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(Re)Claiming Spaces Through Story: An Examination of the Liberatory Potential of Autobiographical Narrative in Adult L2 Literacy Development

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(Re)Claiming Spaces Through Story: An Examination of the Liberatory Potential of
Autobiographical Narrative in Adult L2 Literacy Development

Jessica Elizabeth Peters

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

Degree of Master of Education

Literacy Studies/TESOL

April 2014

Acknowledgements

No project of this length is completed without much support and input from loved ones and colleagues; and nothing at all can be accomplished apart from the grace and mercy of God, Most High.

My deepest gratitude belongs to my Creator. After that, to my family, who have never failed to stand by me even when they were perhaps uncertain what that fidelity would finally be worth; to my advisor, colleague, mentor, and friend, Colleen Brice, without whose firm guidance and patience the present work would have been no more than a shadow of what it is now; to my committee members and teachers, Shinian Wu and Chris Hanks, whose insightful and supportive comments helped me take confidence in the worth of this research, whatever its flaws; and finally, to all those I have encountered in the course of my graduate career, each of whom, for better or worse, showed me who I was, and contributed in their way to the person I am today.

And all success is from God, Most High, and all thanks and praise belong to Him.

Abstract

Adult ESL learners at the community education level are frequently undereducated (Lasater and Elliott, 2000, 2005), and fifty percent of limited-English proficient (LEP) adults report having nine or fewer years of formal schooling (NCIIP, 2012). They may be preliterate or only marginally literate even in their L1, which has significant negative implications both for language acquisition and for employment and educational opportunities. Further, many of these adult students also experience feelings of low self-worth with respect to their ability to succeed in any academic setting, let alone a foreign one, which poses a serious barrier to their ability to transition to community college or university (Shen, 2012). However, standard curricula for adult community education ESL classes typically follow a competency-based model that focuses on oral tasks and basic employment skills rather than attempting to foster and develop critical literacy and sociopolitical agency.

In this paper, I argue that for adults with limited formal education and either limited or interrupted L1 literacy, helping learners develop a meaningful relationship with authentic and personally relevant texts is crucial (Fingeret, 1991; Purcell-Gates et al, 2002; Purcell-Gates & Waterman, 2000; Blanton, 2005). I develop an empirically-grounded theoretical argument for the use of the personal narrative genre in second language instruction, and show that focus on narrative as a social literacy event actively engages learners' histories and subjectivities in the classroom while serving as a bridge between the symbolic codes of speech and writing. I emphasize research which indicates the unique role personal narrative plays in supporting identity negotiation and development of sociopolitical agency (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Nicholas, Rossiter & Abbott, 2011; Mishler, 2006; Coffey & Street, 2008), of special importance

for marginalized populations. Finally, I argue that using autobiographical narrative in adult ESL instruction can provide a forum for tying students' histories to their new language use, thus enabling development of heightened sense of self-worth at the same time as foundational critical literacy skills and agency are developed. A model curriculum for implementing this approach is outlined, and justification is provided.

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Chapter One

1.1 Introduction

Adult immigrant ESL students at the community education level in the United States face a variety of challenges that their counterparts in the tertiary setting do not. Unlike ESL/EFL adult learners in tertiary settings, adult ESL learners at the community education level are frequently undereducated (Lasater & Elliott, 2000/2005); in fact, according to a recent report, fifty percent of limited-English proficient (LEP) adults report having nine or fewer years of formal schooling (NCIIP, 2012). This means that they may be preliterate or only marginally literate even in their L1, which fact has significant negative implications both for language acquisition and for employment and educational opportunities. They come largely from Latin America, Africa, and Southeast Asia (NCSALL, 2003), which means that they may face social discrimination due to ethnicity. They are non-native English speakers, which means that they may face social discrimination due to linguistic factors. Along with culture shock, many of these adult students also experience feelings of low self-worth with respect to their ability to succeed in any academic setting, let alone a foreign one, which poses a serious barrier to their ability to transition to community college or university (Shen, 2012). Further, few, if any, of these learners are citizens of the United States and, depending on the structure of the program, some may not even be in the country legally. In short: adult community ESL students face a wide variety of issues that distinguish them from either K-12 ESL students or adult ESL students in academically-focused intensive English programs.

Unfortunately, curricula in community programs often do not serve this population's needs effectively. It is generally accepted that curricula in such programs should reflect attention to relevant issues like the desire to gain or maintain employment and the need to develop communicative competence in oral tasks. As a result, standard adult education ESL texts typically focus on language acquisition via communicative opportunities revolving around daily or work-oriented tasks, tasks which frequently focus almost exclusively on oral production. However, they do not typically provide explicit opportunities for students to negotiate new identities, nor do they provide opportunities for students to develop writing skills. The absence of opportunities for supported negotiation of identity in the L2 is significant because identity negotiation has important implications for broader social and political identity, not to mention daily interpersonal interactions. Language learners will, to the extent that they use English at all, learn to negotiate identity within the new linguistic forms. But whether learners receive support and guidance in this process of negotiation may affect their degrees of success in acquisition; and, perhaps more importantly, it may make the difference between success and failure in becoming conscious agents in a society in which they are already marginalized. Using autobiographical narrative in adult ESL instruction can provide a forum for tying students' histories to their new language use, thus enabling development of heightened sense of self-worth at the same time as formal acquisition of the language is facilitated through the use of meaningful language.

What is more, a stronger focus on literacy skills may positively influence the educational and career objectives of this population. Auerbach (1986) argues that competency-based ESL programs may limit students' socioeconomic prospects by positioning them, whether explicitly or implicitly, as slated for a particular social stratum: "The selection, organization, and evaluation

of curriculum content are value governed: What we choose to teach, how we teach it, and how we evaluate students reflect our view of the social order and our students' place in it" (p. 417). "Survival" ESL curricula assume a necessary skill-set—what students will need to be able to do with English in order to survive. But decisions about what skills are comprised by "survival" are not value-neutral; they contain judgments about what adults, and, specifically, adult immigrants, will need to accomplish. Competency-based ESL texts frequently

seem to follow the tradition of preparing students to fulfill employers' needs. Many mention only minimum-wage jobs as options for newcomers—for example, busboy, maid, janitor, and factory worker—and teach language functions of subservience, such as apologizing and following orders. They often explicitly teach those behaviors required in menial jobs. (Auerbach, 1986, p. 418)

Adult ESL curricula that address language needs solely as they pertain to employment (often limited to low-wage employment) fail to empower learners as agents in forming and transforming their own socioeconomic and sociopolitical lives. Further, a more recent study on the relationship between participation in Adult Basic Skills programs and literacy development indicated that "basic skills programs increase motivation for literacy but fail to equip participants with the cognitive skills needed to master literacy tasks outside of the classroom" (Sheehan-Holt & Smith, 2000, p. 241). In other words, competency-based or basic skills programs, while useful, are not sufficient. Students may come into the classroom desiring only to gain or maintain employment, but if given the chance to develop skills—like critical thinking and advanced writing—and affective resilience that would enable them to succeed in college, they may find their objectives changing along with their abilities.

Finally, it is important to recognize that community ESL programs that seek to empower adult immigrants have the potential to affect multiple generations. Though many immigrants change locale for the purposes of providing better social and educational opportunities for their children, recent research in post-secondary educational attainment by English Language Learners (ELLs) indicates that ELLs are significantly less likely (as compared to both native English speakers and to speakers of English as a second dialect) to enter, let alone graduate from, a post-secondary institution (Kanno & Cromley, 2013). Were this simply because of a need to develop increased language proficiency, the solution would be fairly straightforward. But in fact, the problem is complicated by a wide variety of social and economic issues, one of which is a lack of parental involvement in and support of academic pursuits (ibid). Studies in intergenerational literacy practices also indicate a significant correlation between children's acquisition of literacy and a strong home literacy culture (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2000; Menard-Warwick, 2005). Seeking to orient adult immigrant ESL students toward post-secondary education by *reorienting* community education ESL programs toward curricula that address transformational as well as academic goals has the potential to change the lives not only of the students themselves, but of their children.

1.2 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the present work is to develop a theoretical argument in favor of a focus on autobiographical narrative in adult community education ESL curricula, and to offer a model curriculum that could be used to implement such an approach. In the last twenty years, the field of applied linguistics has seen a sharp rise in studies of identity, ethics, and politics in relation to second language acquisition and second language pedagogy, as well as in relation to language

use generally. Working within the framework of identity, knowledge, agency, social hierarchies, etc., as co-constructed, many theorists have looked to narrative as a means of understanding how the language user's manipulation of linguistic form reflects an interactive negotiation of identity, and to the ways in which pedagogical techniques (e.g., sociocultural models v. traditional knowledge-transmission models) can either support or debilitate the development of learner agency. The self-perception of the learner as either agentive or non-agentive has direct implications for the ways in which macro-level discourses of power and authority may be locally subverted, resisted, and, eventually, transformed. Offering adult learners a space within which to explore their own histories through written narrative in the L2 can not only bolster their self-confidence, but can positively influence their life-goals, their intellectual development, and their language acquisition more generally.

Drawing on work by critical social theorists (e.g., Foucault, Bourdieu, de Certeau), discourse analysts (e.g., Schiffrin, de Fina), sociocultural theorists (e.g., Vygotsky, Lantolf, Pavlenko, Thorne), and critical applied linguists (e.g., Pennycook), I argue that the effects of language acquisition (for adult L2 English learners) on learner perceptions of self and social power positioning are evidenced in important ways by personal narrative. Though ESL curricula abound, there are few available that take seriously the decentering of identity as a product of second language learning and the agentive function of language use as effecting (or failing to effect) the language user's social position as a legitimate voice. A curriculum that makes use of autobiographical narrative for the purposes of L2 identity development and support of learner agency is one means of addressing this lack. Further, this type of study may offer important insight into the social, political, and ethical ramifications of second language education for the maintenance and reinforcement of power structures. While many researchers in recent years have

worked in the areas of language and identity, language and power, language and agency, and language and discourse (as well as various permutations of the above), comparatively few have investigated the specific area of English language learning, identity, power and discourse, and pedagogy. Particularly in the United States, there is a great need for alternative second language pedagogies to be bolstered by justification grounded in learner action and learner experience. Autobiographical narrative has been shown to be a fruitful means of gaining insight into learner experience, and provides a way to analyze both identity negotiation and power positioning (see, e.g., Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000; Mishler, 2006; Menard-Warwick, 2005; de Fina, 2008; Koven, 1998, 2001). Further, the practice of writing for self-expression serves as a crucial supplement to community education programs that typically address writing only for utilitarian, daily purposes (e.g., writing a note to a boss or a friend, making a grocery list, etc.). Writing, as reflective of reading skills and as evidence of learners' interlanguage, can also assist instructors in better addressing individual student needs in terms of language acquisition.

1.3 Background

While critical social theorists such as Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu were addressing issues of macro-level power structures/discourses and the reproduction of social hierarchies as early as the 1970s, it is only in the last twenty years that this critical approach has taken hold in the field of applied linguistics generally, and in the area of second language pedagogy more specifically. The rise of critical applied linguistics in the 1990s marked, for some, a turn away from psycholinguistics and structuralism, and toward theoretical frameworks that problematized the emphasis on decontextualized features of learner and language (Pennycook, 2001; Toohey, 2000). Drawing on both critical theory and Vygotskian sociocultural

theory of first language acquisition, critical theories of second language acquisition took social construction of both learner and learning environment as fundamental to analysis of the relationship between second language pedagogy and broader social processes. Indeed, it was not until this time that the second language classroom was even considered relevant to social and political concerns regarding power dynamics and their social reproduction.

As Tennessen (1986) notes, Bourdieu's notions of "audibility" and the legitimation of voice are important for understanding the transmission of discourses of power and authority through the educational system. Educational settings wherein a dominant, "power" dialect is privileged over (often to the exclusion of) nonstandard variations, Creoles, or other minority dialects become sites of political struggle; language, here, is not a neutral communicative tool, but rather serves to reinforce social stratification by delegitimizing the means by which socially and politically marginalized populations establish themselves as agentive beings. In Vygotskian terms, language as a tool for mediating both material and symbolic environments is the primary means by which human beings negotiate social relationships, and, eventually, the means by which they negotiate their own consciousness and contextualized identities. To delegitimize a non-power dialect is therefore to undermine the possibility for native speakers of that dialect to perceive themselves as capable of performing competent identities within any language whatsoever: neither in their native language, which has been systematically disenfranchised, nor in the power dialect, which is the tool of those who enact the disenfranchisement. In this sense, native speakers of non-power dialects who are required (whether by coercion or by choice, i.e., for instrumental purposes) to negotiate the social self within the conceptual and symbolic structure of the power dialect can be understood to be performing a doubly-negated identity: the "first" identity, negotiated in the non-power dialect, has been systematically deprived of agency;

the “second” identity, negotiated in the power-dialect, participates symbolically in the deprivation of agency of the first self by socially constructing a new self in the terms of the oppressor (see Norton, 2006). Following Bakhtin’s (1986) conception of the second-order authoring of texts, we might say that in the process of reconstituting, or “re-authoring”, the self in the power dialect, speakers of minority dialects are not only internalizing the ethnic, racial, and linguistic tensions that are typically analyzed at the macro level, but are also, and largely as a result of the complicity of educational institutions, participating in the reproduction and perpetuation of these tensions (see also Bourdieu, 1977; Ahearn, 2001).

This concern for the intersection of language, agency, and identity means that theoretical and empirical research on the negotiation of learner identity in the context of second language acquisition is tightly bound to considerations of power. The “hybridized” identity resulting from the performance of self in two languages (see, e.g., Koven, 1998, 2001; Paris, 2009) can, as suggested above, be seen as an ultimately crippling effect of the perpetuation of power structures via reproduction of authoritative discourses within educational institutions. However, it may also be the case that second language acquisition, specifically the acquisition of a power dialect by marginalized peoples, can be reframed as a site of sociopolitical resistance (see, e.g., Giroux, 1983); rather than serving solely to transmit dominant ideologies, the second language classroom can be a space wherein language practice enables the development of agency even within the formal structures of the power dialect. From the perspective of the resistance model, Pennycook’s (2010) notion of “metrolingualism” can be especially useful: spaces wherein multiple language practices intersect and conjoin are then seen as *creative* spaces within which individuals move, through everyday activities, to transform both self and hegemonic social structures. My position is that the second language classroom can and should be one of those

types of spaces, and that autobiographical narrative is a tool that can support the classroom becoming such a space.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

What follows is a selective review of pertinent literature providing theoretical and empirical support for the use of narrative in the second language classroom. Because relevant literature exists in a wide variety of disciplines, including linguistics and many of its subfields, anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology, and literary theory, I limit my review to those works which bear directly on the subject at hand. Roughly, we can divide the literature treated into the following five categories, the first three of which will deal with theoretical issues, while the latter two address more pragmatic concerns: 1) language and identity; 2) language and agency; 3) narrative and the re-authoring of the self; 4) sociocultural theory and second language instruction; and 5) second language writing and literacy. Theoretically, this analysis takes root in social constructionism and in poststructuralist/postcolonialist accounts of power and discourse, with a special view to critical pedagogy. At the same time, the concept of identity discussed herein adheres most properly to postpositivist realist theorizing to the extent that while I take identity to be socially and historically mediated, I nevertheless take it to be “real”, and thus as something that holds significant implications for social and political life at the level of both collective and individual. My hope is that this review will succeed in demonstrating the peculiar and important function that autobiographical narrative can play in second language curricula.

2.2 Language and Identity

Bonnie Norton (1997) notes that second language educators need to take seriously the relationship between language and identity, for, as she says, “every time language learners speak,

they are not only exchanging information with their interlocutors; they are also constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. They are, in other words, engaged in identity construction and negotiation” (1997, p. 410). Second language teachers need to be able to engage students on multiple levels, specifically because learning is not just about learning information. It is also about learning to “be” in a new language, in a new physical, social, and linguistic environment.

Concern for the intersection of language and identity emerges from a variety of places. One such place is the area of code-switching. Code-switching in di- and heteroglossic societies is a rich area of research for those concerned with identity and language: what does it mean when a person code switches? Is he/she displaying or performing a different identity? In her 2000 paper on cultural identity and heteroglossia, Joan Argenter delves into the world of language and identity specifically with respect to diglossic and heteroglossic societies. Argenter, by way of Catalonia, Galicia, Gibraltar, Sardinia, and Austro-Hungarian border communities, concludes that it is perhaps an oversimplification to suggest that a particular language can be identified with a particular, and different, identity, especially when the “identities” in question are historico-cultural identities. However, she admits that “identity is the result of both human interaction and the responsible assumption for certain interaction and communication patterns” (2000, p. 37) whose meaning is created and affected by communicative practices in particular social contexts. In other words, personal and cultural identity are formed and performed within the context of language use in a social environment. Identity is not, then, a preexisting attribute of the individual, but is constantly being shaped.

Michele Koven, in her studies on identity performance in two languages (1998, 2001), provides striking support for the concept of identity as shaped by socially and historically

constructed language-use patterns. Koven conducted a 19-month-long ethnography of young adult (18-25 years old) Luso-descendants in France, which data she used for both the 1998 and 2001 analyses. Participants were descended from rural Portuguese families that had immigrated to urban France (Paris), and had either been born in France to immigrant parents, or had relocated to France from Portugal at a young age (>6). In her 1998 study she focused on two female participants, and in her 2001 study she focused on 12 female participants (drawing from the more extensive ethnographic data previously collected). Koven had participants tell a story of a moment of conflict with a stranger, a prompt designed to elicit a story of the sort that Luso-descendants often tell amongst themselves (i.e., a story relevant to their lives). Participants told the same story twice, once in Portuguese, and once in French. A control group told the story twice in the same language. These narratives were then evaluated both by Koven and by native speakers of the languages (other Luso-descendants of approximately the same age).

In many cases the individuals participating in Koven's study were analyzed as having their identities constricted by the languages in which they expressed themselves. For example, Ana, a focal participant in Koven's 1998 study, came across to evaluators as "uncomfortably racist" when describing a moment of conflict in Portuguese. Evaluators nevertheless admitted that, given the sociolinguistic restraints of the localized, rural Portuguese Ana used, Ana did not really have a choice but to appear so. The "urban liberalism" of the identity Ana had acquired via her time lived in France was not, according to Koven's analysis, an identity expressible in the particular dialect of Portuguese available to her. In Koven's 2001 study, analysis centers on bilinguals' quoted selves, where she further examines identities as indexed in two languages. Koven found that speakers tended to index different social personae when quoting speech in context of narrative, according to the personae available to speakers in whichever language they

were using to perform the narrative. For example, a “troublemaker” in a story told in rural Portuguese was indexed as backward or ignorant, whereas the same character in a story told in urbane French was indexed as thuggish or haughty.

Though Koven is careful not to take this data as support for sweeping claims about the relationship between language per se and identity, her studies are indicative of a couple of important points. First, language is socially and historically mediated, and therefore the expression of self in any given language will itself be mediated by social and historical factors. Second, this fact ought to be recognized as a challenge to the second language learner, and to the second language teacher: “different language forms have the power to transform self-expression and experience because of their capacity to index, or bring into being, other contexts and identities” (Koven, 1998, p. 437). Learning a second language brings with it the opportunity to index new identities, and it is this facet of language learning that must be acknowledged and supported in the second language classroom; language is not simply about performance of tasks in a new code, but also about performance of self.

But in abandoning an essentialist view of identity, we must be careful not to slip into its opposite—a view that holds, in the postmodern tradition, that there is no “real” self at all, but merely an arbitrary collection of beliefs, lacking in epistemic validity. Postpositivist realist scholars such as Paula Moya offer a much richer theoretical base from which to work in suggesting that identity, while subject to constant evolution and shaped by social structures and systems of domination, nevertheless refers outward to a real social world. Identities, then, are “socially significant and context-specific ideological constructs that refer in non-arbitrary (if partial) ways to verifiable aspects of the social world” (Moya, 2011, p. 80). It is for this reason that studies of identity have social and political significance at all. An individual’s identity is

directly tied to the knowledge bases she has access to, the questions she asks, the means by which she resists structural domination, and the ways in which she is able, or not able, to affect the social structures around her: “Identities instantiate the links between individuals and groups and central organizing principles of our society” (Moya, 2002, p. 13). Questioning identity is thus central to any project that is concerned with social change, as this one is, while simultaneously being an integral feature of second language classrooms—particularly those wherein student populations are comprised almost entirely of marginalized peoples—for, as Moya argues, “how a person identifies herself has profound consequences for how she understands the world and, consequently, how she chooses to act within it” (2001, p. 100).

Finally, it is because learning a language is not simply about learning forms that the sociocultural conception of identity is so crucial to the second language classroom. While many traditional thinkers have understood identity as a preexisting feature of humanity, something that must merely then be translated into another language, sociocultural theorists like Pavlenko, Thorne, Pennycook, Canagarajah, Weedon, Toohey, and others have reconceptualized identity as something that shapes and is shaped by social processes—including language (see Norton, 2006). Meaning is not simply a fact-of-the-matter that must be conveyed via language, but a thing which is co-constructed in the process of communication between individuals. Thus discussion of language and identity must give way to discussion of language and agency, for the co-construction of meaning depends on the ability of each participant to “do” something with the language they are using.

2.3 Language and Agency

Like identity, the concept of agency has been theorized in multiple ways. With respect to language use and sociopolitical concerns, agency in contemporary discussions is often seen as a result of practice, and not a preexisting condition. Laura Ahearn (2001) discusses the question of language and agency at length, sorting through various conceptions of agency that have been used across disciplines. Agency cannot simply be, as many have thought it, “free will”, for conceptualizing agency thus ignores the social factors at play in any action. Our actions are constrained to some extent by our environment; we do not have absolute free will, however much we might like to think it. We are shaped, and to some extent limited, by our histories (both collective and individual), our cultures, our ethnicities, even our proclivities. Then what is agency? Ahearn suggests a provisional definition: “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). This is a rather broad definition, as she admits, leaving many things unspecified (for example, must agency be limited to humans? Must agency be individual, or can it be sub- or supra-individual?). However, its strength lies in its avoidance of equating agency with either free will *or* with resistance, another mistake Ahearn tells us is often made—agency cannot be reduced to simply being oppositional. Agency is complex and multifaceted, and must be understood as such. Just as grammatical agents can shift within a sentence, so can agency shift at the level of the individual. As Coffey and Street (2008) note, “personal agency is constrained and structured by broader social understandings that shape the discursive narratives available to an individual” (p. 454). Language is one means by which agency is revealed, supported, or denied; thus the second language classroom is a site of social and political import.

Thorne (2005) argues that sociocultural theory is especially useful in pointing out that acquisition of language is not just about acquiring linguistic forms; it is also about “one’s

continued development as a person” (p. 401). Critical pedagogy therefore pushes second language teachers, especially but not exclusively at the community adult education level, to consider how pedagogical and language practice affect the development of agency in learners. On the sociocultural model, the development of higher-order cognitive processes is viewed as inseparable from the "humanistic issues of self-efficacy, agency, and the capacity to live a satisfying if not fulfilling life" (Thorne, 2005, p. 403). Thus L2 acquisition is seen to facilitate not only acquisition of the target language, but also the development of increased agency on the part of the learner. This is what locates sociocultural theory within the realm of the "emancipatory" project of education. Learner attitudes, personal histories, affective responses to language learning and to the educational setting, and both intellectual and affective responses to language and educational ideologies (whether at the individual, institutional, local, or state level) all contribute to the individual learner's self-concept as an agent (Peters, 2010). But “agency is mutable” (Thorne, 2005, p. 401), and it is not a “preexisting value; it is continually constructed (or debilitated) as a qualitative function of orientation to activity” (ibid, p. 400). Like identity, then, agency is co-constructed. Because of this, second language classrooms are sites within which learner agency may be either developed or undermined. Classroom practice is essential in the process of supporting or debilitating development of both agency and identity.

The fact of agency as a function of orientation to activity becomes apparent in studies such as that of Alice Ashton Filmer (2003), who conducted an ethnographic case study of African-American students learning Standard American English (SAE). Filmer served as a teacher/mentor for three African-American females studying in a United States high school summer course on Shakespeare during the summer of 1999. With her students, Filmer explored the relationship between SAE and African American Vernacular English (AAVE), and found

that her students were resistant to learning and acquiring SAE because it represented a colonizing and oppressive force. The participants largely felt that acquisition of SAE represented capitulation to a dominant, and dominating, ideology, and that resisting its acquisition situated them in a position of solidarity within their ethnic and cultural community. The struggle, then, is how to enable the agency of such students, who quite reasonably object to acquiring the language of the perceived oppressor, but simultaneously contribute to the delimiting of their own aspirations and goals by refusing *not* to learn SAE. We find similar struggles in classrooms where the “second language” being acquired is a power dialect of any kind, whether SAE, or, in Haiti, French (versus Kreyol; see Tennessen, 1986).

However, we also find examples of students actively engaged in constructing and co-constructing identities in studies such as Bourne’s (2001). The author discusses observations made during an ethnographic case study of a multi-lingual primary school classroom located in London, UK. The student demographic was comprised of both monolingual speakers of English and speakers (with varying degrees of competency) of Cantonese, Bengali, and Sylheti. The purpose of the study was to observe the ways in which students’ knowledge of non-English languages informed or interacted with their use of English (the formal language of instruction). Bourne found that, rather than being passive recipients, the students exhibited dynamic agency in shaping their identities with respect to language use: the students actively participated in distinguishing linguistic domains, in selecting appropriate rhetorical strategies, and in employing a variety of codes and registers. She argues that these observations of student agency contrast markedly with the concept of the authority figure of the teacher imposing education and regulations on powerless students (as per, e.g., Freire’s banking model of education); rather, she

contends, the educational process, the development of discourse use, and student identities are mutually constructed.

Below, I examine studies that indicate sociocultural techniques as one means of addressing issues of agency and identity in the classroom; but first, I turn to research on the importance of narrative for agency development and identity construction.

2.4 Narrative and the Re-Authoring of the Self

Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) note that second language acquisition is not only about acquiring linguistic forms, but also about “a struggle of concrete socially constituted and always situated beings to participate in the symbolically mediated lifeworld of another culture” (2000, p. 155). In being confronted with the necessity of learning to communicate one’s self in another language, L2 learners are simultaneously confronted with the necessity of learning how to understand that self in another language. Narrative-construction can be an important tool in the process of authoring, or re-authoring the self.

Because of the way in which creolization consists in the organic and politically significant intersection of language, culture, and identity, I find it to be a useful metaphor in coming to understand how agency, identity, language, and, finally, narrative, come together in the second language classroom. It is of particular interest here to investigate the question of usage with respect to identity performance. Ana Cara (2003) examines creole culture in Argentina in order to try to understand what it means to “talk creole.” While acknowledging that creole languages in Argentina have died out, she argues that the verbal play that characterizes what it means to *be* creole persists, though it is performed in the standard dialect (Spanish). “Being creole,” she contends, consists both in the integration and adaptation of two (or more

cultures), but also in resistance to the colonizing, prestige culture. Cara emphasizes that, in this context,

It is important...to think of creole talk or of speaking in a creole kind of way as a communicative event, as creative expression, and as social and political performance no less central to creole cultures than any other expressive form...Creole talk, in sum, is a way of “recasting” speech (thereby defying authority) and “reassigning” or co-opting power through language in creole cultures. (p. 40)

Because creole culture consists in the mixing of two (or more) cultures, it is evidenced in a “continuous double discourse and counter discourse (Cara, 2003, p. 43); the creole group both draws, culturally and linguistically, from the dominant group and is also oppressed by that group. Creole talk thus comes to embody the “cleverness, wit and cunning” (ibid, p. 43) necessary to communicate secretly—apart from, though amongst—the dominant group.

We can say that second language acquisition participates in a kind of creolization, or hybridization, of identity. In Fan Shen’s reflections on learning to express himself in English, he notes, “Looking back, I realize that the process of learning to write in English is in fact a process of creating and defining a new identity and balancing it with the old identity” (1989, p. 466). The second language learner does not learn a language merely by acquiring the grammatical forms of that language, but rather by appropriating utterances, or voices: “Persons can use their ‘voices’, when they can enter the communicative chain, as they initially appropriate others’ utterances and bend these utterances to their own intentions” (Toohey, 2000, p. 13). As the creole speaker “bends” the power dialect to suit his/her needs as a marginalized voice, the second language learner must similarly learn to bend the L2 to suit his/her needs as an L2 speaker (whether

marginalized or no). The second language learner, as with the creole speaker, must get past “ventriloquation” and to the point at which his/her utterances become his/her voice, rather than the voice of someone else. Second language textbooks often use scripted dialogue (ventriloquation) to teach basic forms; but second language learners must also be provided with a means to appropriate a *voice* in the L2. According to Bakhtin,

The word in language is half someone else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adopting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that a speaker gets his words!) but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s concrete contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word and make it one’s own. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293-294)

The practice of writing, taken generally, requires second language learners to exercise their ability to express themselves in concrete form. Autobiographical narrative, as a particular type of writing practice, offers a way for learners to develop their own voice in the L2 by molding it to suit their needs as transmitters and even inventors of personal history.

Related to the concept of voice is Bourdieu’s (1977) notion of “audibility”, where an individual must be perceived as having the “right” to speech; the individual must be “heard” as a legitimate speaker. Second language learners require support in this process of gaining voice, or audibility, in the L2. As Coffey and Street (2008) point out, identities are both “contingent and discursively constructed” (p. 452) in the process of language learning, a process they term “the language learning project”. Further, and centrally to this project, “retrospective accounts of their

learning draw on a range of discursive identities, allowing more nuanced glimpses into how individuals narrativise [sic] language learning as an identity project” (ibid.). In their study of retroactive first person narratives by adult ESL learners attempting to gain native-like proficiency, Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) have similarly shown that autobiographical narrative is an important tool for researchers in identity and second language learning. Their 2000 article focuses on published first-person narratives written by nine adult learners of English as a second language, all of Eastern European origin: Eva Hoffman, Anna Wierzbicka, Andrei Codrescu, Marianne Hirsch, Jan Novak, Tzvetan Todorov, Helen Yakobson, Natasha Lvovich, and Cathy Young. In constructing a personal narrative, Pavlenko and Lantolf observe, “people are able to make sense, that is make meaning, of what they do and of what others do with them” (p. 171-172). The process of acquiring a second language as an adult provoked a shift in identity for the writers Pavlenko and Lantolf studied: as learners became linguistically dispossessed, they had to struggle to rearticulate themselves in a new language. The liminal space of partial bilingualism gave way, finally, to these individuals’ new senses of who they are *now*, as distinct from who they *were*. Narrative accounts of the language acquisition process enable learners to bind past and present in a unique way, ensuring “continuity by transforming and reintegrating one’s childhood into one’s new past” (ibid, p. 168).

What is of special importance here is that a certain observable internal dissonance can arise for individuals who cannot bring their past, monolingual self into their present, bi- or multi-lingual self. In other words, individuals who fail to successfully narrativize the process of language learning may find themselves trapped, in a sense, between two worlds. “Without this restructuring, these individuals would remain on the margins of the new community in which they reside (but not live)” (ibid, p. 172). This is because, as Cristina Ros i Sole affirms,

“language not only provides the means of communication, but it is also a powerful instrument for gaining access to new communities of practice and social roles. The speaker has to build and negotiate his/her linguistic voice to be accepted in the new community of practice and take a new role” (Ros i Sole, 2007, p. 205). And this is true not only at the level of the individual, but also at the level of the ethnic or social group: “Narrative activity is central among groups’ symbolic practices because it allows the renegotiation of social relations through reinterpretations of past and present experiences and affirmation of the moral values with which the group is associated” (De Fina, 2008, p. 437). Narrativizing one’s history, or the history of one’s group, is essential in the process of identity construction and negotiation, most particularly when that history admits of major upsets such as living through civil war, losing a loved one, immigrating to another country, or simply suffering the end of one’s career, events E.G. Mishler calls “turning points”. As Mishler puts it:

The process of restorying that both marks and results from these striking turning-point incidents is a general feature of our multiple identities, each rooted in a different set of relationships that form the matrix of our lives. Each of our partial selves is a character in a different story, where we are positioned in different ways in our relationships with others who constitute our several social worlds. (2006, p. 41)

In other words, narrative and identity are not woven into a unitary plot-line; rather, the events in our lives are continuously woven and re-woven, understood and re-understood, as we gain new perspectives. Past and present mutually constitute one another—Mishler’s “double-arrow of time” (2006, p. 36)—as we make sense of ourselves and our lives by telling stories, narratives, about them.

Two final curriculum-based studies offer compelling evidence for the usefulness of personal narrative as a pedagogical tool in the ESL context. Park (2011) explores autobiographical narrative as a means of clarifying and understanding one's life in her study of adult ESL learners' cultural and linguistic autobiographies. The Cultural and Linguistic Autobiography (CLA) writing project was implemented in academic ESL writing courses over the course of five years at a community college in the United States. Adult ESL learners constructed, in a series of drafts, autobiographies that detailed their experiences and aspirations as English language learners. These narratives were then compiled into a single, nearly 400-page, file. Park, via analysis of excerpts from selected student writings, notes that

[t]he most provocative theme from this project is that it enabled students to re-envision their goals and dreams through writing about their experiences and goals in English...the adult ELLs were able to view their CLA writing project as a form of empowerment and development of their sense of self, their emerging identities. The completion of this project revealed a development of their sense of their identities as members of this new community and their hopes to continue engaging in the linguistic and cultural discourses of the U.S. educational, social, and professional contexts. (2011, p. 167)

Following Gail Weinstein's (2006) model of using learners' lives as curriculum, Park's project helps situate autobiographical narrative within the humanizing realm of pedagogical practice: narrative is a tool that enables learners to participate actively in shaping, and re-shaping, their perceptions and self-conceptions as members of multiple communities of practice.

Aronson (2012) continues in this tradition by developing a curriculum for adult ESL students that encourages literacy in beginning level learners by focusing on the development of

first-person narrative. Personal narrative is taken as the ground for linguistic development: Aronson takes students through eight units that cover introductory English structures for the purpose of helping students communicate who they are and where they come from. Learners' personal histories become a vehicle for language acquisition, encouraging the development of learner identity and the emergence of L2 voice. On Aronson's view, autobiographical writing has a largely personal function; students construct autobiographies in order to develop classroom community, get to know one another, and develop individual voice in the L2. Further, as discussed above, such writing contextualizes students' lives at not only the local level, but at the level of community and society, as well.

2.5 The Participatory Frame: Sociocultural Pedagogy and Second Language Instruction

In the final two sections of this review, I turn to research on pedagogy and second language writing in order to examine ways in which narrative, agency, and identity may all be engaged within the second language classroom. The effects of sociocultural pedagogy on the development of learner identity at the micro-level and on ideological paradigms of language, race, and ethnicity at the macro-level have been treated in a variety of ways, but primarily through case studies and ethnographies. These forms of qualitative research enable interactive relationships with the participants and close observation in natural settings, both of which provide a means of discerning the internal and external micro-processes central to evaluation of critical pedagogy.

In their 1994 study of other-regulation in second language learning, Lantolf and Aljaafreh found that sociocultural methodologies were crucial in determining the level of feedback necessary for each individual learner. The study was conducted with 9 adult female ESL learners

that had placed into the same proficiency level class. Three of these nine students participated in Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) tutorials (L1s=Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese). Students volunteered to participate in once-weekly writing tutorials, where the tutor offered graduated and contingent feedback according to each learner's level of need. Through the process of one-on-one work, it became clear that in spite of having placed discretely into the same proficiency level, learners were actually quite disparate in what they were able to acquire in collaboration with an expert. The importance of this study is that it highlights the need for collaborative learning in evaluating each learner's actual level of proficiency; without feedback that is learner-oriented and contingent, it is impossible to determine where and in what fashion negative feedback is required for optimal learning. As this study focused on individual tutorials, however, it is necessary to extend its relevance to include means of implementing sociocultural techniques in a larger classroom.

Marta Anton, in her 1999 study on communicative discourse moves in the learner-centered classroom, addressed this need in part. Anton instigated a study of two first-year university EFL classes over the course of a semester. Both classes were at the elementary level. Anton focused on a French class and an Italian class, which conformed to learner-centered and teacher-centered approaches, respectively: while both classes made use of grammar explanation as part of the class, the Italian class offered limited opportunities for oral practice and focused largely on explanation followed by exercise correction. In the French class, on the other hand, most of the class time was used for pair and small group activities, providing ample opportunities for oral practice and contextualized language use. Over the course of her observation, Anton noted a variety of contrasting pedagogical techniques that had direct effects on learner engagement and the exercise of agency within the classroom. The "learner-centered classroom",

here, has as its specific referent the Vygotskian/sociocultural model of teaching/learning, where the learning process is conceived of as the result of the collaborative efforts of learner and expert. In the French classroom, the students were actively engaged; consistent with sociocultural theory, the collaborative atmosphere and implicit communication of collective responsibility for learning resulted in students who were highly responsive to communicative moves. In the Italian classroom, by contrast, students were almost entirely receptive, and showed little active mental participation. Instruction was directed at the students from the teacher, allowing almost no space for communication or interaction; even the five-minute period allocated for oral practice consisted in questions directed by the teacher to individual students. Anton concludes that

the analysis of teacher-learner interactive exchanges presented here shows that teachers, through dialogue, can lead learners to become highly involved in the negotiation of meaning, linguistic form, and rules for classroom behavior...when learners engage in negotiation with their teachers, the functions of scaffolded assistance are achieved by such communicative moves as directives, assisting questions, repetition, and nonverbal devices such as pauses and gesturing. (p. 314-315)

In contrast, she notes that the paucity of interaction in the teacher-centered classroom made scaffolded/negotiated assistance impossible, and consequently evidenced a significant reduction in student engagement. Studies like Anton's offer a look at what actual teachers can do to implement sociocultural methodologies in their classrooms, indicating that there are concrete and replicable tools available to all teachers.

However, theories of critical pedagogy are sometimes rather more easily adopted as aspirational than in terms of successful practice. Patricia Mayes (2010) conducted an ethnographic study of two ESL English composition classes at an American university that had, ostensibly, implemented a critical pedagogy two years previous to her study. Classes had sixteen students each. Mayes observed 21 of 22 meetings of one section of the class, and 22 of 23 meetings of the other section of the class, taking extensive field notes. She interviewed both teachers independently, and observed student-teacher conferences. While the instructors of the courses were oriented toward critical pedagogical techniques intended to support and increase learner agency (e.g., in interviews, teachers articulated a commitment to non-directive, student-centered techniques), Mayes found that these commitments were at odds with and inhibited by academic formats prescribed by school administrators. For example, though both instructors attempted to engage students in collaborative learning by encouraging active shaping of the assignment by the students, both also ultimately fell back on teacher-centered directives that directly related to the mandated curriculum. In other words, though both teachers expressed a desire to implement non-directive pedagogy, curricular expectations (in this case, in terms of final portfolios) drew them to make more explicit demands of their students. Mayes was particularly interested in the fact that the desire to implement critical pedagogy does not necessarily mean that desire will be easily realized if microprocesses within the classroom are not attended to. She concludes by suggesting that critical theories of pedagogy are not being successfully operationalized. This indicates a need for further research into concrete means by which such pedagogies can be realized in the classroom, particularly within public school classrooms (whether at primary, secondary, or tertiary levels) where the freedom of teachers and

students to co-construct the learning environment is hindered by state and federal policy measures for assessment.

Concrete pedagogies addressing learner needs in terms of identity are both crucial to students' success and largely lacking. Bashir-Ali's (2006) case study of the effect of attempts at social power positioning on second language acquisition further bolsters this point. Bashir-Ali performed a year-long case study in observation of a secondary school ESL student who had been in the United States for only two years. In spite of the brevity of her time in the country, this student had acquired such a high level of proficiency in African American English that she was able to claim mixed African descent and was fully accepted into the African American student population. Though Mexican, she denied this ethnic heritage in order to align herself with the "power" group within the school; ESL students were stigmatized and seen as "uncool", and so the student did everything she could to distance herself from the stigmatized group. Bashir-Ali notes that there is a significant lack in terms of ESL teachers' awareness of the social dynamics and questions of identity that may powerfully affect students' willingness to acquire Standard American English. Attention to the means by which non-native English speakers use English to re-construct and re-negotiate identities will have important implications for ESL teachers' abilities to develop pedagogical orientations that recognize and support such processes.

Discourse-level issues such as those pertaining to ideologies of race, ethnicity, and colonialism play a role here, as well. Motha (2006) focuses on ideologies of colonialization in public schools, suggesting that such national ideologies are both replicated and challenged at the local level, within schools and within classrooms. Motha conducted a year-long ethnographic study of four K-12 ESL teachers in the public school system on the East Coast of the United States. She gathered data from observations, formal and informal interviews, and from once or

twice monthly gatherings in her home, where she and the participants (or, as she terms them, “study partners”) met to discuss their experiences over the course of the school year. In terms of ideological reproduction, Motha noted that the privileging of monolingualism and the colonialist ideology of the inferiority of non-native English speakers, for example, was evidenced in: the teasing of ESL students by native speakers; ESL students’ shame regarding their non-native-like pronunciation, and disparagement of their native languages; and ESL students being located at the periphery of the school environment, largely segregated from the rest of the student body. However, Motha highlights the means by which ESL teachers are resisting these tendencies, and attempting to subvert and change them: standing up for students, integrating them into the broader social and educational environment, and hosting international fairs to familiarize monolingual students with the cultures of their bi-/multi-lingual peers. By analyzing the particular ways in which these teachers enact resistance, Motha offers a way of understanding how change can be effected at the local level.

Further, there are specific types of classroom projects indicated by work such as that of Bonnie Norton, whose 1995 article on social identity and investment suggests one significant way in which teachers can support learners’ acquisition of voice in the L2: through the use of collaborative, classroom-based, social research (for more on learners as community ethnographers, see also Johns, 1990, 1997). Social identity being multifaceted and evolutionary, it is important for learners to have the opportunity to investigate and examine the changing nature of their own identities, both as language-learners and as members of a new society the structures of which are often inequitable. Linguistic and ethnic marginalization position adult immigrant L2 English learners on the periphery of the broader social sphere, and they may not have the time or the opportunity to engage in meaningful interactions with members of the

dominant group. Nor are learners “free” to engage or not engage with target speakers in some atomistic sense of the word—freedom, as with agency above, is characterized by co-constructedness, and the ability to act is delimited by social positioning. “Investment” is Norton’s term for the complex variables which may either spur or inhibit learner engagement with target speakers with whom they have an inequitable social position. As opposed to conventional concepts of learner motivation, Norton’s treatment of investment acknowledges the effect of the very real social world in which learners are attempting to act on learners’ *ability* to act. Because learners are frequently at a sharp social and cultural distance from members of the dominant social group, and because that distance affects the process of identity negotiation as well as the process of language acquisition, Norton argues that “the second language teacher needs to help language learners claim the right to speak outside the classroom. To this end, the lived experiences and social identities of language learners need to be incorporated into the formal second language curriculum” (1995, p. 26). She suggests that collaborative, classroom-based social research—carried out by the learners themselves, in their communities, with the guidance of the teacher—is one method for showing learners how to understand the social nature of language, and helping them find ways to create engagement opportunities with target speakers.

Second language pedagogy is crucial to addressing the political space of the classroom, where individuals act collaboratively to construct both the learning environment and their own identities; however, there is a dearth of research into pedagogical tools that are feasible within the constraints of the average classroom. The present research addresses the ways in which learner’s local language use indicates continuous negotiation of identities within the classroom environment, and takes individual learner narratives to be essential in gaining a more

comprehensive understanding of the ways in which second language use may prompt learners to “re-write” both histories and identities. A curriculum that represents awareness of and sensitivity to these features of the language acquisition process is essential to altering macro-level discourses and the sociopolitical marginalization of linguistic, ethnic, racial, and cultural minorities.

2.6 Second Language Writing and Literacy

How can written narrative help students with language acquisition? What pedagogical tools and methods ought teachers implement in order to support both learner autonomy and the development of L2 literacy? If the purpose of the curriculum is to increase learners’ comfort and confidence in using the L2 while also communicating complex and self-reflective cognitive processes, how can teachers reduce the cultural and linguistic load in order to enable success?

The difficulty in answering these types of questions stems in part from the fact, noted above, that competency-based programming is the norm in adult community ESL. There is thus an unfortunate dearth of research on adult immigrant and refugee ESL learners (Kelly, Soundranayagam, & Grief, 2004)—not only on the ways in which they acquire language and cultural capital, but also on concrete tools that can support literacy acquisition in both the L1 and the L2, identity negotiation in the L2, development of learner agency, and empowered social positioning. Also, and as noted by Leki, Cumming, and Silva (2008), there is a curious lack of research into comprehensively principled curricula designed to facilitate L2 literacy. This is complicated by the fact that significant numbers of adult immigrants are preliterate or only marginally literate in their L1 (NCIIP, 2012), which makes acquisition of literacy skills in the L2 more challenging. However, organizations such as the National Center for the Study of Adult

Learning and Literacy (NCSALL), Low Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA), and the National Research and Development Centre for Adult Literacy and Numeracy (NRDC) have produced substantial and pertinent reports on the state of present programming in adult ESL and adult literacy programming, and have helped point out important directions in which researchers ought to move. There is also a substantial body of work addressing the needs of L2 writers in general, which, to the extent that adult immigrant ESL students are indeed L2 writers, can be applied to the present project.

This section is divided into two parts. First, I address the nature of L2 writing/writers, and the ways in which they differ from L1 writing/writers. Of special interest here are the ways in which adult immigrant ESL students have more in common with students of Standard English as a second dialect than with other ESL populations. Second, I review research and practice in the area of adult literacy, concluding that extant research in this area indicates a need for programming of the type I recommend herein.

2.6.1 The Nature of L2 Writing/Writers

Though once assumed to function similarly to L1 writers, it has become clear over the last twenty years that L2 writers face challenges that L1 writers do not, particularly when the L2 is English. Leki (1992) articulates four primary factors affecting L2 writing development: “linguistic complications, personal history with Standard Written English (SWE), cultural history, and emotional factors surrounding the effort to change dialects or languages” (p. 28). Important to note are the multiple ways in which adult ESL learners have much more in common

with students of Standard English as a second dialect than with K-12 ESL students or with international students in IEPs.

2.6.1.1 Linguistic Factors: In terms of linguistic factors, L2 writers face difficulty in manipulating grammatical forms in English with accuracy, irrespective of whether or not a learner's L1 differs greatly from the L2; however, higher levels of comfort with formal registers—frequent in ESL students—may be an advantage in academic writing (Leki, 1992). L2 writing ability has also been shown to correlate strongly with L2 grammatical ability (Leki et al., 2008). Composing in the L2 tends to be a much different process than in the L1: planning is more difficult, there is less of it, and it accomplishes less; there tends to be less re-reading of and reflection on written material; revising tends to be laborious and largely focused on editing for grammatical rules and spelling; and organization of material is more challenging (Silva, 1993). On the other hand, some studies have shown that, in higher proficiency L2 writers, L2 composing processes differ little from L1 processes (Leki et al., 2008). Composing in the L2 can also be difficult in terms of fluency of thought as related to the doubling of the cognitive load (academic writing + writing in the L2); when considering what to write about, learners may find their minds have gone “blank” (Fu, 2009). As a result, research indicates that L2 writers need more time: more time for planning, composing, writing, revising. Positive gains in writing development are reflected by higher proficiency in the L2, increased automaticity, more pre-writing time, less use of translation as a conscious strategy, more concern with the needs of the reader, and greater ability to choose between alternate wordings (Leki et al., 2008). Further, while additional *tasks* may not be indicated, additional *exposure* and experience is: exposure to grammar, rhetorical conventions, and to reading and writing generally (Leki, 1992). Finally, though the place of translation in L2 learning has been controversial, use of the L1 in composing

and drafting not only reduces the cognitive load but can serve as an important support in communicative tasks for developing writers, particularly at the beginning and intermediate levels (Fu, 2009). Additionally, Uzawa's (1996) study on L1 writing, L2 writing, and translation reported that participants found translation exercises to be more helpful than essay-writing in the L2 because they were pushed to use vocabulary and expressions somewhat beyond their current level.

2.6.1.2 Personal History with SWE: Leki (1992) notes that learners' personal histories with SWE will differ according to whether they are learning English as a second language or as a second dialect. Standard English as a Second Dialect (SESD) students are likely to come from poverty-stricken and marginalized communities, and, since English is their first language, errors in SWE are less likely to be forgiven by teachers (as compared to international students). Further, having grown up in an educational environment where SWE was privileged, SESD students, not yet having mastered academic writing, may suffer negative effects in terms of self-perception and identity (Leki, 1992). International students, on the other hand, may feel—and often actually are—significantly less stigmatized, especially since their future success often will not depend on mastery of SWE, while the opposite is likely true for SESD students. ESL students in an academic context generally have high self-esteem and are often highly literate in their L1, so that deficiencies in the L2 have a lesser effect on their sense of self (Leki, 1992). SESD students, on the other hand, may confront serious and profound damage to self-worth in the process of practicing SWE. This is one significant respect in which adult immigrant ESL students at the community education level are likely to share more in common with SESD students than with ESL students in IEPs, with the added difficulties that 1) unlike SESD students, they are not already fluent in English, and 2) they may be pre-literate or only

marginally literate in the L1, which poses challenges in terms of transfer of skills (Leki et al., 2008). Further, studies have shown that adult ESL students in the community education context often view literacy in English as either unattainable or unnecessary, contributing to learner resistance (ibid). Literacy as social practice (i.e., as a resource accessed as member of a group rather than as the possession of an individual), frequent among immigrants, may also interfere with learner motivation when it comes to acquisition of literacy skills (ibid).

2.6.1.3 Cultural History and Emotional Factors: As Leki notes (1992), different cultural beliefs about the status of writing and writers may influence ESL students' attitudes toward writing, both in the L1 and the L2. ESL students from cultures where writing/writers are celebrated members of society will likely have increased motivation to gain proficiency in L2 writing. This serves as an advantage for ESL students over SEDS students; because the L1 of SEDS students is a non-power dialect of English, they frequently view their own dialect as corrupted, ignorant, or rural (ibid, p. 33). SEDS students' lack of respect for their own dialect may interfere greatly with acquisition of SWE. Here, again, adult immigrant ESL students may have more in common with SEDS students than with international ESL students. To the extent that their L1 is a non-power dialect in the United States, all three groups (SEDS students, adult immigrant ESL students, and international students) are similar. However, international students typically come from privileged social spheres within their own countries, and as such have the potential ability to *identify* with privileged members of their own cultures (like distinguished writers). Adult immigrant ESL students, on the other hand, often come from marginalized populations within their own countries—for example, *campesinos* in Mexico and other parts of Latin America—and thus are significantly less likely to see themselves as capable of attaining prestigious positions even if their culture, in general, values writing/writers: the Spanish of

Mexican laborers is not the same as the Spanish of Mexican intellectuals. Thus while Leki is right to point out that cultural history can be an advantage for ESL students, it is important to keep in mind that not all ESL students participate in the same cultural history—even two students from the same country, with the same L1, may have much different self-perceptions in terms of both language and social capital. Adult immigrant ESL students are more likely than international students to see their L1 as a negative social marker, and, like SEDS students, to disparage their particular form of the L1, which can have negative implications for L2 educational attainment in general and L2 writing development in particular. Ironically, for students coming from marginalized populations, while the L1 itself may be seen as a negative social marker, *use* of the L1 may be an important practice in solidarity. As with SEDS students, the L1 serves to identify immigrants as members of what is often a tightly-knit (and sometimes oppositional) community of practice. Gaining proficiency in the L2 may be seen as a kind of betrayal of that community (“switching sides”), and, to that extent, it may be resisted (cf. Leki, 1992). Noting this affective complication serves to remind educators of the possible ambivalence learners may exhibit toward L2 acquisition, but should not discourage attempts to serve these populations. Indeed, and particularly for learners who lack or have weak L1 literacy skills, quality programming that takes into account and is responsive to learners’ multiple and complex needs can not only improve learners’ basic skills, but also their self-perceptions and their sense of self-efficacy (Lukes, 2009).

2.6.2 “I live in two cultures and I live in two languages”: Adult Basic Education and L2 Literacy

While the “survival skills” orientation to adult education can certainly help newcomer immigrants who need to acquire basic language skills that enable them to perform daily tasks

such as going grocery shopping or ordering a meal, this orientation is not sufficient to assist in the further development of language and social skills for those immigrants who have progressed beyond the remedial level. Further, adult education programs—constituted by ELLs at a rate of 40-50% (Wrigley, in press)—often serve as an entry point for both pre-/low-literate *and* highly educated immigrants. Such programs therefore have the opportunity to powerfully affect the lives of these incoming ELLs, but greater differentiation in curricula is necessary in order to best serve a heterogeneous population with varying needs. Changes in the U.S. citizenship exam also indicate a need for a greater focus on literacy skills in adult ESL education; where earlier versions of the test focused on interactional/conversational skills in English, current versions include tasks that require individuals to describe a series of pictures, both orally and in writing (Wrigley, in press); as a result, greater focus on narrative and descriptive skills is indicated.

It is also important to consider that, in the process of focusing on literacy skills, teachers may well fall into institutionalized patterns of transferring instrumental skills. Currie and Cray (2004) point out that writing tasks in adult immigrant ESL classes are often reduced to exercises that serve merely to teach spelling or structure. In their study of a community based, federally funded Canadian ESL program (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada, LINC), Currie and Cray collected data from 19 learners (ages 20-50) and six teachers via student interviews, teacher interviews, and classroom observations. All of the learners were literate in their L1, and all were legal residents of Canada but not yet citizens (in accordance with the strictures of the LINC program). As with other competency-based programs, LINC benchmarks only required students to construct simple clauses, largely for the purpose of filling out basic forms. Currie and Cray found that both students and teachers tended to view writing merely as language practice, rather than as socialization in community literacy practices. Discrete activities such as fill-in-the-

blank exercises were common, students were frequently asked to copy sentences containing irrelevant information (rather than referencing real-world needs), and little effort was made to discover what kinds of writing students actually did, or needed to do. Teachers expressed conviction in the importance of error correction, confirming use of writing as a tool for improving linguistic accuracy (controlled composition) rather than as a means of entering a community of practice. Programs that approach writing in this way adhere to writing paradigms that, uninformed by current research, favor form over function, and tend to view literacy as a language skill rather than attending to its important place as a social skill. However, for the sake of both literacy and identity development, it is important that writing not be reduced to mere language practice. Efforts to instill in learners an understanding of *why* and *to whom* they are writing, as opposed to merely focusing on the most literal view of *what* they are writing, turn the classroom into a place where learners can begin to explore literacy as a set of social practices: “practices associated with different domains of life that are purpose-ful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices” (Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, & Soler, 2002, p. 70).

However, although current research indicates that use of authentic, personally relevant material is most effective for both language and literacy acquisition (see, e.g., Hunter & Harman, 1985; D’Annunzio, 1994; Stasz, Schwartz, & Weedon, 1994; as cited in Purcell-Gates et al., 2002), Purcell-Gates, Degener, and Jacobson (1998) found that an overwhelming majority of adult literacy programs (73%; n=197) used activities and materials in the classroom that were somewhat to highly life-decontextualized (mass-produced and mass-prescribed), in circumstances that were somewhat to highly teacher-directed. Acknowledging debate over the operationalization of the term “authentic”, Purcell-Gates et al. (2002) specify that in this context “authentic” should be taken as referencing “literacy events that researchers have documented as

mediating people's social and cultural lives" (p. 74). In other words, literacy uses that do not occur in people's lives outside the classroom cannot be taken to be authentic. This real-life/school-life distinction is relevant, and important, in light of research indicating that students learn most efficiently when teaching materials incorporate their prior experiences, and when classroom activities are founded on themes taken from learners' actual lives (Purcell-Gates et al., 2002).

2.7 Conclusion

As Cruz Maria, a participant in Buttaro and King's (2001) study of adult ESL learners, said, "I live in two cultures and I live in two languages" (p. 41). Adult ESL learners, in acquiring English language and literacy skills, are learning to navigate a new social environment, and to negotiate identity within that environment. Drawing on learners' lives in the context of language and literacy instruction validates the social, cultural, and linguistic capital these learners already possess, and helps forge a bridge between the (sometimes multiple) worlds they already inhabit. Literacy curricula that take learners' lives seriously and engage learners as participants in the process of program development have the potential to better serve actual learner needs, and to empower learners who are often multiply marginalized: racially, ethnically, linguistically, socially, and politically.

Chapter Three: Rationale

3.1 Introduction

An ESL curriculum that addresses agency and identity in the context of second language instruction is both sorely needed and critically important, particularly for adult community education language learners. In what follows, I address this need by proposing a rationale for using autobiographical narrative in the second language classroom. First, I revisit the concept of narrative in terms of literacy that is transformative at the personal level. Second, I argue for the benefits of understanding literacy as a social practice. Finally, I discuss the importance of dialogue, oral and written, for both transformative practice and literacy development.

3.2 Narrativizing One's Life: Literacy as Personal Transformation

Research has shown that identity, language, and agency are intertwined in delicate and complex ways. One's language plays a part in shaping one's identity, specifically as identity is performed through language use. Identity and agency are co-constructed through language at the level of the individual as well as at the level of the group, and narrative has been shown to be a powerful means of integrating past and present selves through language. As mentioned above, however, this process of narrativizing a life is not inevitable. Sometimes, especially when great trauma has been undergone, it is too difficult to make sense of certain events, events that may be best understood as un-understandable (such as with survivors of the Holocaust, Mishler's (2006) example). Other times, it is simply that people are not encouraged to put their lives into narrative perspective. Unfortunately, failing to successfully narrativize one's life can lead to troubling consequences of alienation from self and surroundings (c.f. Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000).

Further, writing as practice has several benefits in terms of language acquisition and literacy development. In most community ESL programs, “literacy” skills have largely been reduced to basic reading skills. Students are often not required to master any type of writing beyond that necessary for simple daily/work-related tasks. However, I argue that writing can be seen to have a powerful effect on the development of the self, and should thus be taken as an essential part of serving student needs. Mimi Schwartz’s (1987) reflection on her experiences incorporating autobiographical narrative into a university composition course gives an idea of what is possible when writing is pursued not merely for utilitarian purposes, but as a means of developing the whole person. In her freshman composition courses, Schwartz assisted novice, native-English-speaking writers to develop their style and voice as they pursued writing as a problem-solving mechanism that helped them gain insight into personal struggles. By encouraging these young writers to approach writing as a means of developing not only a skill, but also their *selves*, Schwartz helped her students gain important problem-solving skills and self-confidence. For adult ESL students who are coping with culture-shock, linguistic isolation, poverty, unemployment, social and political marginalization, and oftentimes diminished life prospects, this type of practice can be invaluable in helping them regain a sense of power in the face of overwhelming circumstances.

Narrativizing one’s life can also illuminate possible stumbling blocks in the pursuit of literacy and linguistic competence by situating language development in the context of learners’ intergenerational sociopolitical trajectories as members of various social groups (Menard-Warwick, 2005). Asking students to take their own life experiences as fodder for linguistic and personal development validates those experiences, reduces the cognitive load, and offers a means for students to draw *from* their history *into* their present. As Nicholas, Rossiter, & Abbott have

argued, “personal stories can also be used to illustrate hope and healing, portraying writers ‘as survivors rather than victims and as persons who ha[ve] shown courage and a capacity to endure’” (2011, p. 251). In other words: writing one’s life has the potential to edify, to educate, to enliven, and to transform. Teachers ought not ask students to give up their histories that they may find success, but rather that they understand their histories as part of their present. As Lloyd (1954) elegantly puts it,

If we find anything that we have to change – and we do – we know that we are touching something that goes deep into students’ pasts and spreads wide in their personal lives. We will seek not to dislodge one habit in favor of another but to provide alternative choices for a freer social mobility. We seek to enrich, not to correct . . . By respecting students’ traditions and the people from whom they come, *we teach them to respect and to hold tight to what they have as they reach for more.* (Lloyd, 1954, p. 40, as cited in Smitherman, 2003, p. 13; emphasis added)

3.3 Words and Worlds: Literacy as Social Practice

As all knowledge is situated knowledge (Moya, 2011), so is all language use situated, or contextual. This is to say that the words we choose, as with the knowledge we have access to, emerge not from some objective view of what is real, but rather from a particular socio-historical and cultural standpoint. Words invoke worlds: they carry with them ideologies, histories, and subjectivities. More significantly, Bakhtin (1986) argues that words as signs and symbols of meanings emerge primarily, if not solely, at the inter-individual level; what we mean to say, or to

write, depends not only on personal intention, but on contextual reception. Any use of words, therefore, “cannot escape this sharing and struggle over words” (Purcell-Gates, Degener, & Jacobson, 2006, p. 30). As a result, the meaning of what is read or written, as well as the meaning of the acts of reading and writing, is always contextual—always social.

Understanding literacy as a social practice that is concerned primarily with function and meaning is crucial because literacy, as with language, is very often about power. Too often, instructors in language programs erroneously expect that novice learners will be able to produce error-free imitations of texts composed by experts. This is neither a possible nor a reasonable language goal, but more importantly, and at its root, such a task serves primarily to socialize learners into a hierarchy of power. Encouraging learners to pull from their own experiences, on the other hand, and to use those experiences to stake a claim within a community, has the potential to transform not only their language proficiency, but their social lives as such. Fingeret (1991) notes a significant triad of powers literacy programs have the capacity to support in learners:

When literacy programs help students come to know, reflect upon and express their own meanings, we help students come into their power: instrumental power (they can do new things); personal power (they feel more capable of doing new things); and political power (those who have been poor and disenfranchised can begin to demand a new voice as citizens). (pp. 8-9).

One example of a way in which literacy as social practice can facilitate political agency is offered by Duffy (2004), who reports on civic engagement as a means of pushing literacy acquisition for the Hmong population in Wisconsin. Duffy documents a years-long public

exchange between members of the Hmong refugee community and “native” denizens of a small town in Wisconsin. Anti-immigrant letters-to-the-editor began appearing in the mid-1980s, “accusing the Hmong of abusing the welfare system, refusing to learn English, and eating local dogs” (Duffy, 2004, p. 224). At the time, few Hmong participated in the debate, as most did not speak English on arrival, and many were not literate in any language. However, by the mid-1990s, members of the Hmong professional class began responding; the impulse to respond to anti-immigrant rhetoric in the local newspaper led these members of the Hmong community to engage in social literacy practice. Duffy found that immigrants not only gained high levels of skill in manipulating the genres in question (the letter to the editor and the op-ed) but also evidenced sophisticated ability to turn anti-immigrant rhetoric on its head as a part of oppositional practice. In this way, the Hmong (many of whom were pre- or non-literate in the L1) used rhetoric intended to suppress as a means of acquiring and developing an important form of public writing. Duffy suggests that adult ESL programs that tend to focus on “workplace literacy” would do well to incorporate social genres of writing, and that a focus on engaged rhetoric can be a powerful tool in promoting language and literacy development (2004, p. 247). He also notes that the use of personal narrative here is significant, in that narrative arguments are “fundamentally democratic” (ibid., p. 238) and universal; in other words, in relying on personal narrative as an argument or appeal, the Hmong were positioning themselves as members of the human community, in contradiction to the rhetoric of “Otherness” invoked by anti-immigrant residents.

Personal narrative is thus a particular textual genre that teachers can use to offer writing instruction that better serves learner needs in terms of discourse socialization (with respect to

social genres) and language acquisition, while also supporting the development and expression of learner voice, identity, and agency in the L2. As Miller (2004) notes,

[T]he use of personal narratives is one of the most naturalistic and motivating of all possible texts...exposure to the possibility of reading and writing stories is potentially the best way to develop both human understanding and language proficiency. Another vital function of narrative is also to locate the student as an identity, and an ‘agent’ within a particular social and cultural world. But stories not only reveal agency, they also provide a forum to actually exercise agency and control within the learning context. (p. 22)

My argument herein is that providing learners with means and methods for exercising and developing agency, for accessing personal histories and integrating those histories into the present, and for entering a community of practice within which they may establish themselves as conscious and critical participants is crucial to the second language classroom, and most effectively accomplished through the writing of personal narrative.

3.4 Je est un autre: Discovering Self and Other in Dialogue

Dialogue must play a central role in a curriculum that aims to explicitly engage learner identities and histories. Engaging with words, with meanings, with subjectivities and histories, depends upon engaging substantively with those around us. To speak of “dialogue” is to speak of the intersective dialectic of self and other; dialogue is the space within which words and worlds meet and mutually constitute one another. But dialogue need not be limited to spoken dialogue; written language, too, takes the audience of an Other as its focus, and enables development of the capacity to understand and express one’s self. Even the personal journal, where one’s audience is

one's self, provides the opportunity for delving into that dialectic between self and other: the space between who I *am*, and who I *is*.

The "I is" (or the "je est" in Rimbaud's famous line) in this context is a symbolic articulation of the internal distance/dissonance between the self as familiar and knowable, and the self as alien and other. It becomes most salient in contexts, such as second language acquisition, where one's assumptions about what is articulable are thrown into high relief in confrontation of one's limited ability, or lack of ability, to communicate with others. This breakdown in externally-oriented meaning transference leads to recognition (whether conscious or no) of one's own internal displacement, or, as expressed earlier, the decentering of identity. But just as the displacement/decentering itself arises out of confrontation with another, so must the re-centering occur; orientation, and re-orientation, occur not in isolation, but always relative to social, historical, political, and cultural contexts. As Marchenkova (2008) observes, "Any class is, first and foremost, a group of persons whose self-identities manifest themselves only when there are other identities to whom their voices are addressed" (p. 58). In the process of dialogical interaction at both intra- and inter-individual levels, all participants—students as well as teacher—are presented with the opportunity to engage the liminal space that exists between worlds, as between words. Indeed, it is only in context of dialogue that we can hope to engage that space, and, by entering into it, to find both self and students transformed.

But dialogue is not only integral to the process of self-transformation, it is also essential to literacy development. In context of literacy classes, dialogue may consist in oral discussion, partner journals, and personal narratives, as well as in the interaction between reader and text. Associating meaning with print is a foundational component in becoming fully literate, and for learners who either lack L1 literacy or who have had L1 literacy development interrupted,

connecting oral dialogue with text becomes crucial in the process of gaining L2 literacy. Blanton (2005) explores precisely this feature of literacy development in her examination of the experiences of two would-be immigrant writers, Meseret and Tran (L1s=Amharic and Vietnamese, respectively), who, in spite of high levels of oral proficiency in English, found themselves stalled in the process of attaining sufficient proficiency in written English to allow them to succeed at university. Though both were long-time students of English, neither had progressed in L1 literacy development past the age of 11 or 12. After that point, literacy development in the L1 virtually halted, and use of written English was limited to discrete exercises such as fill-in-the-blank activities. When they arrived in Blanton's classroom, a New Orleans university IEP, they had insufficient literacy in the L1 to enable transfer of skills to the L2, and so foundered in a writing program that focused on academic composition. Had they been fully literate in the L1, Blanton argues, teaching L2 composition would have been profitable; but lacking sufficient literacy skills, they had no foundation from which to proceed. Meseret and Tran, being only minimally literate in any language, lacked a relationship with print text; and because college level ESL programs focus on L2 composition rather than on literacy development, their ESL classes did not help them in developing that relationship.

Blanton argues that being literate consists fundamentally in having a meaningful relationship with texts. Literacy requires that we recognize the connections between two symbolic codes, and that we appropriate the means by which to exploit those connections in pursuit of expressing our own thoughts and experiences. Meseret and Tran exhibited much higher levels of syntactic and grammatical control, as well as more naturalistic style, when they were writing personal emails to Blanton, as opposed to composing essays in response to a prompt; according to Blanton, lacking a context for the communications, lacking a clear

audience, and attempting to write on a subject about which they did not necessarily have anything to say were all contributing factors in this discrepancy. Before they could begin to create successful (or even comprehensible) academic compositions, Meseret and Tran needed to establish foundational literacy skills through the creation of written pieces which mimic the highly contextualized nature of speech. These skills would enable them to eventually bridge into decontextualized forms of writing, such as are required at university.

For learners with limited and/or interrupted patterns of literacy development, the first step, then, must be to engage in dialogue with texts through reading, oral discussion, and written responses. They must begin to see that they can “disagree with what they read, relate it to a different topic, and/or apply what they’ve gotten from one text to another and/or to the world around them” (Blanton, 2005, p. 113). Once learners recognize the connections between these two symbolic systems (print and speech), their writing may evolve toward divergence with speech, as it must for academic success. But the first step is to make that connection in the first place, and story-telling—putting one’s self in dialogue both with one’s own life and with others—can be that bridge.

3.5 Conclusion

The study and production of narrative texts, particularly for developing writers, offers a means of bridging not only a linguistic gap, but a sociopolitical gap. Reading and writing personal histories can help develop critical literacy skills by introducing learners to a community of practice within which they can participate almost immediately while allowing them the space to orient themselves within that community, socially and linguistically. As Hodges and Davies (2013) emphasize,

narratives are not stable or static, even when retold by the same individual. The complexities of people's lives, not least those experiencing migration, are only ever partially caught in the narratives that sometimes straddle, and attempt to synthesise [sic], radically different worlds. (p. 1)

It is my position that while analysis of narrative texts can offer learners tools for linguistic and textual discovery, the production of such texts, through and in response to dialogue, provides the opportunity to synthesize those discoveries—linguistic, social, personal, and political.

Chapter Four: The Curriculum

Using Autobiographical Narrative in Second Language Instruction

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I outline a curriculum for the use of autobiographical narrative in second language instruction. As has been discussed above, adult immigrant ESL students have very distinct needs from international students, and from K-12 ESL students. Rather than addressing those needs comprehensively, however, a plurality of programs in organizations serving adult students tend to focus only on competency-based curricula that, while addressing certain basic daily needs (i.e., “survival” skills), are not sufficient to empower students to transform their social and political lives. A curriculum that incorporates a focus on writing in the form of personal narrative has the potential to socialize learners into a new community of practice, to enable identity negotiation and identity construction in the L2, and to increase learner agency and sense of self-efficacy. Further, such a curriculum provides learners with foundational literacy skills that may assist in eventual involvement in more advanced professional and academic arenas.

4.2 Target Population

The target population for this curriculum is adult (18+ years old) immigrant ESL learners of diverse L1 backgrounds. The curriculum is aimed at learners with approximate oral and writing proficiencies in English of low-advanced (Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System [CASAS], Level C). CASAS Level C in *Basic Skill Level Descriptors for Writing*

indicates writing abilities that include: ability to perform basic writing for daily tasks (such as filling out government forms or incident reports); ability to describe work-related activities in writing; and ability to write personal notes and letters (CASAS, 2006). Writing proficiency in English is anticipated to be lower than oral proficiency for most students, in virtue of variable educational backgrounds combined with the minimal focus on writing in most adult ESL programs, but this curriculum does assume developing literacy skills in the L2; it is not aimed at students with emerging L2 literacy skills (for a related curriculum that addresses low-level students, see Aronson, 2012). Students should be familiar with the Roman alphabet, be able to compose simple sentences, and be able to decode extended, if basic, texts in English, with a base receptive vocabulary consisting of approximately 85% of the 2000 most common words (as evaluated by Version 1 of the *Vocabulary Levels Test*; see Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001)¹. However, literacy in the L1 is not assumed; though L1 literacy has important implications for developing L2 literacy, it is not uncommon for adult students to lack L1 literacy skills, and at present there are simply too few programs that offer L1 literacy instruction to make L1 literacy a requirement for participation, provided the L2 proficiency is met (for an example of one program that addresses development of L1 literacy, see Lukes, 2009).

In terms of educational and professional goals, this program is founded in the belief that the curriculum will be beneficial for all learners, regardless of disparities in expressed professional goals, and assumes that student aspirations may change over time. Thus the curriculum does not differentiate between students who plan, for example, to gain or retain entry-level work and those who plan to eventually enter an English-speaking university.

¹ Vocabulary testing resources publicly available at Norbert Schmitt's website:
<http://www.norbertschmitt.co.uk/resources.html>

4.3 Theoretical Background

This curriculum takes root in sociocultural theory and critical pedagogy. Underpinning both of these theoretical perspectives is the belief that education and literacy are not merely about acquiring instrumental skills. Rather, learning in general, and learning to write in particular, are social processes that invoke learner identities, cultural and social histories, social and economic realities, processes of marginalization, and suppression of voices. Taking literacy seriously as a critical social practice with liberatory potential is thus the driving motivation of this curriculum.

In part as a result of this motivation, the curriculum leans heavily on the concept of curriculum as praxis. To approach curriculum as praxis means to approach it as a manifestation of the intersection of theory and practice: as the place where what we believe and what we do come together, and shape one another. Importantly, such an orientation requires instructors to teach reflectively, and reflexively; it also requires that facilitation of a truly participatory classroom be a primary goal. Participatory, here, means more than simply “learner-centered”. In the context of this curriculum, a participatory classroom is one in which the content, and not only the processes, of the curriculum are taken from learners’ lives, and one in which learners are actively involved in shaping the curriculum (see Auerbach, 1993, for a succinct explanation of what participatory education entails). Effectively, this means that each manifestation of the curriculum proposed here will, and should, vary from classroom to classroom, in response to the needs, desires, and interests of the learners in that classroom.

The liberatory orientation of both pedagogy and curriculum has certain practical implications for the classroom setting, which I will briefly touch on here. Subverting hierarchical and received power structures is essential within this framework; rather than viewing the teacher as the fund of knowledge and the students as the recipients, teacher and students are recognized as co-participants in the process of mutual construction of knowledge. Because individual subjectivities necessarily play a powerful role in shaping group dynamics, and because students will almost inevitably be members of marginalized groups, it is incumbent upon teachers, especially but not exclusively when they are members of a more dominant group, to understand and hold in the forefront of their minds that the marginalization of these students, while perhaps non-arbitrary, is nevertheless a historically contingent and not an absolute feature of their identities. Viewing students as absolutely, rather than as historically, marginalized leads to the risk of a paternalistic relationship that objectifies the learners, however benevolently; and to the extent that learners are objectified, so too is the teacher.

On the other hand, in making a conscious effort to empower students within and without the classroom, teachers must also be sure to retain their role as teachers, rather than assume the role of mere facilitator. To blur the lines between expert and novice is to acknowledge the subjectivities and knowledge-bases of all participants; to mask it entirely is to abdicate responsibility. The teacher's role in this context is to guide learners toward critical engagement with personally and socially relevant themes/ideas/realities. Taking that role seriously means recognizing differences in skills, and bringing one's own knowledge into the classroom dialectic. "To leave the learning solely to the student is not indicative of an ultimate belief in the inherent power and abilities of the students. Rather, such laissez-faire facilitating is actually an abdication

of their responsibilities as teachers and essentially and ultimately oppressive, manipulative, and dishonest” (Purcell-Gates & Waterman, 2000, p. 209). Teachers must be conscientious in developing a pedagogical balance between encouraging empowerment and class control in students, on the one hand, and offering their own insights as guides for dialogue and critique, on the other.

4.4 Needs Analysis

I assume that at least one of the motivations target learners will have for taking this class is the desire to improve English language literacy: to become better readers and, especially, better writers. Beyond this most general assessment, however, it is necessary to gather individual data in order to determine specific learner needs and goals. Following Brown (1995), I developed a learner survey for self-reporting of needs, which has been included here as *Appendix A*. The survey consists of six sections: 1) General Information, 2) Education, 3) Writing in Your First Language, 4) Writing in English, 5) Future Plans, and 6) Goals for This Course.

The **first section** aims to gather basic demographic information about each student; name, residence, home country, age, sex, L1, any other languages spoken, and any other languages in which learners have literacy skills. The **second section** is a brief survey of educational background, both in the learner’s home country, and, if applicable, in the United States. The purpose here is to get a sense of what sort of academic experience the learner has had to this point, in order to contextualize both learner abilities and ultimate goals. The **third and fourth sections** consist of questions designed to appraise learner literacy in both L1 and English.

Survey items in these sections are based on a 5-point Likert model when soliciting self-appraisal of ability, likes/dislikes, and frequency of literacy events. When soliciting information about the types of literacy events the learner participates in, or types of writing the learner has had previous instruction in, a reasonably comprehensive list of options is offered from which to choose, along with an “other” option, allowing learners to identify any events not listed. The **fifth and sixth sections** of the survey are designed to elicit information regarding learner needs as they relate directly to future life goals. Though the sixth section focuses on learner goals for the course, the questions will help me determine more specifically how course material can be adjusted to suit each learner, and can be seen as an extension of the articulation of general life goals in the fifth section.

This survey is designed to be implemented in context of personal interviews with students. Because learner literacy levels in English are expected to be somewhat to significantly lower than their oral/aural proficiency levels, allowing space for conversation will enable me to explain any survey questions, and to ask follow-up questions as necessary (Brice, 2012). Results of the survey, in conjunction with classroom dialogue, will be used to help shape the content and focus of the curriculum.

4.5 Overview of Curriculum

Designed to span a ten week period (six contact hours per week) as a subset of a more generalized program, this module is intended to help learners with developing literacy skills in English achieve the following goals:

- to solidify a meaningful connection between text and talk,
- to become more comfortable expressing themselves in both oral and written English,
- to increase ability to access and make sense of narrative texts, and
- to gain confidence in communicating their own histories, meanings, and subjectivities in their daily lives.

Class meetings will revolve around three focal activities: reading activities based on the reading text; oral discussion of the generative themes emerging from that text; and writing (including responses to the text, responses to oral discussion, and composition of narratives). In accordance with a focus on authentic materials and authentic literacy events (Purcell-Gates et al., 2002), the generative themes emerging from the reading text will be used to access learners' lives, allowing students' particular interests/histories to shape further discussion and written responses. I will use personal journals and dialogue journals as bridge activities that move learners from pure invention toward composition, and the final product for the module will be each learner's personal narrative, which will be developed over the course of the class and published in the final week.

The foundational reading text should be one that reflects attention to learner histories while showcasing the personal narrative genre. I have chosen *Nzingha: Warrior Queen of Matamba* (McKissack, 2000), a book written in the form of a personal diary and detailing the life events of a native Angolan princess in the mid-16th century. *Nzingha* is targeted at the 5th-6th grade reading level for native English speakers, and is based on historical events (Scholastic). In terms of content, *Nzingha* relates details of life in Africa during the time of Portuguese colonialism, and as such, deals with many important themes that enable discussion of issues that

are common to learners in the adult community immigrant population, who frequently come from Africa, Southeast Asia, and Central and South America (NCSALL, 2003). The overarching theme of the text is that of the tension between colonialism and the search for self-actualization; sub-themes include the importance of writing; trust/betrayal; the value of place/land; parental/family relations; gender roles; hierarchies of power; rites of passage; traditional foods/medicines; holidays/celebrations; and courage in times of uncertainty. Following the Freirean concept of generative themes, this curriculum takes the above listed themes, severally, as central to each portion of the class, and uses the themes to engage learner lives.

I have divided the ten weeks of the module into five two-week thematic units that attempt to ground learner experience in personally relevant connections to the primary text, *Nzingha*, while remaining flexible enough to allow for deeper exploration of a given theme, or exploration of an emergent theme. Readings from *Nzingha* will provide opportunities for learners to engage with a model narrative that touches on issues directly relevant to their own experiences—issues such as cultural conflicts in a colonial/post-colonial environment, power and gender struggles within traditional communities, and questions of how to negotiate commitment to one’s own heritage in the face of external/foreign influence. Literacy development will be based around the construction of personal written narratives, which will be developed in successive stages of drafting and revision.

The central writing task of the module is the **narrative writing project**. While it is not uncommon that learners are asked to write about personal issues (family, holidays at home, preferences, etc.) in language classes, this project is distinct in that it pushes learners to use writing as an heuristic tool rather than simply as a means of stating simple facts. Further, the

project differs from conventional adult education writing instruction in its being oriented not only toward the more humanistic process theory of writing, but also toward socioliterate and discourse theories of L2 writing that approach literacies as multiple and as embedded within social practices (see Ferris and Hedgcock, 2013). The narrative writing project pulls from Leki's (1991/1992) sequenced writing assignment (SWA), which seeks to empower writers by asking each student to become an expert in a chosen area of research. In Leki's SWA, authorial confidence is increased as learners acquire a knowledge base through research while simultaneously expanding their expressive abilities through successive writing assignments that build upon one another (in contrast to completion of a series of discrete writing tasks). The project I exposit here is similar to Leki's assignment in that it conceives of the narrative in terms of process and development rather than in terms of product, while stimulating learners to become experts in their area. However, it differs in that, rather than asking students to research a topic that is new to them, I ask students to take their own lives as material. As each new theme from *Nzingha* is presented and explored through class reading and dialogue, learners will have the opportunity to reflect on and add to their own narrative, whether in context of journal writing or narrative composition. The revision process will be similarly additive, and learners will have the opportunity to revise earlier portions of their narrative in light of new articulations and conversations. As a result, learners will have the chance to re-orient their life stories continuously as they engage with the process of discovery facilitated by writing.

Dialogue, both written and oral, is the cornerstone of this curriculum. Focus will be on facilitating dialogue by posing open-ended questions that invite learners to engage in reflective discussion of their own expectations (of the text, of the teacher, and of each other) and

experiences. A truly participatory classroom, in which critical dialogue is a central component, depends upon the development of a sense of community within the classroom, and, as noted above, a blurring of the lines between expert/novice. However, development of community does not necessarily happen spontaneously. To this end, initial activities will involve informal tasks or projects designed to help put learners at ease with the instructor and with one another, while validating participant histories/experiences and enabling participants to get to know one another better.

4.6 Module Schedule and Description of Activities

The following schedule includes page references to the reading text, *Nzingha*, and descriptions of class activities. A simplified version of the schedule is available under *Appendix B*, and included in **Table 1** (below).

<u>I. Introduction to Writing</u>	
Week 1: Introductions (to each other, the course, personal narrative, and the writing process)	Week 2: Use/importance of writing, invention techniques, begin journals (<i>Nzingha</i> , pp. 3-13)
<u>II. Home</u>	
Week 3: Place/Home; explanation of narrative writing project, commencement of literature circles (<i>Nzingha</i> , pp. 14-24)	Week 4: Family/relationships; collaborativewriting, oral storytelling (<i>Nzingha</i> , pp.25-35)
<u>III. Society</u>	

Week 5: Gender roles; narrative composition, discussion of revision process (<i>Nzingha</i> , pp. 36-46)	Week 6: Power; ongoing revision (<i>Nzingha</i> , pp. 47-57)
<u>IV. Ritual</u>	
Week 7: Food/Medicine; ongoing revision (<i>Nzingha</i> , pp. 58-68)	Week 8: Rites of Passage/Celebrations; reflection on developing narratives (<i>Nzingha</i> , pp. 69-79)
<u>V. Connections</u>	
Week 9: Tying it All Together (Nzingha's wedding) (<i>Nzingha</i> , pp. 80-86)	Week 10: Publishing/Final Reflections

I. Introduction to Writing

Week 1: Introductions (to each other, the course, personal narrative, and the writing process)

The first two-week thematic unit, “Introduction to Writing”, focuses on personal introductions and considers the uses and purposes of writing. As an introduction to the class, I will have students participate in paired interviews, where both they and I can engage in one-on-one conversation for the purpose of learning more about one another. This type of activity is particularly helpful in raising awareness of both individual and group histories, goals, and aspirations, toward the end of fostering mutual understanding and facilitating the development of meaningful interpersonal relationships. However, learners, on meeting one another for the first time, may not feel entirely comfortable questioning their peers freely, and their English proficiencies will constrain the types of questions they are able to construct. Because of this, I

will scaffold the interview activity by introducing some guiding questions from the learner survey, previously administered, to be used as a starting point: for example, “Where are you from?”, “What languages do you speak?”, “How long have you lived in the United States?”, “What kind of writing do you use?”, and “What do you want to learn in this class?” Follow-up questions from other students will be explicitly encouraged, and modeled by me, in order to begin shaping a participatory and responsive class dynamic.

In the first week, I will collect writing samples from each student in order to better evaluate actual learner abilities, introduce the writing process, and familiarize learners with pre-writing and invention techniques. I will assess learners’ receptive vocabulary base and design strategies to help increase vocabulary, particularly knowledge of the most common 2,000 words (General Service List; see West, 1953). I will also introduce learners to the **core features of the personal narrative genre** through discussions of cross-cultural story-telling practices and an orientation to the primary rhetorical features of *Nzingha*. Because much of a reader’s ability to predict content derives from understanding of genre, one of the first and key tasks should be to familiarize students with narrative. I will instigate class discussion by eliciting commentary on the meaning/nature of “story”: what a story is, what its function is, who tells stories, and why people tell them. As part of this introduction, I will model story-telling for the class by telling a simple tale about an important event in my life. I will then have volunteers share their own stories, and/or have students tell short personal stories with a partner. Students will be encouraged to tell their story in their native language if they wish (Fu, 2009), using gesture and pictures drawn on the board to supplement their narrative. This will increase both comfort and confidence, as well as adding a touch of playfulness and creativity to the classroom dynamic.

Acceptable narrative structure often varies culturally, and I will engage students, where appropriate, in discussion of differences in *how* students tell their stories in order to increase awareness of contrasting rhetorical styles. To connect to *Nzingha*, I will subsequently invite the class to speculate on what we might find in the text, based on the title, the cover picture, and their understanding of what narrative does/is like.

Week 2: Use/importance of writing, invention techniques, begin journals (*Nzingha*, pp. 3-13)

Beginning from week two of the module, learners will experiment with personal journal writing, and will springboard from this activity to collaborative brainstorming and dialogue journals. Learners will use the **personal journals** to explore their ideas and responses to textual themes and classroom discussion in an activity that reflects the discursive and inherently flexible nature of oral dialogue. In this way, the personal journal serves as a first step from conversation to written text, as well as familiarizing learners with the generative process of writing as practice. Journal writing will at first be incorporated into class time, but as they become more comfortable with the activity learners can continue their journaling outside of class, as well.

As an introduction to invention and pre-writing strategies, the entire class can **brainstorm** collaboratively. Students should be encouraged to take the lead in this activity, with one student at a time serving as “recorder” and compiling class ideas on the board. This practice will give learners who are more comfortable expressing themselves orally a chance to articulate their ideas (whether about the reading, or about their own lives) in speech before attempting to articulate those same ideas in writing. It also gives students an opportunity to stimulate one another through dialogical interaction, and gives the teacher a chance to activate reflective

thought through intentional inquiry (i.e., questions designed to spur critical reflection). Further, this type of activity makes explicit and collaborative an important part of the writing process that learners may not be familiar with, and with which they may require scaffolding before they are capable of successfully and comfortably accomplishing it on their own.

I will also incorporate **dialogue journals**, which offer a rich opportunity to develop writing confidence and comfort with self-expression while transitioning from ego-centric writing to a more formal, academic style (Hadaway & Young, 2006). As an extension of the personal journal, dialogue journals enable learners to continue in the practice of connecting conversation with writing while introducing an audience external to the student herself. This begins the transition toward writing for an abstract audience, necessary for successful academic prose. Such activities also engage learners in a continuous, written conversation (Leki et al., 2008), a useful method of connecting text and talk and of encouraging self-expression. Dialogue journals are best employed as partner journals, where students are paired up and asked to discuss a topic through subsequent and successive entries in a shared journal. I will provide writing prompts that tie into textual themes and elicit student perspectives on both reading and class discussion (see *Appendices C and D*).

In week two, students will also begin to read the primary text, *Nzingha*, and will start to connect the written text with meaningful oral communication through **vocabulary-building** activities, and **reading activities** that support development of reading proficiency. ESL students with limited literacy skills require rich scaffolding of content, not only vocabulary or morphology, in order to increase both comprehension of texts and confidence in approaching them (Gibbons, 2002). Basic readers also often rely too heavily on graphophonic cues, and as a

result read very slowly and arduously. Emphasis in this module will be on developing students' familiarity with the narrative genre, in order to enable them to more accurately predict what they will read, and to increase their familiarity with features of the sorts of texts they themselves will be writing. Additionally, I will focus on teaching global comprehension techniques that will support increased confidence in tackling other unfamiliar texts. Students will also gain increased independence from the individual words of a text as they develop their ability to infer overall meaning, which ability is essential for reading fluency in general, and particularly when attempting to decode a text containing frequent unfamiliar words (which, for lower-level ESL adults, is often necessary).

One of the first activities I will implement will be to **read from the text aloud** while students follow along in their books. This is an important means of modeling reading for the learners, as well as reinforcing accurate sound-letter correspondence and connecting text with talk. Though reading aloud is often used only with young readers, Gibbons (2002) notes that it is very useful with adult readers, as well, and increases reading competence by showing how experienced readers "make" meaning. As a follow-up, I will initiate choral reading by the students, which can be a helpful method for improving phonological processing and teaching sound-letter correspondence (CAELA, 2007). However, such readings will be short and focused. Once students become more comfortable with one another, I may also incorporate shared or partner-readings, where students read together and/or take turns reading aloud to one another. These methods of connecting oral and written language will be echoed when students begin constructing their own texts.

Though emphasis will be on reading for overall meaning, tasks that help students read for detail will also be included. Skills such as skimming and scanning will be explained and practiced, and re-reading for details will be encouraged (Gibbons, 2002). I will allow time in class for partners to re-read slowly and mark unfamiliar words or questions about content, which can then be addressed in small groups or as a class. I will use excerpts from the text to create jigsaw reading activities, which are an excellent way to encourage reading for detail while activating students' abilities to orally summarize smaller segments of text. Post-reading activities will consist primarily in writing activities, such as journaling and, later, narrative composition. However, inclusion of a story-mapping activity will be especially useful for weak readers, readers whose oral proficiency is also weak, and readers who lack confidence in their abilities to orally summarize a text. Story-mapping can be done in small groups or with a partner, using both images and written explanations of the excerpt covered, and then presented to the class.

For **vocabulary**, initial focus should be on increasing learner knowledge of the most common 2,000 words in English. In addition, and after a first reading of the weekly excerpt, a group brainstorming of words relevant to the week's theme can be part of the discussion section of class. This type of vocabulary building is preferable to presenting new words in lexical sets, as it groups words thematically, a strategy shown to be more effective for L2 learners (Nation, 2000). Because the text each week is quite restricted in length, there should be sufficient time for learners to ask questions about unknown words, practice dictionary skills, and negotiate meaning in paired reading activities. Learners will also be encouraged to create a set of vocabulary note cards (rather than a vocabulary notebook); bilingual dictionaries will be used to provide L1 translations of new words, and learners may practice retrieval as an at-home activity (Nation,

2005). Other activities will include whole-class vocabulary tasks that connect to the content of the text, such as building semantic webs and predicting content from key words.

II. Home

Week 3: Place/Home; explanation of narrative writing project, commencement of literature circles (Nzingha, pp. 14-24)

The second thematic unit, “Home”, focuses on themes of family, personal relationships, and the importance of place. In this section of the module, **literature circles** will become a central in-class activity. These small group discussions will activate background knowledge, bring personal experiences to bear on the text, and support use of new relevant vocabulary.

Literature circles constitute an ongoing and integral part of the course, and will continue to support the development of a sense of community within the classroom. Each week, prior to writing activities, students will engage in a small-group literature circle to discuss *Nzingha*, the themes that have come up, and their own responses to those themes. Constituted by no more than five students per circle, literature circles give students an opportunity to engage in dialogue with a small group of their peers, the size of which may help students feel more comfortable disagreeing with and asking questions about the text. Discussion may include reflection on the week’s theme(s); intensive study of a particular part of the text; sharing of personal experiences that relate to the theme/text; discussion of vocabulary or other language-focused topics; or others—what each circle takes as its primary topic should emerge from the needs and interests of that particular circle.

Through initial discussion and reading activities, students will have spent time reflecting on the themes as well as reading the text aloud with a partner. Thus by the time they join with the mid-sized literature circle, they will have had several opportunities not only to read the text, but to consider what their reactions to the text may be, and to draw connections between their own lives and events in the story. Such scaffolding should help learners gain confidence in carrying out what for many, if not most, of them may be an unfamiliar activity. Participation in the literature circles will also, over the course of the term, help the continued development of a safe, participatory, and dialogical classroom community.

Week 4: Family/relationships; collaborative writing, oral storytelling (Nzingha, pp.25-35)

In week 4, as an introduction to more formal composed narratives (initiated in week 5), I will first have students work collaboratively. **Collaborative writing** has been shown to be an effective means of introducing and familiarizing learners with the writing process while allowing them supported opportunities to negotiate meaning, organization, and vocabulary (Shehadeh, 2011). In this type of activity, students are paired up, and carry out all stages of the writing process together: idea generation/brainstorming, idea discussion, planning, composing/drafting, and revising. Collaborative writing tasks have been shown to result in significant positive effects in content, organization, and vocabulary for intermediate level students (ibid). Such collaborative activities also increase opportunities for negotiation of meaning in a communicative, task-based context. I will provide writing prompts for collaborative tasks that require student pairs to problem-solve regarding a situation they might encounter in their daily lives, and which is

connected to the week's theme. For example, in week four, as we discuss family and relationships, I might use the prompt, "Think of a time you had an argument in your family. How did you resolve it? What could you have done differently?" More writing prompts are available in *Appendix C*.

I will also have students write independently about their own connections to the text, in order to help put students in dialogue with the text: what events in the text relate to their own lives? What might learners have done differently than Nzingha? Did any events or feelings described in the book remind them of their own feelings or experiences? (See *Appendix D* for writing prompts to be used for reading reflection.) Students will be encouraged to respond openly and honestly to the text; personal opinions, whether positive or negative, will be welcomed. This task, preceded by group brainstorming, is intended to assist students in developing a relationship with the text and its main character, as well as to support later construction of personal narrative by helping students start thinking about their own lives.

Especially but not exclusively in the early weeks of the course, I will use **oral story-telling** as a supplemental task. This task is best employed as an individual activity with an audio recorder, but depending on the class constituents, may also be done in pairs. The activity will have three parts: first, the student will speak in response to a selected prompt (see Appendices), while recording him/herself. Second, the student will listen to and transcribe the recording (a useful addition here would be to then have students read their transcriptions aloud to a partner). Third, the student will re-tell the same story in writing, but without reference to the original recording or transcript. Oral story-telling and transcription is a task similar to those used in the Language Experience Approach (LEA), which has been shown to be effective for literacy level

learners (Taylor, 1992), and incorporates suggestions from Blanton (2005) on the need for integrating communication in speech and writing. However, the importance of oral proficiency in supporting and developing writing skills is well established in the literature (see, e.g., Belcher & Hirvela, 2008). The purpose of this task is to develop meaningful connections between talk and text by drawing explicit connections between the two codes: a story told orally and a story transcribed in writing. The task also enables learners to exploit their strengths in one modality (speaking) in order to develop another (writing).

III. Society

Week 5: Gender roles; narrative composition, discussion of revision process (*Nzingha*, pp. 36-46)

Week 6: Power; ongoing revision (*Nzingha*, pp. 47-57)

The third thematic unit, “Society”, focuses on broader social relationships, considerations of power, and gender roles. During this portion of the module, I will introduce and focus more explicitly on the **narrative writing project**, and students will be tasked with writing their stories in a more formal and composed manner. I will explain that the stories we tell about ourselves help us understand our own lives more clearly, as well as helping other people understand us. I will link the discussion to *Nzingha*, highlighting the ways in which her stories both clarify her own thoughts and help us know more about who she is and what her experiences have been. I will then provide an overview of the writing process—brainstorming, writing, revising, publishing—to give students a sense of the holistic nature of the project, and explain that we will be writing and revising every week, with feedback provided from both myself and their peers.

The focus of each student's narrative will ultimately be up to each writer, and may involve re-writing and expanding journal entries, or telling new stories from their own lives that connect to the generative theme of that week. However, I will provide structured writing prompts which will scaffold the students' development of the narrative by guiding them to recall and reflect on various events in their own lives which connect to the generative themes of the reading text. Prompts previously used for collaborative writing tasks (*Appendix C*) in weeks 3 and 4 will be re-used or rephrased as follow-up questions, hence transforming the paired writing activities into pre-writing tasks, and additional prompts will be included that reference current themes of the text.

Once beginning to compose their narratives, students will be encouraged to write as much as they can, but should not be pressured to produce more than they are capable of or comfortable with. Joint use of L1 and L2 will be explicitly encouraged. Use of the L1 positively affects learners' affective states, assists in increased writing fluency, reduces the cognitive load, and gives learners the opportunity to focus on meaning, rather than L2 form (Fu, 2009). Learners who choose to write all or part of their narratives in the L1 can later translate their writing to an all-English text, which practice has also been shown to increase learners' rates of acquisition by enabling them to stretch beyond their current L2 proficiency in self-expression (Uzawa, 1996).

During the fifth week of the module, I will also address **the revision process**, which will be reviewed and engaged with in the coming weeks. At the end of every week, students will hand in their current narrative draft to me for feedback (positive comments on strengths, and questions that will help writer add to and develop the writing). The following week, they will

receive their narrative back, and will revise and extend their previous work in response to my written comments, peer feedback, and ongoing class discussion.

To support learners in gaining greater confidence in expressing both their life histories and their perspectives on themes/ideas/texts, I will offer formative, written feedback on narrative drafts that encourages attention to higher-order concerns such as development of content, organization, and focus. My comments will focus on drawing out the writer into greater risk-taking in pursuit of claiming a voice, or a stance, in the L2, and will consist in two primary features: one, supportive comments that highlight writer strengths (e.g., “I like what you did here,” “Very interesting,” etc.), and two, delving questions that require writers to stretch their abilities in response (“Can you explain this?,” “Can you think of another way to say this?,” etc.). Through comments which both offer and request elaboration in the writing process, I will provide modeling for student writers, encourage writers to engage in additional negotiation of meaning, and support them in extending their texts in a way they may not yet be able to do independently (Hadaway & Young, 2006). Individual writing conferences will be implemented at least twice throughout the module, so that students receive both oral and written feedback on their writing; the more variety in modes of offering feedback, the better the scaffolding, and the more likely students will benefit from that feedback (Leki et al., 2008). Writing conferences will also give students a chance to collaborate on-line with me, to negotiate meaning, and to ask questions about both form and content.

Students will revise their narratives regularly, and will be encouraged to respond to teacher feedback by attempting to extend and elaborate their texts toward inclusion in the final portfolio. They will continue to revise and develop their narratives as they engage in dialogue

with *Nzingha* and with one another regarding the unit's themes, and will be encouraged to engage in ongoing revision outside of class to the extent they are able.

IV. Ritual

Week 7: Food/Medicine; ongoing revision (Nzingha, pp. 58-68)

Week 8: Rites of Passage/Celebrations; workshops on developing narratives (Nzingha, pp. 69-79)

The fourth thematic unit, "Ritual", focuses on holidays, celebrations, rites of passage, and the daily rituals of preparing and sharing food. Class discussion will include reflective engagement with learner texts as each narrative gains breadth and depth. During this period of the module, I will implement peer revision via a class writing workshop. At this point, each student will have a working text of their narrative, and will be more comfortable with one another and with the collaborative process. I will solicit volunteers to share their draft with the rest of the class. All students will receive a copy, and the volunteer will read his/her narrative aloud as the rest of the students read along. As a class, we will then offer oral feedback on the narrative, toward the end of clarifying ambiguous or confusing parts of the text, and asking questions that encourage the volunteer to elaborate on his/her narrative. The workshop reinforces text-talk connections, and ties the writing process to oral feedback as well as offering an opportunity to practice text analysis.

V. Connections

Week 9: Tying it All Together (Nzingha's wedding) (Nzingha, pp. 80-86)

Week 10: Publishing/Final Reflections

The fifth and final thematic unit, “Connections”, considers means by which individuals and communities are bound together, and brings the module to a close by tying together and reflecting on all previous themes and their interrelatedness. The final unit is also the point at which learners will enter the **publishing** stage of the writing process, where final versions of each learner’s narrative will be collected and displayed.

Learning is most efficient and learner engagement is highest when there is a clear, recognizable, and personally relevant goal in position (Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). Further, process-oriented writing instruction, as a form of humanistic pedagogy, has as its ultimate end a “publishing” stage, or a point at which learner achievements are given public validation (whether the public is constituted by the class as a whole, by other classes in the program, or by recognition in the broader community) (Widodo, 2008). To this end, the final product of this curriculum is the publishing of a class autobiography: a joint text that showcases each learner’s history, perspective, and achievements. By the end of the course, each student will have a final draft of their narrative, which will constitute their personal autobiography. Individual students’ work will then be collected or otherwise bound together in order to create a class autobiography.

4.7 Evaluation

As Brown (1995) notes, “the process of curriculum development is never finished” (p. 217); mechanisms for evaluation and re-evaluation must be in place such that any program has within it the ability to be constantly revised. In a curriculum such as this one, which operates under the principle of curriculum as praxis, this is even more the case, though it may be better to speak rather of a *commitment* to evaluation rather than a mechanism for it. Administrators and teachers must be continuously attuned to variations in student and class needs, and must be able and willing to make on-line negotiations and changes to the program as the need for those changes becomes clear. There is sufficient flexibility built in to this curriculum that, provided teacher training and theoretical background are appropriate, individual teachers ought to find adequate room for making alterations and/or additions, and for including supplementary or complementary activities that nevertheless remain within the scope of the original conception of the course and adhere to its objectives; indeed, various possible alterations and additions have already been suggested. Thus in respect of teachers’ commitments to on-line revision of the curriculum to suit the particular needs of each class, formative evaluation should be ongoing and interactive.

However, some form of final, or summative, evaluation ought also be implemented in order to gauge the overall effectiveness of the program in meeting its objectives. The objectives of this curriculum, as stated above (section 4.6) are: “to help learners with developing literacy skills in English solidify a meaningful connection between text and talk, become more comfortable expressing themselves in both oral and written English, and gain confidence in communicating their own histories, meanings, and subjectivities in their daily lives”. Viewing

evaluation as necessarily responsive to the needs analysis conducted at the start of the program, final evaluations may consist in large part of a second survey administered to students, a second set of individual interviews to discuss outcomes, and notes taken by teachers on both the context and the content of any revisions made during the length of the course. Other materials that may be used for evaluation include class observations and analysis of student writing portfolios.

4.7.1 Student Surveys/Interviews

Just as the class opened with a set of surveys and interviews eliciting student needs, so should the class close with a second set of surveys and interviews eliciting student responses to the program. An evaluative student survey has been included as *Appendix E*. The purpose of the survey is to attempt to discover the extent to which students' feel both their literacy and their affective needs were met. In terms of student progress in literacy skills, data from the surveys/interviews can be triangulated with class observations and analysis of writing portfolios in order to determine effectiveness of the curriculum in increasing abilities in communicative writing. The extent to which the program addressed affective needs, such as confidence levels in L2 writing and level of comfort in self-expression, should be determined by a combination of student self-reporting and teacher observation.

4.7.2 Teacher Notes on On-Line Revisions

Any and all on-line revisions made to the course will be documented by the teacher as such revisions are made. Notes on both context and content of revisions will then be used to evaluate both effectiveness and efficiency of the program in meeting student needs. Explanations of motivation for revisions will be included along with explanation of the revisions themselves and student responses to the revisions.

4.7.3 Class Observations

Periodic observations of the class by other teachers or administrators, as well as video records of selected classes if available, may be used to engage in ongoing assessment of effectiveness of class materials and to gather additional data on the degree of success in the development of interactional activities such as classroom dialogue, partner reading/writing tasks, and other participatory components.

4.7.4 Student Writing Portfolios

While student autobiographies will include only the final drafts of the narratives, student writing portfolios will include any and all writing tasks completed during the course. Analysis of the complete student portfolio will assist in evaluating student progress in developing literacy skills and abilities for self-expression. Any journals or letter writing tasks can further be used to gauge effectiveness of teacher feedback in spurring student response with respect to extension/elaboration of texts and greater risk-taking in communication.

4.8 Conclusion

For adult immigrant ESL students working toward continued development of L2 literacy, supported opportunities for communicating their own histories and subjectivities are essential in the process of gaining greater comfort with and control of L2 writing. Construction of personal narratives not only serves as an important transition between two codes, speech and writing, but also assists learners in developing their own voice in the L2. Adult learners attempting to imitate formal texts run the risk of eradicating their own voices altogether in pursuit of an acceptably “academic” voice (Correa, 2010) by resorting to stringing quotes together with no discursive context of their own to bind them. Study of and construction of narrative texts has the potential to strengthen novice writers’ senses of their own stance and of their own abilities to express personal perspectives and experiences in the L2, thus preparing them to better engage with more formal writing tasks should they choose to pursue them. Personal narrative has the further advantage of assisting learners in the development of agency and sense of self-efficacy by allowing them the space and opportunity to articulate their own visions of their lives—past, present, and future—thus supporting learners in the development of attitudes and abilities that can enable them to transform their personal and sociopolitical lives. For those committed to the transformative and liberatory potential of education, the opening of spaces within which learners can both speak and be heard represented by this curriculum is crucial, for, in the words of the great educational activist and pedagogue, Paulo Freire:

To speak of democracy and silence the people is a farce. To speak of humanism and negate humanity is a lie. (“Hablar de democracia y callar al pueblo es una farsa. Hablar

del humanismo y negar a los hombres es una mentira.” Translation mine.) Freire, 1970, p. 105.

A commitment to the humanization of all members of society means that each one of us must be committed to *humanizing*. By making use of personal narrative in the ways outlined above, teachers can enable learners to claim, or re-claim, their voices, and thence to claim a space of their own within the broader community.

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Appendix A:

Survey for Self-Reporting of Learner Needs

General Information

1. Name: _____
2. Age: _____
3. Male/Female (circle one)
4. Where were you born? (city, country): _____
5. Where do you live now? (city, state): _____
6. How long have you lived in the United States (months/years)? _____
7. What language(s) did you grow up speaking?: _____
8. What language(s) do you speak now (besides English)?: _____
9. List the language(s) you are able to *speak*: _____
10. List the language(s) you are able to *read* and *write*: _____

Education:

11. How much schooling have you had?
- ___ no formal schooling ___ elementary school ___ middle school ___ high school
- ___ some college ___ college degree ___ some graduate school
- ___ graduate degree (circle one: M.A., Ph.D.)

12. Did you go to school in your home country? If yes, where? What did you study?

13. Have you gone to school in the United States? If yes, where? What did you study?

14. How long have you been studying English? (years/months/weeks) _____

15. Before now, have you ever studied English in the United States? _____

If yes, where?

16. If yes to 15, what kinds of things did you study?

___ speaking ___ listening ___ grammar ___ writing ___ reading
___ culture ___ other (please specify) _____

Writing in Your First Language:

17. Have you ever studied writing in your first language? _____

18. If yes to 17, what kind of writing did you study?

___ filling out forms ___ writing resumes ___ writing cover letters ___ writing stories
___ writing poems ___ writing essays ___ writing personal letters
___ writing letters to a newspaper ___ writing academic papers ___ writing emails

19. How do you feel about writing in your first language?

___ I love it ___ I like it ___ It's ok ___ I don't like it ___ I hate it

20. How often do you write in your first language?

___ every day ___ often ___ sometimes ___ not often ___ never

21. If you write in your first language, what kinds of things do you write?

___ letters to friends/family ___ journal/diary ___ essays ___ academic papers
___ stories ___ poems ___ lists (to-do lists, grocery lists, etc)
___ other (please specify) _____

22. What is your skill level for writing in your first language?

advanced very good fair not very good beginner

Writing in English

23. Have you ever studied writing in English? _____

24. If yes to 23, what kind of writing did you study?

filling out forms writing resumes writing cover letters writing stories
 writing poems writing essays writing personal letters
 writing letters to a newspaper writing academic papers writing emails

25. How do you feel about writing in English?

I love it I like it It's ok I don't like it I hate it

26. How often do you write in English?

every day often sometimes not often never

27. If you write in English, what kinds of things do you write?

letters to friends/family journal/diary essays academic papers
 stories poems lists (to-do lists, grocery lists, etc)
 other (please specify) _____

28. What is your skill level for writing in English?

advanced very good fair not very good beginner

Future Plans

29. What are your future plans?

___ to get a job ___ to keep current job ___ to get a better job ___ to go to college
___ to change careers ___ to attend a job training program/vocational school
___ other (please specify)_____

30. Do you plan to live permanently in an English-speaking country?_____

31. How often do you think you will English in the future?
___ all the time ___ often ___ sometimes ___ not often ___ never

Goals for This Course

32. Why do you want to take this class?

33. What do you want to learn in this class?

34. What kinds of activities help you learn best?

35. Please include here any additional information you think may help me better understand your needs and goals.

Appendix B:

Module Schedule

I. Introduction to Writing

Week 1: Introductions (to each other, the course, personal narrative, and the writing process)

Week 2: Use/importance of writing, invention techniques, begin journals (*Nzingha*, pp. 3-13)

II. Home

Week 3: Place/Home; explanation of narrative writing project, commencement of literature circles (*Nzingha*, pp. 14-24)

Week 4: Family/relationships; collaborative writing, oral storytelling (*Nzingha*, pp.25-35)

III. Society

Week 5: Gender roles; narrative composition, discussion of revision process (*Nzingha*, pp. 36-46)

Week 6: Power; ongoing revision (*Nzingha*, pp. 47-57)

IV. Ritual

Week 7: Food/Medicine; ongoing revision (*Nzingha*, pp. 58-68)

Week 8: Rites of Passage/Celebrations; reflection on developing narratives (*Nzingha*, pp. 69-79)

V. Connections

Week 9: Tying it All Together (Nzingha's wedding) (*Nzingha*, pp. 80-86)

Week 10: Publishing/Final Reflections

Appendix C:

Writing prompts

Week 3—Place/Home:

In some communities, there are a lot of poor people without a home or job. Should we help these people? Why or why not? If you think we should help them, what kinds of things can we do?

Was your neighborhood safe when you were growing up? Is the neighborhood you live in now safe for your children? What can we do to make sure all of our children are safer?

Week 4—Family/Relationships:

Think of a time you had an argument in your family. How did you resolve it? What could you have done differently?

Do you know anyone who has gotten divorced? How did it affect the family?

Week 5—Gender roles:

Think about education in your home country. Do boys and girls have the same chances to go to school? Why or why not?

In your home culture, do men and women do the same jobs, or different jobs? Which do you think is better? Why?

Week 6—Power:

Have you ever gotten in trouble with an authority figure (a teacher, a parent, the police, the government)? How did you feel? Were you treated fairly? Why or why not?

Do you think poor people have the same opportunities as rich people? Why or why not?

Week 7—Food/Medicine:

What kinds of food did you eat as a child? What kinds of foods do your children eat? Are these foods healthy or unhealthy? How can we help our children choose healthy foods?

Do you go to the doctor when you or your family get sick, or do you try to take medicines from home? Which do you think is better? Why?

Week 8—Rites of Passage/Celebration:

When you were growing up, did you have any special celebrations to show you were getting older? When do people become “adults” in your home country? How do you know someone is an adult?

Was religion important in your family when you were growing up? Why or why not? Is religion important in your life now? Do you think religious holidays should be celebrated publicly or privately? Why?

Appendix D:

Writing Prompts for Reading Reflection (see also Ferris & Hedgcock, 2013)

Why did the author write this story? What is she trying to tell you?

What are your favorite parts of this story? Why are those parts your favorites?

What have you learned from reading this story?

Does this story remind you of any other stories you have read, or stories you have heard? What is the same? What is different?

What would you change about this story? What would make it better?

Are there parts in the story that you don't understand? What parts? What could the author do to make those parts clearer?

Are there parts in the story that remind you of your own life? What parts? What is the same? What is different?

Appendix E:

Final Evaluation of the Course: Student Survey

General

1. Name: _____

2. How much of the class did you finish?
____ All of it ____ Most of it (about 8 weeks) ____ Half of it (about 5 weeks)
____ Some of it (3-5 weeks) ____ Only a little (1-2 weeks)

3. If you missed classes, please tell us why:
____ Work ____ Family needs ____ Transportation problems
____ Other (Please explain: _____)

Class Activities

4. What kinds of activities did you participate in?
____ journal writing ____ letter writing ____ oral story-telling
____ reading (on your own) ____ reading (with a partner) ____ reading (with the class)
____ writing with a partner ____ literature circles ____ partner discussion
____ vocabulary activities ____ work on writing better sentences
____ Other (Please describe: _____)

5. What activities did you like, and why?

6. What activities did you dislike, and why?

Opinion of the Class

7. Do you feel more confident writing in English now?

_____ yes _____ no _____ about the same as before

8. Please explain your answer to 7.

9. Do you feel more comfortable talking and writing about your life now?

_____ yes _____ no _____ about the same as before

10. Please explain your answer to 9.

11. In your opinion, was this class helpful for you? Why or why not?

12. Would you recommend this class to friends or family? Why or why not?

Other Comments

13. Is there anything else you think we should change about this class to make it better?

14. Is there anything else you would like to say about this class?