reflection itself is an inherent value of western education. The practice of reflection in the west places importance on independent individuals willing to share their thoughts (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013). Ilieva and Waterstone's (2013) subjects struggled with these practices at first but by the second study, had internalized this academic practice as part of their graduate identities. Ilieva and Waterstone (2013) note that this illustrates the Bakhtinian theory that discourses can be both authoritative and persuasive at the same time, meaning

that the student finds the discourse personally relevant to his or her current perceptions. By the end of the study, they confirm that offering access and choice of a variety of critical discourses helped students to become more critical leading to more positive identity formation within TESOL academic communities (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013). Ilieva and Waterstone (2013) also note that there still is much research to be done in the many other non-western ways that criticism and reflection can be carried out.

While understanding of the multi-modal strategies that multilingual subjects employ to reflect on and criticize the current structures and processes that can perpetuate inequalities increases, Kramersch (2009) notes other barriers to building a reflexive critical approach within educational practice. One of them is that many students resist critiquing western symbolic practices because they hope to escape their own positions of marginality by adopting the western identities they have come to associate with empowered identities (Kramersch, 2009). Kramersch (2009) references Kubota and Saito-Abbott's study that reveals these findings, but she also offers the solution that this might be resolved if the students did not form identities of marginality in relationship to the west in the first place, meaning that this approach should be taught to students as soon as possible as a means to prevent crystallization of a negative identity formation.

Another issue is whether the critical practice should take place in English or in the students' heritage language (Kramersch, 2009; Spina, 2006). However, Kramersch (2009) refers to her own research to state that there should be "space for the critical awareness of language use in the foreign language classroom" and that it is possible to use current language acquisition strategies, such as a simpler vocabulary and demonstrations to teach learners to recognize embedded norms and inequalities in English (p. 194).

Finally, as more communication happens globally online, it becomes difficult for national educational environments to negotiate their roles within the context of globalization and virtual reality (Kramersch, 2009). As global competition increases, the impetus rises to pursue and sell the myth of one English language based on a supposed common understanding or perception of reality, something that would further disenfranchise those who do not speak the *global* English, if it could be created (Touraine; Florio-Hansen & Hu; Philipson as cited in Kramersch, 2009). Therefore, Kramersch (2009) states that there remains an important role for national universities to play within the critical and reflexive approach because they operate in specific contexts outside the virtual and economic milieus, offering the distance necessary to critique them.

As demonstrated above, there is increasing demand for increased critical and reflective awareness of social justice issues both nationally and globally, many students are not driven to critique language use and educational practices as they remain, understandably, concerned with maintaining their grades, passing their tests and getting into the right universities (Kramersch, 2009). The second approach to fostering symbolic competence, the creative narrative approach, combats this apathy and seeks to engage students' motivation to value their symbolic identity.

Creative/Narrative Approach

The creative/narrative approach as a means of fostering symbolic competence combats apathy regarding critical/reflexive approaches to language, by creating an emotional connection to the language fostering students' creativity and ownership of English through narratives (Kramersch, 2009). Polina Vinogradova (2007) and Robb Lindgren and Rudy McDaniel (2012) also show in their research on digital spaces and

identity formation how narratives encourage students to use their understanding of language's flexibility to imagine the future or to re-imagine the past, thus giving them agency to position themselves socially in ways that are meaningful, or emotionally resonant to them (Kramersch, 2009; Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012; Vinogradova, 2007). Kramersch (2009) explains that creativity with the language, in this light, is the formation of new or new combinations of emotional and cognitive resonances based on the multilingual's understanding of the gaps or ambiguities between signs (such as word, tone, gesture, etc.) and their meanings, fostered through the critical/reflexive approach discussed above (Kramersch, 2009; Spina, 2006). Narrative is a creative "mapping of our experiences," within a genre around themes as a means of negotiating identity as well as forming perceptions of reality (Bruner cited in Kramersch, 2009, p. 133) Using various genres of storytelling or narrative, which are themselves culturally defined and positioned, multilingual subjects have a great deal of agency to recast their identities in the perspectives and structures of their own choosing, because they have a greater repertoire of symbolic resources to do so (Kramersch, 2009). Furthermore, Vinogradova (2007) in her study of the impact of digital storytelling on identity formation also states that narratives can be used to both negotiate and perform social identity, and therefore are agentive acts. Hence, the creative/narrative approach empowers students to (re)construct the language in ways that are resonant to their own sense of self through a narrative voice, deepening ownership and thus fostering a deeper motivation to continue developing the language (Kramersch, 2009; Spina, 2006).

According to Kramersch (2009), the benefits of the narrative/creative approach to foster student agency and the cultivation of other faculties valuable to learning a language

are significant. She argues, using her own research with Heath, that one of “the strongest predictors for academic success” is the skill people have to solve problems they frame for themselves, rather than those posed by others (Kramsch & Heath as cited in Kramsch, 2009, p. 196). The creative/narrative approach cultivates this ability to foresee problems, to consider variables and to predict outcomes because ELSs can see problems and their solutions from varied perspectives afforded by their linguistic resources (Kramsch, 2009).

Furthermore, what the creative/narrative approach adds to this skill of predicting problems is the fostering of the multilinguals’ agency to imagine and pose creative solutions that are not simply regurgitations of western genres or ideals (Kramsch, 2009). Ilieva and Waterstone (2013) confirmed this by using this approach in their study to create more options and agentive spaces for their students by exposing them to readings by multilingual writers as models for how to form these subjective resonances. Students began to value how their unique array of perceptions encoded in their languages informed their own narratorial or writing voices, and began to notice and comment on problematic issues of inequality, such as western normative practices they encountered within the program, as well as to propose solutions (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013).

The formation of the narratorial voice in English, according to Kramsch (2009) and Ilieva and Waterstone (2013), is a key part of creative narrative construction within symbolic competence because it mediates the owners’ identities in ways that resonate with them and the context within which they are positioning themselves, thus adding to the importance of ecology or context to the development of language competence. After scaffolding the development of a writer’s voice as it emerges in discourse with an

audience, Ilieva and Waterstone (2013) found that students in their courses felt more empowered to speak within their academic communities and engage academic discourses in writing with “a voice that can be heard” (p. 31). They noted that showing examples and critically engaging the unique yet grounded voices of other multilingual writers who found ways to mediate their identities in English-speaking contexts encouraged the students to see that they too could contribute meaningfully to the academic discourses within their fields, reversing the identities of marginalization, which they had upon entering the program, to identities of empowerment (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013).

Kramersch (2009) confirms the importance of narrative voice formation in relationship to audience, stating that to gain a true sense of empowerment and ownership of English, students need to be able to submit their ideas in ways that the culture to which they are speaking will understand their meaning. Teachers, often multilingual subjects themselves, can also help students develop and value their multilingual voices by consciously modeling their own use of their multilingual repertoires to inform their voices in consideration of their audience (Kramersch, 2009). Thus, for Kramersch (2009) and Ilieva and Waterstone (2013), voice formation happens in conjunction with ecology, and as part of symbolic competence within the creative/aesthetic approach, creates agentic spaces for students to negotiate their identities and find meaningful connections, not only with the language, but also with the communities within which it is spoken.

As with the critical/reflexive approach, the creative narrative approach also faces a variety of challenges in implementation within college-level contexts. One of the reasons, as posited by Kramersch (2009) in the critical/narrative approach, is the pressure ELLs face to pass tests and memorize given information quickly, with little time or

motivation for the process of building their linguistic capital through creative projects, despite the fact that many studies have shown that these projects significantly benefit cognitive ability, sensory engagement, and language acquisition (Murphy, 2014; Spina, 2006). However, Murphy (2014) and Kramersch (2009) both cite official academic standards passed by U.S. and European authorities for all levels of education which affirm the importance of the arts and creative practice, and require the implementation of arts-based curriculum; both scholars agree that while the actual classroom application of aesthetic practice remains below standard, these official movements are important steps to promoting an essential competency in ELLs' language development.

An additional barrier that the implementation of the aesthetic/creative approach faces is that it does not receive the recognition, funding or attention given to other areas of study. Both Murphy (2014) and Spina (2006) emphasize the fact that educational institutions treat the arts and arts-based curricula, which include the aesthetic practices described in symbolic competence, as subordinate to other disciplines. Funding, therefore, from the government and other organizations remains harder to obtain and justify than for other areas of study and practice, such as mathematics and science (Merrion, 2008). Margaret Merrion (2008), dean and researcher at Michigan University, states that, along with recession-driven decreases in government spending on the arts, corporate and non-profit giving will continue to "lean towards social and health causes to the neglect of the arts," meaning that arts-based colleges and curricula will need to spend a significant amount of effort to prove their value in order to receive funding (p. 8). Nevertheless, Merrion (2008) also affirms that, while private investments may come with specific, perhaps limiting, conditions, they will have many benefits, including faster

implementation of needed changes to systems and curricula as well as fostering deeper connections between arts institutions and wider communities. This connection to ecology, according to Kramersch (2009), further necessitates the need for symbolic competence, along with its emphasis on the subjective experience of language learning and the potential creative products arising from that lived experience. It is in ecologies that cultures and economies are formed, and where a creative, intentional formation and use of the communicative symbols valued by these institutions occurs, symbols essential for ELSs to have access, connection and agency to use and shape (Kramersch, 2009).

In summation, by fostering symbolic competence through the reflexive/critical approach and the creative/narrative approach, teachers can increase the agency ELSs have to mediate their identities and participate within their CoPs (Kramersch, 2009). Kramersch (2009) states that though language and thus perceptions differ from person to person, people can find common emotional resonances through the narrative voice, formed and refined through the cultivation of symbolic competence. Helping ELSs to find these common resonances and to create narratives around them that engage their multilingual, multimodal repertoires remains the challenge for teachers as they negotiate their own identities within an array of contexts.

Symbolic Narratives of Student Identities In Digital Storytelling

As a means of promoting symbolic competence, this project uses digital storytelling as an accessible, project-based, pedagogical tool because it provides an ideal framework to nurture symbolic competence as a means of engaging linguistic inequalities by creating agency-rich spaces for language development and ownership within supportive communities. According to their research on digital storytelling within an

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment, scholars Mehri Razmi, Soheila Pourali, and Sanaz Nozad (2014) state that digital storytelling has been around since the 1980s, but has only increased in relevance and multimodality as technology has expanded. According to a (2010) study done by John Raven and Karen O'Donnell at universities in the United Arab Emirates, digital storytelling is ideal for a project-based approach, fostering ELSs' identities, and therefore, giving them agency as users of English. In order to illustrate how this works, I will first discuss the use and effectiveness of technology as it relates to learner agency and community development within virtual educational environments. I will then examine the various practices and competences involved in digital storytelling, their connection to symbolic competence in language acquisition and how they connect to learner identity formation and agency within the process of second language development.

Technology and Online Learning

Online learning has become a key means of learning and will play a more and more central role as a space for online learning and development according to the recent (2011) study findings of Kim Parker, Amanda Lenhart and Kathleen Moore at the Pew Research Center. According their (2011) report, nearly a quarter of U.S. college students take online courses, and that over three quarters of U.S. colleges and universities offer online courses. This number is predicted to rise, as the rate of online enrollments in higher education programs is increasing much more rapidly than enrollments in traditional programs (Parker et al., 2011). In their book, the *Virtual Student*, professors at Capella University Rena M. Palloff and Keith Pratt (2003) state one major reason for the rapid growth and importance of online learning is that it offers curricula that are better

tailored to individual learner's needs, which increases their agency within the learning process. Other reasons for this rise include a wider breadth of opportunities, due to the interactive nature of online courses, for learners to meet others and to form CoPs where they can collaborate and build their knowledge around niche interests (Palloff & Pratt, 2003). The current number of virtual communities will only continue rise, as, according to researcher Jason Mander (2015) of *Global Web Index*, the world is already spending more than six hours online per day, an increase from former years. In this light, Merriem (2008), agrees with Palloff and Pratt (2003) in affirming that online learning therefore offers a practical workshop in which learners can develop their technological and multimodal competences, making them more viable and professionally valuable navigators of its communication structures as, and rising.

The scholars reviewed here agree that online learning curricula increases student agency through its flexible design that lends itself to the Piagetian theories of learning through co-creation of knowledge (Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012; Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Wenger, 2002). Lindgren and McDaniel (2012) emphasize that if people are given the means to explore, negotiate and contribute to ideas that they believe are meaningful to them, the more their motivation to participate in the learning process will increase (Wenger, 2002). The online learning environment is a site rife with choices, which are directly connected to learner agency (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Lindgren & McDaniel, 2014). Essentially, technology "personalizes the learning experience" (Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012, p. 346). One of the significant ways it does this is, according to Palloff and Pratt (2003), is by allowing learners more room to participate as equal members within the community, rather than subordinates to a teacher. This is because teachers in

online learning environments act as facilitators, that “construct worlds to be explored and discovered” rather than dispensers of knowledge (Palloff & Pratt, 2003, p. 13). The space to participate as individuals as equals with the potential to become experts increases student participation as critical thinkers in the meaning-making process, which empowers the progression of identity development within that area of knowledge (Wenger, 2002). Because it offers an increasing array of options that are learner-driven, Lindgren and McDaniel (2012) posit that online learning increases students’ agency by scaffolding their ability to self-regulate their own learning process and to negotiate the meanings that most align with their individual identities.

Another unique opportunity that online education offers to learners is a wider choice of CoPs within which to establish their identities. Palloff and Pratt (2003) state that collaboration is essential to the online learning experience, and that students, while finding agency in the kinds of knowledge areas they choose to engage in, do not do so in a vacuum. In agreement with several other scholars, they cite Wenger’s belief that identity cannot be established without the social environment and discourses that, at least partially, construct it and provide space for it to be performed (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Tsui, 2007; Wenger, 2002). The online world provides ample learning environments within which to construct identities, and negotiate meanings within communities, best described by Wenger’s (1998) communities of practice in that they are “homes for identities” in which participants socially construct knowledge together to produce artifacts and competencies that are valuable to the community (p. 5). According to these studies, online learning is much less about gaining knowledge from the teacher, and far more about participating, critically and reflectively –

echoing Kramersch (2009) – in the construction of meanings that are valuable both to individuals as well as to the group (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Tsui, 2007; Wenger, 2002).

The literature reviewed demonstrates that online learning, as a platform for multimodal communication, can prepare learners from many different kinds of backgrounds for the multitude of shapes online communication takes, the projects they will be professionally asked to undertake, and the problems they will be asked to solve using the online breadth of communicative resources available (Kramersch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Lindgren & McDaniel, 2012; Merrion, 2008). In regard to the multimodality of online communication, Kramersch (2009) and Merrion (2008) note that people no longer use only words to communicate; the internet provides an array of other texts, such as pictures, videos, and sounds, around which internet users build meanings, often far from the original intent of the original author, recalling Block's (2013) argument that language is more than just words. Online learning can provide access to, constructive criticism of and proficiency in these multiple modes of communication, a skill that is growing more and more important (Kramersch, 2009; Merrion, 2008).

By giving learners access to authentic texts outside the classroom, online learning suits project-based methodology, in which learners work collaboratively together to accomplish a project that they elected to do (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Merrion, 2008). According to Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011), project based learning encourages students to move “out of the classroom and into the real world” (p. 158). Christopher Tribble (2011), scholar of applied linguistics at the King's College,

London, notes the increase of proliferation of online texts accessible for research as well as spaces to reach real audiences online. The increase in authentic texts, as part of online learning, provides an ideal space to engage the world outside the classroom and its discourses (Tribble, 2011). This engagement with the outside world creates a more meaningful experience for the students, as it is a more authentic one (Kramersch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Learner and teacher agency is activated as they have choices in the content areas they will explore, and how they will communicate their ideas within their communities (Kramersch, 2009).

In summation, the literature shows that online learning has increased learner and teacher agency through increased flexibility, access to authentic materials, and facilitation of self-constructed projects is what makes online learning in Second language development (SLD) as defined by Larsen-Freeman (2015) a key means of promoting student success (Kramersch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). This increase in choices in learning and community significantly promotes SLD as demonstrated in the literature that follows.

Technology Promotes Second Language Development

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) discuss the rising use of technology in SLD in their book *Principles and Techniques of Language Teaching*. One of the benefits they highlight is the access ELSs have to new ways of using language. They cite Kern, who states: “Rapid evolution of communication technologies has changed language pedagogy and language use, enabling new forms of discourse, new forms of authorship, and new ways to create and participate in communities” (Kern as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 200). These three innovations in language use have created more

agency and therefore more motivation for ELSs (Duff, 2015; Kramsch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). I will discuss each innovation below and its impact on SLD, as well as some of the significant limitations or problems within it that this project seeks to address.

In *The Multilingual Subject*, Kramsch (2009) discusses how online learning or use of technology in the classroom offers learners new ways to engage in discourse, an important method of increasing learner agency and ownership of learning, particularly through language play. She focuses particularly on the use of synchronous chatrooms to illustrate some of the many benefits researchers in a variety of studies have found on this particular deployment of in-classroom technology. Using excerpts from chatroom sessions in language classes at universities collected by Warner in one study and McGrath in another, Kramsch (2009) illustrates some of these benefits, including “a greater propensity to play with language, to code-switch and foreground language form” (p. 160). Spina in her (2006) study of Latinos using both English and Spanish in the classroom, highlights the importance of maintaining the interplay between both L1 and L2 as well as of providing space for multimodal, communicative creativity as a means of enhancing communicative competencies and greater cognitive abilities. Audrey Figueroa Murphy (2014) concurs with Spina (2006) in her study on the impact of arts-based curricula in the classroom, showing that adult learners also internalize the language more if they are given greater latitude to engage it creatively within their language classes. Kramsch’s (2009) discussion demonstrates how online learning through chatrooms facilitates these discursive spaces of switching back and forth between languages as well as allowing for play with its ambiguities, such as combining morphemes from one

language with another to make a pun or a new word, an important aspect of language learning which is supported by Spina's (2006) and Murphy's (2014) findings. She indicates that the online environment, through its facilitations of creativity and play, leads to stronger ownership of the language (Kramsch, 2009). This aligns with Wenger's (2002) argument that if imagination has space to "land" or to be practically worked out within a CoP, learners will build identities of participation, leading to better *alignment*, or identification as part of a larger group, that in turns leads innovation or expansion of the community's knowledge (p. 218).

According to Kramsch (2009), Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011), and Spina (2006), the idea of language play and creativity is particularly important in SLD because it also part of student identity formation, discussed in great detail above in its relationship to language learning. In the context of role-playing within the online chatrooms, students could find a degree of anonymity, freeing them up to explore multiple identities or iterations of themselves within the language they were learning (Kramsch, 2009). Within *virtual culture*, Kramsch (2009) states that as students can both watch their language learning happen in reality on the screen as well as engage with the virtual content of their online discourses, they have greater freedom both to see and to play with the gaps between languages, their implied meanings as well as to develop and to practically re-imagine their identities without the constraints sometimes imposed by the body, such as accent or appearance. Wenger (2002) states that the ability to imagine or to re-imagine one's identities within multiple CoPs is foundational to the practice of learning.

Alongside the ability to re-imagine or explore new identities in SLD, Kramsch (2009) and Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) agree that online learning allows

students more opportunities for authorship, what Wenger (2002) would note as a form of reification within a CoP. Kramersch (2009) cites MIT scholar Janet Murray's description of the online space as one that allows "distributed authorship" (p. 159). As a new form of authorship, distributed authorship is a collection of "collaborative virtuosity," in other words, authorship is no longer one or a few authors who produce a work selected reviewed for accuracy by a publisher and editor (Kramersch, 2009, p. 159). It is work produced by many participants who may or may not be sanctioned within the communities in which they seek to engage, created by a collaging together of various ideas, either original or repurposed (Kramersch, 2009). For the language learner, this means more access to producing or publishing in the new language through a variety of platforms, from public editorials, such as blogs and social networks, to private communication, such as e-mails, in order to both draw from and engage other learners as well as experts in the use of language as a means of co-constructing knowledge together (Kramersch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Tsui (2007) demonstrates in her study of Minfang that the ability to participate in negotiation of meanings and to build collective artifacts, whether central or at the periphery of the CoP, empowers learner identities and leads to developing alternative competencies that lead to new knowledge.

Duff (2015) also notes the expansion of online community and its very real effect on language learning as providing more spaces of socialization into culture and practices through online communities. In particular, she discusses how "virtual connectedness" creates greater variety and nuance of transnational identity formation (Duff, 2015, p. 57). Immigrants are no longer defined by others or define themselves only by their physical surroundings, but often perform several different identities based on how they remain

virtually connected to their culture of origin, including its traditions as well as its changing practices (Duff, 2015). Therefore, online communities, including CoPs as defined by Wenger (2002), are much more widespread than ever before, and provide much more room for creative development of individual identity through language students alignment with and participation in their practices and reifications, which includes language use and development (Duff, 2015; Wenger, 2002).

While all of these attributes of technology and online learning in SLD can certainly be positive, according to these researchers, the computer is still not a neutral site of education. Kramsch (2009) cautions that social networks, as mediums of communication, can and do manipulate users and their identities, creating a great deal of anxiety in ELSs. Social networks, Kramsch (2009) argues, are seductive because they seem to allow the user to control his or her identity formation, when, in fact, the networks control the users by arousing in them the need to constantly affirm they fit in with others in their networks. This drive for popularity, even within educational spaces, is something writer and consultant Susan Cain (2013) discusses at length, in her book, *Quiet*, identifying it as an attribute rooted in U.S. culture. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) cite Reeder et al. (2004) to note that the use of the computer in the classroom could potentially privilege the western values of “efficacy,” thus restricting identity formation by marginalizing other values and modalities (p. 216). Thus, while online learning provides many benefits, scholars caution educators should be aware of the cultural dimensions embedded in its use (Kramsch, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Furthermore, Kramsch (2009) notes that the lack of boundaries in online learning can also overwhelm learners in their online identity formation. Multilingual subjects, as

operating with more than one symbolic system within online communities, are sometimes overwhelmed by the many subject positions available to them within their local and transnational networks, causing them to create their identities dependent on the reactions and examples of others (Kramersch, 2009). Wenger (2002) agrees that the multiplicity of options in the information age actually leads to greater complexity in the learning process, not a simplification of it, as is sometimes stated. This can be particularly damaging to learners' cognitive and emotional development because it creates deep anxiety, i.e. affective barriers, which Kramersch (2009) in agreement with H. Douglas Brown (2014), TESOL scholar at San Francisco State University, citing Krashen's theory of affective barriers, both indicate as a limit learning and development. Boundaries, and the ability to see them, are important for learning, as "it is the boundary that creates the subject" (Kramersch, 2009, p. 184). Precisely because they have a greater ability to see and navigate around the arbitrary boundaries between cultures and symbols, multilingual subjects are very vulnerable to the anxieties caused by the lack of boundaries in the online ecology; however, they can also become most proficient in online learning environments with the help of symbolic competence (Kramersch, 2009).

As this project seeks to demonstrate, fostering symbolic competence takes on great importance in online education because Kramersch (2009) has demonstrated that it enables subjects to step outside the virtual context, critique and reflect on its practices within a reality apart from the hegemony of the public identity performance in relationship to others. ELSs can then reenter armed with a clearer knowledge of which boundaries to reinforce and which to transgress using the array of symbolic structures available within the virtual world (Kramersch, 2009). This is because symbolic

competence, through the critical/reflexive and creative/narrative approaches, helps multilingual subjects to maintain “an outsideness that enables [the multilingual self] to play with various objective and subjective meanings” (Kramsch, 2009, p .189). This outsideness, part of a reflective practice, and the ability to practically synthesize its experiences and meanings into practice within society, is crucial to identity development, participation within communities, and agency, all essential to the process of learning (Wenger, 2002). One of the symbolic structures through which ELSs as multilingual subjects can use language, as a symbolic structure composed of more than just words, to perform their identities is digital storytelling.

Digital Storytelling Empowers Students’ Symbolic Identities

By engaging narratives of inequality, students can use their symbolic competence to renegotiate their identities, both past and future in society (Kramsch, 2009). Online learning allows a broader space for engagement in and alignment with communities, making technology a valuable tool for accessing meaningful knowledge from wider communities (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Palloff & Pratt, 2003; Raven & O’Donnell, 2010). Digital storytelling, therefore, as a means of both engaging narrative with all the multimodalities and access points offered in the virtual space, provides a practical framework for teachers to both model symbolic competence through their own engagement of positioning narratives and facilitate positive student identity development through symbolic narratives within the target language. In order to elucidate the power of digital storytelling as a means of symbolic competence, I will first discuss what digital storytelling is, cite several studies in which it aligns with the theory of symbolic competence as described above and describe its many significant uses within SLD.

Kramersch (2009), Raven and O'Donnell (2010) and Pinnow (2011) emphasize that narrative is an important method through which learners perform their identities. Through the use of narrative, subjects can reposition themselves by alignment to genres, themes and discourses valued by the dominant structures (Raven & O'Donnell, 2010). Genre plays an especially important role, as Kramersch (2009) states it is a method of constructing a self that is valued by an audience. Kramersch (2009) cites her own studies to reflect how this is done, particularly noting the case of a woman named Camila, who engaged social norms of her own Salvadorian culture within a story whose messages and themes would be attractive to her audience, in this case, western ESL teachers, in order to “cast herself” within the framework of her context and history (p. 122). Kramersch is certainly not alone in stating the use of narrative as an important aspect in identity formation. Lindgren and McDaniel (2012) in their study of narrative and learner agency in online learning, cite Bruner who argued that human beings naturally use stories to codify and index how they perceive reality. Vinogradova (2007) agrees, arguing the ability to cast oneself effectively in narrative is an agentive and potentially empowering act, allowing for reflection, or what Morris (2013) calls the building of self-knowledge, and the ability to mediate that knowledge through stories to an audience.

As a site of narrative communication, digital storytelling is an important method of identity negotiation by nature of its construction (Raven & O'Donnell, 2010; Vinogradova, 2007). It is essentially the combination of pictures, voice, sometimes short video clips, and music into a two to four-minute narrative, along a theme of the author's choice. The stories traditionally are personal, often autobiographical portrayals that follow a plot line to tell a story designed to engage a specific audience (Lambert as cited

in Morris, 2013). In this way, digital storytelling is both personal and interactive, by being inseparable from the audience for whom it was intended in order to have the most effect (Morris, 2013). It demonstrates Wenger's (2002) theory of the importance of learner identities as negotiated within a community, as the presence of an audience is overt in the nature of the genre. In order to communicate most effectively, storytellers must master the genres and symbols, which will best convey their intended meanings to their audiences (Kramsch, 2009).

As audiences are expanding due to the nature of online social networks, there are many symbols and modalities that can sometimes overwhelm learners in virtual spaces; it is important for educational institutions to provide a framework for making meaning of them (Kramsch, 2009; Raven & O'Donnell, 2010). Morris (2013) shows that digital storytelling is just such a multimodal framework, in that it uses so many different methods of symbolic representation available in the online world. By teaching digital storytelling, teachers can scaffold a method of constructing and negotiating meaning, as well as assessing, various combinations of symbols and different ways of expressing them, in virtual spaces, an important skill within today's networked society (Morris, 2013). Citing Erstad and Silseth, Morris (2013) states that digital storytelling allows users to "identify complexities in the construction of the 'reading' of multimodal texts... and switch between various modes of attending to and interpreting the content" (p. 55). Introducing and scaffolding methods of multimodal method of communication, such as digital storytelling, can educate learners to intentionally engage the many symbolic resources available to them, and to use them to more intentionally negotiate their identities using a variety of modalities (Block, 2013; Kramsch, 2009).

Digital storytelling, according to Vinogradova (2007), is itself a symbolic framework for communication and identity development, therefore a means of engaging the uneven power relations described by Blommaert (2010) and Kramsch (2009). Vinogradova, in her (2007) study of digital storytelling's influence on social identity, demonstrates how digital storytelling effectively works as a symbolic means by which marginalized individuals, particularly the five of ten the subjects who represented ethnic minorities in the US, reposition themselves. She calls this act of repositioning "social creativity" and defines it as changing "negatively viewed symbols" in order to position oneself in a more positive light (Vinogradova, 2007, Social Identity Theory section, para. 4). In conjunction with the theory of symbolic identity formation within social spaces, Vinogradova (2007) significantly states that "it is possible to suggest that since digital stories are combinations of verbal narration, visual images, and musical background, positive social identities can be negotiated and performed symbolically in digital stories using narrative means" (Self-Categorization and Self-Positioning section, para. 4). The authors of the digital stories in this study used the variety of symbolic strategies, including visuals, images and music, in which to engage narratives that they personally felt marginalized by and to reposition themselves within a more positive light as well as engaging in themes that resonated within the communities they sought equality in (Vinogradova, 2007). This reflects Kramsch's (2009) discussion of the importance of narrative in positioning the self as it lends agency to the learner to navigate and to engage (or not) themes and genres within the culture in an aesthetic, intentional way that resonates emotionally across cultures.

Digital storytelling, as a symbolic framework demonstrated above, is a natural site for the critical/reflexive approach Kramsch (2009) describes as part of symbolic competence. Morris (2013), in her study of the role of digital storytelling in improving multimodal literacy, discusses how it plays a central characteristic in allowing the distancing or otherness as described by Wenger (2002) and Kramsch (2009) as being the nature of a critical approach to learning. Morris (2013) particularly notes the formation of self-assessment tools in the learning process, as learners act as creators or authors while being simultaneously distanced from their own work as they edit and view it. In a way reflective of Kramsch's (2009) description of how symbolic competence allows the multilingual subject to shift positions, Morris (2013) depicts the multiple positions her subjects occupied in order to create and engage with their own digital stories, becoming both viewers and editors. It was in this role of editing, Morris (2013) found, that students embodied the critical role of the outsider looking in on how their own narratives operated to construct their meanings relationship to their context and their audience. By positioning students as editors or critics within their projects, rather than passive viewers or absorbers of the process of meaning making, Morris (2013) demonstrated that students became more reflective on how their meanings were constructed through their digital narratives, reinforcing the importance of this process in student ownership of learning as well as developing stronger metacognitive skills, both skills essential within Kramsch's (2009) framework for symbolic competence in SLD.

Alongside the critical and reflective aspects, Morris' (2013) findings in her digital storytelling study align with Kramsch's (2009) theory of the aesthetic, or the creative/narrative approach, and its importance in the learning process. Morris (2013)

notes that digital storytelling, like the chatrooms in Kramsch's (2009) discussion, is a space of play. Citing Mackey, Morris (2013) describes how the constant switching between roles of audience and author promoted "text tinkering," as the students attempted to build meanings by creatively synthesizing the variety of resources available to them within the digital storytelling process (p. 58). Vinogradova (2007) also demonstrates the creative aspects inherent in the process of constructing the digital story, as the subjects in her study used symbolic tools to "negotiate positive social identities at an individual level," thus framing their own problems and uniquely positing their own solutions by reframing their identities using symbolic means (Strategies for Positive Social Identity Negotiation section, para. 7). Through their play with text, image and sound to create meaning, Vinogradova (2007) asserts that her subjects used the digital storytelling process to align themselves with larger themes, specifically the ability to overcome obstacles and hard work, valued by the ethnic majority. In this way, they created new spaces for themselves through their symbolic action of alignment, similar to that described by Wenger (2002), within the social schema (Vinogradova, 2007). Raven and O'Donnell (2010) successfully used digital storytelling in a similar way within the UAE as a means of building Emirati students' sense of national identity. This creative synthesis of multimedia, Morris (2013), Raven and O'Donnell (2010) and Vinogradova (2007) agree, empowered their subjects to perform their identities, engaging narratives of the past and hope for the future, using methods cited by Kramsch (2009) as means by which their multilingual students found equality and thus greater ownership through positive symbolic identity formation in the language learning process.

Digital storytelling as a project-based method of learning encourages students to take their language practice outside the classroom and to create an artifact that symbolizes that engagement (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Digital storytelling allows ELSs to collect realia from life, such as photos and music, that are meaningful to them, and to produce something that can be published within a wider online community, not simply within the bounds of the classroom, as it can be a means of negotiating identity within a variety of spaces (Raven & O'Donnell, 2010; Vinogradova, 2007). As Wenger (2002) states, the more people have agency to choose the areas of knowledge they feel are important, the more they will participate in the learning process. This makes digital storytelling, as a project in which learners can engage a variety of themes, agentively negotiate their identities, and reflect on the process, a significant pedagogical tool in SLD as well as a process that nurtures symbolic competence.

Digital Storytelling and Symbolic Competence in SLD

Many researchers, including Kramersch (2009), Early and Norton (2011), and Ilieva and Waterstone (2013), cite the empowering effects of narrative on their students' language ownership. This project seeks to foster ELSs' narratives specifically within the digital format to build symbolic competence, and thus promote positive identity formation through agency and ownership of English. The three studies below examine narratives specifically in context of digital storytelling and SLD and suggest that, as a project-based method within SLD, this form of narrative has successfully helped adult ELSs in university settings to develop multimodal competencies in ways that empowered them to express their perspectives.

Researchers Mehri, Pourali and Sanz in their (2014) study report positive identity formation through digital storytelling within an EFL university environment. They cite Rance-Roney, stating, “learners have numerous opportunities to interact and use the language in authentic and personally meaningful ways” within a digital storytelling project (p. 1542). This echoes Wenger’s (2002) findings that people align themselves and their identities with practices that allow them agency to create their own meanings or reifications and engage with knowledge that is meaningful to them and validated within a larger community. Mehri et al. (2014) specifically studied how digital storytelling helped oral fluency, and found that it increased language skills across all areas, including listening, reading and writing. They say this was because their students reported that learning through digital storytelling was “personal, enjoyable, attractive and creative” echoing what Kramsch (2009) cites as an essential component to successful language development, fostering an emotional connection to the language through symbolic competence within the aesthetic/creative approach (p. 1544). Mehri et al. (2014) also note that students found the skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking more personally meaningful in that they could use digital storytelling to explore and discuss their own opinions. Kramsch (2009) would suggest that this a multimodal negotiation of meanings, causing them to frame their own problems and perceptions within the language, an act of symbolic competence, using multimodal methods of negotiating meanings.

Ana Gimeno-Sanz (2015), in her study of digital storytelling as a means of scaffolding English for specific purposes (ESP), cites the many benefits afforded to her university-level students through the use of this method of teaching. In her results, she

reports a slew of competencies her students reported as enlarged by the process of digital storytelling, among them several that are important for the development of symbolic competence, including language skills, problem-solving skills, and critical-thinking skills (Gimeno-Sanz, 2015).

Finally, Raven and O'Donnell (2010), in their study of digital storytelling's effect on the identity formation of Emirati students, demonstrate its ability to frame the identification process, empower the authors, and connect authors and their audiences meaningfully. In their study of sixty-two digital stories submitted to a digital storytelling competition, Raven and O'Donnell (2010) report positive feedback from participants on a more multifaceted awareness of their national identity, their motivation to continue learning about it and a stronger ownership of it. The digital stories in this study appear to be in English, some with both Arabic and English script combined. Though Raven and O'Donnell (2010) do not comment on this, Kramsch (2009) and Spina (2006) would suggest this represents the authors' dual identities, and supports the importance of language interplay in SLD and cognitive development.

In alignment with one of Kramsch's (2009) definitions of symbolic competence as a means of finding meaningful connections across cultural boundaries through shared emotional resonances, Raven and O'Donnell (2013) reveal how digital storytelling relies on emotional connection with the viewers and that this was an important component to the success of their study, wedding previously isolated individuals targeted in the study to a shared perception of national culture. By understanding their shared identity, the participants in this study built symbolic competence in the sense that together, they negotiated the boundary lines that made them unique through the use of symbolic forms

of language, image and voice, agentively creating a real change in their understanding of the world, and their position within it (Raven & O'Donnell, 2013).

Summary

As demonstrated by the literature, there is a need for curricula that supports student and teacher identity formation as an essential part of successful SLD. Many of the studies demonstrate the need for such a curricula that recognizes and nurtures ELTs' identities has become even more urgent due to the nature of globalization and the complications it has imposed on these identities and on the English language itself as a means of projecting identity (Duff, 2015; Early & Norton, 2015; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Motha, 2006; Spina, 2006; Tsui, 2007). However, these scholars also caution that, while knowledge of English within the globalized world is a powerful resource, it can also be one that subtly marginalizes the learner by means of its residual symbolic power relations and indexes within western socialization practices, culture, and communities, to which ELSs seek to participate as equal members and legitimate experts. These embedded symbolic inequalities reinforce perceptions that in turn, play out into reality (Blommaert, 2010; Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Motha, 2006; Pinnow, 2011; Tsui, 2007). By recognizing how they are being marginalized within the symbolic structures of the English language and classroom socialization practices, ELSs and teachers can become more intentional agents in changing its inequalities (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Tsui, 2007).

As a significant means of engaging these perpetuated inequities, symbolic competence, according to Kramsch (2009), has an important place among the other communicative competencies offered to ELSs within the higher education ecology.

Digital storytelling provides a means of creating widely accessible narratives that engage the performative power of language as well as offering the authors and viewers multiple vantage points and agency-rich spaces within which to negotiate identities and cast themselves within past, present or future realities (Vinogradova, 2007). As a project-based pedagogical tool that lends itself to both the critical/reflexive and creative/narrative approaches of symbolic competence proposed by Kramersch (2009), digital storytelling, as used in this project, can become a key method by which teachers and students alike explore and take ownership their identities as English speakers. In doing so, they can create more space for their many uniquely shaped voices and perspectives within its symbolic practices, thus enriching the language as artfully as the many colorful panes of a stained glass window enrich the light.

CHAPTER III THE PROJECT AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

Description of the Project

This project is an online curriculum for high intermediate, adult, English-language learners entitled *Creative ESOL: Digital storytelling and English language development*. It focuses on supporting students to develop symbolic competence using a synthesis of the critical/reflexive and creative/narrative approaches, promoting positive student and teacher identity formation through greater ownership of the English language. To accomplish this, *Creative ESOL* contains a total of nine modules, which come with embedded choices for further practice and as spaces for community building between students facilitated by the instructor.

Using digital storytelling within a project-based framework, *Creative ESOL* scaffolds the skills needed in digital storytelling within the first four modules for students, as well as in one instructor module. The underpinning teaching philosophy of this curriculum recognizes the instructor as an important member of the learning community and as a subject who is modeling identity formation to a class. Each module is structured with five sections as follows: “Reflect,” “Explore,” “Critique,” “Create,” and “Assess” (RECCA). The module sections were intentionally designed to foster symbolic awareness and competence, guiding the student through a process of examining different aspects of the English language and western classroom socialization practices. The “Reflect” sections ask practitioners to reflect on their own experiences in connection to a given topic. The “Explore” sections present students with challenging texts about the nature of storytelling and narrative. In the “Critique” section, students engage these modules critically through a short writing assignment and align or contrast them to those

same aspects within their own cultures and personal experiences. Towards the end of each module, students are provided steps in the “Create” sections with which to develop their first digital stories, creatively synthesizing their knowledge into a product to be shared with an audience potentially outside the classroom walls, such as on an online forum or social media website. They then can practice self-assessment using the same rubric the instructor will use to assess them. The goal underlying this step-by-step organization of the units is that students will continue to apply the RECCA process on their own throughout their identity formation in English language communities.

Offering more spaces to foster symbolic competence, modules five through eight contain a range of different projects that examine English language communication and use as well as the underpinning symbolic positioning of audience identities through a variety of lenses. These lenses include poetry, advertising, and education, all sites within which relationships of power and desire are present, and that influence perceptions and actions through intentional, communicative strategies. Following the RECCA structure, students can critically examine these now ubiquitous spaces of communication with their embedded cultures and values, and resist, reinforce or recreate them through the digital story assignments that follow. Each digital story assignment offers a variety of prompts students can respond to, as well as open-ended themes for those who require more open-ended learning directives.

I designed *Creative ESOL* to be flexible in as many domains as possible while still offering enough direction to the learning process to provide a safe space for learner identity and community formation. With all its modules situated online, the curriculum is accessible and practicable as a synchronous, asynchronous or hybrid class, giving

students the possibility of building their online symbolic and communicative competencies within an English-speaking ecology to the extent the instructor determines appropriate. As a whole, the curriculum is geared to provide both teacher and student choice, and therefore motivation and ownership, within the learning process. Thus, *Creative ESOL* seeks to expand students' intentionality with communicative competences by building both English language and technological skills along with the agency to see and engage through digital stories the ways that culture and values symbolically position their identities as English language speakers.

Development of the Project

This project has its roots in my own educational experience as a child. Stories have always formed a large part of my life and identity development. While growing up, my sister, brothers, and I spent many hours telling and illustrating our own stories, and, like most children, aligned ourselves with the identities of characters we most admired in books and Disney films. Homeschooled throughout my elementary school years, primarily by my long-suffering mother who is a great lover of children's books and literature, we were surrounded by books, encouraged to read whenever we could and often had plenty of time to engage in creative activities like drawing, playing music, and acting out our own plays when lessons ended. My parents rarely missed a night to read aloud to us from the Bible, Greek mythology, Shakespeare, and other stories beloved and foundational in Western culture. We all grew up ingrained with a strong appreciation for the power of language as well as a penchant to both read and create.

Alongside an appreciation for stories, my parents also instilled a strong critical practice in us, often telling us to think about why we wanted to do even simple things

such as choosing friends or buying a certain product. My father, especially, would often take us out to the backyard, sit us down on a large picnic blanket on the grass, and unfold to us the parts of an argument, importance of reflection, and the Socratic method of questioning. At the time, I had little idea of the value of what both my parents gave me, though I enjoyed the process when I did not find it obstructive to other things I thought were important, such as my stuffed animal collection and making mud soup with the garden hose. Thus, the critical/reflexive approach and the creative/narrative approach were instilled in my blood long before I ever discovered Kramsch's theories.

When I entered middle school, I quickly found I had an aptitude for English. I won a small award for a poem I wrote in eighth grade, received much praise for my understanding of English grammar, and was encouraged to go to college for English all the way through high school. My path took a different turn, however, when I went to Kosovo as a volunteer, between my high school and college years in 2000, to teach English to former refugees. I found a great deal of fulfillment in applying my English skills in a new cultural environment, and in turn, I learned a great deal about different ways of viewing the world. Daily transitioning between French and English to communicate, I found renewed interest in the spaces between language and meaning in the transactions with the ethnic Albanians, many former refugees from Belgium. I applied to be an English major to the University of California, Berkeley, and was accepted.

My path took another turn, however, with a traumatic back injury incurred towards the end of my time in Kosovo. The pain was both terrible and fascinating to me as a 19 year old, and I needed a way to express how it was limiting my identity development in some ways and extending it in others. The latent art developed in my

storytelling with my siblings resurfaced, and I applied and was accepted to art school for painting shortly after returning to the US in 2003. In my art practice, I began to search for a visual language for pain because my knowledge of English failed to fully describe it. During my studies, I was exposed to semiotic theories of Judith Butler, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and many others, and became fascinated by what one of my professors, a great fan of Martin Heidegger, often called the “slippage” of language to define meaning. This slippage described my own attempts to explain my pain to the many doctors I was seeing at the time. My art was able to convey my experience, as other people were able to recognize my meanings and connect to my art through their own experiences of pain. This led to a great deal of emotional healing through the formation of an understanding and supportive community, as well as the physical recovery I later gained.

Simultaneously, I began tutoring English language learners in order to make a little extra money. It quickly became more than a job to me. I found a great deal of personal meaning and purpose in discussing both language and art with my tutees and helping them develop, and sometimes invent, entire vocabularies to describe their new creations. I finally had the theory to define my fascination with the space and synthesis between language and symbol, as well as the profession to put hands and feet on it: instructor of ESOL.

A few years after art school, I began studying at the University of San Francisco to obtain my master’s degree in TESOL. While in the program, I took a course on digital storytelling that brought me back to my childhood love of stories and helped me to understand their power to define and shape perception. This class inspired me to write my

own digital storytelling curriculum for the adult ELLs at the school where I taught. My students' motivation, confidence and linguistic output through digital stories increased so significantly in level and accuracy, that I became a firm believer in the power of storytelling as a means of intentional identity development in adults. I also realized my own understanding of their cultures and values became clearer as I watched their stories, leading to personal expansion and pleasure for me as part of the learning community. The power of digital storytelling became clearer later on in my studies when I was finally introduced to Kramsch's (2009) *The Multilingual Subject*, Wenger's (1998) theory on CoPs, as well as David Block's (2013) "Moving beyond "lingualism": Multilingual embodiment and multimodality in SLA." The stars aligned in their work because I found the theoretical connection between the body, language, narrative, community and my own teaching practice. From this final alignment, moving across the stepping stones laid from my childhood through my adulthood, I created this project. *Creative ESOL* is meant to be an agency-rich space with the intent of liberating, even if in a small way, English language students to be thoughtful and intentional practitioners of language to create positive, unique spaces for all identities in the English-speaking communities growing all over the world. In many ways, it is simply a simulation of the space I was given as a child, only for adults, a space I have come to value more deeply than ever as I continue on the journey of my own identity development as a multilingual subject in a rapidly shifting world.

The Project

Creative ESOL: Digital storytelling and English language development can be accessed at the following URL: www.creativeesol.weebly.com

CHAPTER IV CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Many studies have demonstrated that international students, as citizens of an increasingly globalized and virtually connected world, have access to multiple identities conveyed through an array of languages (Duff, 2015; Early & Norton, 2012; Kayi-Aydar, 2015; Kramch, 2009; Pinnow, 2011; Spina, 2006). Despite these current research findings, some TESOL curricula and classroom practices still contain essentialized perspectives that reduce the complex multilingual identities of students and teachers and privilege western norms (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013; Kramsch, 2009; Motha, 2006; Spina, 2006). As a result, these practices can limit students' motivation to learn, ownership of the English language, and willingness to participate significantly in its development (Ilieva & Waterstone, 2013).

This project engages these issues in that it both raises awareness of the connection between identity and learning, and activates engagement with the symbolic processes that influence identity development within social communicative practices. By employing Kramsch's (2009) theory of symbolic competence using a practical, project-based approach, *Creative ESOL* provides teachers and international students with agentive spaces to build their own critical and creative practice through personal narratives in digital stories. This curriculum recognizes that language development is a lifelong process that extends beyond the classroom, and, in light of this, it seeks to deliver a clear pedagogical framework that teachers and students can apply throughout their lifetimes to engage, reinforce, reject and transform the English language and develop positive identities of ownership and authorship.

Recommendations

Creative ESOL, as an accessible website, gives teachers of college ESOL courses, whether online, offline, or hybrid, the option to use any of the digital story projects from module four through eight as midterm or final assignments; the last four modules in particular feature culminating projects that demonstrate symbolic competence, as well as the standard array of general communicative competencies, including reading, writing, speaking and listening, usually within the scope of essential instructional objectives in university level English language (EL) classes. If time allows, I recommend starting at module one and working through module four, using the digital story at the end of module four as a midterm to provide a baseline of student competency in completing this type of project. As a final project, students can choose one of the modules in set five through eight, as I designed them to be accessible to independent study at the upper-intermediate to advanced English level, per the general TOEFL level that most U.S. universities accept.

If class time and curricular demands do not allow time for work on these projects in class, all of the modules can be assigned as part of a self-study program or homework, as they contain clear directions at the students' language level for each stage of to completion. *Creative ESOL* additionally provides instructors a separate module to explore their own multimodal identities, preparing them to act as models to their students of a critical/reflexive and creative/narrative approach in life-long learning.

To evaluate the success of this curriculum, I recommend conducting a short survey at the beginning and end of the course that asks students about their motivation, confidence level and perceived skill level in English language and western

communication practices. The curriculum itself contains rubrics for assessing the digital storytelling projects within the classroom, and can be applied as recommended above, first to a midterm to establish baseline skills and then to a final project to assess student improvement. Additionally digital storytelling lends itself easily to evaluation of any of the four major communicative competencies needed within an academic English environment. Teachers can apply a variety of rubrics to different stages of these projects to assess speaking, reading, writing and listening skills, as part of course requirements. At the end of the course, students should be surveyed again to assess their perceived improvements in the areas of motivation, confidence and skills in English and how they perceived the teacher's specific implementation of the curriculum; perception shapes identity, and positive identity formation is one of the main objectives of this curriculum. The program can be adapted based on student feedback, and I welcome comments from instructors to improve the site on the contact form of the *Creative ESOL* website.

In the future, I hope to add modules for low-intermediate students, as students' English language levels do vary, despite TOEFL scores. Providing options, such as levels, is a key facet of *Creative ESOL*. Additionally, Kramsch (2009) posits that it is never too soon for students to develop their symbolic competence to avoid marginalized identities from the beginning of SLD, providing me with further impetus to build lower level modules.

Furthermore, I believe that more supportive, online CoPs are needed for teachers in adult education to build their awareness of symbolic practices that position and shape their identities and provide space for them to explore those identities. The more intentional teachers become in their awareness of how their professional identities shape

their pedagogies, the more they will be able to assist learners in the development of symbolic competence no matter what their English language level. They will also be able to better critique and create more agentive and meaningful classroom materials for their students, and grow their own pedagogical practice more purposefully. I hope to offer this curriculum to my colleagues and actively garner feedback as well as build a supportive CoP through the digital stories offered by teachers in the forum within the site.

Finally, I hope this curriculum will make a real difference in combating the perceptions and normative practices that perpetuate inequalities in English language education. The news contains recent headlines that speak to the ways identities are still symbolically marginalized in U.S. schools, from the recent Texas Board of Education's decision to allow textbooks that call the North American slaves *workers* to current attitudes towards immigrants, including those fomented within the Syrian refugee crisis, illegal immigrant rights and Islamophobia (Rockmore, 2015, The Pew Research Center, 2015). My greatest goal in developing *Creative ESOL* is that international students and teachers in U.S. universities will actively examine, resist and transform these perceptions using digital stories. Through shared narratives, multilingual subjects would then be empowered to shape English into a richer semiotic medium with which all people can convey their thoughts, experiences and emotions to a global community that recognizes and values them.

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