

LITERACY PROGRAMS AND LANGUAGE LEARNING: A
QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE BELIEFS AND
PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS'
SPOUSES LEARNING ENGLISH IN AN INFORMAL
LITERACY CENTER

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Title of Study

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LEARNING ENGLISH IN AN INFORMAL LITERACY CENTER

Major Field: PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION STUDIES

Abstract: This qualitative research study explores the beliefs and perceptions of the spouses of adult international students regarding the ESL literacy programs offered at a unique University Center (UC) for international students and their families. It was intended to provide an understanding of the adult spousal sojourners' beliefs and perceptions of the literacy programs within the context of their cultural backgrounds. The goal was to understand how people of various cultural backgrounds perceived the UC's teaching methods, models, and learning environment. The study was based on interviews and participant observations with spouses of international students from diverse cultural backgrounds who accompanied their husbands or wives to the United States of America for secondary purposes. Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis and concepts from symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969), critical theory, affective, and sociocultural theories of language learning. Findings included perceptions of the learning environment as the study intended, including that diverse cultural models influenced participants' learning experiences at the UC, and the welcoming environment and its activities facilitated cross-cultural communication and language learning. In addition, some findings were relevant to the students' secondary positionality as sojourners accompanying their spouses to the United States of America. Language learning and secondary positionality symbolized multiple meanings in the participants' respective experiences. Students often felt a sense of "nothingness" in the host society in giving up their professional careers to accompany their spouses and encountered both struggles with and empowerment from language learning in pursuit of their new personal and professional goals. A notable finding was the symbolic role of grammar in the language program to connote language mastery and good teaching beyond its power as a tool of language learning. Language learning, in turn, symbolized access, social adjustment, bonding, liberation, and empowerment. The study concluded with emphasizing the primacy of language learning for the students' adjustment and socialization in the host society. The implications are that language learning is a crucial "lifeline" and tool of survival; thus the students' beliefs and perceptions of learning should be duly considered while designing literacy programs and interpreted in relation to their culture and the learning environment.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Just as our skin provides us with a means to negotiate our interactions with the world- both in how we perceive our surroundings and in how those around us perceive us- our language plays an equally pivotal role in determining who we are: it is *The Skin That We Speak*. (Delpit and Dowdy, 2002, p. xix)

A friend of mine once asked my daughter: “what would you like to be when you grow up?” She answered: “nothing, like mom.” Although her response was spontaneous and innocent, it was an eye-opening experience to me. After pursuing all these years of education, earning undergraduate and graduate degrees, and holding varied full and part-time jobs, at that moment, I was still “nothing” in my daughter’s opinion. When I reflected on her response, I realized how she might come to this conclusion. It is true that I have exerted much effort to make a career for myself. However, these efforts have been disrupted time after time due to moving from one place to another with my spouse. All efforts to adjust could not contend with both the restrictions of visa issues which prohibited me from studying or working as well as the family demands, which disrupted the pursuit of a career of my own. Now I am in my mid-forties and I am still struggling

to have a career that would be regarded as “something” in my daughter’s eyes. As a spouse who left my home country to support my husband’s career, all my previous degrees, honors, courses, prior work experience are worthless in the host country. They do not guarantee my realization of self-fulfillment or even self-adequacy.

When I began observing my fellow spouses in the University Center (hereafter UC), a program on a Midwestern university campus designed to help students and their spouses adjust to the host society, I began to realize that I was not the only one experiencing these feelings. Other spouses, who had successful careers in their home countries, seemed to develop a sense of inadequacy and inefficiency in the host society because their diverse and often substantial qualifications did not transfer to new contexts when they moved internationally to support their spouses. Hence, questions emerged about the spouses’ (sojourners) perception of their experience, their role, their interaction with the learning environment in the UC, and adult literacy. My observation compelled me to turn to the professional literature to seek answers for my questions. During the process of reviewing literature and, later, analyzing data, other questions emerged, such as how does using the qualitative paradigm matter in this data? How does the informal setting in which participants interact and develop language skills show us something different or similar to formal settings? How do spousal sojourners as adult learners experience the language learning different than international students or immigrants? How do we as educators need to think about education for sojourners differently or similarly to other learners? What spaces are available for sojourners? What works about these spaces? All of these questions emerged organically from my years of working in the UC and in my interaction with the spouses as I collected and analyzed data for this study.

It is worth mentioning that every year thousands of people come to the United States of America with high aspirations for self-fulfillment. The United States of America is often perceived as a land of education and opportunities. Many spouses accompany their husbands or wives while they pursue a degree or career in the United States. They may have great hopes to learn the English language to facilitate their personal and professional development, whether in the United States or

their native countries when they return. For them, mastering English is crucial for survival in the host society, social mobility in their native countries, and eventually access to opportunities should they decide to stay in the U.S.. However, there are varying degrees in the spouses' achievement and their perception of self-fulfillment in English learning. In a pilot study I conducted with sojourners in 2009, I found that those who had high expectations about their progress in language learning tended to have a low sense of self-fulfillment when they failed to meet minimum language requirements, such as a passing TOEFL score, to attain acceptance in college. Meanwhile, others with low expectations reported a higher sense of self-fulfillment. Cultural background could be at play in the students' expectations and perceptions. In addition, cultural and linguistic differences between the native and host countries are among the main challenges English language learners face in the learning environment (Miller & Endo, 2004).

The sojourners' adaptation to the culture of the host society is always a challenging process and yet researchers have linked acculturation to language learning. The people who manage to adapt are mainly successful in learning the target language, and those who fail to adapt are less successful in language learning (Gunderson, 2009). Culture, learning styles, motivation, and perceptions of self-fulfillment are interrelated aspects of language learning (Ruff & Fritz, 1994; Guild, 1994). Patton (2002) referred to "the power of language to shape our perceptions and experiences" (p. 288). Similarly, culture shapes perception of experiences (Gunderson, 2009; Patton, 2002; Suhor, 1984). Diverse students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds influence their perception of the learning environment and the world in general. The concurrence or disagreement between the individual's cultural background and expectations on one hand and the learning environment and teachers on the other influence a student's progress (Gunderson, 2009). Implementing diverse culturally responsive teaching strategies in multicultural contexts helps provide students with an ample chance to realize progress in language learning (Guild, 1994; Brown, 2007), which could eventually help the students develop a sense of empowerment. Thus teachers' awareness of the students' cultural and linguistic background is deemed necessary for their success (Gunderson, 2009) as students' learning experience

is the outcome of the interaction of the immediate context of learning and the learners' unique individual background which they bring to the learning community (Behrman, 2002).

This intersection of culture and learning is epitomized in the current research study, which is important to me as a teacher, researcher, and a spouse who accompanied my husband to pursue an academic career, which soon developed into a professional career. Being on a dependent visa did not allow me to work in the host society. I was able to pursue academic development after changing my visa five years after we have arrived in the host society. However, I had to change my major because there were not any graduate studies pertinent to my original major in the city where my husband got his job. Eventually after nine years, I was able to change my visa to an immigrant visa once our status changed from sojourners to immigrants. This was a turning point in my pursuit of a new career as it changed my plans for the second time. When I came to the host society, the plan was to stay for only four years until my husband completed his degree and then return to my native country. Upon his graduation, my husband was offered a job for one year. It was hard to decline an offer to gain professional experience in the host society, so he accepted it and I decided to put my career on hold for one more year. Then my husband's contract was renewed for four more years, so I decided to start working on a master's degree that would be an asset for me when I return to my native country. Four years later, we realized that it would be hard for our children to switch to a different educational system if we returned home. Someone had to sacrifice, and it was more convenient that I do so again.

My situation is similar to many sojourners who adjust their temporary stay to an immigrant status once a family member secures a job opportunity in a foreign country. Long-term planning is challenging given the varied uncertainties of studying and working abroad. However, by the time most of us realize the dilemmas posed by schooling and career uncertainties, it is often too late to start a new career appropriate for the host society. Thus, it is important to shed more light on the experiences of spouses who accompany their husbands or wives for secondary purposes. Further, as a teacher in a literacy program at the UC, this issue was of particular importance in my professional role. It informed my practice by developing a better understanding of my students, their needs, and

expectations. This helped in addressing these needs when making choices regarding teaching methods and models, as well as selecting appropriate reading texts and topics for discussion.

Problem Statement

International students participating in the literacy programs at the UC come with diverse abilities, learning experiences and habits, which have been mostly inculcated by means of the teaching methods and models implemented in their native countries. Thus addressing the needs of students from cultural background in an ESL classroom is challenging. Some teaching methods and models could be appropriate for some but not all the students. Awareness of the students' learning styles, their preferred teaching/ learning activities, their perception of viable teaching methods and models, and their responses to power relations involved in the process of language learning in a cross-cultural setting and the learning environment can help in informing teachers' practice and honing their planning to satisfy the needs of the majority of these students. Little information from empirical research in centers such as the UC is available and could be useful for informing educators in other informal environments with what works. In addition, understanding the students' perception of the learning experience is essential for facilitating students' learning. Thus, it is important to focus on the intersection of culture and literacy, which are intricately related, to study the role of culture in shaping the students' perceptions of their experience of learning English as a second language.

Statement of Purpose

This research study explored adult international students' beliefs and perceptions of the "informal" literacy programs offered at a UC that is associated with a university residential life system. Specifically, the focus of the study was on the spouses of international students who accompanied their husbands or wives to the United States of America for secondary purposes. The purpose was to explore the participants' beliefs and perceptions of the UC literacy programs within the context of their cultural backgrounds. The goal was to understand how people of various cultural backgrounds perceive the UC's teaching methods, models, and learning environment. It explored the

participants' pursuit of success in language learning, which entailed identifying personal and external factors that influenced their language learning experience.

In the process of inductive data analysis other salient information beyond the initial purpose emerged, such as how people of various cultural backgrounds communicate, learn, perceive their learning process and progress; negotiate power relations in an informal, nontraditional learning setting; and how this negotiation influenced their perceptions of the methods and models of teaching used in these classes, as well as the learning environment. The study also revealed that language learning symbolized to sojourners' hope and possibility for their futures beyond acquiring language skills. This understanding highlighted the symbolic meaning of language learning to participants who occupy temporary and secondary positions in the host society and feel a range of uncertainties about the direction of their professional futures. This knowledge can contribute to UC teachers and administrators' decisions on adjusting teaching practices to address the students' needs, provide insight to others teaching adult ELL students in multi-lingual and multi-cultural settings, as well as shed light on the uniqueness of the sojourners' experiences.

Understanding the students' perception of the learning experience is essential for lowering the cognitive and cultural loads, which Miller and Endo (2004) consider essential steps for addressing the needs of ESL students. It could potentially help in empowering the participants by virtue of their socialization into second language literacy. In one of my conversations with a spouse, she stated that when she had first arrived in the United States, she was not able to communicate with Americans and that she had always relied on her husband for translation. After a few months of English learning, she said that she felt that she was able to communicate with others using the English language which made her regain her sense of independence, which is an element of empowerment.

One's cultural background includes nationality, beliefs, values, educational experiences in their home countries, their learning styles, classroom practices at their native countries, and expectations of educational achievement. In this research project, I selected students of different cultural backgrounds that primarily reflected the nationality demographics of the UC and explored

their perceptions of the literacy programs to understand how some participants perceived their language learning experience. The participants' sense of self-fulfillment in learning English as a second language then emerged during the process of analysis.

Rationale

This research study contributes to understanding the students' perceptions of the teaching models and methods in particular and their beliefs about second language learning in general. In the majority of the studies I reviewed, the focus was always on the teaching methods and models and the researchers or teachers' perception of whether these models work or not for their students. Second Language Acquisition research tends to overlook the students' perspective (Allen, 2006). This research study gleaned first-hand information from the students' point of view. Further, many studies focused on international students who came to the United States of America for primary purposes, such as education or employment. Miller and Endo (2004), Ruff and Fritz (1994), Saucedo-Castillo (2001), Yoko (2006), Zhou (2008) cited but few examples of studies focusing on international students. Yet, there is a paucity of research on language learners who come to the United States for secondary purposes, such as spouses who accompany graduate students as my own story reflects leaving behind their academic or professional careers in their native countries or putting their careers on hold for an unknown period of time. Many of these individuals do not hold visas that allow them to work or study in the United States, particularly spouses of international students who hold student visas, as the majority of participants in this research study. This rendered involvement in literacy education a potentially meaningful aspect of their development and adjustment in the host society.

Some of the studies conducted with international graduate students, such as Perrucci and Hu (1995), reported a close connection between international students' "social contact", primarily gender and language proficiency, and "adaptation" (p. 495). The students' perception of satisfaction in the host society was influenced by their ability to use English language for communication and the social opportunities offered for interaction with native speakers. The researchers recommended that standardized admission tests should be supplemented with informal ESL programs for international

students and their families to facilitate their adjustment and ameliorate their perception of the host environment.

Moreover, the few research studies conducted on informal adult ESL education exclusively focused on one nationality, such as Morgan's (1997) study, which focused on Chinese students. He explored the use of critical perspectives in adult community-based education. Other quantitative studies focused on effective instruction for adult ESL literacy students. The present research study is a qualitative research study which focused on understanding the perceptions and beliefs of students from diverse countries. Cross-cultural interaction among students as a tool of learning in the context was key data source in this study. Finally, the literacy program at the University Center is unique. Indeed, there is a multitude of literacy centers all over the United States as various institutions are providing literacy services, including churches and literacy councils. However, at the UC, literacy is integrated into a comprehensive program of community development. Language is not taught in isolation of the environment and social context. In fact, language, literacy, and culture are enmeshed in the daily activities provided at the Center with the view of providing an organic learning experience within an authentic real-life context.

Overview of the Study

The research study helped explore the participants' perceptions of their language learning experience, which entailed identifying personal and external factors that influenced their language learning experience. The personal factors included learning styles, cultural background, and individual responses to the stages of culture and language shocks. External factors covered "the crystallizing" and "paralyzing experiences" (Armstrong, 2000, p. 18) they have experienced in the language programs. These experiences shaped the learning environment which is associated with Krashen's *Affective Filter Hypothesis* (Brown, 2007; Miller & Endo, 2004). The previous terms are defined later in the terms' definition section.

In this qualitative study, I interviewed ten people about their experiences in the UC and collected documents related to their learning and experience, and I observed 30 residents. Participants

were from multiple countries including Turkey, Korea, China, Brazil, Egypt, Iraq, Indonesia, India, Ethiopia, Mexico, Romania, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Libya. I analyzed the data inductively, systematically focusing on the participants' perception of their learning experience and the power relations associated with the process of language learning and secondary positionality in the host society.

Conceptual elements began to surface inductively in the data that spoke to a range of key ideas tied to language, literacy, and culture theories. Power relations; culture capital; the physical and emotional well-being of the learners; constructing meaning in relation; symbolic meaning of concepts; and the influence of the sociocultural context of language learning began to surface which spoke to the saliency of concepts from critical theory, symbolic interactionism, and the sociocultural and affective approach to language learning. These theoretical concepts were used to develop and interpret relevant themes in the data that led to the research findings for this study, which included, first, findings relevant to the participants' perception of the learning environment and perception of progress; second, findings associated with the participants' cultural models; third, applicability and inconsistency of the acculturation model of language learning with the participants' experiences; fourth, the participants' secondary positionality and associated meanings; and fifth, language empowerment and how learning symbolized access, social adjustment, bonding, liberation, and empowerment. A thorough discussion of these findings is included in chapter five. The conceptual lenses helped in interpreting different aspects of the students' perception of their learning experiences at the UC. They also helped compare and contrast these perceptions against the backdrop of the students' diverse cultural backgrounds.

Authorial Voice

I chose to use multiple voices in presenting the research process (Van Maanen, 1988). These voices are associated with my multiple positionalities in the current research study as a researcher, teacher, and spouse. This shift in voice is reflected in switching from first to third person depending in the role I assume at each respective point. As a researcher, I used the third person and I used the

first person to represent the teacher and spouse roles. This shift helped me in representing at times elements of the research in which I was directly implicated as, originally, a sojourning spouse as well as, at other times, a stance of passionate detachment from the research process. Following Mizzi's (2010) view that narrative voices interact together (p. 7), I believe that the interaction of these voices allowed me to explore and emphasize meaning from these three perspectives that may not have been accessible to the reader otherwise. A detailed rationale for the shift in voice and the theoretical underpinnings for this shift are provided in Chapter Three.

Mizzi (2010) added that this method provided him with "a richer understanding of the complexities that underlined human interactions" in his research study (p. 7-8). It also allowed for shedding light on power relations in the research setting. He reported some challenges in employing this method, such as "silent voices", "intensity of emotions", and "institutional resistance" (p. 10). In the same vein, "multivocality" in the current research study helped unravel multiple layers of meanings in the data which gave rise to new questions that have not been among the initial research questions.

Research Questions

I initiated the study with specific research questions which are listed below as *original research questions*. I developed the original research questions to explore the participants' perceptions of the literacy component of the UC Community Development program; however, more analytical research questions emerged during the process of data collection and analysis. Revising and developing new research questions during the process of data collection is common practice in qualitative research (Agee, 2009). Moreover, this "ongoing process of questioning" is deemed necessary for exploring participants' perceptions (Agee, 2009, p. 432). The original questions focused on *what* their perceptions were and *how* they perceived their learning experience. The analytical questions went beyond the *how* and *what* and helped pose questions on *why* they have developed these perceptions. Other questions emerged as related to broader issues, such as the participants' sense of secondary positionality in the host society.

I. Original questions

1. What are the students' perceptions of the teaching models and methods used in the University Center?

A. What are the differences in responses of students from different cultural backgrounds?

2. What are the students' cultural models for teaching and learning? How do they fit as learners within that cultural model?

A. How well do the students feel the teaching models accommodate their learning styles?

B. How are their cultural models of teaching and learning connected to their negotiation of the learning environment?

3. What teaching practices helped them in learning and developing a sense of self-fulfillment regarding their learning experience?

4. What is their perception of their progress in language learning?

5. What are the participants' experiences as second language learners in the University Center?

II. Unfolding questions that developed during data collection and in data analysis

1. How does the literacy program help the students' social adjustment in the host society?

A. How do cultural differences account for language development and social adjustment?

B. What are the practices which learners perceive as empowering or disempowering?

2. How did students with limited English proficiency experience interactions or learning with students at a similar or slightly different level of English proficiency?

A. How did this similarity and variance facilitate and/or disrupt communication, learning of the English language, and developing a sense of community?

3. What does language learning symbolize to the participants?

4. How do we need to think about education for sojourners differently or similarly than others?

A. What works about these educational spaces?

5. How did it feel like to be a spouse with secondary positionality living in the host society?

6. How did using the qualitative paradigm matter in this research study?
7. How did the researcher's positionality as a teacher in the UC affect the participants' responses?

Research Setting: The University Center

Setting Background. The University Center is affiliated with the residential life of a public university in the United States of America. It primarily serves residents who live on the university campus, and most programs are open to the community in the university town. It is inspired by the belief that both social and literacy support are important for adjustment. This Center has been established to connect students and their families to the available resources in town. It also helps them adjust to the host society by providing them with daily, weekly, monthly, biannual, and annual programs aimed at community development. The ultimate goal is "to promote the residents' [in university housing] academic success and personal fulfillment." International students represent 85% of the residents' population (University Center Records, 2011).

The history of the University Center dates back to 1987 when a professor at the College of Human Environmental Sciences and the Assistant Director of University Apartments started a collaborative project to apply students' projects targeting family services and responding to the needs of the students' families living in the university apartments. The setting of the University Center was originally a "double-wide trailer" and "a graduate students' practicum." The University Center started to be run by the University Apartments in 1994. High attendance and expansion of activities necessitated the establishment of a new facility which was opened in July of 1998 (University Center Records, 2011).

The University housing is currently composed of 706 apartments accommodating about 1500 residents from over 30 countries. There are four main sections of the UC. The first is the apartment assistants' section. The second is the marketing section. The third is the children's programs section, which serves about 60 children enrolled in the daily after-school programs in about eight daily and weekly programs. The fourth, which is the focus of this research, is the adult programs or community development section. The adult programs' department provides educational and recreational programs

for over 200 adults each week. In its early beginnings, the UC provided “sporadic English language classes,” but currently provides over 17 specialized English language classes for speakers of other languages at multiple levels of language proficiency. One of the returning residents, who participated in the UC activities ten years ago, noted the evolution of the classes and stated that the English classes are more “serious” at the present time. In her remark, she was referring to the academic language classes that are now being offered at the UC.

The UC’s approach to language learning is theoretically based on the language socialization theory which considers “the acquisition of linguistic and of sociocultural competence as interdependent” (Gunderson, 2009, 83). The literacy programs adopt the communicative language approach, which is defined by Brown (2007) as an approach focusing on communication, “pragmatic, authentic, and functional use of language” where accuracy and fluency are integrated with occasionally giving primacy to fluency (p. 241). Other programs provide opportunities to use English in context, and hence help develop the students’ pragmatic competence. All programs are designed to fit in an informal social context. They are meant to facilitate communication, cross-cultural interaction, and mutual understanding among residents. Although the adult programs are open for everyone in the community, the majority of participants are spouses of international students pursuing graduate degrees in the university. The ratio of female to male representation in participants is four to one. For example, in every class of twenty students, there are sixteen female and four male students. The numbers change from time to time, but the ratio is relatively stable across all classes. Registration and enrollment are not required to attend the classes. There are no placement tests. Students attend the classes which they perceive as most beneficial and most aligned with their language proficiency. All classes and activities are free of charge.

Teaching Model and Content. The UC teachers use the multiple intelligences model of teaching. It is particularly important in this setting as it is not restricted to the linguistic intelligence, but rather aims at addressing diverse intelligences especially that most of the residents have limited

language proficiency. This research study provided a rationale for continuing to adopt the multiple intelligences based on the participants' positive perception of the teaching model.

This model is based on Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (Armstrong, 2002), which stipulates that all learners have varying degrees of eight intelligences, which are linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences. These intelligences are not mutually exclusive, which means that different learners could have more than one intelligence at varying degrees. Some scholars argue that addressing these intelligences in the classroom enhances learning (Armstrong, 2002). They suggest including multiple activities that address multiple intelligences in the classroom to maximize students' learning.

Culture is also incorporated in the UC language curriculum. Popular culture is primarily used to familiarize the students with the host society. UC activities which involve popular culture help explore the residents' diverse views and preconceptions of the American culture and critically analyze them. Preconceptions and stereotypes of the target culture are common in the second language classroom. Before entering the host country, sojourners may have little experience beyond media and political messages to evaluate and understand members of the host country's diverse cultures. Such stereotypes can shape the students' perception of other cultures negatively because biased and excessive use of stereotypes encourages students and teachers to develop a narrow and biased worldview (Atkinson, 1999; Brown, 2007).

Kumaravadivelu (as cited in Brown, 2007) suggests substituting stereotypes with "a critical awareness of the complex nature of cultural understanding" (p. 192). Scholars proposed analyzing stereotypes critically (Brown, 2007; Duff, 2002), and dealing with all humans as individuals in dynamic cultural contexts and not "cultural types" (Atkinson, 1999, p. 641). Brown (2007) stated that language classrooms are an optimum place for engaging with cultural diversity. Knowledge of both teachers and students' cultures could be the starting point for developing appreciation to diversity and

others' cultures. However, what is needed is not merely knowledge about cultures as secluded elements, but rather as interconnected cultures (Rowell, Sztainbok, & Blaney, 2007).

In the UC, teachers discuss elements from the students' native cultures, compare and contrast native and target cultures, discuss current events that are of global interest, and invite them to share their thoughts and experiences about mundane incidents. All these practices affect the students' perception of the target culture. Brown (2007) pointed out that learners' attitudes toward the target culture affect their motivation to learn the target language. Further, positive attitude results in higher proficiency level in the target language.

Incorporating culture in the ESL classroom is of paramount importance. It helps motivate students to learn foreign languages, enhance their language proficiency, develop global awareness of cultural diversity, and empower them to participate in the classroom and assume an active role in the language acquisition process. Preparing teachers to this effect by incorporating culture in student teaching programs, particularly TESOL teacher education, is of equal importance (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2006; Rowell, Sztainbok, & Blaney, 2007). Culture teaching could include comparing and contrasting gestures from around the world, taboos in different countries, holidays, celebrations, food, and speech acts such as greetings, making requests, and apologies in different cultures. The UC incorporates all of these principles in both literacy and recreational programs. The Everyday English class I taught focused on popular culture and encouraged comparisons between the native and target cultures. I encouraged the students to compare and contrast their native cultural practices as regards each speech act with the target culture and the other students' cultures.

Sociocultural Influence. Sociocultural influences on learning and the potentially empowering role of literacy have been well-documented by scholars such as Freire (2005), Heath (1983), and Delpit and Dowdy (2002). Freire (2005) in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* argued that literacy is a tool for empowerment, agency, liberation, and humanization. It is not mere reading and writing. This tenet is important framing for understanding sojourners' experiences in the host country as in the current study, language learning symbolized empowerment, liberation, and means of

survival in the host society. Freire considered literacy for oppressed people to be a transformative experience, which emancipates and humanizes learners in their quest to become “more fully human” (Freire, 2005, p. 74). He used the dialogic method to teach impoverished Brazilian people words which they had co-generated and taught them to correspond sound and words and create different formations. This method draws on the students’ prior knowledge to produce relevant and engaging curricula for literacy that serves the purpose of becoming more fully human. One of the underlying assumptions in this research study is that drawing on the students’ own cultural experience facilitates the process of their learning about the culture of the host society and even facilitates acculturation. Focusing solely on acculturation and didactic teaching about the target culture could impair students’ learning and adaptation. On the other hand, the students’ knowledge about the target culture could be enhanced by scaffolding the students’ learning by building on what they already know and drawing cultural comparisons between their native culture and the target culture.

Delpit and Dowdy (2002) emphasized the interrelationship of language and culture in shaping identity. The politics of power relations in the society promotes a culture of silence and/or freedom which is reflected on thought and language use. Freire (2005) argues that liberation is not granted by the oppressor. It is earned by means of earnest hard work on the part of the oppressed. Language is an expression of identity. Communication in a foreign language, or even different dialects, could be limiting or liberating to this sense of identity depending on the learners’ facility with language use. Language and dialect use influences our sense of identity and others’ perception of this identity. In *The Skin That We Speak*, Dowdy (Delpit and Dowdy, 2002) offers examples of how one’s choice of language can be limiting or liberating. Dowdy narrated the story of how one might create multiple identities for oneself through language use by deliberately switching languages and dialects in different settings. The endeavor to preserve the native language and the choices made to use different languages in different contexts was a conscientious act which allowed for liberation and legitimatization in the society. In one key example in the text that speaks to the ways linguistic choices can reflect identity commitments similar to participants’ experiences in the current study, a

daughter of a mother from the Caribbean did not give in to the language of the British colonization her mother perceived to be empowering and wanted her to use to gain social acceptance. She pointed out that the discord between her thought and medium of expression silenced her voice. She was able to preserve her identity and to be true to herself through the use of her native Caribbean language. Thus, she decided to preserve and use her native language which was a true expression of her inner reality and helped her realize harmony between her thought and expression of this thought. However, she did not reject the language of the colonizer altogether. In Dowdy's analysis, language choice was associated with shifts in identity. The same applies to the students in the UC. Their use of native or target languages, as well as their diverse language skills, promote or disrupt their ability to sustain their sense of identity and agency.

Significance to Scholarship

Exploring the lived experiences and perceptions of the spouses who enrolled in this voluntary literacy program supported by University residential life helped shed light on their frustrations or successes and their responses to the literacy programs. The information gleaned from the observations and interviews was intended to gain insight into their perception and interpretation of the literacy programs. This knowledge may help benefit other ESL literacy programs by informing them about some of the learners' beliefs and perceptions which interfere with and facilitate the process of their second language learning. Scholars, such as Miller & Endo (2004), identified culture and language shocks as two hurdles impairing the learning experience. The study with adult sojourners also extends research that has associated power relations with language learning and the learning environment (Brown, 2007; Cummins, 2000; Freire, 2005). This information about spousal learning experiences is valuable because it sheds light on a unique subject position that may change how we think about literacy practices in naturalistic informal settings.

Further, the UC where the study was conducted is unique and there have not been any studies conducted on student experiences in such informal learning centers. According to the UC coordinator, this Center is considered "a one-of-a kind facility that is second to none in the US!" (January, 2012,

UC Newslane, p. 2). It is characterized by offering literacy and recreational services to the community, particularly residents on the university campus. All services are free. The language learning context is informal in the sense that there are no placement tests, no attendance required, and no grades reported. Its mission is to facilitate international students and their spouses' adjustment in the host society by means of language, recreational, and cultural enrichment programs. Shedding light on the literacy services it provides and the spouses' perceptions of these services is of prime importance to raise awareness of the UC's role in supporting spouses in their own personal and professional language journeys to interpret the residents' experiences within its context, and to consider how such centers can develop new approaches for serving their diverse population.

Finally, this study helped highlight experiences of sojourners who accompanied their partners to the host society for secondary purposes. Participants discussed the meaning of language learning in the UC and the host country as well as, more broadly, lived experiences of self-fulfillment, failure, uncertainty, and their intercultural learning and growth. From this study, it emerged that their perception of the effect of the realities of their temporary residence was far more influential than the connotation of their positionality as temporary sojourners. For some, their sacrifices to career in moving to a new country and their new realities had a life-altering impact that went beyond the transient period of their residence. As I experienced, some participants in this study expressed a sense of disillusionment about their spousal roles, career plans, and the influence of their sojourn on their career. Thus, the findings from this study are potentially helpful for informing others of the lived experiences they might anticipate.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions will help in understanding the meanings of the following terms, which are central to this project. The term, "adult international nontraditional students" refers to the spouses who accompany their wives or husbands to the United States to pursue an educational degree or a career. They are the focus of this study. "Crystallizing experience" (Armstrong, 2000, p. 18) refers to the students' positive experiences in the literacy programs, which might have helped in

solidifying and advancing their language learning skills. This use of the term is based on Armstrong's (2002) definition of *crystallizing experiences* as "the turning points in the development of a person's talents and abilities. Often these events occur in early childhood, although they can occur anytime during the life span" (p. 18). "Paralyzing experience" (Armstrong, 2000, p. 18) refers to the negative experiences they had in the literacy programs, and which might have obstructed the learning process. These experiences shaped the learning environment and contributed to the affective factors involved in the learning context. The "affective filter" is explained by Krashen as a hypothetical filter reflexively put up by second language learners in a stressful classroom environment. When put up, this filter blocks the acquisition of language input. This filter is lowered to allow language input to flow when the classroom environment is free from anxiety (Brown, 2007; Miller & Endo, 2004). "Learning styles" are defined as "the composite of characteristic cognitive, affective [or motivational], and physiological traits that are relatively stable indicators of how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to the learning environment" (Keefe, 1985, p. 140). "Residents" is an indigenous term (Patton, 2002) used within the University Center to refer to the English language learners attending the literacy programs who are usually residents in University housing as well. "Multiple intelligences model" refers to the application of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences in planning lesson plans. This teaching model necessitates the use of activities which address multiple intelligences in each lesson plan.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

“Viewing the literature as honoring the past to inform the present gives us the opportunity for it to affect the future” (Rocco & Plakhotnlk, 2009, p. 128).

This chapter provides a review of literature of studies conducted in the field of Second Language Acquisition and literacy education to provide a rationale and foundation for the current study. This research study necessitated conducting an interdisciplinary review of literature since it is situated on the borderline/intersection of two major fields of research, namely English as a second language (ESL) and adult literacy. Connecting both fields was essential for highlighting the scope of the current research study. Furthermore, ESL literature review involved drawing on research in both Second Language Acquisition (SLA), which is the theoretical framework of how language development processes take place, and Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), which focuses on the pedagogical practice and application of SLA theories.

Historical Background of Literacy

Literacy is a critical component of the services provided at the UC. This necessitates reviewing the diverse definitions of literacy and the development in its meaning over time. Literacy in this research study is not restricted to reading and writing, but its meaning involves social and cultural literacy, as well.

A key aspect of the current study is participants' perception of their language learning experience including the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, as well as teaching practices and environment which involve social and cultural literacy.

This study involves highlighting the intersection of culture and literacy to explore the residents' perception of their learning experience and the UC teaching approaches. Hence it is important to start with defining literacy and culture and tracing the historical background of the current definition of literacy used in this study. Literacy has historically been associated with language whether in the oral (nonliterate) versus written (literate) discourses, or "primitive" versus "civilized" continuum as Goody (1973) terms it, and to interpret development in "modes of thought" and culture (p. 5). Gee (2008) provided a detailed account of scholars' definition of literacy as writing (Goody and Ong), and as an "autonomous" versus "ideological" entity. The definition of literacy as autonomous indicates that it has "cognitive effects" regardless of the sociocultural context in which it is employed. The "ideological" viewpoint emphasizes the impact of the sociocultural context in shaping literacy as an ideological model. Followers of this approach oppose the claim of the autonomous model that upward mobility and success are contingent on literacy. They suggest that other factors far outweigh the impact of literacy in ensuring success and better living conditions. Such factors include ethnicity, class, and cultural background (Gee, 2008, p. 80). The review of literature on the sociocultural approach to follow in the next section sheds more light on the intricate interrelationship between literacy, language, and culture within the sociocultural context.

The definition of literacy has changed over time, especially within the context of the sociocultural approach of learning. The sociocultural approach adopts critical thinking, social activism, social justice, and democratic education as indispensable elements in literacy and language education (Gee, 2008; Harste, 2003). In accordance with the sociocultural approach, literacy is a social practice (Brandt, 2008; Harste, 2003), and its meaning is situated in the sociocultural context (Brandt, 2008). It is worth mentioning that critical thinking undergirds literacy programs informed by the sociocultural approach.

Literacy education has evolved alongside definitions of literacy. Early practices of literacy education involved exclusive focus on teaching reading and writing. Contemporary methods consider literacy development within a social context. However, some scholars have criticized the sociocultural approach to literacy for disregarding individual traits in the learning process (Behrman, 2002). More recent approaches view literacy as a social and individual practice, with a view to balance the cognitive and social approaches to learning (Behrman, 2002). This approach to literacy is referred to as community-based literacy, which is the model used at the UC where this study was conducted. In this sense, literacy is not regarded as teaching reading and writing, but is based on the concept that literacy is a social act. Behrman (2002) stated that this trend is informed by the situated cognition theory, which is the underpinning of community-based literacy education. Situated cognition theory states that “learning is always a contextualized activity occurring within a community that has both social and physical features” (Behrman, 2002, p. 27); Behrman (2002) identified three forms of community, which are: “experiential community, classroom community, and anticipatory community” (p. 28). Thus the literature on community-based literacy relates to the topic of my research study which focuses on the sociocultural context of learning experience within a community of learners at the UC.

Some researchers, such as Brandt (2008) portrayed the development in literacy education by focusing on its “sponsors” or those who provided literacy services (p.19) at different historical moments. Brandt (2008) contended that over history literacy has been a tool serving two binary opposites: “upward mobility” and “stratification” (p. 2). She conducted a life-story research study in 1990 on eighty participants born in the period between 1890s and 1980s. She pointed out that shift in “sponsors” proceeded from individual to “commercial sponsorship” (p.20), and that the concept and content of literacy programs has always been shaped by the “sponsors” purposes. “Sponsors” influenced “...what, when, why, and how people write and read” (p. 20). One of the key sponsors of literacy was the Protestant church, which played a key role in literacy education prior to the introduction of public education in the United States by teaching the working class to read the Bible. Furthermore, during the age of slavery, African-Americans receiving literacy education in “self-help institutions” (p. 110), such as

Baptist and Methodist churches, maintained a sort of “critical literacy,” which spurred “religious, educational, and political” activism (p.20). Brandt (2008) also referred to the interrelationship between literacy and the social, political, and economic changes in the American society. One of the examples she cited was the impact of the industrial revolution on American literacy. It terminated some venues of literacy education and prompted the development of other economically-oriented literacy programs aimed at skilling workers after their “deskilling” by the Industrial Revolution (p.18). Then, with the advent of the information age, literacy purposes have been modified to cope with the change.

One of the specific examples Brandt (2008) cited was the prominent role of the African American Protestant church in the history of literacy approaches in the United States of America. Brandt (2008) referred to the African American Protestant church as a main sponsor of the African Americans’ literacy. It also played a key role in preserving their culture and documenting their existence. Brandt described it as “the cultural womb” (p.111) which nurtured and allowed for the African Americans’ growth. Using the framework of critical theory, it could be inferred that the African American church’s sponsorship of literacy was a response to oppression, and to the monopoly of capital. Brandt stated that the Church “developed literacy as part of a larger spiritual effort to practice a form of Christianity that resisted and repaired the insults of racism” (p. 118). The oppressed shouldered their commitment to liberate themselves from the oppressor. If they waited for dominant Anglo-Americans to grant this right, they may not have achieved this rise in literacy rates. Their collaboration was a key element in their pursuit of justice. Brandt’s (2001) idea of literacy sponsors helped in exploring cultural differences, which might have been influenced by literacy sponsors in the students’ native countries in this research study. Being aware of the influence of literacy sponsors on perception helped understand the students’ perceptions as shaped during their learning experience in the context of their sociocultural background.

Peace literacy as defined by Brooks (2011) is a further example of the historical development in the definition and connotation of the concept of literacy. It is meant to realize peace in the learning context by leveling power relations among stake holders. It is compatible with dialogical education. It is based on the pedagogical concept that the teacher is a facilitator of learning. Within this context, the

teacher and students are co-participants in the educational process by means of dialogue, key for generating “praxis”- a process of reflection and action (Freire, 2005, p. 125). In the peace literacy model, the curriculum is not imposed on teachers and students as within a top down model. Rather, , they are mainly inspired and guided by the students’ background knowledge. Within this model teachers should be fully aware of their own “historicity” and the students’ as well. Teachers should be able to assess and consider the students’ perspectives as well as their own (Brooks, 2011, p. 5).

Peace literacy is relevant to the learning context in the UC. Teachers apply its principles, but they have never used the term to refer to this practice. It is compatible with the Second Language Socialization theory employed in the UC in that they both assign prior consideration to the students’ cultural background and build on the interaction of teachers and students within a dialogical process. They are both inspired by Freire’s concept of “problem posing education” (Brooks, 2011, p. 8). Within this model the teacher is not the authoritative figure. Both teachers and students are partners in the educational process where students pose problems to facilitate learning. “Dismantling hierarchies in the classroom” is one of the prerequisites for peace literacy. It views “alienating human beings from their own decision-making” as, what Freire referred to, “dehumanizing.” Peace literacy gives equal weight to both ends and means which should be compatible (Brooks, 2011, p. 10). In the same sense, UC teachers are facilitators of education. They are perceived as “friends” by the residents and as one participant put it that “they are not real teachers.”

The Intersection of Language and Culture

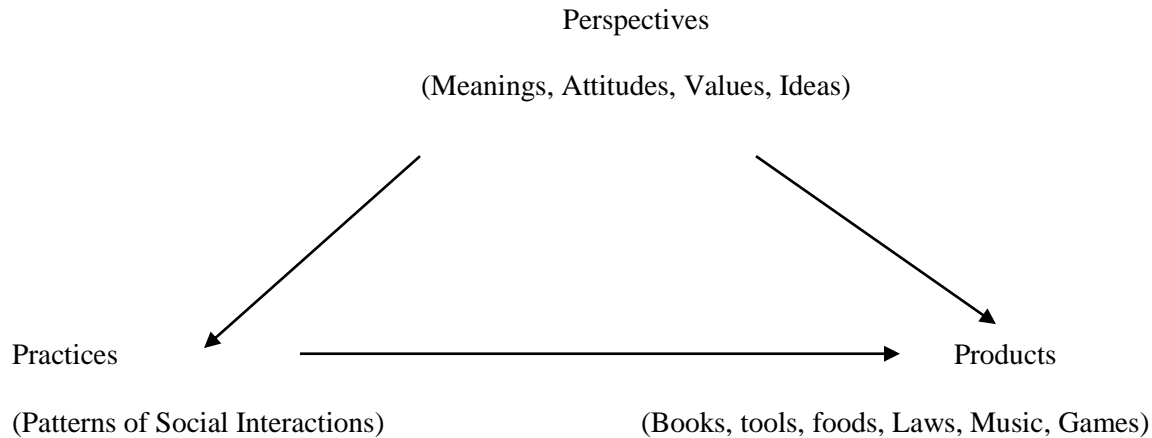
One practice emphasized in the UC is exploring residents’ native cultures and comparing and contrasting their cultural worldview with the target culture. Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) considered culture to be “the most important context for language learning” (p. 225). Culture and language are inseparable. Focusing on one at the expense of the other results in an impaired perception of both sides (Atkinson, 1999; Brown, 2007, Nault, 2006; Rowsell, Sztainbok, & Blaney, 2007). The standards for foreign language learning in the 21st Century incorporated culture as an integral part of foreign language teaching. The American Council for Teachers of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) identified five standards

for foreign language learning: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons and communities. ACTFL stated that foreign language learners should develop awareness and understanding of different cultures and determined two standards to this effect: First, developing an understanding of the correlation between the “practices and perspectives” of the target culture; Second, developing understanding of the correlation between the “products and perspectives” of the target culture (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004, p. 226). Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) point out that even half a century ago, when the most commonly used method of teaching English as a second language was grammar-translation, with a focus on grammar and translation from and into the native language, culture was a part of foreign language teaching. Culture was then represented by studying historical figures, geography, literary works, and sample arts of the target culture.

In recent years, culture represents an indispensable component of language teaching programs that incorporate the interactive Communicative Approach in foreign language teaching. The content of language learning is no longer the grammar and vocabulary, but rather the target culture as represented in the target language. Culture and linguistic competence are entwined (Rowell, Sztainbok, & Blaney, 2007). Besides cultural products, and practices, Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) referred to narrative as an important tool for exposing students to the target culture. Narrative refers to the use of stories in this context and helps in giving meaning to the cultural products, “realia” and other objects used from the target language. Brown (2007) suggested that role play, readings, films, games and simulation give meaning to cultural objects and help immerse students in a real life context in the target language to facilitate their acculturation.

Contemporary curriculum in language learning that focuses on culture includes popular culture such as everyday life practices of the target language speakers, folklore, and media with a view to help learners develop cultural awareness of, and empathy to the surrounding world. ACTFL developed what is called the culture triangle, which includes the philosophical perspectives, practices (patterns of social interactions), and products (books, tools, foods, laws, music, games, artifacts, realia) of the target culture

(Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004, p. 225). This culture triangle is used for illustrating the components of culture curriculum in teaching foreign languages.



(Figure 1. The Culture Triangle, Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century. Curtain, & Dahlberg, 2004, p. 227).

Moreover, the ACTFL's standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (1999) expanded the role of culture in teaching foreign languages. This is reflected in not only assigning separate standards for culture, but also incorporating culture into all components of language learning, such as communication, cultural connections, language comparisons, and communities. Current philosophy in teaching is the tenets that communication should be culturally sensitive, and language comparisons include focusing on comparing expressions and worldview of native and target language and culture. Finally, linguistic and cultural "competencies" are to be implemented in communities outside of the classroom. As Brown (2007) expresses, incorporating culture in the second language curriculum helps students understand that their reality and culture are not universal, and that their perception of reality is not the only correct one; their "culture-bound worldview" is but one part of a whole (p.190). This perspective informs the UC approach as well as the current study of considering diverse cultural perspectives in facilitating language learning as well as exploring learners' perceptions and beliefs about learning. In fact, reference to learning about other cultures recurred in some of the students' written responses about what they learned in the UC. For example, Kamel wrote: "about other cultures I learned

that every people is different to each other and also all of we are the same, we just have a different point of view.” Also, Nima commented that what she learned was “respect the other culture. I learn the different we are.”

The Sociocultural Nature of Language Learning and Its Impact on Shaping Knowledge

One of the underpinnings of this research study is the sociocultural nature of language learning. The UC literacy programs are integrated into a broader curriculum for community development. This curriculum is based on the sociocultural approach to language learning. In the UC, language is taught within a broader context of acculturation (exposing the international residents to the US culture) and socialization in the host society (social and entertainment activities which facilitate cross cultural interaction among residents of diverse cultural backgrounds).

In the present research study, the researcher claims that perceptions are “mediated” by the participants’ cultural background. In this claim, the researcher adopts what Mallon (2006) refers to as “social dependence constructionism” (p. 99). The sociocultural context shapes people’s knowledge and behavior (Cunliffe, 2008; Howe, 1998; Hruby, 2001; Mallon, 2006). In this sense, the researcher assumes that the researcher and participants’ perceptions are neither natural nor inevitable. Nor are they neutral. They are socially constructed, and in this, as Howe (1998) phrases it, their knowledge is “culturally and historically contingent” on the values they cherish (p. 14). Similarly, the researcher’s interpretation of their perceptions is also socially constructed. The researcher adopts Berger and Lukmann’s (as cited in Cunliffe, 2008) interpretation of reality as a social construction. They interpret reality as being both subjective and objective. Understanding the meaning of reality is an ongoing process of “externalization, objectivation and internalization, i.e. society is a human product” and at the same time “[m]an is a social product” (p. 125).

The researcher believes that the cultural repertoire of the researcher and participants is a key in interpreting perceptions in relation to each other. “The contingency of phenomena,” Mallon (2006) suggests, is an underlying assumption in this research study that the cultural background of the students and pedagogical approaches in their home countries helped shape their perception of their learning

experience in the literacy program in the host country. The UC residents have different cultural backgrounds, and hence, different perceptions and experiences with the same literacy programs offered in the same UC. Exploring prior experience and background knowledge about viable educational practices aids in interpreting their perceptions. Further, meaning is constructed, and the meaning generation process (by means of interaction) takes place within “a social context” (Crotty, 1999, p. 42). In this case, the social context is the UC, which provides classes to teach English as a second language and hosts varied social activities, as well as intercultural communication inside and outside the classroom.

Cultural capital (Bourdieu). As mentioned in Chapter one, and discussed at greater length in Chapter 5, Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital informs the cultural framework of this research study to explore the perspectives of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Bourdieu identified three interrelated forms of capital, which are the economic, the cultural and the social capital. In his opinion, economic capital is the “most efficient form,” and it is relatively “easy” to transform into “symbolic capital,” which are the social and the cultural (Postone, Lipuma, & Calhoun, 1993, p. 5). Bourdieu stated that capital is inherited and transferred from one generation to the other; hence allowing for the accumulation of capital overtime (Postone, Lipuma, & Calhoun, 1993, p. 5).

Based on Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, the similarity of pedagogical models and cultural similarity to the UC learning environment provides students with a type of “cultural capital.” This capital is “a form of power” (Postone, Lipuma, & Calhoun, 1993, p. 4). Based on my reading of Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital, I expected students who learned using the same teaching models and methods employed in the University Center to have “accumulated” more capital than their peers who were socialized into education using different methods. However, the participants’ account of their English learning experiences in their native countries seemed to be replicated. In their native countries, didactic methods, particularly lecturing, were used. Their first language was mainly used for instruction. All of them used the translation-grammar method at some points of their language learning experiences in their home countries.

The students' emotions were used to interpret the students' perceptions within the framework of Bourdieu's cultural capital theory. Bourdieu delineates emotions into "experiences" formed and presented through "enculturated social actors" (Probyn, as cited in Zembylas, 2007, p.443). Emotions are considered resources which are "circulated, accumulated and exchanged for other forms of capital." Bourdieu did not use the term "emotional capital" but other researchers built on his theory of cultural capital to develop this concept. Emotional capital refers to emotional resources. It is reciprocally reproduced and produces the educational setting (Zembylas, 2007, p. 444). In this sense, the residents' feelings about the learning environment are both influencing and influenced by the UC. This feeling, whether positive or negative, accumulates overtime and facilitates or obstructs learning.

In his description of emotional capital, Zembylas (2007) referred to Bourdieu's account of habitus which "explains" how the interaction between the subjective factors (such as emotions) and objective factors affect people's "actions." Habitus is not restricted to the present, but rather involves history (Zembylas, 2007, p. 447). In this sense, the residents' prior experiences and preconception of learning and of other nationalities influence their perception of the learning environment and facilitate or disrupt their communication with others. This perception is both developed and contributes to the development of emotional capital which is accumulated and lead to the reproduction of certain "emotion norms and affective economies" (Zembylas, 2007, p. 453). Bourdieu's concept of capital is based on rejecting the claim that intelligence, with all its kinds, determines "success or failure." (Zembylas, 2007, p. 456). Drawing on this assumption, implementing the multiple intelligences model at the UC should be coupled with an understanding of the influence of capital.

Historicity of language. The current research study is situated within the context of the sociocultural approach to language learning in terms of theory. In practice, the UC employs the same approach to literacy in all the activities that are designed to facilitate the residents' socialization into the host society. The following overview of sociocultural theories would thus help in highlighting the key issues in this approach with a view to provide background information on the theories informing this approach and the current study.

The idea of historicity is based on the theme of continuity across the past, present, future, and its effect on liberating the subject from spatial and temporal thought constraints. Bakhtin (1986) referred to the concept of the historicity of the text. Adding this dimension of history to the sociocultural context of language provides a deeper understanding of the meaning of discourse. It is a step further than what Gee (2008) referred to as the change of meaning and that words do not have a fixed meaning. For Bakhtin (1986) as well, meaning-making is dynamic. The difference in Bakhtin's take is in considering the historical context of the text, and that it is not a mere change in as much as it is unraveling more meanings which are intrinsic in the text itself, "bearers of meaning", and not added extrinsically. The role of the successors is to build on (and not neglect) predecessors' meanings and unravel the locus of meaning to set the text free from the constraints of time. He said:

We must emphasize that we are speaking here about new semantic depths that lie embedded in the cultures of past epochs and not about the expansion of our factual, material knowledge of them....new discoveries of material bearers of culture alter our semantic concepts, and they can also force us to restructure them radically. (p. 6)

Like Gee, Bakhtin (1986) emphasized the importance of the present sociocultural context for the process of meaning-making. Nevertheless, Bakhtin (1986) emphasized the importance of history. This theme of continuity evokes the image of a tree, which has its roots deep planted in the past, and overtime the branches, leaves, and fruits grow. Similarly, he emphasized considering past roots which are necessary for interpreting meaning in the present time and nurturing future implications (Bakhtin, 1986). As the word in isolation has no meaning, a text which is stripped of its historical context has a distorted meaning or meanings.

The vantage point from which the reader or listener considers the text, would it be temporal or spatial, allows for a different view of its meanings. This sounds the same as the phenomenological principle of bracketing our own experiences, immersion, and assuming the standpoint of a target culture, and seeing the world through others' eyes to be able to see the essence of the phenomenon in question. However, according to Bakhtin (1986), this bracketing will only allow for a "one-sided" view. He said:

...a certain entry as a living being into a foreign culture, the possibility of seeing the world through its eyes, is a necessary part of the process of understanding it; but if this were the only aspect of this understanding, it would merely be duplication and would not entail anything new or enriching. (p. 7)

One aspect of the sociocultural approach mentioned by Bakhtin (1986) is “creative understanding” which necessitates putting into consideration all the spatial and temporal contexts. Being an insider allows for seeing one dimension of meaning. However, to have a well-rounded view we need to see phenomena from the outside. This will allow for seeing multiple dimensions that were invisible to insiders in this “epoch.” Further, in addition to considering the time and space framework, Bakhtin (1986) emphasized exchanging dialogue, and posing questions for the clarification of texts. However, while this is possible with spoken language, how could this be applied to written texts, especially with exchanging dialogues? In his argument against written texts, Plato criticized written texts for traveling “in time and space away from its “author”” (Gee, 2008, p. 52). In this view, it is possible to review the historical background of the text, question the author, and come up with our own interpretations and conclusions beyond what the author intended in his or her context. Exchanging dialogue with people from the same culture where this text was produced will allow for unfolding other layers of meaning. It would be part of what Brooks (2011) has called upon teachers to do, which is to develop understanding of their own history as well as the history of their students. Seeking knowledge of the diverse experiences of people through direct and equal dialogue allows for gleaning knowledge from primary sources and helps in developing understanding. They have the advantage of sharing common spatial factors with the author. However, their understanding of the text is still impaired because they did not share with the author the same temporal context. The text had traveled in time and they never had the chance to negotiate the meaning with the author.

Drawing on Bakhtin’s (1986) theory which emphasizes the socio-historicity of language, I included questions in the interview which were meant to glean information on the sociocultural and historical context in which the participants learned English as a second language in their native countries.

These questions included when they have started and how they were taught, questions about the learning environment, and their perception of the learning environment in their native countries and the UC. The underlying assumption was that the way they have been socialized into language learning in the past influenced their perception of their learning experiences at present. This information was important for having insight into the historical and cultural context of their perception of viable teaching practices.

The Importance of Considering the Sociocultural and Affective Context in Language Learning and Research

“Learning, even self-directed learning, rarely occurs “in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives; ...it is intimately related to that world and affected by it” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 5).

Given the aforementioned value assigned to the sociocultural nature of language learning, it is thus incumbent to duly consider it while designing and assessing language learning programs as well as while exploring the learners’ perception of their learning experience. In the field of Second Language Acquisition, a compendium of research emphasized the importance of considering the cultural, social, and affective factors when conducting research in this particular area (Nunan, 1992; Sawyer, 1992; Brown & White, 2010). Aragão (2011) highlighted the reciprocity of beliefs about second language learning and emotions. Brown and White (2010) highlighted the interdependence of affective and sociocognitive aspects in the process of language learning. In a qualitative study conducted with learners of Russian language, Brown and White (2010) pointed out that there was an association between the students’ perception of their learning experience and their relationship with their teachers.

Other research studies emphasized the key role of social and psychological factors in language learning (Gardner & Lalonde, 1985). Gardner and Lalonde (1985) identified students’ motivation as an important factor in language learning. They contended that the cultural context of learning influences motivation to learn a second language, which is, in turn, influenced by the learners’ willingness to approach and embrace cultural practices associated with language learning. Culture integration plays a great role in motivating students to learn a foreign language (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004; Nault, 2006;

Rowell, Sztainbok, & Blaney, 2007). Learners' interest in the target culture could be a source of motivation for the target language acquisition. It could also help the students compare their culture to the target culture and understand the diversity of culture and that their culture is one among other cultures (Brown; 2007; Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004).

Some researchers, such as Nunan (1992), criticized research which disregarded the social and cultural contexts of learning, arguing that learning does not happen in "a social vacuum" (p. 13). He emphasized the need for conducting qualitative studies focused on the sociocultural and affective contexts of language learning during the learning process. Nunan (1992) proposed direct observation and analysis as alternative tools to replace the conventional methods already in use. Hence, this study contributes to this trajectory of knowledge through analyzing the participants' perceptions as mediated by the sociocultural and affective contexts of the learning environment. The review of literature of sociocultural theories helped "provide a reference point for interpretation of findings" (Merriam & Simpson, as cited in Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009, p. 122).

Adult Education

The participants in this research study start or resume learning English as a second language in their adulthood and the processes in the UC are in part developed from the philosophy of adult learning. The principles of adult education proceed from the assumption that adult learners have different needs and styles than young learners. According to Merriam et al. (2007), adult education has been patronized by formal and informal institutions, mainly "community-based", ranging from "business and industry and educational institutions" to "the military, cooperative extensions, churches, hospitals, and other institutions" (p. 2) and developed in relation to different sociocultural developments and needs. According to Merriam et al. (2007), interest in adult education was early developed with the advent of the Industrial Revolution in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries to train workers or for the "Americanization" of immigrants (p. 6) and then evolved in response to globalization, emphasizing the interactive relationship between adult education and the socialcultural context (Merriam et al., 2007).

Merriam et al. (2007) criticized undue consideration of the sociocultural context in this field and emphasized its importance in forging the learning experience, particularly in relation to the “race, class, and gender” of adult participants (p. X). Moreover, they highlighted the interactive nature of the relationship between the learning process and the learning context. In the same vein, the learning experience of the participants in this research study is not considered as an individual endeavor, but rather in relation to the UC immediate learning environment in particular and the learners’ sociocultural context in general.

Research conducted in the field of adult education has included attention to the implications of going back to school to adult learners. In a study conducted on working-class women in adult basic education in Philadelphia and later in another setting in North Carolina, Wendy Luttrell (1997) attempted to explore “what it meant to become somebody” (p. 1). Participants in these qualitative research studies considered earning high-school diploma to be their gateway to “become somebody.” Doreen, one of the participants in this study, did not see dropping out of high school as the “end” of the “world.” However, she, together with another participant, reported that they returned to school to earn their diplomas to “feel like [they were] somebody” (p.1). The experience of returning to school was often difficult, involving negotiation with family needs, feelings of insecurity, and yet conviction that schooling was a vehicle for personal and vocational advancement.

Luttrell (1997) pointed out that in spite of the fact that participants’ backgrounds differed, they shared the perception that attaining the diploma as a marker of identity. Luttrell (1997) added that these women’s stories exposed the inculcation and establishment of “social inequalities” which helped define perceptions of identity (p. 1). Participants’ consensus was on the belief that the diploma was not the only sign or proof of intelligence, and that their “common sense” intelligence and other sensibilities helped them succeed as wives and in performing other jobs, such as a participant, Doreen, whose husband could fix things that college graduates could not. Nevertheless, the society’s established rules influenced their perception of their worth and spurred their attempt to define this sense of worthiness in terms of the social rules. Luttrell added that there were similarities between the two groups of the participants, and the shared

discrepancy between their personal belief in their prior smartness and the society's demands to provide an evidence of this smartness in the form of a diploma. However, racial identity of the black female participants still put them at a disadvantage even after they earned their high school diploma which was the marker of being "somebody." This reflected another dimension of social inequality where people were judged according to preconceptions or misconceptions and not real worth. Luttrell referred to a dichotomy in the participants' perception of "commonsense knowledge" and school knowledge as a proof of intelligence (p.2).

In the same vein, the current research study explored the participants' perceptions of their learning experience and the implications of these perceptions and differences in their interpretation of their learning in the UC. Some of the participants shared that their progress in language learning helped them develop a feeling of doing something "important" similar to Luttrell's participants. On the other hand, others felt that they were still struggling to realize progress. This contradiction in the participants' interpretation of their experiences shed light on the complex intersecting issues involved in adult education. The residents' perception of progress in language learning was associated with their sense of identity and self-worth. For some participants, such as Julian, slow progress signified losing her agency as an adult in the host society. Other participants who felt successful, as Denise and Henda, associated progress in language learning with a sense of independence and freedom.

Prior Knowledge as a Key Factor in the Learning Process

Research studies in the field of education have included findings that emphasize the role of prior knowledge as influential to participants' learning processes, particularly with English Language Learners. Building on the students' prior knowledge and focusing on thematic units that involve mundane concepts and background information familiar to the participants in this research study facilitated learning. Other research relevant to the present inquiry focused on the importance of considering prior knowledge in the educational process. Freire (2005) stated that learners are not "blank slates" ready to absorb teachers' instruction. He proposed that the students enter the classroom with a set of beliefs and understandings shaped by their background knowledge of the world. He criticized what he referred to as "the banking

concept of education” (p. 72), which ignores students’ background knowledge, and considers them objects or empty vessels ready to be filled with pure teachers’ knowledge. In this “banking” system, the interaction between the students and teacher is minimal. Knowledge is transmitted in one direction from the subject (teacher) to the object (student). In this kind of relationship, the students become mere gate keepers of the precious knowledge granted to them by the teacher. Freire (2005) considered this type of education as dehumanizing.

In the same vein, some SLA scholars rejected the analogy of first and second language acquisition (May, 2011; Ellis, 2008), pointing that second language learners enter the field with many conceptions about language learning, first language rules, cultural background that interfere with their processing and conceptualization of language learning. Using Locke’s term, they are not a “tabula rasa” ready to be indoctrinated into the second language learning, but, as in Ellis’s (2008) words, “a tabula repleta” generated by means of their prior language and cultural background knowledge (p. 238).

To emphasize the importance of prior knowledge to the learning process, Brooks (2011) cited Addams’ example of working class children who were taken on a fieldtrip to a park. The educators were disappointed by the children’s disinterest in trees and flowers. They were alarmed because the children’s interest was unexpectedly aroused by a passing-by police car. Addams criticized the educators for their limited awareness of the children’s experiences and suggested the events presented a teachable moment that they should have seized. This anecdote provides an example of Freire’s (2005) concept of prior knowledge, which he considered essential for education. It should be the starting point for designing the curriculum and selecting the appropriate learning materials within the context of a liberatory model of education.

Merriam et al. (2007) emphasized the primacy of teachers’ awareness of the students’ prior experience in the field of adult education. They considered it to be “a basic assumption” (p. 27) for facilitating the learning process of adult learners. The authors consider that familiarizing adult educators with formal and informal learning venues of their students would help them recognize the importance of their awareness of the students’ prior experiences. They added that shedding light on informal venues

besides formal learning would help shift the adult learners' focus to their competencies as "lifelong learners" (p. 51). Hence, conducting the current research study contributes to the body of knowledge on the participants' prior experiences and their association with their perception of the learning environment.

Language Teaching Methods

Communicative Language Approach. One of the assumptions in this research study, based on current field knowledge and experience in UC, is that there is no universally approved method for teaching English to speakers of other languages. However, the teaching method used in the UC is the communicative approach to language learning (as defined in Chapter One). Grammar classes have been recently introduced upon residents' request. Based on the residents' responses to the interview questions and the observation notes, almost all the participants were taught English using the grammar-translation method. The communicative approach does not seem to be favored by all residents. The review of literature indicates that culture influences preferences of teaching methods and that the communicative approach is not suitable for everyone. For example, May (2011) criticized the current predominance of the communicative approach in the field of TESOL and attributed it to reliance on SLA guidelines.

Some scholars stated that teaching approaches that employ multiple methodologies are more effective in teaching language learners than approaches that use single methodologies (Armstrong, 2002; Brown, 2007; Hinkelman & Pysock, 1992), likely because multiple methodologies address multiple learning styles of the students. In a study conducted by Hinkelman and Pysock (1992) with 200 university students in Japan, the researchers stated that the use of multiple methods, which address diverse learning styles, increased vocabulary retention. They recommended that teachers use multiple methods which address diverse learning styles, mainly the auditory, visual, and kinesthetic.

Moreover, earlier research studies that have been conducted in EFL (English as a foreign language) setting have revealed a discrepancy between the methods used by English teachers, mainly westerners, and students' expectations (Ellis, 1996). Ellis (1996) referred to research studies conducted by Damen in 1987 in China on Chinese students learning English as a foreign language. He criticized the assumption that the communicative approach of language learning is "universal" and pointed out that the Chinese

students in the cited study expected a teacher-led rather than student-centered approach. The findings reflected that the teachers should be flexible and adjust teaching methods to be “sensitive to existing beliefs and values” (Ellis, 1996, p. 214). Ellis emphasized the importance of employing culturally-sensitive and culturally-responsive approaches to facilitate students’ learning.

Ellis (1996) referred to another study conducted on Vietnamese EFL teachers. He stated that some of the principles of the communicative approach, as in Canale and Swain’s “model”, are rendered inappropriate for some learners in some settings as it focuses on content or language “as process.” It aims at developing both language competence and performance; hence focusing on teaching form in context, and meaning takes priority over form. Thus, it disregards the high esteem some cultures, such as Asian, assign to form (Ellis, 1996, p. 215). While the previous study was conducted in a formal setting, the current study conducted in an informal setting revealed similar participant reverence to form. Ellis (1996) also pointed out that culture creates our worldview and our perceptions. He criticized employing our own values to attribute other people’s behavior and referred to the model of “teacher as mediator”, considering it to be the most appropriate cultural model for teacher-student relationship where both worldviews are reconciled. He defined it as “the process of moving from an ethnocentric perception to a non-dualistic, ‘metacultural’ perception” (p. 217). Ellis (1996) identified two principles for the mediation model; namely finding access to the learners’ culture and showing empathy with their culture. He illustrated this model by sharing that teachers’ inclusion of aspects of the Confucian philosophy gave the teachers’ access to the culture of the Chinese learners and facilitated their acceptance of the student-centered model. Ellis (1996) concluded by emphasizing the importance of teachers’ flexibility and consideration of both theory and practice in “cross-cultural” settings (p. 218).

In a later article, Ellis (2008) delineated “an emergentist account” of Second Language Acquisition which portrayed L2 acquisition as a complex process of organically interrelated “dynamic cycles of language use, language change, language perception, and language acquisition” taking place by means of “interactions” in the language learning context (p. 232). While the sociocultural context influenced second language learning, Ellis (2008) argued that adults’ second language learning, in turn, influenced

the target language as well. In this case second language learning both influences and is influenced by the sociocultural context. In this approach, implicit learning associated with the communicative approach is downplayed and overridden by an explicit focus on form (in context) which helps in raising a dynamic consciousness of the language content. According to Ellis (2008), consciousness represents an ultimate outcome of socialization.

Socialization. One assumption guiding the present study is that socialization is a better model of second language teaching than acculturation. This research study was conducted within the framework of sociocultural theories of language acquisition which was the basis for the development of the Second Language Socialization (SLS) theory in the field of Second Language Acquisition in the 1990's (Duff, 2007; Gunderson, 2009). The new wave of SLS scholarship was influenced by sociocultural theories, such as Bakhtin's literary theory of historicity and Bourdieu's theory of capital, field, and habitus. Earlier SLS scholars were influenced by Vygotsky. SLS emphasizes the role of the sociocultural context of language learning and its contribution to "create/transform those contexts and human understanding" (Duff, 2007, p. 313). Duff (2007) defined second language socialization theory as:

The process by which novices or newcomers in a community or culture gain communicative competence, membership, and legitimacy in the group. It is a process that is mediated by language and whose goal is the mastery of linguistic conventions, pragmatics, the adoption of appropriate identities, stances (e.g., epistemic or emphatic) or ideologies, and other behaviors associated with the target group and its normative practices. (Duff, 2007, p. 310)

Duff (2007) pointed out that, according to the SLS theory, language, "social interactions", and dialogical relationship between teachers and students are foundational for language learning. She stated that the target is the development of the social, cultural, and linguistic competence of learners. She added that the second language socialization research has thus far exclusively targeted children rather than adults. The current research study extends knowledge about adult sojourners' perceptions of a learning context employing the second language socialization theory.

Finally, Duff (2007) pointed out that learners within the context of SLS may have diverse experiences due to the level of acceptance in the learning environment, learners' level of motivation, as well as their attitudes and feelings towards the target language and culture. She cited the example of the "conflicting" feelings or resistance of the "first-generation immigrants and expatriates" regarding socialization into the host society (p. 310). She also raised concerns about the "simplistic" consideration of access to and membership in the target culture and language. In a study she conducted with undergraduate Korean students in Canada, Duff (2007) pointed out that socialization into the host society was in some instances disrupted for many reasons, primarily lack of access (p. 316).

Unlike early adopters of SLS, Duff (2007) added, current SLS researchers focus on exploring members' meanings of their own learning experience. Hence, the current research study pursued the participants' interpretation of their learning within what Duff (2007) referred to as a "community of practice" (p. 315). Within the framework of SLS theory, the researcher sought to explore the participants' perception of their learning experience as facilitated by their daily interaction inside and outside the classroom in the UC.

Interaction versus input acquisition. Many scholars referred to the importance of mutual interaction between the teacher and students to facilitate learning. Other researchers in the field of Second Language Acquisition emphasized the importance of another dimension of interaction, which is the students' interaction with the learning environment. Nunan (1992) stated that language learning does not occur by means of an "osmotic process of input" (p. 23), hence criticizing Krashen's input hypothesis which stipulates that for effective learning to take place, the teacher has to provide the learners with a comprehensible input + 1, which is one step higher than what the learners can do on their own. According to this hypothesis, Krashen assumes that providing the students with the appropriate input would maximize language acquisition (Brown, 2007). On the other hand, researchers who oppose the Naturalistic Approach to Second Language Acquisition, an approach which emphasizes communication and does not rely on explicit grammar instruction, emphasize the importance of interaction with the learning environment. Interaction with the social context, cultural background, and the affective factors

involved in the learning process affect language acquisition and use (Brown, 2007; Nunan, 1992).

Functional language use within the context of the Naturalistic Approach and modes of interaction among language learners tend to differ inside and outside the classroom (Nunan, 1992; Van Lier, 1988), which highlights the impact of social context on language use.

Studies cited by Nunan (1992) reported that second language learners prefer to communicate with non-native speakers than with native speakers of language, which again emphasizes the importance of the social context on language use. This claim is useful for interpreting comments in the present research study, such as Julian's remark that it is easier for her to understand nonnative speakers regardless of their language of origin than native speakers whom, she states, speak too fast for her to comprehend.

Theories of English Language Learning

This section provides a review of English language learning body of literature that provides a framework for interpreting pieces of data in this study. Based on the constructionist approach, understanding the influence of cultural background in the field of teaching English as a second language helped in selecting certain theoretical frameworks to read and analyze the data and to understand why for some students the learning environment was anxiety free and for others it was loaded with anxiety. This justifies using the affective and sociocultural framework of language learning (Acton and de Felix, 1986) to interpret data. First, the researcher employed Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis as a lens to interpret some emerging themes in the analysis process. Krashen assumes the presence of a hypothetical filter inside ESL learners. When the learning environment is free of anxiety, the students lower this filter to give access to language input. On the other hand, when the learning environment is loaded with anxiety, language learners erect the filter to block language input (Brown, 2007; Miller & Endo, 2004).

However, it is worth mentioning that since it is assumed in this study that meaning is socially constructed by means of interaction, what might be a source of anxiety for some students could be common practice for others and could be considered an indispensable part of what constitutes language learning in their cognitive schemata. Therefore they request its inclusion in the curriculum. To provide an example to illustrate this point, in a pilot study conducted by the researcher in 2009 in preparation for the

current study, some of the students asked literacy educators in the UC to include tests and explicit grammar teaching in their program. These students emphasized that this would lead to more progress in their language learning because it was the way they have been taught English in their home countries. Other students referred to tests as a source of anxiety. Thus conducting this research study helped understand from the participants' perspective what constituted anxiety for them. In the same vein, this helped explore the crystallizing and paralyzing experiences they have experienced at the University Center. As mentioned earlier, Armstrong (2002) describes crystallizing experiences as favorable conditions, which facilitate language learning. In contrast, paralyzing experiences are the bad experiences the students encounter, which debilitate their motivation to learn.

The other lens the researcher used to analyze data was the cultural learning styles theory. The use of this theory is aligned with the assumption that phenomena are socially dependent. In this sense, it would be possible to interpret students' preferences, and possibly help them "alter" (Mallon, 2006, p.101) or adjust their style preferences by means of interaction within the learning environment.

The Learning Environment

Besides the impact of intrinsic factors on language learning, some researchers referred to a top down impact of social conditions and learning context on the perception of the self, social reality, and consequently learning (Elia, 2006; Erickson & Al-Timimi 2001; Suleiman, 2000). Based on his ethnographic study on Arab students' experiences in the US schools, Suleiman (2000) has pointed out that "social conditioning" in the United States is characterized by bias against and ignorance, at best, regarding the Arab minorities. This "social conditioning" triggers prejudice toward Arab students which negatively impact their self-perception, results in creating an "identity crisis" and in providing a negative learning environment which drastically affect the Arab students' academic achievement (p. 2). Increasing teachers' knowledge of the students' "microcultures" is required for redressing the impact of negative social conditioning (Suleiman, 2000, p.11).

As for theories in the field of language learning, the underlying assumption in this research study was that language learning does not occur in "vacuum." The learning environment influences the

students' learning and their perception of their learning experiences. The importance of the learning environment for language learning has been well-documented in many research studies (Brown, 2007; Terry, 2006). In a qualitative research study employing case study methodology in an adult literacy program, Terry (2006) emphasized the importance of interpersonal relationships among teachers and students in creating a viable learning environment. The study focused on both peer and teacher-student relationships. Terry (2006) referred to the importance of "positive" human relations in creating a favorable learning environment and consequently learning outcomes (p. 31). Terry (2006) specified some of the features of "positive" relationships (p. 33). This includes the teacher's role as a facilitator, non-judgmental evaluation of the students, partnership in learning, respect and acceptance of differences, cherishing diversity, "role modeling", and "mentoring." Students in this study attributed the welcoming learning environment to the teachers' role in the learning context. Peer relations were of equal importance to their progress. Socialization, sharing food, and informal terms of address, and friendship were some descriptors of the relationships among teachers and students. This is similar to the relationships at the UC in this current research study.

From above, it is apparent that the learning environment is as important as the teaching methods and teaching models. Krashen's theory of Affective Filter (Brown, 2007) and power relations are key elements in the learning environment and influence the affective elements in language learning. The Affective Filter Hypothesis was defined earlier in the teaching methods section, and peace literacy was introduced above under the literacy development section. The following is an explanation on the correlation among power relations, peace literacy, and the creation of learning environments that are welcoming to the students.

Power relations and peace literacy in the classroom. The model of peace literacy (Brooks, 2011) employed in the UC affects the participants' perception of the learning environment. It could be considered one form of transformative education mentioned by Freire. Freire (2005) stated that dialogue is an important element of transformative education. In the same vein, Brooks (2011) built on this notion of the importance of dialogue and added that this dialogue should be among "equals" (p. 4). This is

realized by the teacher relinquishing power and using the problem posing approach to facilitate the students' engagement in a dialogue and dismantle the authoritative positionality of the teacher as the sole source of power which disrupts dialogue (Brooks, 2011).

This view of relinquishing teachers' power to empower students is aligned with the Second Language Socialization theory, which is being adopted by the UC. In this context, students are not regarded as having a deficient linguistic competence and are not objects responding to the teachers' power. They are subjects engaged in initiating and exchanging dialogue. As Brooks (2011) mentioned this model of education allows students to be proactive. They are not avid followers of the teachers' instruction. They become capable of problem posing and problem solution. They do not wait to be told what to do. Freire (2005) emphasized that students should be agents in generating these problems. In Brooks' (2011) opinion this process effects "real and measurable social change" (p. 4). He pointed out that the peace literacy model is empowering for all students and would be an optimum means for providing diversified learning experiences. He added that it could be a solution for the marginalization of some students.

Brooks (2011) quoted Woodson as saying that what would be "liberating for one student may further marginalize another student." Woodson was referring to the case of African-American students and their disempowerment in the American classrooms. Woodson provided the solution to this problem, which lies in peace literacy that allows for students to assume leadership and break their way out of unjust power relations which are "super-imposed" (p. 6). This echoes Freire's (2005) notion of oppression as an unjust relationship of power which could only be disrupted by the collaboration of both the oppressor and the oppressed. Liberation could not be granted by the empowered but has to be earned by the disempowered.

This notion of conducting dialogue among equals is essential for peace literacy. This necessitates going beyond reducing our intolerance of difference to promote accepting these differences and tuning our minds to accommodate the dialogue flow to allow room for the expression and understanding of others' perspectives (Crusius, as cited in Brooks, 2011). Without this dialogue, misunderstanding will prevail, which is, according to Brooks (2011), detrimental to education and an element of emphasizing

cultural differences associated with social class in the classroom. Understanding is essential for raising awareness of the diversity of experience and its impact on learning

A teacher's insufficient awareness of the students' prior experiences triggers misunderstanding. It likewise gives rise to unjust power relations. Brooks (2011) addressed the issue of power in the classroom. He pointed out that it is of prime importance for the teachers to be aware of their "subject position" which endows them with "power." Being tenacious to this power is detrimental to peace literacy, which is based on "respect" for others' perspectives (p. 5). This respect could be achieved by the educators' sincere efforts to develop a culture of mutual understanding of diverse experiences in the classroom.

Dialogue, understanding, misunderstanding, expression of diverse experiences, and assumption of power relations take place through language. Brooks (2011) argues that teachers need to develop an awareness of the intricate relationship of language and power, and of language and understanding of diverse experiences. Language is the tool for either emphasizing teachers' exclusive entitlement to power or sharing this power with students as equal partners in the learning process to implement peace literacy. Further, understanding, which is an element of peace literacy, requires teachers to familiarize themselves with their "historical" background as well as their students' backgrounds (Brooks, 2011). This should be coupled with developing an awareness of what Bakhtin (1986) referred to as the historicity of language. This awareness of the subject and language historicity is essential for promoting a better understanding of power relations in the classroom and would provide key tools for disrupting unjust power relations and developing a better context for mutual understanding.

Cultural Learning Styles

A compendium of research emphasized the importance of considering the students' cultural learning styles in the classroom. Some researchers called for establishing "a culturally responsive pedagogy" which puts into consideration the students' cultural learning styles (Villegas, as cited in Latham, 1997, p. 89). Nelson (as cited in Sheorey, 2006) defined the concept of "cultural learning style" as the set of common styles that are shared by and sometimes unique to people of the same cultural

background. These shared learning styles are initially associated with the ways these students have been taught “how to learn” (p. 129). Thus the researcher in this research study used this lens to interpret the differences in the participants’ perception of the multiple intelligences teaching model and communicative teaching method used in the UC.

It is worth mentioning that shared learning styles among people of the same cultural background do not mean that there is no variation in preferences within each group. Culture is rather one of many factors which help in shaping learning style preferences. Other intrinsic factors include personality, interests, and students’ major. Research indicates that students’ learning styles vary across disciplines. In a study conducted by Jones, Reichard, and Mokhtari (2003) on 105 community college students, the researchers pointed out that learning styles differed across disciplines. The authors stated that students have the ability to “style-flex” to adjust to the learning environment. This is aligned with the constructionist view of social dependence and the power or control over innate traits (Mallon, 2006). Cultural learning styles are not innate, but rather acquired from the participants’ interaction with the learning environment in their native countries. This indicates that teachers might be able to help the students “style-flex” to adapt to the learning context at the UC, or adjust the learning context to accommodate the preferences of the majority of the students. Interaction with the social context is key to this effect. It could also account for the participants’ varied perceptions of the teaching and learning methods employed in the UC.

The previous overview of language, literacy, and culture and the associated interrelationship among the three concepts together with the review of the language teaching methods and models and key concepts in language learning was intended to situate the current research study in the current literature and highlight the theoretical underpinnings informing its framework. The sociocultural approach to language learning helped me in interpreting the students’ perception. The students’ backgrounds and the meanings they made of what constitutes language learning were mainly influenced by the sociocultural context of their learning in their native countries and the UC. For example, in their native countries, grammar was an indispensable component of language learning; hence Julia, Rouj, and Hend considered

grammar teaching to be important in their learning experience. It is, as Julia put it, “the most important thing.” Further, Julia suggested taking tests to encourage her to study. Further, their language learning journey was replete with “crystallizing and paralyzing” experiences (Armstrong, 2001, p. 18), which facilitated or blocked their language learning. The previous trans-disciplinary review of literature was intended to provide an integrated framework of theories and empirical research studies informing the purpose for conducting the current research study.

The reviewed literature produced some inconsistencies between theory and practice, and different models of research, particularly quantitative and qualitative research paradigms. Hence it was important to highlight knowledge gaps in the literature because of the paucity of qualitative research in the SLA field, and later the rise of qualitative research and the associated tension between the different types of knowledge quantitative and qualitative paradigms can produce. Particularly important in this review of literature is the limited research using qualitative methodologies which focus on learners’ perceptions of the learning experience in informal settings.

Knowledge Gaps Related to the Current Research Setting, Focus, and Participants

Limited knowledge regarding alternative learning environments for language learners. Many research studies focus on formal settings of teaching English to speakers of other languages, but there remains a scarcity of research on ESL learners in informal learning settings. Firth and Wagner (2007a, b) stated that although there are some ethnographic studies that have been situated in sociocultural contexts, they have exclusively focused on formal instructional settings. Hence, more empirical research is needed that incorporates the language user’s “emic” perspective as well as in interaction with others in informal non-instructional settings (Firth and Wagner, 2007a, p.760), two elements which are central to the design of the present research study.

The current research study expands research conducted on students’ perception of their learning experience to diverse contexts beyond classrooms in structured degree programs or higher education to a community-based program intended to provide social activities and language classes to bolster learning of the family members of students coming to the United States for graduate schooling. Focusing on informal

settings can provide an entirely different perspective that gives us an insight into the learners' perceptions of their learning experience in relation to their everyday social context during interaction in the UC, grocery stores, or other settings in the host society. This study also reflects that language learning takes place in a variety of spaces. These spaces provide an ample chance for using language in a variety of authentic contexts in which people develop and practice their skills which is a cherished principle in the Communicative Approach of language learning.

Limited knowledge in research focus in the field of Second Language Acquisition.

Atkinson (2002), Firth and Wagner (2007a,b), and Larsen-Freeman (2007) have identified the following gaps in the body of research in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). First, Atkinson (2002) has referred to the paucity of qualitative research in the field of SLA and stated that studies focused on the learner as a whole human being are direly needed to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the language process. He added that implementing these research initiatives will bridge the gap between theory and practice.

This idea of focusing on the holistic experience of the learner is not new. Adopting a sociocultural approach to second language learning, Vygotsky (*Thought and Language*, ND) argued for considering both competence and performance as an integrated unit. Thought and competence are at the abstract level of cognitive processes, whereas language has an expressive function. According to Vygotsky (ND) they should be both considered as one unit at the level of word meaning and should not be analyzed into separate elements as these elements are not representatives of the characteristics of the whole. He cited the example of water whose constituents do not by any means represent the characteristics of the whole. "...water...extinguishes fire." On the other hand, "...hydrogen burns and oxygen sustains fire." Vygotsky (ND) calls for the use of "analysis into units." He defined unit as "a product of analysis which, unlike elements, retains all the basic properties of the whole and which cannot be further divided without losing them" (par. 11). Similarly, this research study also helped in focusing on both competence and performance as one entity as it allowed for intercepting the participants' thought and language by exploring their perception of learning as expressed in their own

words, which helped provide an authentic representation of their own learning experience in the UC informal learning setting.

In the same vein, Nassaji (2012) reported a need for qualitative research using interviews to complement a survey research study he conducted to explore teachers' perceptions of the relationship between theory and practice in the field of SLA. Moreover, other researchers such as Polat (2013) pointed out the need for using particular qualitative methodologies such as phenomenography, to study "the conceptualization" of the process of second language learning (p. 116).

Second, Atkinson (2002); Firth and Wagner (2007a, b); Larsen-Freeman (2007) stated that most studies are decontextualized with a focus on the learners' cognitive skills. When the context is observed, the attention to these elements is mainly peripheral and often situated in a formal instructional setting; hence neglecting communication in informal everyday interactions. Brown (2007) argued that empirical research within the social constructionist approach and comparative studies of different models of teaching English as a second language are still lacking.

Furthermore, Tarone (2007) noted a research gap in the lack of focus on sociocognitive aspects of language learning, which is the correlation between the social context and the cognitive development in interlanguage, or competence and performance and account for the variation in performance. Tarone's (2007) findings were of prime importance to my research study, as it primarily focused on the social and cultural contexts of language learning and their influence on the students' perception of the learning environment. Moreover, the underlying assumption in research informed by the cognitive approach is that nonnative speakers have a deficient communicative competence and their ultimate goal is to mimic the perfect competence of native speakers (May, 2011). This assumption, which is based on a deficiency model, is at odds with the findings that indicate that some nonnative speakers with limited proficiency can communicate effectively. The focus of this type of research (focusing on cognitive) is on the failures rather than the successes in communication (Firth & Wagner, 2007a, b; May 2011). Firth and Wagner (2007a) view this as a reflection of power dynamics which favors the monolingual approach in linguistics.

Furthermore, Firth and Wagner (2007a) and May (2011) stated that the body of research lumps all those involved in communication into the dichotomy of native and nonnative speakers; hence obliterating the multiple identities that people occupy and assume as they move in and out of different spaces. Moreover, it also assumes that all native speakers presumably speak the same dialect (Firth & Wagner, 2007a, b). This assumption neglects the different dialects people speak, and even different varieties within one language, as what Kachru (1992) referred to as the “world Englishes.” This trend in research also runs counter to language theories which refer to the differences in social languages, such as Bakhtin’s concept of Hetroglossia which refers to the diversity of voices and considers language as a social construction (Bakhtin, 1986).

In the same vein, May (2011) criticized both fields (SLA and TESOL) because they “...exclude particular forms of knowledge,” particularly referring to their adopting a monolingual approach and disregard of a bilingual approach (p. 236). May (2011) stated that in spite of the emergence of sociocultural and critical approaches in TESOL, similar criticism has been leveled to the field as regards neglecting the sociocultural context and idolizing the native speaker. This trend is problematic to May (2011) because it overlooks key elements involved in the bilingual learner’s experience. On the other hand, Duff (2007) provides an example of qualitative studies focusing on the sociocultural context. In an earlier article, Duff (2007) referred to the key role Korean “Generation 1.5” played in facilitating the socialization of undergraduate Korean students in a Canadian university into the target language and culture.

Knowledge Gaps regarding the sojourner participants in informal settings. There is little research available on the population of participants in this research study who are sojourners studying English as a second language, and who came to the United States for secondary purposes. Most of the research studies reviewed focus on immigrants and people who come to the United States for primary reasons. The majority of research studies I reviewed focus on students in formal classrooms or immigrants in informal settings whereas this research study focused on adult spouse sojourners learning English as a second language in an informal setting. Culturally responsive pedagogy has

been addressed in the body of literature. Tarone (2010) has referred to a research gap pertinent to the population studied that limits full understanding of their learning experiences, and she has emphasized that there is a dire need to replicate SLA research on non-literate and low-literate learners, especially in the light of the growing numbers of immigrants who belong to this group. While all of the participants in the current research study are high-literate in their native language, some of the UC students and the observation participants are low-literate.

Some of the significant findings in the literature on Second Language Acquisition that were particularly relevant to creating a foundation for my research study were that the learners' identity, "biography," social relations, and meaning-making in interaction in social contexts reflect how learning takes place and hence they need to be in the "foreground." Further, identity influences the way learners learn and use language (Firth & Wagner, 2007a, p. 812). This finding is of particular importance as my underlying assumption that guides the current research study is that the cultural background and social context influence the learners' perception of the teaching methods and models in the UC (Brown, 2007). The other relevant finding is in Tarone's (2010) study which states that alphabetic literacy influences oral word processing and accounts for the difference between literate and non-literate learners' progress. The knowledge the current research study contributed was focusing on intermediate and highly-literate English language adult learners on a temporary sojourn in the United States in an informal setting which involved cross-cultural communication.

In conclusion, the afore-mentioned research studies helped in identifying important issues and gaps in the SLA field that limit educators' knowledge about intermediate and highly-literate adult learners sojourning in the host country and learning English language in informal settings that are culturally and linguistically diverse. My research study builds on their findings. In contrast to the majority of the cited studies, my dissertation research study is within the qualitative paradigm, which provides opportunities for exploring phenomenon in naturalistic settings in depth and detail. It was also informed by the constructionist epistemology, interpretivist perspective, and employed thematic analysis to interpret the data. Drawing on Firth and Wagner (2007a), I focused on "the participant-as-

language-user” (p. 758) in everyday informal communication to expand the limited knowledge base on learners in informal settings. I explored how multiethnic and multilingual groups were socialized into language learning in an informal learning setting and in interaction in recreational activities. The research study pursued the participants’ “emic” (Patton, 2002, p. 84) interpretation of their experience, which was also lacking in the research body.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study is a naturalistic inquiry as informed by Patton's (2002) definition which involves exploring life experiences "as they unfold naturally", adopting a flexible interview protocol and conducting it in the participants' naturalistic learning setting, and employing inductive analytical frameworks that allow for the researcher's "openness" to emerging findings (p. 40). Patton (2002) points out that the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research, and that the quality of data is dependent on a number of factors including the researcher's methodological skill, sensitivity, and integrity. The rationale for employing qualitative research methodology is that the current research study questions lend themselves to qualitative research methodology in that they seek in-depth exploration of the participants' beliefs and perceptions, pursue meanings constructed by means of the interaction between the researcher and participants, and invoke rich detailed description of the participants' experiences. Moreover, limited qualitative research has been conducted in the field of teaching English as a second language and second language acquisition in informal settings.

As noted in chapter two of this dissertation, the scholarly literature on Second Language Acquisition and Teaching English as a Second Language primarily reflects studies using quantitative methodology with insufficient studies using qualitative research methods. Most of the studies conducted until 2011 focused on testing cognitive processes in learning English as a

second or foreign language by assigning control groups and conducting pre and post-tests with little attention to social interaction in the learning environment. This qualitative research study, instead, explains the participants' perceptions of their experiences and provides detailed and individualized description of this unique setting and participants. This process and the resulting findings are potentially productive for considering similar phenomena elsewhere. Hence this research study was conducted with qualitative methods to expand scholarship on the sociocultural component of language learning and individual language learners' perceptions of language learning in specific contexts, which is of prime importance for addressing students' needs.

There are gaps in Second Language Acquisition and English as a second language research that limit the types of knowledge created about this important area of study; foremost is a need to diversify the epistemologies and methodologies used to complement the predominant objectivist, positivist, and post-positivist approaches. The methodologies used in the body of research which the researcher reviewed were predominantly quantitative experimental and quasi-experimental research studies informed by an objectivist epistemology (Atkinson, 2002; Firth & Wagner, 2007a; Larsen-Freeman, 2007; Navidinia & Reza, 2009). The most common theoretical perspective was positivism and post-positivism which aimed to identify the process and outcome of the absolute reality of language acquisition. The research studies started with hypotheses that were being tested and eventually rejected or validated based on the findings. They used statistical methods of analysis of pre and post-tests. These research methodologies, thus, typically give us a quantitative assessment of the students' learning and performance in formal classrooms with traditional students rather than multicultural, multinational, alternative setting with adults as the current research study which provides a qualitative understanding of the individuality of the students' perception of their learning experiences.

The review produced few qualitative research studies in the field of Second Language Acquisition informed by critical or poststructuralist theoretical perspectives, such as Firth and Wagner's (2007b) research study, and Larsen-Freeman's (2007) proposition to use chaos/complexity

theory under this qualitative approach. Further, there were some ethnographic studies cited in (Firth & Wagner, 2007b), in addition to Firth and Wagner's (2007b) ethnomethodology, and Kim's (2013) qualitative case study on exploring the effect of attending senior school and associated social support and religious belief on senior Korean immigrants in the United States.

Firth and Wagner (2007b) pointed out that the field needed more qualitative studies which focus on the learning experience in authentic contexts. They reported the need to develop "a holistic, bio-social SLA" (p. 804). They also emphasized the need for studies that might shed light on authentic learning taking place in interaction, where the focus is on the process itself and not the outcome. The focus of my research study was neither the product of learning nor the ultimate progress in language learning, but rather the students' perception of the learning process in relation to the learning and sociocultural contexts.

Atkinson (2002) summed up the research gaps in the field of Second Language Acquisition as generally the disregarding of the social nature of human beings. He referred to the "contradictory present absence of human beings" in research studies which underscores the need for greater attention to people involved in the learning process and referred to some studies which considered the humanity of learners; however, these were just few exceptions in the body of literature (p. 535-536). Furthermore, Atkinson et al. (2007) emphasized the need for more research which applied the principle of alignment to bridge the gap between the social and cognitive perspectives to language learning, particularly second language learning. The authors identified "alignment" as one of the fundamental principles of the sociocognitive approach both in the field of language learning in general and second language learning in particular. The authors defined alignment as a means for ecological adaptation. It is "the complex processes through which human beings effect coordinated interaction, both with other human beings and (usually human-engineered) environments, situations, tools, and affordances" (p. 169). It is intended to realize the integration of "mind-body-world" (p. 170), which is consistent with Freire's (2005) vision that the purpose of human life and education is to become more fully human. Atkinson et al. (2007) pointed out that alignment in other disciplines is

associated not only with learning but also with existence. Consequently, they added, alignment should be considered in the field of Second Language Acquisition instead of focusing on mechanistic systems.

Other researchers, as Navidinia and Reza (2009), criticized the dichotomy between research and practice in the field of Second Language Acquisition. They referred to the contradictory disposition of SLA research which is still predominantly quantitative whereas practice is progressing toward being more socioculturally oriented. The authors suggested that objectifying the learning experience using quantitative research tools could be impractical and artificial; they proposed using qualitative approaches as more conceptually fitting paradigm for exploring sociocultural nuances.

Recently, more qualitative research studies have been conducted within the framework of sociocultural theories. Ortega (2013) referred to a current progress in the field of Second Language Acquisition as regards employing different types of epistemologies and called for adopting a “transdisciplinarity” approach (p. 2). In an editorial to a special *System* issue, Barcelos and Kalaja (2011) referred to a transition in the field by the production of more qualitative studies on the beliefs about Second Language Acquisition. The focus in the recent studies is on the process of beliefs development or “how”, as stated, and not on the beliefs themselves or the “what” they are (p. 282). In the earlier studies, questionnaires and survey research prevailed, but interviews, observation, self-report, and other qualitative methods were employed in SLA research studies. Unlike earlier SLA research on beliefs which pursued “etic perspectives”, recent research studies explored “emic” and “epic perspectives” (Barcelos & Kalaja, 2011, p. 282). For future studies on beliefs, the editorial recommended conducting research on “beliefs and identities”, “emotions”, “motivation”, and “agency within sociocultural theory” (p. 288). The focus of the current research study was the beliefs and perceptions of international students’ spouses of literacy programs and language learning. However, the dynamic relationship among the participants’ beliefs, perceptions, and sense of agency, emotions, and motivation were reflected in the findings.

Research Study

Epistemology: Constructionism

Epistemology refers to the relationship between the knower and what she or he knows. According to Crotty (1999) the domain of epistemology is “the nature of knowledge, its possibility, scope and general basis” (p. 8). It provides the philosophical basis, which determines the definition, nature of knowledge, and what would count as “legitimate” knowledge (p. 8). It reflects assumptions about the researcher’s knowledge of reality and the possibilities of this knowledge. Constructionism is the epistemology which informs the theoretical perspective in this research study. The underlying assumption in this research study is that meaning is co-constructed by means of interaction between the subject and object, between the researcher as the subject and data sources as object of inquiry within this particular learning environment.

Cultural background influences our view of reality and produces differentiated perceptions thereof. In other words, in this epistemological view there is no objective truth out there to be unraveled and there is no meaning prior to this interaction. In this research study, the researcher approached all sources of data, including the transcriptions, fieldnotes, and documents, as not having intrinsic meaning prior to the researcher’s interaction with them. The researcher was aware that her epistemological allegiance and decisions as well as cultural, personal, and professional background affected the data gathering, analytic, and interpretation processes involved in the study. Adopting the constructionist approach is aligned with the purpose of the current research study as this study assumed that students co-constructed the meaning of experiences in the UC rather than discovered them.

Aligned with the constructionist epistemology, interpretivist theoretical perspective, and emergent design, the researcher was an instrument in the study, actively and intentionally engaged in the process of meaning generation (Crotty, 1999; Hruby, 2001; Mallon, 2006). She intended to raise consciousness of diverse perspectives of the students to develop multiple meanings. This intentionality raised consciousness of the object of analysis of this research study which was the

diverse participants' perceptions of the literacy program. This consciousness of the literacy program helped in turn in shaping the reality of this very object of the research study, which eventually helped in constructing meaning of this interaction. Therefore, intentionality led to focusing on interaction between the subject and object through which meaning construction took place. In this sense, the meaning of the object was not discovered, but rather "made" during the interaction process (Crotty, 1999, p. 52).

Interaction with reality is a key concept in constructionism (Crotty, 1999; Hruby, 2001; Mallon, 2006). The researcher's exploration of the participants' perceptions was made possible by the researcher's long-term interaction with the learning environment (University Center) and interaction with the participants, which helped in the co-generation and interpretation of a meaning of their reality. The UC and its programs were not meaningful or meaningless in themselves. It was the interaction between the researcher and the participants in this environment which provided meaning for this experience. Further, this process of meaning making was not static but rather dynamic and ongoing. The purpose of this research study was to provide a useful interpretation of the residents' (research participants) experiences in the UC setting. In the process of meaning making, the researcher adopted Strauss' interpretation of "bricoleur" concept (Crotty, 1999, p. 51). Through interaction with the object, the subject (the researcher) intended to put together details of the diverse participants' experiences to weave a meaningful and useful interpretation of these experiences as constructed and seen in this specific context of the UC. The purpose was twofold. The first was to construct new "messages" from the participants' experiences to convey to the Center's administrators, teachers, and people concerned with the topic of this study that would aid them in understanding and addressing the participants' needs. The second was a more general purpose which was to shed light on the unique population and unique setting of this research study, particularly the secondary positionality of spouses and the informal learning space of the UC social adaptation objectives by means of language learning.

Following the constructionist approach, the researcher assumed that there were multiple realities, and they were all valid ways of understanding the world. The knowledge and reality of the participants' perception as reported in this study were among many other realities. It is possible that other research studies could provide different readings of the same context and of the same participants' perceptions and could produce different findings. However, this study provided productive and important meaning in representing participants' "indigenous" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 122) perceptions of their experience at the University Center. Adapting this interpretation from this study was intended to help provide the residents (language learners in the Center) with better learning and life experiences. However, as in all qualitative studies that explore a phenomenon in depth and detail, it has the potential to be useful in other settings.

Theoretical Perspective

The theoretical perspective is a belief system which provides our worldview and undergirds our methodology. It is described as "a way of looking at the world and making sense of it. It involves knowledge, therefore, and embodies a certain understanding of what is entailed in knowing..." (Crotty, 1999, p. 8). The different ways of viewing the world shape different ways of researching the world (Crotty, 1999, p. 66). The purpose of this research study and questions lend themselves to interpretivism and the study was designed with an interpretivist theoretical perspective. However, the data collected over four years produced a variety of critical questions and issues that made the use of critical theoretical frameworks fitting to include as lenses in data analysis. The initial research questions were interpretivist as they were meant to explore the participants' perception of their experience and the viable teaching methods and practices in the UC. However, more critical questions emerged from the data, which justified applying the theoretical framework of critical theory to interpret them and provide material for future research using critical frameworks. This development from one perspective in design to additional research and analytic questions as the research progresses is a practice common in qualitative research, aligned with emergent flexible design, and advocated by Agee (2009).

Furthermore, the interpretivist theoretical perspective was more in line with my positionality as a researcher and teacher who sought to explore the participants' perceptions of their learning experiences. However, my positionality as a fellow spouse made it difficult at some points to uphold the exploratory role in accordance with the interpretivist perspective. As a spouse researcher, I had a critical emic perspective which perceived power relations in the UC learning environment and the participants' secondary status in the host society. I viewed them as representing the image of satellites revolving around their partners in a stellar system. The unfolding questions posed a need for addressing inequities and transforming the spouses' reality. This understanding also developed during my years of experience teaching in the UC and interacting with the participants.

Interpretivism

As mentioned earlier, the theoretical perspective which informed this research study was interpretivism. Interpretivism facilitated exploring the participants' perception of their learning experience and understanding how it felt to be a second language learner in the University Center. It helped the researcher learn about the possible effects of cross-cultural communication in the target language and the associated misinterpretation and misunderstanding due to the language barrier on the students' perceptions of the learning experience.

Interpretivism is associated with Max Weber who contended that the purpose of human and social sciences is "understanding" as opposed to natural sciences, which are more concerned with "explaining" and "causality." Other philosophers added that natural sciences seek to find "consistencies, regularities," whereas social sciences focus on "the individual case." In other words, though it is controversial, one is concerned with generalization (natural sciences) and the other focuses on individualization (human and social sciences) (Crotty, 1999, p. 67). The focus of this research study was exploring unique and individualistic learners' perceptions in a particular setting.

The underlying assumption of interpretivism is that the researcher must engage with the social phenomenon in order to understand it, and in order to understand the world we have to interpret it. Charles Taylor (as cited in Howe, 1998) describes man as "a self-interpreting animal...[T]here is

no such thing as the structure of meaning for him independently of his interpretation of them” (p. 13). The interpretivist seeks interpretations of the world, which are informed by the cultural heritage within a historic time framework (Crotty, 1999). Thus, in the current research study, in order to understand the participants’ diverse perspectives and perceptions of the literacy programs, the researcher was intentionally engaged with the participants in the process of teaching and learning English as a second language in the UC. Knowledge and meaning were co-constructed by the researcher and participants by means of mutual interaction and their interaction with the object of study which was their perception of language learning in a particular setting. The researcher/participant experiences were interpreted against the “backdrop” of the researcher and participants’ views and the values they cherished by virtue of their cultural background. In this sense, the researcher did not plan to discover an absolute truth. On the contrary, as an interpretivist researcher, she “seeks” a truth as seen from her own perspective (Roth & Metha, 2002, p. 132) and of these she works with the participants. Interpretivism provides the theoretical logic for using qualitative methods to explore and interpret the residents’ perception of the multiple intelligences teaching model and methods used in the UC as well as their experiences in general.

Rationale for Shift in Voice

The researcher’s awareness of these multiple roles has effected a transition in chosen voice to represent the research findings, as well. Voice is one of the elements used for the representation of social reality in writing (Van Maanen, 1988).). In his classic study, *Tales from the Field*, Van Maanen (1988) identified three different forms of ethnographic reporting, which are realist, confessional, and impressionist. Data reporting in the current research study could be considered a fusion of the realist and confessional traditions as described by Van Maanen (1988). Following the realist tradition, the reporting was done by “orchestrating” the participants’ voices and using indigenous terms (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 50). Confessional reporting was also used to complement the realist form by means of providing an “autobiographical” (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 77) account of

the data, acknowledging and highlighting the researcher's reflexivity and interpretation of the participants' responses.

This integration of both modes of voice was reflected in the use of different points of view. To represent the researcher and participants' voices, the researcher opted to have this fusion of first and third persons as well as direct quotes of the participants' responses. As a researcher, she performed objectivity by using the third person voice in writing the proposal and data analysis; hence, assuming a realist position. As a spouse, the first person voice sounded more natural and appropriate, providing a confessional mode of the reporting. Also, as Patton (2002) stated, the first person voice reflects the researcher's awareness of positionality in the research study (p. 65). In the field of narrative research, Coulter and Smith (2009) added that the first person "lends closeness to the telling" (p. 580). The integration of first and third person points of view reflects the researcher's positionality as both an insider and outsider in the research setting. The reflection of this "paradoxical" situation through representation by means of multiple points of view is described by Van Maanen (1988) as follows:

The attitude conveyed is one of tacking back and forth between an insider's passionate perspective and an outsider's dispassionate one. Perhaps no other confessional convention is as difficult for the writer as maintaining in print this paradoxical, if not schizophrenic, attitude toward the group observed. A delightful dance of words often ensues as fieldworkers present themselves as both vessels and vehicles of knowledge. (Van Maanen, 1988, p. 77)

The method of consciously adopting multiple researchers' voices has been used in previous research. Mizzi (2010) used "multivocality" as a method in autoethnographic research (p. 1). He defined multivocality as "providing representational space in the autoethnography for the plural and sometimes contradictory narrative voices located within the researcher" (p. 2). He reported that this method in autoethnography allowed for highlighting the inherent plurality and fluidity of a researcher's voice and helped connect "personal self to the social context" (p. 1).

The multiple researcher voices represented in the current research study are those of the researcher, teacher, and spouse with secondary positionality. Shifting from first to third person helped her in exploring meaning from these three perspectives that may not have been accessible to the reader otherwise. Unlike Bakhtin who stated that narrative voices “do not merge”, Mizzi (2010) pointed out that he believed that narrative voices interact together (p. 7).

Mizzi (2010) added that this method provided him with “a richer understanding of the complexities that underlined human interactions” in his research study (p. 7-8). It also allowed for shedding light on power relations in the research setting. He reported some challenges in employing this method, such as “silent voices”, “intensity of emotions”, and “institutional resistance” (p. 10). In the same vein, “multivocality” in the current research study helped unravel multiple layers of meanings in the data which gave rise to new questions that have not been among the initial research questions.

Methodology

This research study is a naturalistic and people-oriented inquiry focused on exploring the perceptions of non-traditional adult learners’ beliefs and perceptions of their language learning experience. As a researcher, I tried to realize the golden rule of “empathic neutrality and mindfulness” in the process of data collection (Patton, 2002, p. 40). I tried to fulfill Lofland’s (as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 28) four “mandates” for data. First, physical and psychological proximity were fulfilled to get a better understanding of the participants’ lives. Being a teacher in the UC and member of the UC community for more than five years helped me glean in-depth knowledge of the participants and see their world. I remained open to understanding their perspective of their experiences as I moved in and out of these living and research spaces. I tried to fulfill the second “mandate” by means of the detailed recording of what happened and participants’ account of incidents by means of interviews and observation as well as ongoing data analysis and interpretation. I observed the third “mandate” by providing thick and vivid description of the participants which produced a considerable amount of data that I later refined and organized into a narrative form. The fourth “mandate” was attained by

including direct quotes in the description as “confirming evidence” to support my understanding of the residents’ perceptions of their experiences (Erickson, 1985, p. 90).

Data Collection

Sampling. The sample size for the interviews was ten interviewees from different countries: three South Korean, two Egyptian, and one from each of the following countries: Turkey, China, Indonesia, one Brazil, and Iraq. The sample size for the observation was 30 participants belonging to different nationalities: South Korea, China, Egypt, Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Indonesia, Mexico, Japan, Ethiopia, Romania, Thailand, and India. I sought the approval of the University Institutional review board (IRB) prior to conducting the study. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and approved the consent form before I started the data collection process. I used observations of classroom and social events interactions to facilitate interviews.

I used purposeful sampling for both the observation and interviews. For the observation, I used criterion sampling, which, in this case, was selecting cases that represented the criterion of being a spouse who came to the United States for secondary purposes and attending the University Center programs on regular basis. For the interviews, I used intensity sampling for the selection of the interviewees who represented “information-rich cases” from the sample of the observation participants. The interview cases were exemplars of intensive representation (Patton, 2002, p. 242) of diversity in terms of nationality. They ranked themselves at the intermediate level of English language proficiency. This criterion was of prime importance because it facilitated communication with the interviewer. However, the sample is not fully representative of the demographics of the UC in that some nationalities the center serves were not included in the interview sampling. In contrast, the observation data typically represented the population participating in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes and recreational activities. As for gender representation, the sample was consistent with the demographics at the UC. Nine interviewees were women and one was a man. The majority of UC participants in the ESOL classes were primarily women. Participant diversity

enhances this research study as it focuses on a multinational, multilingual, and multicultural population in interaction in and with the learning environment.

Methods

This study required a direct experience which necessitated interaction with the participants and the object of study (their perception of the literacy programs). In this case, the researcher was a “participant” observer involved in the process of the co-generation of meaning which could be constructed and interpreted in multiple ways by other researchers (Patton, 2002, p. 265). In conducting this research, she assumed an insider and outsider positionalities. She was an insider as a member of the international community in the UC, learner of English as a second language, and shared experience as a spouse who came to the host society for secondary purposes. As a researcher of participants from different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, she assumed an outsider’s role in that she was not familiar with their prior language learning experiences in their home countries. However, she was equally familiar with all the participants’ positionality in the UC in particular and the host country in general. She did not try to impose beliefs about and perceptions of the UC objectives to interfere with the participants’ interpretation of their experiences nor influence or interpret their responses in the process of data collection. However, the meaning made of these responses and direct observation was rather created and recreated in the researcher-participant interactions.

Multiple sources of data collection provided the researcher with opportunities to develop a rounded view of the participants’ experiences (Patton, 2002, p. 247). The three sources of data were documents, observation, and interviews. These methods facilitated gaining insight into the indigenous meaning system and perceptions of the participants and helped the researcher interpret these meanings within the context of their cultural background (Crotty, 1999). Cumulatively, varied data sources also provided “triangulation” of methods to enrich understanding of the phenomenon of interest and thereby enhance validity and credibility (Patton, 2002, p. 248). The use of “triangulation” also enhances the dependability of findings (Daniel & Onwuegbuzie, 2002; Patton, 2002).

The rationale for diversifying data sources was to explore the residents' beliefs and perceptions in depth. First, interviews allowed for having an insight into the participants' beliefs and perceptions of their learning experience. They helped explore the participants' insights into their experience in a dynamic and interactive way with a researcher and co-constructor they knew from their interactions in the setting, which would have never been possible with other methods. Second, the observation of 30 participants in language classes and recreational events captured instances of the mutual interactions among the multilingualistic and multicultural participants, their sharing of opinions and feelings, and reaction to prompts in the classroom. Observation, participant observation in particular, provided a better understanding of what actually took place in the classroom "not entirely possible using only the insights of others obtained through interviews" (Patton 2002, p. 23). It also facilitated selecting information-rich multinational participants for the interviews. Third, documents helped glean information about both the UC and the participants, including the logistics of the UC space, class offerings, programs, population UC serves, nationalities represented in all programs, participants' attendance, and scheduling,

Documents. The methods included document collection both to explore the UC's mission and as a means for considering students' experiences. They included the monthly newsletters, flyers, posted advertisement, lesson plans, classes and activities' objectives, programs' description and evaluation, announcements posted on the bulletin board, samples of students' work, as well as the UC's mission as posted on its website. The documents that were particularly productive for understanding the participants' experiences were the students' in-class written work, such as the "time pie" activity. In this particular activity, each student had to draw a pie chart to represent their daily routine. Some participants had a big blank portion labeled as "nothing" on the pie chart. This entry produced a theme of nothingness that emerged in inductive data analysis.

Observation. The second method was observation of three classes that take place as part of the UC weekly course and social offerings: Intermediate English, Everyday English, conversation circle, and two recreation activities, which were the Cooking Demonstration, Craft Class, and

Women's Night. As previously mentioned, the UC offers daily multilevel language classes for literacy development and weekly recreational classes that incorporate the use of English language, such as the craft and cooking classes. This is in addition to monthly events, such as Women's Night and Couples' Night which provide recreational and socialization venues for the residents. During the observation, the researcher was not simply an observer, but rather "a participant observer" (Patton, 2002, p. 4; Gold as cited in Preissle & Grant, 2004, p. 163), as she was engaged in a reciprocal relationship with the participants. As a participant observer, she was able to provide an "emic" perspective. According to Patton (2002), a participant observer does not only observe, "but feels what it is like to be a part of the setting or program" (p. 268). Through observation the researcher decided on the participants who represented information-rich cases and requested interviews with them.

She created an observation notebook to record "jottings" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p.17) of those who had consented to participate. She subtly took notes of teacher-student and student-student interactions during and after the classes she taught as students worked on activities. In the classes taught by other teachers, she sat in the back of the room and took notes in a nonintrusive manner. As for the recreation events, she took notes of the participants' interaction or lack of interaction in the activities in which we all participated.

The following data excerpts are from her observation notes of a participant, Zanza, one year after our interview. These excerpts were particularly important in prompting the use of critical framing in interpretation and revealed unfolding critical questions in the data. Zanza expressed,

I think I am ready to go home. We will go back in December (after 4 months). I want to feel more important and do something useful and do things other than cleaning the house. Yeah! I'm ready to go home. I need to do something important. I love to stay if I have something excited to do. Sorry for complaining. I wish I could get a master's in physics. I'm pushing myself, but I'm still bad in English I could not do the TOEFL. I could not study. (August, 2012)

I don't know. We have to go because my husband got a full time job in Brazil. It is good for him. Brazil is now having a better economy. Here he could not find a job. Maybe it is better. I am worried about my English because I will lose it when I go back. I will not have opportunity to practice. No native speakers to practice with. Here I am immersed in English. I breathe in English. I don't know. I wish to stay, but I can't. (Zanza, observation notes, September 2012)

The excerpts highlight the themes of participant uncertainty, feeling of nothingness, and effects of the spousal role that recurred in the data. This turned her attention more directly to critical framing of issues associated with the secondary positionality of the participants.

Interviews. The third method was interviews. According to Kvale (as cited in deMarris & Lapan, 2004), interviews are used to provide undisturbed “descriptions of an experience” (p. 58). The researcher used combined approaches of structured and semi structured interviews with duration of 40-60 minutes each. These approaches were the informal conversational interview and standardized semi-structured open-ended interview (Patton, 2002). She started with asking a set of standardized open-ended questions in the same order. Then she used conversational techniques to elaborate on any issues precipitated from observing each interviewee in the classroom. The use of unstructured interviews is a typical method used in a variety of interpretivist and critical studies with ethnographic elements. In the unstructured conversational interview questions, she went “with the flow” of the conversation (Patton, 2002, p. 343). She explored their learning experience in the UC, preferred activities, prior language learning experiences in their home countries, and experiencing life the American way. While conducting the interviews with Arabic-Speaking participants, she helped translate some words from and into English upon the participants’ request. She helped others who did not speak her native language by using gestures, pictures, further explanation of the words and questions they deemed unclear.

Interviews included a variety of topics focused on the participants’ educational experiences in the UC and home countries and the sociocultural context of learning in the UC. The protocol included

questions which focused on participants' past educational experiences in their home countries and their experiences in the United States of America. Participants were asked to do memory research to remember some of positive and negative experiences that affected their learning and might have, in their opinion, contributed to their language learning processes.

Questions to explore past experiences drew from Bakhtin's (1986) theory which emphasized the socio-historicity of language. The researcher included questions in the interview (please see appendix 2) which were meant to glean information on the sociocultural and historical context in which the participants learned English as a foreign language in their native countries. These questions facilitated insight into their cultural model of teaching and learning English as a second language. They included questions on the time they started learning English in their native countries and how they were first taught English, questions about the learning environment and their perception of the learning environment in their native countries and the UC. The underlying assumption was that the way they have been socialized into language learning in the past influenced their perception of their learning experiences at present. The interviews were audio-recorded, and the researcher took notes of nonverbal gestures while conducting them. Later, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and analytic insights were added to the transcriptions.

Setting

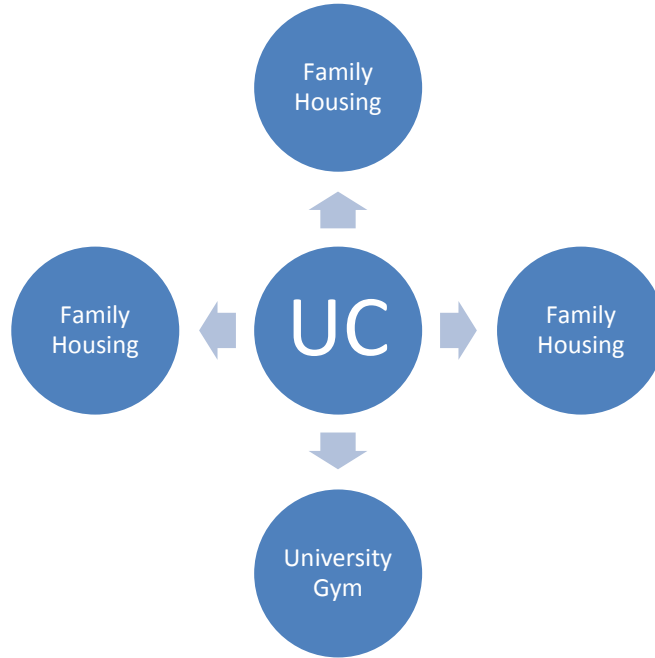


Figure 2: UC in the heart of the campus residential buildings

The setting for observation and most interviews was the University Center, which is located in the heart of the University family housing where participants reside and on the periphery of the University campus. The researcher observed classes and social events at the UC. As for the interviews, she set a convenient time with each participant. Most of the interviews were conducted in the morning when children were at school to minimize noise and distractions. They were all conducted in the UC with the exception of one interview which was conducted in one of the participants' apartment upon her request.

Researcher's Positionality. As my opening narrative suggests, I identified with the participants in some aspects such as being spouses and accompanying their partners to the United States of America to pursue an academic career. Like the participants, I came to the United States for secondary purposes. However, this sense of identification with the participants diverged at this point due to our differences in cultural and educational background and facility with English language. This divergence facilitated starting with a fresh look at the participants' experiences which was different

from mine due to the cultural background factor. First, I had experienced the program as a student, next as a volunteer in the programs, then a teacher of English as a second language. My goal was to seek knowledge of the participants' experiences, which I assumed was different because we are all products of our culture. This meaning was interpreted through interaction and long term communication with the participants in the University Center.

Participants. They are spouses, active participants in the classes, and attend most ESL classes on regular bases. Setting times for interviews was challenging in order to accommodate the researcher and the interviewees' schedules.

Figure (3) is an emic representation of the participants' perception of their secondary positionality as compared to their partners who came to the host society for primary purposes.

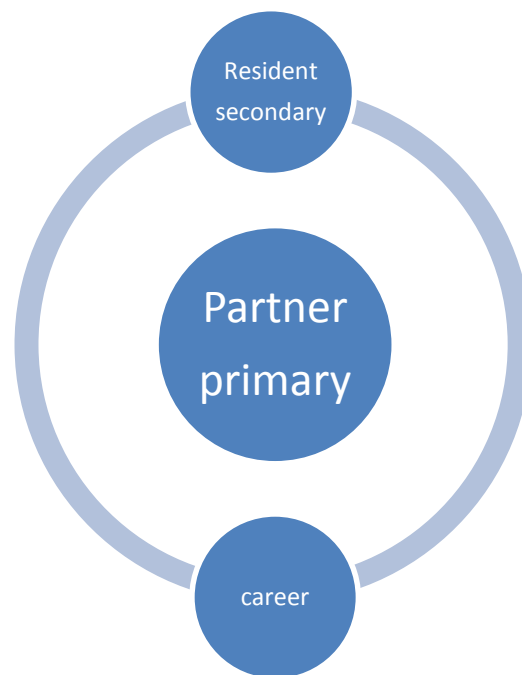


Figure 3. Participants' secondary status in the host society as compared to their partners' primary status. They are satellites revolving around their partners.

Data Analysis

This section describes the layered approach to analysis” (Bailey, 2014) that the researcher took in the meaning making process. The analytic process used consisted of six steps all initially focused on inductive analysis through immersion; open coding, themes, categories, analytical statements, integrative memos, and findings (Emerson, Fretz.& Shaw, 1995; Patton, 2002). The researcher collected all the transcriptions in one file, and created a new file for data analysis. She immersed herself in the data to realize what Patton (2002) referred to as “incubation” (p.453). She started reading the transcriptions one by one thoroughly at one time, and highlighted recurrent patterns and all pieces of data which spoke to her. She wrote notes of her thoughts in the margins. She used open coding to start organizing and managing the data. Then she collapsed these patterns into categories (Patton, 2002). She used indigenous concepts from the transcriptions as titles for major themes, and inserted quotes, or evidentiary warrants from the data (Erickson, 1986), aligned with each code. She iteratively and systematically reviewed all the transcriptions and began creating codes that emerged from the data and returned to transcriptions to select data that fit with each code. It was very tempting to jump to conclusions while immersed in this process, but she worked hard and in consultation with her advisor to abide by the transcription text and its surface meaning to provide the top layer of meaning without further interpretation from her as a researcher. The other layers of meanings unfolded later in the interpretation process by virtue of a virtual conversation among the interviews, observation, and documents and a peer-review process for collaborative meaning making with her advisor.

Following Emerson et al.’s guidance (1995), she read the observation notes and highlighted the sections which were relevant to the themes surfacing in the transcriptions, as well as all the notes on the interview participants. She used color coding to facilitate drawing connections among related codes. She followed the same coding technique and used indigenous terms for codes. She typed the highlighted sections, added them to the relevant categories produced from the interview transcriptions, and created new categories for the data which seemed to be not represented in the

interview categories. After that she made empirical assertions (Erickson, 1986) about these categories.

Then the researcher tested these categories deductively by examining the data to find “confirming and disconfirming evidence” (Erickson, 1986, p. 90) to support the assertions. The content analysis of interviews revealed a pattern of comparing and contrasting English language learning in the University Center and the participants’ home countries and other academic institutes. Through discussion and collaborative analysis with her advisor, she highlighted “indigenous contrasts” in the transcription (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995, p. 122). Indigenous contrasts refer to contrasting terms used by the participants themselves in the research setting. They could help deduce members’ meanings of their experiences. One example is when Julian, a Korean participant, contrasted her learning experience in the University Center with her experience in a formal intensive program for teaching English as a second language. One assertion the researcher developed from these contrasts was that the welcoming environment in the UC facilitated participants’ progress in language learning, particularly the speaking skill. The researcher put the data aside for several months in 2012 and returned to it with a fresh eye to check her reading of the data.

She used the categories and supporting data pieces to create assertions and develop these into integrative memos (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995), in which she tried to create a conversation among the transcriptions, observation, documents, and literature review. This step helped her recognize hidden connections, which she would not have noticed otherwise. Based on the data she gleaned from all sources, she drew a chart for each participant to provide a graphic representation of the participants within the setting of the learning environment. This helped in visualizing the data and seeing connections among synopses of data. Each graphic representation included information about the age, nationality, duration of residence, perceived level of proficiency, satisfaction, dissatisfaction of the residents with their learning experience, and goals for learning English.

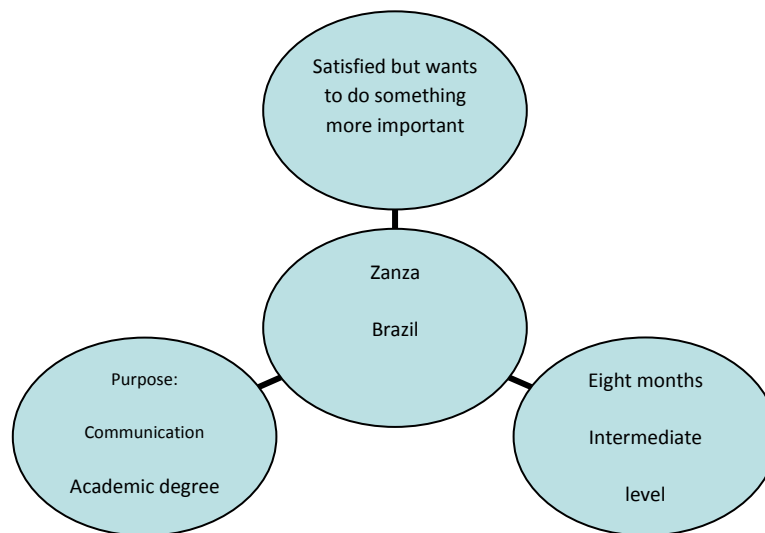


Figure 4: Graphic Representation of Zanza

In the analysis, she implemented a sort of reflexive relationship with all the elements involved in the research. In the data analysis, she followed what Patton (2002) referred to as “being-in, being-for, and being-with” the research setting and participants (p. 434). She was intrigued by Lather and Smithies’ (1997) feminist study, *Troubling the Angels*, and adapted their technique in acting as “filters” for the stories they had heard. They described in their research “getting out of the way and getting in the way” (Lather, & Smithies, 1997, p. xiv). Their personal reflexivity is evident throughout their report on the data in a running commentary placed at the bottom half of some of the book pages. Their analysis is also characterized by creativity in “giving voice” to the others through the researchers’ lens and their understanding of the world (Lather, & Smithies, 1997, p. xvi). Throughout the data analysis, she tried to follow their lead and switch roles along the way from a teacher to a fellow language learner and spouse. In the analysis of the data and transformation of the data into findings, Lather and Smithies (1997) were not objective researchers simply researching and

recording the stories of stigmatized women who are HIV-positive. They rather played the role of what Patton (2002) referred to as “the catalyst” (p. 432). They interacted with the raw data, research participants, the context of their research, and the outside world in general to transform data into findings, using “the storytelling motif” (Patton, 2002, p. 432). Similarly, the researcher’s subjectivity in the current research study was “a catalyst” which helped shape the findings in the process of data interpretation.

In short, for analysis strategies, the researcher used inductive analysis and synthesis of the data; and context sensitivity where findings were analyzed in the specific historical, social, and temporal context of the UC. Further, in terms of voice, perspective and reflexivity, I incorporated my positionality and values. Constant exploration of both the participants’ voices and perspectives and mine, as well as reflecting on both standpoints were intended to render the research more authentic and to capture the complexity of real life situations which I had observed through years of participating in the setting.

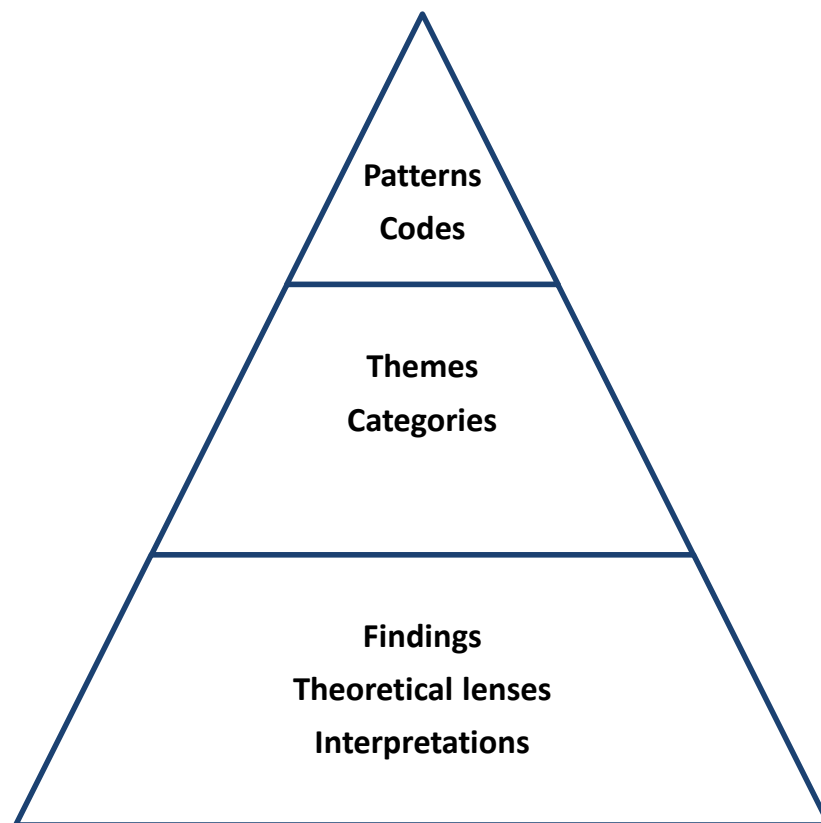


Figure 5: Layers of data analysis and interpretation

Complexities in Data Collection

As a teacher in the literacy programs, I had easy access to the students' gatherings inside and outside the classroom for observation which was an asset in having an already established relationship of trust with the observed groups and interviewees. The courses in the UC were not graded but I remained conscious that the participants as perceived me an authority figure. However, there were some problems, such as variation in the group size during the observation. Other problems included power relations while conducting the interviews: First, because the participants had all been my students at one time or another during their time at the UC; Second, power relations resulting from the language barrier could be an issue. The following is an example of a methodological narrative of the interviewing process with one participant. This narrative highlights some struggles inherent to the process of interviewing across culture, language, and positions in relation to the context in which the study took place.

Two Worlds One Common Language: Communication in a Foreign Language

It is late February right after our Everyday English class, which ends at 1:30 pm. Our classroom is lit by fluorescent lamps. The only opening to the outside is a high narrow window, which allows a slim beam of daylight into the room. The whole room is enshrouded in a neutral white fluorescent light. Sunlight is denied access to the room. Denise (pseudonym for my interviewee) had promised to let me know whether she accepted my invitation to interview her based on the list of interview questions I had sent earlier in the week. After class, I expected her to approach me and inform me of her decision, but she did not seem to have any intention to do that. After our session had ended, she kept seated silently in her chair around the rectangular oak table. She had a shy smile which I usually see on her face. I started cleaning up after class, putting away the dry erase markers, and gathering my books, remaining handouts, and other belongings to leave the room. The cleanup procedure took me about 10 minutes. During this time, I was considering the most appropriate way to approach Denise. Maybe she decided not to participate in the interview. How would I ask her about

her decision without embarrassing her? I gave her some time to come over to me to let me know about her decision, but she did not, so what should I do?

Before leaving the classroom, I decided to take the initiative and ask her about her decision and whether she liked the questions. When I moved to her, she stood up hesitantly. She still had this same shy smile. She avoided eye contact. Instead, she focused on her notebook which was on the table right in front of her. Through our brief exchange of words she would steal a brief glimpse upward and then swiftly look back at her notebook. I greeted her at first, and then asked her about what she thought about the questions. Her blushing cheeks and shy look gave me the impression that she would refuse my request. Contrarily, she reservedly said that she was ready for the interview. We both gathered our belongings and moved to the Great Room to start the interview.

Entering the Great Room was like opening up to the outside world. The huge glass windows, which overlooked the north, south, and east sides, allowed the warm sunlight to enter the room, and provided perfect daylighting which penetrated the half-open blinds. The view of trees, vast green fields, and the soccer field to the south and east of the building provided a relaxing atmosphere that helped in building rapport with the interviewee and finding some topics to talk about to pave the way for the interview. The only sound coming from the outside was birds chirping and the loud sound of geese which would pass by every now and then during our interview, announcing the advent of spring.

However, the welcoming setting did not make up for the disruption in the dynamics of communication. My interviewee and I came from two different language backgrounds. Our interview was conducted in English, the common foreign language which we both claimed to speak. The interviewee seemed to be nervous, and so was I. Some breakdowns in the dialogue and stuttering revealed lingering struggles in facility with language. Sometimes we turned off the recorder to rephrase a question, negotiate some meanings, or ask for clarification of some questions or statements. When I asked Denise about her perception of her proficiency level in the English

language, she seemed confused by the question. She laughed nervously and asked me to turn off the recorder to ask for some clarification. Her response was:

I think now I'm in intermediate level two or three not advanced eh maybe advanced beginning. I understand a lots of thing of intermediate level and I I can answer the questions but ed advanced classes a little bit difficult for me now. I have a lots of words that I don't know their meaning... and I I think I'm intermediate level two or three it's yeah in up {Silence}. (Denise)

I asked Denise about her opinion in the language programs offered at the University Center. She replied that the programs were “too fun very fun and interesting.” I was excited to know that she perceived the classes as “fun” and “interesting”; however both adjectives were too general. She did not use specific terms to clarify why she liked these classes, and what made them “fun” and “interesting”. I wondered whether I could have elicited a more detailed response from Denise if we were using her native language. Several questions haunted me regarding the use of a foreign language for interviewing. Further, another issue came to my mind. I emailed Denise the interview questions prior to our interview. Some of her responses seemed to be like reciting something which she had memorized by heart. The flow in responses was interrupted whenever I added a conversational question which was not initially in the structured interview. How much did my role as a teacher shape how she practiced and performed in the interview? How did allowing her to examine these questions before hand affect her responses? Did her use of general terms such as “fun” and “interesting” reflect a lack of facility with the language and use of vocabulary words which were conveniently available in her lexical repertoire?

Linguistic expression is key for gaining insight into the residents' perceptions of their experiences in the UC literacy programs. Using a foreign language as a medium for interviewing participants could result in misunderstanding, loss of important meanings, or in other words losing the content of a message by virtue of the method of its delivery. Multiple language processes took place in the participants' minds and mine, as well. Processing multiple layers of meanings while translating

from and into English was an ongoing process during the interview. The interviewee and interviewer's translation of thought and words could have affected communication and understanding of mutual messages. Thus, I believe that initiating another study with the same focus but using the native languages of the participant would facilitate self-expression and yield more in-depth, and more layers of meaning of the participants' experiences. And yet, the participant responses, self-corrections in speaking, questions to the researcher about pronunciation, were illuminating precisely because they demonstrated English language learning and use in action.

CHAPTER IV

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

“Just Doing Nothing”

This chapter provides a brief portrayal of the interview participants to represent their perspective of their experience in the learning setting and the host society in general. The original research questions for this study focused on the participants’ language learning experience in the UC. The participants’ role as spouses accompanying their partners for secondary purposes to the host society—what I call secondary positionality— was a key consideration in my experiences, in designing the study, and in how participants described their experiences even though I didn’t ask about it. It emerged as forefront in the fieldnotes and interviewees’ responses. Secondary positionality is a somewhat constrained position to occupy in the host society. Spouses who accompany their partners for secondary purposes move within limited domains preset and continually shaped by the primary partners’ path. The position resembles a clock pendulum which swings back and forth within the same place without any progress. It keeps ticking and swinging but within a limited space. This movement could be laborious and exhausting; could have moments of pleasure and growth, but reflects little forward motion in terms of personal career and developmental goals. It is time that is moving fast, leaving them behind stuck in a space not of their own creation. However, there was one exception among the participants, and this was Mitch,

the only male interview participant. Mitch did not spend much time confined within these secondary positionality constraints. After few months, he decided to move back to Germany and resume his job.

The pendulum movement is also clear in the participants' reported purpose of language learning. They kept switching between referring to formal and informal purposes for learning English. While they all shared a primary interest in improving informal communication skills, some hoped to develop their academic skills and particularly referred to grammar as a prerequisite to realize progress in language learning. Even those who did not express an interest in academic language development were conscious of their sentence structure and always asked for validation or correction. In one instance they disclosed that their purpose was communication. Then they later expressed a hope for academic and career advancement by improving their language skills.

Data revealed that the spouses' describe their progress or even ventures for the future are dependent on the primary partners' opportunities and choices. Long-term career planning, including the spouse's degree progression and career opportunities, is not an option. There is a sense of uncertainty. Their future plans and movements always "depend if" it is in the best interest of their primary partners' career. Malak and Tressie abandoned their medical careers in their native countries to accompany their husbands to pursue doctoral degrees. Tressie said she was being realistic by deciding to put her career on hold until she returned to her native country because, as she mentioned, the study of medicine is very difficult in the United States, and that a medical path would require beginning her education all over again.. On the other hand, Malak opted for what would be a career flex. She decided to change her major and pursued a master's degree in nutrition. She was a straight "A" student and was happy with her progress until her husband graduated and was offered a job in another state. When I interviewed her, she was struggling with a tough decision she had to make, whether to stay to complete her degree or accompany him and try to seek new opportunities in the new location. Eventually, she decided to move with her husband because she could not secure an assistantship that would assist with tuition. Once again, she had to adjust her future plans to fit within available confined space of the parameters shaped by her husband's education and career path.

Similarly, Zanza who was a police officer in Brazil left her job to accompany her husband to pursue an academic degree in the United States. When I interviewed her eight months after her arrival, she was overwhelmed with her new life. She was hopeful to realize language progress and get a job or take the TOEFL and pursue a master's degree in business. Zanza was self-confident, assertive, energetic, and very optimistic about her ability to fulfill her dreams. She stated that when she wants to do something, she simply "gets it done." Unfortunately, neither of her dreams was fulfilled during the time she attended the UC. In an observation note, one year after the interview, Zanza was not satisfied with her experience. She said that she was "ready to go home." She wanted to "do something important." My interpretation of Zanza's experience is that she may have been one of the fortunate few of sojourning spouses who might be able to return home to resume her career pursuit. Other participants' circumstances were different in that some of them changed their status into permanent residence, which meant that they needed to keep experimenting with this process of career flex, making the best of the available opportunities. Some would soon give up while others would keep swinging in the same confined space. Those equipped with proficiency in the target language and culture may be more persistent in their pursuits in the host society.

The following are snapshots of the interview participants; highlighting key points from transcripts and fieldnotes to capture their perception of their experience. The purpose of the representation of data in this chapter is to introduce the interview participants as characterized in the data. In being descriptive of the participants' learning experience, this representation also highlights some of the issues the unique adult international student spouses face as they learn the English language in this space and place. This representation is particularly important to give insight into the participants' perceptions of their experience, which is useful in shedding light on representatives of this unique population that could be helpful in better understanding their positionality and transferring this knowledge to similar settings. As much as possible, I preserved the participants' words as they were delivered to convey their message without imposing my interpretation which will be presented in the next chapter.

Julian: “I Am Not an Adult in America”

I interviewed Julian at the UC Great Room in the fall. We sat at a table in the east corner of the Great Room. It was quiet, probably because many staff members went for lunch at this time. It was raining and cloudy. We could see the outside of the building from the windows. It was all painted with colorful fall colors. Trees were orange, yellow, red, and green. We could see few cars from the window on the south side of the building. The parking lot which is located on the north side of the building is hidden by trees. The blinds were open to allow for daylight to enter the room. This openness to the outside natural space and the non-intrusiveness of unnatural elements made the room feel like an organic part of the natural scenery as if in a landscape painting.

Julian is a Korean woman in her mid-twenties. She is about 154 cm tall, and she weighs about 45 kilograms. She looked very elegant in her trim jean leggings, the gray and blue striped sweater, black top, and white tennis shoes. She had nicely trimmed nails and short black hair. Her eyeglasses gave her an air of seriousness. Throughout the interview she was keen to be accurate in her responses, often correcting tenses and sentence structure. Her cordiality, passion, and openness in responding to the questions could not be missed. She had a warm smile that remained on her face during most of the interview. She only frowned when she started to recall negative experiences. She shared with me that she had a full time job in her country as a teacher of Korean language. She accompanied her husband to attain a doctoral degree in the sciences. She hoped that one day she could continue her graduate studies to attain a doctoral degree in teaching Korean as a foreign language.

Transition in Julian’s life required career adjustment by pursuing an academic degree or finding a new job. Both cannot be realized without progress in language learning. In her journey for English language learning, Julian participated in the UC informal ESOL programs as well as a formal intensive ESL program. She felt the UC setting was more welcoming to her than other programs. Teachers were friendlier—in fact, they were not “real teachers”. They were friends, and they knew how to teach English to foreigners. In the other setting, Julian complained of being treated as a “child” and perceived English to primarily develop self confidence in the host society. The following

quotes reflect that language learning is not simply a skill, but it rather symbolizes deeper meanings for the participants.

Umm the best thing is confidence... yes confidence. Self-confidence is most important uhh because as uhh as I told you I'm adult but without English uhh uhm I'm not adult in America. So... it is very good point for me (in a sad voice). (Julian)

For Julian, language proficiency symbolized intelligence and success in the host society. Julian blamed herself for slow progress in language learning. Failing to realize the required improvement that would facilitate her success in the United States made Julian feel that she was "slow" and not as "intelligent" as her husband, who could speak English fluently. Lack of language proficiency was a source of disempowerment, lack of agency, and depression. She said,

uhmm yes uhmm because (smiling) uhmm my husband is very intelligent person everything uhh everything learning running fast very fast. So he can speak English or another major he can do it but I'm not because umm something umm wrong I need more time so ummm (...) ah so umm I'm really depressed because my husband and I have very big gap so I I tried to speak English every time even at home I turn on the T.V. in English. I listen it all day, and uhmm, learning grammar, and exercise, speaking in English is very important for my ... (asks me for help with the appropriate word. I suggested improvement and she accepted this word) yeah improve my English.

Like other participants, Julian is fully aware of her secondary and spousal positionality. If we draw a chart of their mutual relationship as described in the data, the partners would be at the core whereas the participant spouses would be orbiting around this core (see figure 2, chapter 3). Julian is aware of the limitations of her spousal positioning. Her career is pinned on her husband's choices. Wherever he goes, she follows and tries to adjust. This adjustment always comes at high price.

It [learning English] is not necessary for me but umm actually umm when I get married when I got married with my husband he really want to be American veterinarian uhh umm so ah ah at the time I got really confused because my job is teaching Korean for foreigners in a

university, so I had great job in my country so I I didn't uhm didn't want to change my life but my husband want to .. be get a chance because in America there are many chance for veterinarian so uhm I respect my husband and also I thought I could get a job in America for foreigner for Americans teaching Korean. That's why I study English. (Julian)

The previous data excerpt sheds light on some of the consequences of career transitions for sojourners. Julian was reluctant to "change" her life, yet she felt she must make these changes for the good of the family and in hope for a smoother transition in the host society. However, what actually happened was that Julian kept trying without realizing the progress she aspired to achieve. The image of the pendulum emerges with Julian's back and forth movement in the same place without realizing any progress or career advancement.

Milati: "I Have Not Got My Goals"

I interviewed Milati in the UC in the evening. We tried to find a vacant room, but all rooms were in use. We decided to hold the interview in the computer lab. Four people were in the room using the computers. The university students and residents have 24-hour access to the computer lab. It is equipped with eight computer sets and a printer. There are also three large rectangular tables in the middle of the room for studying or group work, clocks showing local times in different countries worldwide, and a paper recycling bin. It has a high window very close to the ceiling along the east side of the room. Exhibiting international time zones provides residents with a connection with their home countries. The high windows and limited visibility access to the outside world provides a sense of seclusion. The participants' life in the UC is somewhat sheltered from the outside world in what could be described as a gradual exposure to the still unfamiliar outside world in new society. For them, the UC is a stepping stone that facilitates their journey of socialization in the host society. Representing the pendulum motion, participants move back to reconnect with their past life in their home countries and move forth to explore and adjust in the host society.

Milati is an Indonesian woman in her late thirties. She is the mother of three children, the eldest in high school and the youngest in elementary school. She accompanied her husband to the

United States of America to pursue a doctoral degree. Milati wore a head scarf. She has brown eyes with a bright smile. She is about 155 cm tall. She is outgoing and energetic. She always volunteered to answer questions in the classroom and was always willing to take the risk to start conversations in English. On the day of the interview, she was wearing a green jacket and long brown skirt. The colors match her head cover.

Like another participant, Denise, Milati asked for a copy of the interview questions, so I sent them in advance. She accepted the invitation to participate and mentioned that getting the questions helped her prepare to answer them. There was some confusion as she thought that she had to answer the questions in writing. Initially, she answered the questions and emailed them back to me. I explained to her that we had to conduct the interview in person and hence set that time to do it. After greeting her and asking about her children, we started the interview before the room became too busy to hear each other.

Milati seemed to be excited about the UC programs and referred to the “many opportunities” the UC provides residents “to share our culture like food festival, women night, cooking demo, craft class.” She is happy with her learning experience and feels that the UC is a unique place because it provided her with an opportunity to improve her listening and speaking skills and make friends. Grammar was a UC class that Milati liked because it helped improve her English. She particularly enjoyed the conversation classes because they helped her with speaking skills and with communication. Language learning helped her socialize and make friends with people who do not speak her native language.

Yes exactly now ehhe.... I can speak with other person. I’m making a friend with my apartment assistant ehhe, and we are very close today than before when I afraid to speaking English. So you know the next Sunday I will make Indonesian food for the UC for the neighborhood gathering. (Milati)

However, at the time of the interview, Milati had not yet achieved her goals of language learning. She was still trying to improve her “pronunciation” and “vocabulary” to communicate with

others. She wished to fulfill her dreams one day. Milati was also aware of her social role as a spouse. Her prime purpose for learning English was to help her children.

Milati is talented in both crafts and cooking. Craft and cooking classes are among the activities offered in the community development program. They are used as medium for using English language in an authentic setting. Milati participated in the Edible Book contest in the Public Library. She not only won first prize in dessert competition and cake decoration contests, but received awards in two subsequent recycling craft contests at the UC. Milati also volunteered to lead the craft class several times and demonstrated making Indonesian dishes in the Cooking Demonstration.

In spite of Milati's active participation in the UC, the theme of "nothingness" emerged in her responses. As other spouses have noted in passing to me, they felt that they were doing nothing in the host society, especially in comparison with their primary partners' lives or their busy lives back home. She compared the slow-pace, passive, and boring life of spouses to their partners' active and busy lives. She asked for holding classes during winter and spring breaks because spouses have nothing to do during this time whereas "students have research. They keep studying in the vacation time."

Su: "I Am a Bad Woman"

I interviewed Su in the University Center Great Room. We sat on a round table next to the fireplace at the west side of the room. It was close to the sliding door leading to the kitchen. A poster board with laminated pictures of backpacks carrying the names of the children participating in the After School Adventures program was hung over the fireplace. The weather was mildly cool and breezy. The blinds were open which allowed us to see the trees dancing with the breezy wind.

Su is a Korean woman in her thirties. She is about five feet tall and has a slim figure. She was wearing blue flare-style jeans, a yellow shirt with a white top underneath it. She was also wearing a delicate golden chain. Her hair is black and slightly wavy. She kept it loose to touch her shoulders as if it was tenderly patting her shoulders to assure her that the interview would be smooth and

everything would be alright. She was nervous at the beginning of the interview, sharing her worry with me that her English was not good enough to participate in the interview.

Like Julian, Su is also assessing her language progress in relation to others. She is not satisfied with the language progress she has made during her three-year stay in the United States. She also blames herself for her slow progress. Her words reflect a sense of guilt even though she delivers them with humor: “many people want to help me, but I’m bad woman (laughing).” Unlike Julian, Su seemed to take things lightly. She was laughing and smiling most of the time. Although she was not satisfied with her language progress, she did not seem to feel stress because of this issue. Her eyes reflected sincere kindness and contentment. We chatted for sometime before the interview, and I think that this conversation increased her comfort before starting to record the interview. Our conversation started with greetings, sharing plans for the Christmas break, and the differences between the Korean and American cultures. Su mentioned that one of the striking differences was the issue of eye contact. Only then I realized that she avoided eye contact. Then she shared with me that “eye contact is rude in Korea.” She added that “no eye contact helps more understanding English,” especially listening.

As with other participants, the UC provided Su with a space to meet and communicate with people using the English language. As mentioned earlier, it is a sheltered space to facilitate the adjustment process. Su noted progress in her communication skills with people from different countries. However, she stated that cultural proximity with Chinese and Japanese residents facilitated communication more than with other residents with whom she is still at distance. When I asked her about the place where communication takes place, she said the UC because “it’s difficult to meet other people outside.” As mentioned earlier, Su blamed herself rather than her classes in the UC for the slow progress. She said that to realize progress she had to change herself.

I just want to change myself like my personality to brave sometimes I’m afraid of of eh speak English but I have I have to destroy destroy (thinking about the correct word, I suggested fears and she accepted it) yes destroy my fears. (Su)

Tressie: “I Can Talk Very Bravely and Communicate with Others”

When I began my interview with Tressie in the UC great room, there was some noise in the kitchen. Staff members were probably sorting and putting away shopping items. We could hear cabinet doors opening and closing and people talking in the kitchen. We were sitting on the same table which Su and I used for the interview.

Tressie is a Chinese woman in her early thirties. She is a medical doctor, and worked full time in her native country. Like the other interviewees, she accompanied her husband to pursue a graduate degree. She had been in the United States for seven months. She was wearing a gray top, off white crochet jacket, olive green pants, and brown shoes. She tied her straight black hair into a ponytail. She was wearing eyeglasses. She was pregnant with her first baby. She shared with me that it was a girl. Tressie seemed to be the most reserved of all participants. Her responses were short and to the point. With her, I felt that everything was under control. She did not have any plans to pursue a degree in medicine from the United States because she believed it to be difficult.

Tressie felt satisfied with her learning experience at the UC. She was “happy” with it as she was able to fulfill her goals for learning English which were socialization and communication. She had a positive opinion about the learning environment as she mentioned that the “environment to force you to have to speak English.” She had realized progress in speaking skills. She used the passive voice to express her opinion. She stated: “my English has been improved.” Using the passive voice might mistakenly connote that she is not the agent of change in her language learning. Someone else caused the improvement.

Moreover, Tressie stated that language learning facilitated intercultural communication and making friends, and intercultural communication helped her in cross-culturalcross-cultural understanding as she said:

Sometimes maybe when you don’t know don’t know a lot about these countries maybe you have a prejudice or some misunderstanding but yeah but yeah when you communicate with

others and you learn from other learn something about other countries you realize you may be misunderstood something. (Tressie)

Tressie came with her husband and she was not sure when they would go back to China. She was clear that she did not have career plans in the host society. She mentioned that she was being realistic because pursuing a medical degree in the United States “is very difficult ... If you want to study medicine you have to begin from the start. It takes a long time.” Tressie did not seem to worry about this issue at that time maybe because as she mentioned she was pregnant with her first baby and needed some time to fulfill maternity needs. She said that her goal was to reach an advanced level of proficiency; however she could not achieve this goal during her ten-month stay in the United States. She added that this progress could help her in communication and when traveling. Nevertheless, she had to put off her career plans until she returned to China.

Hend: “I Have Something to Do”

Hend is an Egyptian woman in her early thirties. The interview took place in her apartment across the street from the UC. It lasted for about an hour with some interruptions which included checking on her daughter and checking on the meat she was cooking for dinner. We stayed in the living room all the time. The room was furnished with a green sofa and a brown loveseat. Both of them were made of the same fabric and their colors blended in very well. There was also a built-in dining table with five chairs. The seats of the chairs were padded with beige leather and wooden backs. There was a television unit, built-in bookcase, and a small coffee table. We spent some time chatting together while she was preparing dinner for her family before we started the interview.

Hend is medium height and medium built. She wore a head cover following the shari’a (law) of the Islamic religion. She wore brown pants and brown body with a yellow cardigan on top. She seemed to be particular about matching colors. She has a dark complexion which reflects a general physical trait of people living in her hometown in a coastal city in Egypt. She is a mother of two girls and is expecting her third child. She has a bachelor’s degree in accounting. She accompanied her

husband to the United States to pursue a doctoral degree. They lived in Michigan for one year and then they moved to this university town a year before the interview took place.

Hend was very hospitable to me as a guest in her home, reflecting cultural norms of her native country. Before we started, she served me Egyptian tea, pudding, and a special Egyptian treat, which could be described as fried pancakes filled with ground nuts and raisins. Her two-year-old daughter was sitting with us all the time, playing around in the living room.

Hend had plans to take the TOEFL exam and apply for a master's degree. When I interviewed her, she was happy with her experience and satisfied with her learning progress. She had recently moved from Michigan where she "didn't have anything to do ... just cooked dinner," but in the new place the UC provided her with "something to do." She wakes up early and goes to classes at the UC "like my husband has classes." Language learning was an empowering and liberating experience for Hend. She started to do things she had not done prior to attending the UC programs.

I used to listen to the TV a lot like the news and cartoon too with my daughter. I think this is for the first time I came here I listened to the news and I didn't understand anything so I said you I want to understand especially the forecast and this stuff. After this I tried to listen to it everyday and if I find words I don't understand it you know I open the dictionary and I looking for it. So I understand it a little bit.. more than before, and my practice. I had an American woman she's my friend and I usually talked with her and asked her about what I didn't understand. So I think that helped me a lot practice and...so I'm going for shopping by myself and looking for the name for anything I don't understand I don't know what is the name uhh. Yeah I think this stuff. (Hend)

Like Tressie, Hend used the passive voice to refer to her progress in her language proficiency, "I think it's increased." Her wording, whether intentionally or because of her language proficiency level, suggests that she is not the agent of her language progress. Her progress facilitated her communication with other international students and led to more understanding.

I think it's increased (laughing), a little bit because I've been busy so... But I see this increase with the other people there in the classes you know eh I think first time I went there I didn't understand anything from like Korean student. Now I can talk with him and make situation with him and conversation. I understand them more than before you know. So yeah I think yeah it's very good for the international student. (Hend)

Nevertheless, two years after the interview, specifically before Hend left the country, she disclosed her dissatisfaction with her language progress because she could not pass the TOEFL and get the score required for college admission.

Similar to other spouses, Hend was also aware of her social role. She needed to learn English to fulfill her goals and also to help her daughter succeed at school. She said,

I must know English good to make a relationship with other people you know, and to understand what they saying, to see the movie, to help my daughter to study you know. I must understand this language to help her. (Hend)

Rouj: "F2 Is Just for Care Not for Work or Study"

This interview took place in the staff room at the University Center, which was equipped with two computers and a laptop which were set for staff members' use to do lesson planning. There was a bookcase full of children's books and two cabinets to keep first aid kits, art, and craft tools. There was a narrow rectangular window close to the ceiling, overlooking the building's west side. It could barely allow any daylight from outside nor allow any peek into the outside world. There was another square window on the south wall which overlooked the Children's Room to allow staff members see the children playing without being seen from the other side. We could hear children of other residents and UC attendees playing in the Children Room. Her daughter joined us during the interview. She was playing around in the room. Then she sat down in her umbrella stroller and fell asleep.

Rouj is an Iraqi woman in her twenties. She is a mother of a two-year old girl. She came with her husband to the United States who came to pursue a graduate degree. She said that she also hoped to continue her graduate studies. On the day of the interview, she was wearing dark brown pants,

floral tunic with red, orange, hot pink, blue, brown, white, and beige colors. Like Hend, she was wearing a head cover. It was a beige scarf which perfectly matched her tunic. She is petite, about five feet tall. She has a smiley face. She is quiet and has a very soft voice with a subtle sense of self confidence and determination. Rouj provided another example of the obstacles facing some of the spouses in pursuing a career in the United States. Rouj was an assistant professor in Iraq. She had a facility with language and could have possibly achieved the standardized test scores required for graduate college admission. Her problem was that her F2 visa did not allow her to study in the United States. She had to change her visa, which was difficult for her at that time because changing her status required returning to Iraq. She said: “My visa is F2 and I think F2 is just for care not for work or study.”

Rouj was satisfied with her progress in language learning in the UC, particularly listening and speaking skills. She had learned English in her home country, but like most of the other participants, the focus was on reading and writing, primarily grammar. In the UC, she mentioned that she had myriads of opportunities to develop her listening and speaking skills. She wished she could translate this progress into fulfilling her career goals which were interrupted by visa issues.

Mitch: “Is This Right?”

Mitch is an architect from Korea, and the only male interview participant in the study. He is in his late twenties. He lived and worked in Germany for a few years. He accompanied his wife to conduct research at an American university. He attended classes regularly, and I also tutored him. He is reserved, handsome, well-dressed, and has a particularly kind nature. He was always reserved and did not participate much in group activities at the UC. However, he was willing to participate in small group activities, particularly when he was with his group of male friends (one from Mexico and the other from Turkey).

While listening to my recorded interview with Mitch, I felt at first that I was putting words in the mouth of the interviewee. However, on second thoughts, I felt that my interactions reflected sympathetic listening, and I tried to help him out or rather rescue him, with words. I think that being a

member of the ESL community, both as a teacher and fellow learner, I have shared knowledge about the feelings of a nonnative speaker while communicating in the target language. As a teacher, I have experience with students seeking help with words to keep the flow of conversation. As a nonnative speaker, I feel the pain while exerting an effort to come up with the right words to prevent the breakdown of dialogue. This consciousness of language breakdown is most felt during communication with figures of authority and in public settings with native speakers. These attempts at accuracy come at the expense of fluency. While this note is a reflection on how preoccupation with grammar can disrupt speaking skills, it also sheds light on power relations in language use in classrooms and in multi-linguistic research interactions.

Mitch is tall and slim. He has fair complexion. He has fine shiny black hair and small black eyes. He was wearing a plaid beige and brown shirt, brown pants, and a light beige sweater. We conducted our interview in a classroom at the UC, directly after our intermediate English class during lunch time. It was sunny outside; however, the small high windows allowed for little access of daylight into this room. There were four tables set in rows. Each table had eight chairs surrounding it. There were two maps on the wall; one of the world and the other of the United States of America. Other wall posts included a set of classroom rules, such as cell phone use and priority for UC use of the room for classes. There were two doors in the room; one leading to the lobby and another to the north side of the building. It leads to a parking lot, which the University Center shared with the campus laundry facility.

Mitch was modest in describing his progress in language learning. He said “someone tell me your English progress is good. I don’t know.” He shared with me that he married his wife after a long love story, and that he still loved her dearly. He also told me that his wife would like to stay in the United States, and that she had an opportunity to pursue a doctoral degree in one of the universities. He said that while he would like to stay, he had limited opportunities to find a job in the United States relevant to his major and that he would have many problems pursuing the same career here. After pondering his options, Mitch decided to go back to Germany and resume working at the same place

he had worked previously.. He was on an unpaid leave during his stay in the United States. This male participant is the only person in the study who returned to live in his home country without waiting for his spouse to continue her studies. Although this is not a study on gender, it has potential to be framed within this framework. In one of the class activities in the intermediate English class, the students had to draw an interesting scene from the UC backyard. Then they presented and described their drawings orally. Mitch drew a tree in the middle of a blank page. In his presentation, he explained that he was this tree and the surrounding vacuum symbolized his feeling of loneliness and isolation in the host society.

Mitch criticized explicit teaching of grammar in his native country as counterproductive to learning language. However, in his descriptions of language learning, he often focused on the accuracy of his words at the expense of fluency. He kept asking for validation from me after each utterance to make sure that he was using his words correctly. His progress in language learning, which he thought had not been realized yet, would open up new opportunities for him. In his case, progress in English proficiency was a matter of empowerment in terms of his career rather than abstract values, such as confidence and courage as with Julian and Tressie.

I uhhm uhhm I want to study English for my career. If uhm if I want to uhhm.... nice job... if I want to get nice job I have to learn English and I have to speak very well English....if I have more experience for learning maybe it give me too many opportunity in my life. (Mitch)

Zanza: “I Want to Feel More Important and Do Something Useful”

Zanza is from Brazil. She is in her mid-twenties. She is medium height, slim, and elegant. She has dark black short hair, black eyes, and bronze complexion. She always had a beautiful friendly smile on her face. We held our interview early in the morning. We started our interview in the Great Room, but carpenters came in to fix some tables and chairs, so we had to move to the Toy Room. On that day, Zanza was wearing stylish brown eyeglasses, black pants, a blue shirt, and a short leather jacket. She was also wearing casual black shoes. She had light makeup, brownish colors.

Zanza is charged with an eagerness to learn and always speaks with noticeable enthusiasm. During class, she always volunteered to share her thoughts, explain her ideas, and defend her choices. She had a high facility with language. Until I interviewed her, I thought that she had been learning English for quite some time. However, when I asked her about when she started learning English, she told me “eight months” ago, which was after she came to the United States. There were many people who have been learning the language for years, but they were not as proficient as Zanza.

As other participants, language learning was empowering to Zanza. It liberated her from a sense of disability she had when she arrived in the United States. She said,

I feel so so glad because when I arrived here I feel like a deaf people, a deaf person because I didn't understand nothing, so I couldn't speak ehheh I couldn't speak with anybody with ehheh and when I watched T.V., I didn't understand (emphasis on the last syllable) nothing, but now I feel like I'm a person who can understand everybody and I can talk and so I feel and feel happy. (Zanza)

Zanza's sense of empowerment has not lasted until the end of her stay in the United States. She has been energetic, enthusiastic, and all hopeful to have a better future and fulfill all her dreams to reach a reasonable level of language proficiency to be able to pass the TOEFL exam and be granted admission to a US college to pursue a master's degree. She was all hopeful to get a job in the meantime to help her with the tuition expenses. Unfortunately, she could not attain what she aspired for. A year after our interview, after 20 months of learning English at the University Center, I observed her in one of the classes. She did not seem to be as optimistic as when I first interviewed her. She seemed to be more frustrated because she could not reach any of her long-term goals.

During one class I taught at the UC at the beginning of the fall semester, I asked the students to share how they spent the summer break. Zanza was the first to share her thoughts. She was the only returning student among a group of ten new residents. She said,

I think I am ready to go home. We will go back in December (after 4 months). I want to feel more important and do something useful and do things other than cleaning the house. Yeah!

I'm ready to go home. I need to do something important. I love to stay if I have something excited to do. Sorry for complaining. I wish I could get a master's in physics. I'm pushing myself, but I'm still bad in English I could not do the TOEFL. I could not study. (Zanza)

To make her feel better (and I really mean what I said), I told her she was not the only one who had this feeling of being unimportant, and that we all go through the same stages at one point or another. Then I directed my words to the other students, and I told them that if they needed advice about the best way to navigate their way in language learning, they should ask Zanza because for me she would be the best example I would give of how much progress language learners could make in a short time. I told them that I was amazed when I learned that she did not learn English in her native country, and that all the progress she had realized in language learning was in a matter of eight months. After these words Zanza's face brightened and her eyes widened. She started talking to the others enthusiastically and sharing her experience. She started by saying: "My advice to new comers don't give up! There were times when I felt lost. I could not understand a word. I know I'm not dumb. I told myself that. I'm pushing myself. I worked hard." This reflects the pendulum movement in Zanza's case. It is true that she worked hard to accomplish her goals, but unfortunately she found out that all her efforts and laborious motion were insufficient to meet her goals. All her movement was in the same place without tangible progress. Zanza said that she was sad to leave and was worried about the progress she had achieved, not enough to count as important, though. She added that in the USA she "breathes in English." However, this was not enough to help her achieve her goals, and she had to go back to "to feel more important and do something useful."

Malak: "It Depends on My Husband"

I interviewed Malak in an early morning in the spring. Malak is an Egyptian in her thirties. She is about 5 feet and 6 inches tall. She has a round plump smiley face, wide black eyes, dark black hair, and black eyebrows. She wore a loose black dress, a yellow head cover with a black bandana under it, black flat shoes, and a wedding ring. She was not wearing makeup.

Malak is a medical doctor. She had just completed her residency before coming to the United States. She was a devout student who attended most of the University Center classes the year before the interview. Her goal was to take the TOEFL and apply for a master's degree. Fortunately, Malak was able to get the required score on TOEFL and GRE and was accepted in the same university her husband attended. She had to change her major, though. The closest to her medical degree, she told me, was the field of nutrition. When we had our interview, Malak was through her first year in the master's program. When we met she was excited to break the news that she passed all her three classes with grade A. However, her husband graduated that semester and got a job offer in another state. Once again, she had to worry about another disruption in her career. She had to apply to another university in the same city to which they were moving. She was worried that she would not be accepted and told me that she could not stay behind with her two young girls.

At the scheduled time, Malak met me at the UC, and asked if we could conduct the interview on the terrace in the fresh air. It was cold and cloudy. The temperature was 66 degrees Fahrenheit. It also started to drizzle during our interview, but it felt fresh and clean and we enjoyed the weather. It was so quiet at this time of the day and semester. Green trees surrounded us from all sides and the grass seemed like a green carpet just installed. Malak commented that it was "a romantic view." We sat on a wooden picnic table on the terrace. Malak treated me to a bottle of iced tea. I thanked her and chatted together about family and her career plans before we started the interview.

Like other participants in this research study, Malak followed her husband to the United States. It was not her preference, but she felt that she had to do it to be with her husband. She was aware of her secondary positionality. Like other spouses, Malak's words indicated a high sense of obligation toward their partners' primary role. They do things not because they want to do them, but because they have to. In Malak's response on her opinion about her experience in the United States, her husband and children were at the forefront.

...uhhh ehhhh.... I think coming here to USA was very good experience and opportunity to my husband of course ehhe and I'm so proud and so happy for him because he got a position

after he finished his PhD and for me and for my girls too they speak English much better than me and their father very good. It will help them a lot when we will be back to Egypt. (Malak, 215)

She also shared a sense of uncertainty associated with her secondary positionality. The following quote from her interview reflected this sense of uncertainty.

...as long we will stay here I will keep trying. My husband has got an opportunity to work in another state for a post doctor position, and I will transfer my my master over there and I will try hard to finish my master, and if we will stay for a longer time I will apply for a PhD.

Actually it depends on my husband (laughing) because he is the principal he is the one who is coming here ehheh, but it is very good to find an opportunity for me. I'll keep trying (laughing). (Malak)

Malak's joyful personality is apparent in these interview excerpts, but it is also clear that she feels she must adjust her plans in line with her husband's career changes and relocations.

In sum, the purpose of this chapter was to provide snapshots of the interview participants who represented the main source of data in this research study and to provide insights into the broader population of adults who attend the UC. Their representation highlighted some emerging key concepts that will be analyzed and discussed in details in the next chapter. These concepts included the participants' perception of their language learning progress and its effect on their perception of their sense of agency in the host society. The participants' awareness of their secondary positionality also emerged in association with themes, such as their sense of uncertainty, doing nothing important, adjustment and readjustment to fit into their primary partners' plans, the empowering role of language learning which symbolizes agency, freedom, and ability to the participants.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS

“Knowledge is not simply transmitted and shared through communication, it is produced in communication” (Hartley, 1992, p. 11).

This chapter provides an overview of the research findings and discussion of the concepts and theoretical framework employed to interpret data and produce these findings. Employing different theoretical frameworks to interpret data helped in exploring layers of meanings embedded in the data. Conceptual elements began to surface inductively in the data that spoke to a range of key ideas tied to language, literacy, and culture theories. Power relations; culture capital; affective filter hypothesis; constructing meaning in relation; symbolic meaning of concepts; and the influence of the sociocultural context of language learning began to surface which spoke to the saliency of concepts from critical theory, symbolic interactionism, the sociocultural and affective approach to language learning, and Second Language Acquisition. These theoretical concepts are aligned with the constructionist epistemology and interpretivist theoretical perspective.

The researcher’s purpose was to explore participants’ perceptions of their learning experience within a community of learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds in the UC. During data gathering and analysis new unfolding analytic questions

emerged such as how. How does the literacy program help the students' social adjustment in the host society? How did students with limited English proficiency experience interactions or learning with students at a similar or slightly different level of English proficiency? How did this similarity and variance facilitate and/or disrupt communication and developing a sense of community? How did this daily interaction influence their sense of self-fulfillment and perception of the learning environment? What does language learning symbolize to the participants?

The researcher sought answers for all these questions, which arose as part of the analytic process, by exploring the beliefs and perceptions of the participants in their interaction with others and with the new spaces they have constructed and reconstructed through their daily interactions and in relation to their cultural background, the UC multicultural space, and other residents of diverse cultural belonging. The researcher intended to provide an insider's view, and make meaning of their perceptions by means of long-term interactions within classrooms and through recreational activities at the UC.

Conducting research with human beings does not yield conclusive results. After collecting the data from the interviews, observation, and documents, highlighting the themes, producing findings, and reporting them were not easy tasks. New potential interpretations unfolded during the researcher's interaction with the data. The analysis process of this research study reflected Patton's (2002) view that "the complete analysis isn't" (p. 431). After several attempts to interact with the data units to decipher the secret codes and make meaning, the data seemed to be unwieldy (Patton, 2002). The interview transcriptions and observation notes included multiple perspectives of different people, contradictory opinions, and lent themselves to multiple interpretations.

Theoretical Framework for Interpretation

Symbolic Interactionism

To answer these questions, it was important for the researcher to explore participants' meanings and perceptions, particularly the meanings participants created through their interactions in the different learning spaces. Using Blumer's (1969) three "premises" on which symbolic

interactionism is based highlighted the unique meanings of the participants' experiences and what these meanings symbolized for them. These premises are: first, that human beings' actions toward objects are guided by the meaning they perceive in these objects. The second is that meaning is constructed by means of "social interaction." The third premise is that these meanings are interpreted and adjusted during interaction (p. 2).

Applying the three key elements of symbolic interactionism (hereafter SI), which are symbol, self, and interaction (Hartley, 1992), elucidated a series of findings focused on meaning made in the process of interaction and symbolic connotation of the participants' experience with language learning. In terms of the concept of "symbol," central to SI, and at the heart of this study, the meaning of language to participants had both denotative and symbolic elements.

The research study focused on the participants' perception of a language learning milieu and as conveyed in their interaction with others and their context in a nonnative language (English). Applying the concept of self as Hartley (1992) explained, the researcher was a motivator to conduct this study to explore the participants' perceptions and to focus on the participants' attitudes, cultural background, and perceptions, as well as see the learning context and even her own experience as a spouse and language learner through their eyes. Further, the researcher assumed that her interaction with the diverse participants' perceptions was key for meaning construction and of making sense of the participants' experiences and perception of their experiences. Adopting the symbolic interactionism lens helped the researcher see the learning environment through the residents' eyes and explore their perception of their positionality in relation to the UC space and other residents as discussed later in this chapter. In the same vein, the researcher saw the concept of culture as a way of meaning making that helped understand the participants' perceptions in relation to their cultural background of what constitutes viable teaching practices, a "real" school, and self-fulfillment.

Critical Theory

As ideas emerged inductively, they lent themselves to critical framing. Thus, concepts drawn from critical theory were used to analyze the data. As Chapter Two covered in detail Critical literacy

studies commonly turn to Freire's (2005) classic work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, to draw connections between literacy and empowerment. Connections emerged inductively as well, in that Freire's concept of literacy education helped explore and highlight power relations inside and outside the classroom that included sojourners' constrained positions in the host society in comparison to the wider mobility and career options and sense of self-fulfillment they experienced in their home country. Further, it shed light on the students' perceptions of the liberatory power of language learning.

Some of the new questions emerging from the data were liberatory, aiming to raise awareness of the participants' sense of disempowerment from oppressive situations precipitated by English language incompetence and their secondary status in the host society. In this particular research study, liberation referred to the spouses' perception of language proficiency as a liberatory power and highlighting their perception of instances of injustice and oppression they might have been subjected to in the host society. It is worth mentioning that the researcher used critical theory at times to interpret data regardless of the participants' reference to similar interpretations of their experience. Some participants interpreted their experience as unjust whereas others were happy with their supporting role although they felt constrained.

Oppression in all its forms, including language oppression, is dehumanizing. According to Freire (2005), "humanization is people's vocation" (p. 44). It is achieved by liberation and justice. Following Freire, "Conscientization" of oppression is deemed necessary for liberation from oppression; in this case, the spouses of international students' consciousness of their condition as disadvantaged is necessary for empowerment in their journey of second language learning.

According to Freire (2005), the liberation process should be undertaken by the oppressed themselves and could not be granted by others as an act of kindness. Hence, the researcher was not conducting research *on* participants but rather *with* participants (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. 9). Participants perceived progress in language learning as liberating from their sense of isolation, loneliness, and ineptness; hence prompting the use of critical theoretical framework for interpretation

of their transformative experience and to reveal their sense of liberation and the politics of power relations in the learning context. Freire's (2005) principles productive for this study included literacy as a tool for liberation and empowerment, the value of lived experience in promoting literacy, dialogical practice, and the unity of theory and praxis. The UC was a key space for promoting cross-cultural interaction by means of authentic literacy practices in structured classes and spontaneous recreational events. It provided the residents with a space and created opportunities for interaction.

The current research study drew on Freire's (2005) concept of literacy as a transformative experience, which emancipates and humanizes learners by drawing on the students' prior knowledge to produce relevant and engaging curricula. The underlying assumption in the UC work and in this study is that drawing on the students' own cultural experience facilitates the process of their learning about the culture of the host society and even acculturation. Focusing solely on acculturation and didactic teaching about the target culture could impair the students' learning and adaptation to the culture of the host society. On the other hand, the students' knowledge about the target culture could be enhanced by scaffolding the students' learning by building on what they already know by means of drawing cultural comparisons between their native culture and culture of the host society.

Sociocultural Theories

Sociocultural theories formed another theoretical lens for interpreting data in this study. Perception of the world is highly influenced by the individual's sociocultural context. The language that people use and the meanings they draw from their everyday interaction is informed by their diverse sociocultural backgrounds. According to Gee (2008), people "...have lots and lots of cultural models about all sorts of things" (Gee, 2008, p. 9). These models help interpret the world and give meaning to individual experiences. These meanings are dynamic and change constantly through social interaction. In this model, I recognize that the residents come to the UC with their cultural models of what constitutes good teaching practices. Their interaction with the learning environment and with others from different cultural backgrounds influences the meaning making process of their experience in the UC.

Gee (2008) differentiated between two types of discourse which help formulate people's cultural models and meaning making processes, which are the primary and secondary discourses. These discourses do not only refer to language, but also "the values, attitudes, and beliefs..." (Gee, 2008, p. 174). The proximity or remoteness of the participants' "primary Discourses" (which are used at their native countries and at home) from "secondary Discourse" in the University Center and host society probably influenced their perception of their learning experience in the UC. According to Gee (2008), the agreement between primary and secondary Discourses is an added advantage to people who enjoy this proximity. Further, the interaction among Discourses contributes to the negotiation of new meanings. This helped interpret the students' different registers of time and classroom etiquette.

Bakhtin (1986) took this a step further by emphasizing the influence of context on the process of meaning making. Any text should be interpreted within its historical context. Thus the researcher in the current research study considered the participants' biographical background, ESL literacy beginnings, and prior education while interpreting the meanings of their learning experiences. My standpoint as a teacher in the University Center and my relationship with the participants as students were also considered in analyzing and interpreting their responses.

Overview of Findings

The original research questions focused on participants' experiences learning English and their perceptions of the teaching methods and model at the University Center, and all participants described their experiences as positive, particularly regarding the use of the multiple intelligences model of teaching. They liked the communicative approach of language learning. However, there were some minor problems which they cited, and some contradictions in the data which pointed to interesting nuances related to their positions as sojourners. Some of them described difficulties in keeping up with some teachers. They stated that some teachers speak so fast that they could not understand them and that sometimes they felt lost.

Further, some participants requested the use of some methods which they have used in their native countries such as tests to motivate them to study. Others asked for implementing placement

tests to ensure that students attend classes at their level of proficiency. I have noticed that some patterns of themes emerged in the responses of all participants regardless of their cultural background. I classified the themes into two groups. The first group was relevant to Second Language Acquisition, and the second group was relevant to sociocultural theories and the role of social and cultural contexts in the process of meaning making. Some of the themes seemed to be revolving around a core theme which was the empowering role of language learning and its role in facilitating social adjustment and adaptation to the host society. For the participants, language learning symbolized and realized security, independence, and freedom. It also suppressed fear and facilitated intercultural communication. The following section is a detailed discussion of the research findings and theoretical lenses used to make meaning of the data.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding is that the participants' diverse cultural models from their home countries influenced their perception of their learning experience at the UC. In other words, as expected, their worldview or preconception of English language education and formal schooling influenced their diverse perceptions of the UC informal setting as will be explained below. The second was that the participants represent a broad range of acculturation stages, and the acculturation model is not a fully encompassing model to understand sojourners' experience because of the unique liminal nature of the UC. The third was that the unique multi-cultural and multi-linguistic context of language learning in the UC facilitated cross-cultural communication among residents. The fourth was that in spite of the participants' overall positive experience with the UC learning environment, they expressed different feelings about progress; different perspectives of viable literacy practices, particularly the role of grammar in their English language learning experiences. The fifth was that language learning was a source of empowerment for the residents. The Sixth was that language learning was associated with a shifting sense of strong and weak agency developed in a third hybrid space in the UC. The seventh was that participants had different purposes for learning English which was associated with diverse perceptions of self-fulfillment and motivation orientation. Some interviewees were integratively-

oriented, whereas others were instrumentally-oriented which seemed to influence their perception of their language progress as well as their sense of self- fulfillment in their life in the host society. The eighth was that participants had a feeling of nothingness in the host society, associated with their involuntary/secondary positionality as compared to their partners who are voluntary/primary sojourners, and they wanted to do something “important”. Language facility and progress contributed to, and inhibited, their sense of self-fulfillment and satisfaction. The ninth was that participants’ experiences of change and language learning hopes for the future were associated with the duration of residence in the host society. Finally, as the UC was liberating to the residents, it was also confining because of the power relations evident in the data, particularly interviews, which was limiting to the production of other potential meanings.

The Participants’ Diverse Cultural Models Influence their Perception of their Learning Experience at the UC

Perception of the world is highly influenced by the individual’s sociocultural context. The language that people use and the meanings they draw from their everyday interaction is informed by their diverse sociocultural backgrounds. The residents come to the UC with their cultural models of what constitutes good teaching practices and schooling. Their interaction with the learning environment and with others from different cultural backgrounds influenced the meaning making process of their learning experience. Further, the proximity or remoteness of their primary Discourses (which were used in their native countries and at home) from secondary Discourses in the UC influenced their perception.

Residents perceived their progress in language learning in relation to the UC space, home country practices, other learners, or partners. As participants described their progress, they regularly contrasted their sense of progress with others as touchstones to evaluate and communicate how they were doing. Julian and Su were modest in rating their progress in language learning. They described it as “slow” and happening “gradually.” They both blamed themselves for the slow process. Su described her progress in relation to other learners in the UC. She was grateful for others’ help, but

she described herself as a “lazy” and “bad”. Julian compared her progress to her “smart” husband, and blamed herself for being slow. Others, such as Rouj, though happy with her progress, especially with her speaking skills, she mentioned extrinsic factors, such as visa issues, which hinder her from pursuing an academic degree. She perceived her progress in speaking skills in relation to her proficiency level in her home country. Rouj’s comparison of the communication practice facilitated at the UC and lack of speaking activities in her native country prompted her to modify her cultural model of language teaching practices and develop a favorable perception of the UC. Finally, Heng perceived her progress in language learning in relation to her maternal responsibilities toward her young daughter which prevented her from attending all the classes; hence slowing down her progress.

As for the learning environment, the following data excerpt reflects Julian’s cultural model of learning and acceptable student behavior and some elements that she considered disruptive behavior that interfered with her learning, such as lack of punctuality and use of native language.

[In Korea] the students do not want to interrupt the class but in UC there are many student. There are many people uhh umm in UC they don they do not they do not... uhh keep they don’t keep correct time so uhh I feel um a little bit messy in the class because I really like to focus on teachers’ uhm teachers’ teaching but umm some of student talk about their language talking their languages use their languages and some people are loud in class and some people go out frequently. So I don’t want it because we are learning English in this class and this time is very important. (Julian)

She added,

Okay umm I really satisfied in ... program except umm umm the participation participa participation system because uhm because it is very sensitive thing, because in my country we when we have some class late ten minutes is okay 20 minutes late is not okay at the time most of the students do not want to interrupt the class but in ... there are many student. There

are many people uhh umm in... they don they do not they do not... uhh keep they don't keep correct time so uhh I feel um a little bit messy in the class. (Julian)

Julian's words reflected that students operated with different beliefs regarding time and different registers of time, such as punctuality or flexibility in being on time to classes, and that they interpreted UC practices in relation to their cultural models of schooling practices. Some participants such as Julian and Su cited some disruptions in the learning environment that reflected their understandings of cultural differences in the perception of the concept of time. Julian and Su value punctuality. They mentioned that in their native country students abide by strict starting time of their classes. At the UC a common practice was for some students to enter class late in ways some participants' found disrupting to class and their learning process. Other participants made no reference to this issue. The situated meaning of late arrival (for Julian), and teachers' flexibility in allowing late students in the classroom is disruption. At the meantime, the situated meaning of the same thing for those who arrive late is flexibility and convenience.

Culture also influences students' formation of certain learning styles. It helps in developing what some researchers referred to as cultural learning styles (Sheorey, 2006). The participants perceived the UC as a place dedicated to English language learning. They requested that the UC literacy programs include some procedures such as tests to help them study. Others mentioned worksheets as one of the tools which helped their progress in language proficiency. Other participants mentioned referring to a dictionary to help them learn. All these practices are associated with the authority-oriented learning style.

When I asked them about how they learned English in their native countries, all participants described what could be called a teacher-led method, using the grammar-translation approach. The teacher would do all the talking by means of lecturing using their native language. They would be called upon to answer questions or asked to fill out worksheets, but there was consensus among all participants that they did not have opportunities for speaking or engagement in authentic conversations in the target language, in this case the English language. For them, the teacher, tests

and textbooks are symbols of authority which are typically revered by students with an authority-oriented learning style (Sheorey, 2006). The participants were always concerned with the “right” way to learn and the “right” way to pronounce and structure an utterance. Hence to facilitate their learning the students requested the inclusion of some of the symbols of authority missing from the informal learning environment of the UC, such as tests, which were commonplace in their native countries.

Moreover, it was evident that some students experienced some tensions because of the incongruence between the UC informal model and their cultural model of schooling. All the interviewees and most of the observation participants are highly literate with college degrees from their native countries. They have been socialized into learning in particular ways and have expectations of what constitutes viable teaching practices. In their attempt to negotiate UC literacy practices, some found them fall short in the traditional way of schooling. Some students referred to UC teachers as being “friends” and not “real teachers”. It is worth mentioning that some teachers concur as they do not consider the participants as “students” in a traditional sense but as residents or participants in the program. Furthermore, the students’ request of having placement and end of instruction tests, explicit grammar instruction, and worksheets reflected that the students’ concept of appropriate schooling practices and learning is relational to their cultural model of traditional schooling in their native countries; hence it is important for UC teachers to be aware of the students’ expectations of the literacy programs to be able to address their needs.

Discrepancy in people’s perception and interpretation of social reality, as well as self-perception in the social context was the focus of a compendium of research. As mentioned above, participants in this research study had diverse interpretations of their success and failure in language learning. Some attributed failure to external factors and others blamed themselves for slow progress. In the same vein, Kovach & Hillman’s (2002) addressed some of the intrinsic factors which affected Arab minorities’ perception of the causes of their success and failure. Kovach & Hillman (2002) compared Arab, African American, and European American adolescents to study the correlation between ethnicity “identification” and academic success. The authors pointed out that ethnic minority

groups were more aware of social inequities than their majority peers. This distinction had become clear as early as adolescent years. They referred to the interrelationship between “minority group membership” and academic progress. In some studies, this relationship was reported to be positive and in other studies it was reported to be negative (Kovach & Hillman, 2002, p.4). In this research study, group membership of fellow spouses facilitated their transition stage in the host society. For example, Hend stated,

I met a lot of friends they are some of them from Korea, and China. Some from Libya and Iraq and I didn't know many things about these countries before umm. Sometimes I read about many things about these countries. Like today I asked a Korean woman because I saw in the Internet that they have twice the year the sea is separated and different visitors go and visit this place. So I asked a Korean woman so she said yes. We have this you know. So I was amazing this...when I saw this in the Internet and I can't believe this happen until now. So I asked her today and she said yeah we have this and the sea separated and the people walk on the sea you know and so you know about many things and sometimes some friends or some people make like presentation about her country and sometimes we talking about the most important festival in our country so you hear about many things and about other countries. And I think this is very good, many things we didn't know before. (Hend)

The relationship between “group membership” and success was further explained in terms of “the attribution theory” which contended that “perceptions of experiences influence later achievement motivation” (Kovach & Hillman, 2002, p.5). In a culture that links self-esteem with performance on academic tasks and holds self-esteem at a high value like the Arab culture, failure is shameful and leads to low self-esteem. According to Kovach and Hillman (2002), to alleviate this sense of shame, and to preserve self-esteem, the Arab adolescents in their study used “an externalized attributional style” (Kovach & Hillman, 2002, p.5). This means that they attributed failure to external causes beyond their control, such as prejudice, which resulted in a state of perceived fatalism and perceiving

themselves as vulnerable, which in turn debilitated their motivation to succeed. While Kovach and Hillman (2002) focused on adolescents, my study focused on adults in terms of their interpretation of the social reality and attribution of failure and success in their language learning process. In this research study, some participants attributed their failure to achieve self-fulfillment to themselves and others to external factors, which reflects a discrepancy in perception and interpretation of social reality, as well as self-perception in the social context.

For example, as mentioned above, Su mentioned that she did not realize much progress because she did not work hard enough, and Julian said that she was not as smart as her husband and that she needed longer time to realize progress. On the other hand, Hend and Rouj attributed their perceived slow progress to extrinsic factors, such as class time, the participation of multiple ability groups in each class, and family obligations. Hend and Malak perceived their progress in relation to their primary care-taking responsibility toward their young children, as their learning was disrupted because they were busy with providing care for their children. This primary role shaped their perception of learning and progress in the UC space without family support as expected in their cultural model of kinship support during schooling in their native countries.

Cultural production and social reproduction theories provide concepts useful to interpreting the external social surroundings and the participants' perception of self-fulfillment and interpretation of their successes and failures. According to Willis (2005) working class children are doomed to follow the same career path of their parents. However, in Willis' opinion, the working class children are not passive victims. By resisting conformity to social and school rules, they forfeit their chance of escaping the present pattern which reproduces living conditions similar to their parents. Manual labor is their choice as, for them, it symbolizes "masculine power and superiority" (Gordon, 1984, p. 109).

The researcher considered some of the spouses' sense of determinism (Kovach and Hillman's, 2002) and Willis' interpretation of cultural production and reproduction as relevant to participants' perception of ineptness as a precursor of failure. This lens helped shed light on the interaction among intrinsic and extrinsic factors which might have impacted the residents'

perceptions of their experiences. In other words, Kovach and Hillman's (2002) interpretation of the Arabs' sense of determinism in interpreting failure to safeguard their self-esteem represents the active role they play in preserving cultural productions of their status and perception of social condition which conduces to social reproduction of the same patterns of social relationships between the dominant majority and less powerful minority groups. Similar to the working class representatives in Willis' ethnography who resorted to determinism to interpret failure; some residents opted for determinism to failure and attributed it to social prejudice to be their resort for saving their self-esteem as when Julian attributed her delayed progress in academic English to what she perceived as an instance of prejudice in the formal academic program she attended prior to her participation in the UC . She later blamed herself for being "slow". In this sense, they helped reproduce the social relations in which they were entrapped. Willingly choosing to give up to this feeling of determinism rendered these residents as active players in recreating determinism to primarily failure or success (Kovach & Hillman, 2002).

Participants' words reflected different levels of self-determinism in relation to their learning. In reference to her slow progress, Su seemed to have surrendered to her sense of failure to achieve her set goals for language learning. She stated that "many people want to help me but I'm bad woman (laughing)". Similarly, Julian was desperate because of her failure to achieve the progress she aspired for. She said:

So I ha I have to learn English because ... I feel wrong how can I say it when I speak in English that's not correct that's not true I feel I felt like that uhm I'm very dis I'm very dismal. It made me very unhappy. Umm also I I need a job because job job is very important for me because I'm not a good house wife (laughing). I'm not I don't ha I don't I can't feel happy in my house ... I need more social life yes. (Julian)

Both Su and Tressie punctuated their interviews with laughter, but their frustration with their progress was clear in Tressie's reference to her being practical by abandoning her medical career in China because it did not count in the United States. Similarly, Su's frustration was evident in blaming

herself for slow progress in language learning and referring to her feeling of idleness and attempts to spend her time wisely by teaching piano lessons. On the contrary, Zanza described herself in control of her learning experience:

I think I help myself eh...because when I want eh...when I want something I try to ...to get this thing I try to I try to.... Uhhh if I have a one aim I want to I want to achieve this aim I try to push myself for something. if I want to learn English so I push me because I know it is not easy. It is very difficult. Sometimes it's bored it's really boring. It's really boring because listening listening and you don't understand. I think these things helped me.
(Zanza)

Participants Represent a Broad Range of Acculturation Stages, and the Acculturation Model is not a Fully Encompassing Model to Understand Sojourners' Experience Because of the Unique Liminal Nature of the UC

Scholars associated acculturation with second language learning (Brown, 1986). Brown (1986) noted different “degrees” of acculturation with different “types” of second language learning, adding that learning in a nonnative country involves the highest level of acculturation because of the foreignness of the learning context. Acculturation is often associated with culture shock which is defined by Brown (1986) as being “associated with feelings ... of estrangement, anger, hostility, indecision, frustration, unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, homesickness, and even physical illness” (p. 35). This could help understand some participants' feelings and perception of their learning experience, such as Julian who felt frustrated and “depressed” because of her perceived slow progress.

Furthermore, Brown (1986) overviewed an array of definitions of culture shock ranging from negative comparing this state to “schizophrenia” to positive definitions that consider it to be “a cross-cultural learning experience” and an opportunity to increase awareness of one's cherished beliefs and values (p. 38). Regardless of the definition divide, Brown (1986) stated affective solutions are not

adequate to address this issue. It is the teacher's responsibility to turn it into a teachable moment by guiding the students through this stage and helping them "understand" the deep causes of their distress and then "to emerge from those depths to a very powerful and personal form of learning" (p. 39).

I used the acculturation model as a touchstone to make sense of participants' perception of their language learning experience because the data reflected, at times, various acculturation stages. However, significantly, due to the inherent transient nature of the UC and the participants' sojourner positionality, the acculturation model fits the sojourner experience in the UC in some ways and not in others. This is a productive realization because acculturation models are often used to analyze the experiences of international students, and yet, temporary sojourners and those in the process of immigrating have different end goals for "acculturation." Acton and de Felix (1986) cited Merleau-Ponty as saying: "I may speak many languages, but there remains one in which I live" (p. 20). Participants' descriptions and the researcher observations of language learning reflected some connections between participants' experiences and a broad series of acculturation stages.

Schumann defined acculturation as "the social and psychological integration of the learner with the target language (TL) group" (Gunderson, 2009, p. 82). Schumann posited the concept of acculturation stages that are typically relevant to immigrants but often applied to international students. In this study, the same model was extended to conceptualize stages in the sojourners' experience in the host society. The majority of students at the UC are spouses of international students. They have all come from foreign countries. Some came on a long sojourn and others came only for a few months. They do not hold an immigrant status. They are all dependents on non-immigration visas.

Once learners start their language learning journey, they cannot go back to the starting point. They are no longer the same persons prior to the learning process. Guiora (as cited in Acton and de Felix, 1986) stated: "we cannot go home again, we cannot truly leave either" (p. 28). Language

learning goes beyond focusing on linguistic details to include acculturation into the target culture to varying levels and degrees.

Acton and de Felix (1986) identified a model of acculturation which involved four developmental stages, which are: tourist, survivor, immigrant, and citizen. Learners' cognitive features, personality characteristics, social and affective domains affect the learners transition from one stage to the other. As is inherent to their status as sojourners, the participants attended the UC for varying amounts of time. They attended most of the language classes provided through the language programs in this Center. It would be unrealistic to claim that I know enough about their personality and cognitive features to serve as analytic lenses; thus, I focused on their perception of the sociocultural and affective environment at the UC. Moreover, unlike Acton and de Felix's (1986) model, the acculturation stages in this study were not sequential, but they were constructed and modified in the process of interaction with the learning environment.

Earlier stages of adjustment and adaptation are reflected in the ways participants interact in the UC. However, it is an adjustment and adaptation to this unique hybrid sheltered space, the UC, that serves as a temporary liminal comforting space to facilitate transition. It is neither here, in the host society, nor there in the participants' native countries, and everyone shares a transitional position as learners in the space.). At first, participants often stick to their own cultural groups *cocooning* with limited or even no cross cultural communication. For instance, in recreational events, such as Women's Night, women from the same cultural group often gather together and communicate using their native language. In one of the Women's Night I observed, which was typical to other similar events in this respect, I noticed that Su, Julian, Soyoun, and Tressie (from Korea and China) were sitting together on one table all the time. Hend, Malak, Heba, and Laila (Arab countries) were doing the same. Similarly, Rina, Rosina, and Raj (from India) spent the whole time together. This pattern typically recurred in all recreational events.

As regards English classes, this pattern of association changed. As the participants progress by means of language learning, cross-cultural communication was facilitated in the common UC spaces.

The similarities which facilitated their bonding were internal as they were more pertinent to emotional issues and the spouses' inner perception of their situation and the learning context. For example, newcomers, like Camilla, tended to sit by people from their native country. Camilla was a student from Mexico with limited English language proficiency. She spent a whole semester sitting by Mariana who was also from Mexico. She would smile and nod her head to greet me, but she did not communicate with other residents. After few months, and after acquiring some knowledge of the English language, I saw Camilla communicating with other residents in English and even starting conversations with them.

As the spouses progress in language learning, and through the use of community building activities in the classroom and social activities, they start to step outside their comfort zone by exploring the host environment and cultures of residents from other cultural backgrounds. Their exploration through the use of English reveals commonalities among different people, and eventually identification and bonding with fellow residents outside their cultural group. Observational notes and interview responses reflect the stage of bonding experienced by some participants during the journey of language learning. The following quote from one of the interviews reflects Denise's exploration of other residents' human experiences, which seem to be universal in different cultures, such as shopping, craft, food, and cooking. Denise said,

we have fun with the d d diff different people, and you learn how to make and talk with each other when you do the craft class and you make pillows or we learn how to sewing or to use the sewing machine, and I think cooking demo is also fun because we learn uhm dishes from different country and we learn how to write a receipt [she means recipe] or how to read the instructions on the boxes we bought from market. I think they helped much for the people yeah.

Similarly, Julian, Hend, Malak, Su, and Milati referred to the ties of friendships facilitated by language learning. For example, Rouj said,

I've now more friends. Ehh ehh they are from the from many.. They're from other countries. I can communicate with them and speak with them and they able to understand me and I can able

to understand them. Sometimes maybe they didn't understand. They acting for each other yes and.. It's a good thing I... to communicate.

Some residents stopped at the threshold of the exploration stage which is characterized by getting acquainted with the target culture. At the meantime, other residents, like Denise, Hend, Rouj, and Zanza proceed to the next stage which is bonding. Through language learning and shared experiences, bonding strengthens the spouses and gives them more confidence and "courage" to cross their language territory to other multiple levels of communication which they may never have explored independently before their sojourn. "I think that to speak un understand English is good, and you can talk with your neighbors, you can go shopping alone. You can do anything you want."

Denise's farewell party provides another example of collaboration and bonding. A group of students from different nationalities suggested having a surprise farewell party for Denise during class time. They invited all teachers and UC staff, organized the event, decorated the Great Room, and set up the food which everyone brought. During the party everyone shared his or her memories with Denise and we made a card for her. The room was filled with conversations, laughs, and tears in the end when it was time to say goodbye.

Nevertheless, progress in language learning was not always associated with bonding. This pattern is reflected in some residents' irritation with others' practices during class time. Sources of irritation included late arrivals and use of cell phone during class time, which Julian and Tressie found disrupting and unacceptable classroom behavior. In such cases, the participants' cultural model of what constitutes appropriate classroom conduct for students and teachers overrides their adherence to sequential stages of acculturation. Also, others found incorrect pronunciation disruptive to communication as Rafiq wrote in one of the class assignments: "different person or culture can't pronounce the correct word sound and make difficult the communication."

Finally, the last stage is acculturation. The spouses' acculturation is probably not full acculturation to the target culture, but rather acculturation to a hybrid culture emanating from the intercultural communication and bonding among spouses in the University Center. Three themes

supported this finding; first, spouses cliqued with members of their cultural group, and language learning helped in breaking the cliques. Second, experiences with the learning environment and feelings about progress were crucial for promoting language learning, communication, intercultural communication, and acculturation. Third, progress in language learning facilitated bonding of some language learners from different cultural backgrounds. Employing Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1995) use of "conceptual import" (p. 151) helped shed light on the situated meaning of the participants' use of terms such as "socializing with people from the same country, friendship, easy communication, and doing things together." These terms representing the participants' perception of their relationship with others in this context signified the participants' acculturation stages and symbolized some participants' perception of the UC and language learning as means of social adjustment and acculturation.

The UC environment did not only facilitate language learning, but also provided a wider perspective of learning as an experience of mutual human interchange and understanding. The following quote showed that Denise did not stop at the stage of exploration. Her positive perception of her experience at the University Center and the multiple opportunities for communication enabled her to cross her geographical and cultural borders to meet with fellow spouses in a hybrid space, where they created new bonds of friendship:

I like most of the activities at the [UC] because we meet people from different country, and we had chance to communicate together. We had chance to be become friends.

Malak, Hend, Mitch, Su, and Milati also referred to "making friends" and developing better "understanding" with other residents from other countries.

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the students' acculturation stage and the associated perception of the learning environment and learning experience in general are not static. Previous studies indicated the dynamicity, variability, and context specificity of second language learners' beliefs and perceptions (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Mercer, 2011) and that these beliefs influence their learning (De Costa, 2011). This could be best demonstrated by Zanza's case. After eight months in

the host society, Zanza had a positive perception of her learning experience and had developed clear opinions about viable teaching and learning methods. However, one year later, Zanza's perception of the learning context and beliefs about her learning changed in a manner that was inconsistent with the acculturation model. Her case could be a reversed example as instead of acculturation, Zanza perceived that she had not even reached the second stage of being "a survivor". Zanza was frustrated and developed a feeling of ineptness in the host society after failing to realize tangible goals from her learning experience. Also, she had to leave because her husband got a job in their native country. She was disappointed because she would lose the English language. In the UC, she "breathes in English", but she had to go home to "do something more important." Guiora (as cited in Acton and de Felix, 1986) explained that learners who hold high "self-esteem in their own culture" are more likely to reach the "citizens" stage on the acculturation model. Some participants, such as Denise and Zanza, seem to be experiencing this transformation within the acculturation stages. One possible interpretation according to this model could be that their strong self-esteem seems to facilitate the transformation process and progress in language learning.

This reflects other elements involved in the participants' learning journey other than their progression on an acculturation model. Zanza perceived her learning experience in relation to the goals she achieved or more accurately did not achieve, which reflected a regression in her sense of citizenship in language learning. Another interpretation could be that the UC is the climax of language acculturation, after which participants either leave or move to more advanced spaces suitable to address their modified needs. Otherwise, they would be going back to an anticlimax of language learning. Zanza had reached as high as she could and as potentially possible in the UC space, but unfortunately she could not move up any further because of her temporary sojourner positionality as well as the transitory purpose of the UC and the transient nature of the ways sojourners use its services.

Language Learning Facilitated Cross-cultural Communication among Residents

Other findings included language learning facilitation of cross-cultural communication in a multilinguistic setting. The participants had formal classroom experiences with fellow language communities, but few of them had learning experiences with mixed cultural groups prior to coming to the UC. The nature of the UC space demanded the use of English to facilitate communication among diverse groups. By learning English, the participants were able to use it to practice communicating with other English language learners and communicate with others who do not speak their native language; hence, the situated meaning of language learning in this research setting goes beyond the literal definition of learning a language. It symbolized the residents' ability to communicate with others, navigating their way in the host society, and creating friendships with people from other cultures.

Further, cross-cultural communication was a product of collaborative work. Learning English and using it as a common language for communication with speakers of other languages enabled the participants to meet across the borders to interact and create new bonds of friendship. In other words, they used English language as a tool for intercultural communication and understanding. For example, one of the participants, Denise, said:

Uhm we use English because everyone uhm uhm speak eh different language. Some of them speak Korean. Some of them speak Chinese. Some of them speak Spanish, and we have to use the English because the English is our uh uh language to communicate together. I don't know Spanish. I don't know Japanese or uh I don't know Chinese [laughing] and they must speak we must speak English together when we are together.

Language learning created a context and tool for intercultural communication. The experience of language learning facilitated the spouses' communication and then bonding. However, bonding was not an end in itself, but a means for working together to create a new reality of understanding or at least interchange of dialogue which facilitated cross-cultural understanding, spouses' liberation, and empowerment. Denise said that learning English was important for many reasons, primarily for doing

what she wanted to do: “I think that to speak un understand English is good, and you can talk with your neighbors, you can go shopping alone. You can do anything you want.”

Some participants, such as Hend, Milati, and Denise see their progress in language learning in terms of their relationship with other residents. Progress in language learning is assessed in terms of their ability to communicate with others. Hend said,

But I see this increase with the other people there in the classes you know eh I think first time I went there I didn't understand anything from like Korean student. Now I can talk with him and make situation with him and conversation. I understand them more than before you know. (Hend)

Using Gee's (2005) principles of building tasks, this could be interpreted as that the situated meaning of language learning for Hend, as well as other participants, is that it is a means for communication. The residents' situated meaning of progress is measured by their ability to promote cross-cultural understanding with others. They evaluate their progress in relation to their ability to communicate with others. New social relationships among residents are being constructed and reconstructed along the way of their language learning. Cross-cultural misunderstanding is being transformed and replaced with better understanding and social communication. In this context, ESL literacy is a means for making friends and for facilitating better understanding of other cultures. In sum, the conceptual import of progress is that language learning had multiple symbolic meanings to the participants that go beyond language learning skills, and that their facility with language use symbolized their place on the acculturation continuum and sense of self fulfillment and socialization into the host society. However, as mentioned above, bonding was not always the end result because of cultural misunderstandings and disparities in participants' cultural model of learning and schooling that they used in evaluating the “informal” processes in the UC.

Participants Expressed Different Experiences with the Learning Environment and Feelings about Progress; However They Had an Overall Positive Experience with the Learning Environment as the UC Was Welcoming and Facilitated their Learning Experience

“I think my spoken English has been improved” (Tressie, L. 11).

Like Tressie, other participants reported a self-perceived progress in their English language proficiency. Tressie used the passive voice which connoted a passive role on her part in the progress process. It was others who helped improve her spoken language.

Similarly, Malak expressed her satisfaction with her progress. She stated:

Sometime you have a little chatty time with them which is really nice maybe sometime you think it's nothing, but it really helped me to ehh to practice a little bit my speaking skills...dealing with the other students ...and the class I taught here at the UC health and nutrition class actually it refreshed my knowledge my own information and at the same time it gave me the chance to practice my English give the chance for the students too to interact with me and to ehh to practice their English too and have a great time” (Malak).

Similary, Zanza reported some progress in language learning as compared to her level in her native country, Brazil. She said

I arrive here my English was so so terrible, but now uhhh when I attended class I can feel and many everybody around me mean my English is improving. Not so good yet, but I think it is improving (laughing). (Zanza)

Others, such as Su and Julian reported a “slow” and “gradual” progress. Su seemed to be “satisfied” with this progress. Nevertheless she blamed herself for the slow process and commended others for helping her. The same applies to Julian, who has judged herself harshly and taken blame for her slow progress in comparison to her husband. To interpret their responses, a further understanding of participants’ cultural background and their primary Discourses of expressing success and failure is needed. . If we apply Gee’s (2005) principles of building tasks, the prominent situated meaning and

values the participants' embrace and attach to their experience is that of modesty. In this utterance, the participant feels shy to attribute success to herself and prefers to give credit to others.

All participants reported positive experiences with the learning environment, teaching model and methods in the program. They reported that they were more comfortable with the communicative approach of language learning than the grammar-translation method used in their native countries. They liked the activities and games used in the classroom, and preferred them over the activities used in their native countries. However, they felt that sometimes it was hard to keep up with the teachers, and their feedback on what was missing in the program was more in line with the methods used in their native countries. For example, they requested tests, and more grammar. They also commended the teachers. Julian mentioned that they were not "real teachers." They were "friends." Others described teachers as "friendly" and "the best." Gee's (2005) concept of building tasks provide another angle for looking at the data. In one sense this could be relevant to the building significance task. The situated meaning of the learning environment is positive. However, if we consider the relationship between the interviewer as the teacher and interviewees as students, we could interpret the data as being suffused with politics. The power dynamics in the interview could prompt these responses. . There is an unequal distribution of "social goods" (Gee, 2005, p. 112) which could have prompted the participants' tactful responses.

As for the students' report of negative feelings such as inability to keep up with teachers or feeling "lost", this could be attributed to the issue that maybe the class materials are above the students' level or beyond what Vygotsky referred to as the *zone of proximal development (ZPD)* (Vygotsky, 1934). ZPD is the difference between what the learners can do independently and what they can do with some help. For learning to take place, the taught concepts must be one step ahead of the learner's independent level. If the concepts are beyond this level, then a learner can become frustrated. and learning will not take place. On the other hand, if the concepts are below the instructional level of the learner, the time spent to teach this material will be a sheer waste of time. The ideal scenario is to select teaching concepts and materials which build on the learner's

knowledge, and are one level higher than what they already know. Although Vygotsky developed his theory with children in mind, it fits adults perfectly as well. This theory is of particular importance to the current research setting, especially given the absence of placement criteria in the UC. Students attend multiple-level classes based on their self-assessment of their proficiency levels. This could be counterproductive if students feel material is not appropriate to their level and become frustrated, and perhaps decide to drop out of the program.

In the same vein, the comprehensible input hypothesis could be used to interpret the students' negative feelings. I argue that the comprehensible input hypothesis is an adaptation of Vygotsky's theory in the field of Second Language Acquisition. Krashen (Brown, 2007) built on Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development, and adjusted it to the field of Second Language Acquisition. According to Krashen, the ideal instructional content for second language learners is to provide them with concepts and materials which are one level higher than what they comprehend on their own. In other words it is comprehensible input + 1.

In general, participants viewed the learning environment as welcoming to all. They all noted some progress in language learning, "making friends", facilitated "communication", independence as reflected in their doing things "alone". One of the advantages of the UC is that all classes are free. Other advantages included flexibility in the attendance policy with no enrollment requirement. . Further, Julian, Rouj, and Hend referred to the teachers' and staff members' friendliness. Accepting and "welcoming" the "other" are characteristics of environments which cherish diversity (Pollmann, 2009, p. 539).

On his article on intercultural capital, Pollmann (2009) emphasized the importance of intercultural communication to go "beyond narrow ethno-national boundaries..." (p. 541). He stated that intercultural capital is not equally accessible by virtue of class, race, and nationality. As some participants maintained, communication with residents from different backgrounds was restricted by their limited English proficiency, among other things. Some of them stated that they needed more opportunities to practice speaking. To enhance their expressive skills, intercultural communication

was promoted by drawing on the students' prior knowledge and encouraging them to engage in an intercultural dialogue by presenting their ideas, and sharing their cultural worldview. "The more people have to do with each other in everyday life, the more likely they will be able to identify each other as fellow individuals, rather than primarily by reference to their collective identifications" (Jenkins, as cited in Pollmann, 2009). Employing the theoretical framework of second language acquisition, particularly Krashen's hypothesis of the affective filter helped interpret the participants' perceptions. The affective filter hypothesis could be also seen as an application of the emotional capital concept from the field of sociocultural theories. The welcoming environment may have allowed participants to lower the hypothetical affective filter (as cited in Brown, 2007). Lowering the filter allowed for the flow of language input, and hence the students' positive perception of their learning experience and progress in language learning. The affective filter hypothesis could be further illustrated in Julian's comparison of her experience at a local academic center for teaching English as a second language and her experience at the UC. In the academic center, she was treated like "children." Lack of English language proficiency stripped her of her agency as an adult. The environment of the academic center seemed sufficiently stressful to prompt Julian to erect her affective filter and block language input.

Furthermore, by employing the symbolic interactionism conceptual lens, it is evident that participants perceived their progress in relation to different entities. Some, as Milati and Hend, perceived progress in terms of their ability to navigate through the UC activities and negotiate meanings of their interactions within the UC space. Others as, Zanza and Julian, perceived their progress in relation to their ability to pass the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or secure a job in the host society. Finally, some participants such as Su perceived their progress in relation to other residents. Hence, the meaning of the participants' experiences was constructed in relation and within dynamic processes of interaction with people, spaces, and objects such as tests. In this case, it is not the learning environment by itself that is, as stated in literature, the identifier of language learning facilitation. It is rather the axis of interaction of the learning environment space, the

learners, and teachers that define any learning experience. This information is of particular importance for UC staff in terms of highlighting the diverse ways UC participants evaluate engage to evaluate their progress. .

Language Learning Was a Source of Empowerment, liberation, and independence for the Residents

In the same vein, some participants in the current study regarded their progress in learning English as a second language and their ability to communicate independently in English as an act of empowerment, realization of agency, and independence. The transformation of the learning “context and human understanding” is one of the tenets of the Second Language Socialization theory (Duff, 2007, p. 313). This emerging finding of the empowering role of language learning was evident in the transcriptions and observation notes. Denise said,

you feel yourself more uhm helpful or more safe if you travel somewhere and you know English.

You can communicate and you can ask where you can find the place... I think that to speak un understand English is good, and you can talk with your neighbors, you can go shopping alone.

You can do anything you want...I don't have courage...but now I'm okay. (Denise)

In the previous quote, Denise communicated a sense of empowerment associated with learning English as compared to her previous language facility when her husband had helped her previously by means of “translation” and “communication” with others on her behalf. Further, language seemed to provide her with a sense of security and independence. The same applies to all the female participants. Language learning decreased their anxiety concerning communicating with others. liberated them from anxiety of communication with others. Their language learning and overall experience may have helped them acquire an agency to stand for themselves, deal with others, and fulfill everyday tasks in the new culture. In another instance, Denise stated “if you start thinking in English, it's good and you can go up and up.” This metaphor, “up and up” could be interpreted as willful upward movement, of possibility, of progress, and improvement. The use of the modal “can” denoted ability to do it. Hence it suggested a sense of possibility, of freedom, even upward mobility.

The language provided Denise and Zanza with “courage” of which they were deprived before practicing their expressive skills. Another participant, Zanza, referred to the empowering role of language learning by saying that before progress in language learning, she was “deaf.” In another context, the same participant stated that she “breathes” in English in the UC.

From above, the situated meaning of language learning reflected what it symbolized to the participants. It was not only about skills, but rather a life altering experience and new way of life. Their collaborative daily interaction inside and outside the classroom facilitated this conscientious move towards empowerment and liberation. Freire’s (2005) concept of empowerment and liberation by means of collaboration speaks to the power of language learning as liberating and empowering Residents’ cross their countries’ borders to communicate with others from different cultures. This reflects that they have transcended space confinement within geographical borders to explore new spaces. Most importantly, they are standing for themselves and acting independently, as they stated, by going shopping on their own, communicating in English without translation, and “going up and up” by means of language learning, as Denise put it. This cross-cultural communication is a collaborative action that brought to my mind Freire’s (2005) emphasis on the importance of collaborative action to transform reality and realize freedom.

Language learning was also liberating. For some participants, such as Denise, Julian, Rouj, and Hend, language learning was a liberating experience. First, it was liberating from foreign language anxiety. Providing them with a venue for using the target language empowered them and gave them “the courage” from which they were deprived in their native context because they all mentioned that they did not practice listening and speaking in the English learning programs they have attended in their native countries. Second, it liberated them in some ways from dependence on their husbands to assist them in the host culture. Acton and de Felix (1986) explained Curran’s concept of “language ego.” This concept entails that learning a second language involves assuming a second language identity. It is “essentially adding on another personality” (p. 26). In their answer to a question on how language learning had helped them get along with others in the UC, these

participants replied that it helped them communicate and make friends. For them, language learning had the power to transform the dependent subject into an independent agent actively involved in the process of disrupting shackling power relations due to their lack of language facility in the host society which made them feel “deaf” (Zanza) and helpless like “a child” (Julian).

The liberating opportunities offered at the University Center could be also interpreted in terms of freedom of movement in space in the host society. The majority of the residents cannot drive and those who can might not have a car to facilitate their transportation. Going to places in the University bus is somewhat inconvenient, especially for those who have little children. The location of the UC at the heart of the residential apartment buildings provided the residents with easy access to places for socialization. For some, it seemed to free them from the confinement of their apartments. Some participants requested continuing the literacy programs during winter, spring, and summer breaks because they (spouses) had nothing to do. “...most of the people they stay here. Some of them they go to the vacation but just for the short time.” She added,

If we have classes here it will better yeah I think, because all husbands or wives they have research at the [University] they keep studying in the vacation time but we watch ... or maybe some of them their husbands they stay at home and care for kids maybe who have kids and others just stay at home just cooking, cleaning, and it's too boring. They don't.. eh in [town name] don't have anything to do in the free time. (Milati)

Language Learning Was Associated with a Shifting Sense of Weak or Strong Agency Developed in a Third Hybrid Space in the UC. Interviewees' responses reflected a shifted sense of agency. This could be classified into two groups. The first was more relevant to space which was their sense of agency in their native countries and in the United States of America. The other was relevant to their ability before and after the progress of their communicative skills. The following are pieces of confirming evidence from the data:

Here and in native country

I'm I'm an intelligent person in my country (laughing shyly) of course but ahh in America

I'm not an intelligent person because I can't speak English everything so I can explain everything even. (Julian)

Before and after learning English

Self-confidence is most important uhh because as uhh as I told you I'm adult but without English uhh uhm I'm not adult in America. (Julian)

[English] helped me a lot you know to go in places by myself without my husband you know to make shopping or something like this. I think it helped me a lot" (Hend, L. 169).

Gee's (2005) principle of building identities could be applied here to interpret this finding.

The residents' shifting sense of agency was part of their developing new identities which are "consequential" (Gee, 2005, p. 111) to the geographic context in the host society and the historic context of an ongoing development in their communicative skills. Their sense of agency was undergoing constant "construction" (p. 111) and reconstruction by virtue of their interaction with the new geographical and temporal space. The interaction between the residents' primary Discourses and the University Center's secondary Discourses was a catalyst which perpetuated this sense of shifting agency. In other words, the residents perceived their sense of agency in relation to empowerment/disempowerment, liberation/confinement, in relation to the proximity or distance between their primary and secondary Discourses, or rather in relation to a hybrid Discourse constructed in the process of interaction between the diverse primary Discourses of participants and Secondary Discourse in the UC. This hybrid discourse was created in a third space which is a hybrid production of or in middle grounds between their native countries and the host society. This space was sheltered and provided the participants with a place to practice language learning in a safe welcoming environment with sympathetic listeners. Julian stated that it was easier for her to communicate with nonnative speakers more than native speakers of English. For her, as well as other participants, the UC was a stepping stone that facilitated their transition to communicate in the bigger nonnative

society. This concept of the UC liminal space as a facility which sets the stage for communication in the wider society is evident in Zanza's quote:

“...have relationship with foreign like me is okay (laughing), because but with Americans is ... different because they are native so they are more complicated to speak with them with Americans native Americans. So if I know English I think it is easier to get on to get along. (Zanza)

Furthermore, this constructed and reconstructed hybrid Discourse and third space facilitated the participants' fluid movement from and back to their primary Discourses. The switch between participants' cross-cultural cross-cultural interaction with staff members and other residents in English is punctuated by the participants' recourse to exclusive conversations with same culture groups. Being aware of the agreement or discord between these Discourses and the great potential of a common hybrid Discourse to scaffold transition among Discourses will help understand students' perceptions of successes or frustration with language learning and its symbolic connotations to the learners as well as facilitate their sense of empowerment and agency.

The Residents had Different Purposes for Learning English Language Which Was Associated with Diverse Perceptions of Self Fulfillment and Motivation Orientation

I think English is important language to communicate. All the world uhm to meet new people and to communicate with them but uhm also helps when I want to make a research to find a paper in English. It will help me to do research with my eh agricultural education. It is also to read papers and ..I will help my husband much more when I learn English...because we meet people from different country, and we had chance to communicate together. We had chance to be become friends... (Denise)

The previous quotation reflects Denise's purpose for learning English which is mainly social, primarily communication. The primacy of communication for Denise is manifest in her starting with communication to exemplify the importance of learning English, and repeating it three times in these quotes, and several times in the interview, as well as referring to other things which are associated with communication such as meeting new people, and making new friends. Similarly, Heng, Su,

Tressie, and Milati expressed that communication was the main purpose for attending the literacy programs at the University Center. Denise's purposes for learning English include academic and social purposes, as well. It is understood from her first quote that she has a college degree, and a career of her own. Learning the language "will" help her fulfill her plans for herself. Nevertheless, she did not forget her familial obligation toward her husband. She maintains her expected gender role as a supportive and nurturing partner. Listing her three purposes in the previous order suggests her priorities. Further, using the present tense when referring to communication and the future when referring to the academic and social purposes denotes that communication is a reality which is being fulfilled at the moment, meanwhile the other two purposes are still remote and "non-factual" (Yule, 2009). Further, her use of "will" instead of "be going to" to denote future plans reflects that she did not have previous plans to use English for these particular purposes (doing research and helping husband) (Azar, 2003). It might have occurred to her at this particular moment as supplemental benefits of language learning. However, it is worth mentioning that Denise herself at her proficiency level, and sentence structure flaws (inconsistency in subject verb agreement, misuse of articles and prepositions, and sometimes faulty word order) might not be aware of this connotative difference. Her use of "will" might be a matter of convenience.

The participants' purposes for learning English were associated with their motivation orientation toward language learning. Acton and de Felix (1986) and Brown (2007) differentiated between two types of motivation orientation toward learning a foreign language. The first type is integrative orientation which means the students learn the foreign language to be integrated with the target culture. The instrumental orientation refers to the students who learn the language for practical purposes such as learning for academic or professional purposes. First, to start with, some participants seemed to have an "integrative orientation" toward language learning (Acton and de Felix, 1986, p. 24) for integration within the community of the target culture. Others had "instrumental" purposes such as finding a job and pursuing an academic career. The third group of participants had a mixed type of orientation.

Su and Hend's responses reflected that they were integratively oriented to learn English. They learned English to be able to communicate with others and to make friends. This highlights the importance of the socio-affective domain in their case, and account for their self-perceived progress. It also led to lowering their hypothetical filter to facilitate the inflow of language input (Brown, 2007).

Denise was also more interested in integrative orientation. When asked about the reasons for learning English, Denise's first response was communication, but her response was followed by other reasons such as academic purposes and familial responsibilities. However, starting with communication reflects the primacy of integrative motivation for language learning for Denise. She perceived language learning in relation to her ability to communicate. She said,

I think English is important language to communicate. All the world uhm to meet new people and to communicate with them but uhm also helps when I want to make a research to find a paper in English. It will help me to do research with my eh agricultural education. It is also to read papers and ..I will help my husband much more when I learn English [again supportive role, in the background]. (Denise)

Rouj expressed a mixed type of orientation. She wanted to be able to communicate and to pursue an academic degree. Julian's responses highlighted an instrumental orientation. She wanted to learn to pursue an academic degree and to get a job. The participants who mentioned that they learned English to pursue an academic degree or find a job, such as Julian, tended to be less satisfied with their progress than the participants who stated that they learned English to make friends, or to communicate with others. This brings to mind Cummins' (as cited in Brown, 2007) distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) which are "context-embedded" and could be easier for children to acquire than cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) which is "context-reduced" and need more time to acquire (p.219).

Integrative orientation

"I want to uhh make a friends here and communicate with other peoples" (Rouj).

“To able to speak to international people to yeah to make friends. I want to make friends. And Maybe I’m not sure if I live into America Maybe I have to” (Su).

Instrumental orientation

“I thought I could get a job in America for foreigner for Americans teaching Korean that’s why I study English” (Julian).

“... if I get a chance I would like to study for PhD” (Julian)

These participants did not perceive progress in language learning as an end in itself but rather a means to meet an end; whether an example of integrative orientation to language learning as blending in the host society, making friends, communication with facility, or a form of instrumental orientation, such as continuing their graduate education or getting a job. Once the ends were met, the participants experienced a sense of self-fulfillment in language learning. For example, Denise, Hend, Milati, and Rina who were integratively motivated stated that they were “happy” with their language progress. Rina was “grateful” for being part of the UC. Acton and de Felix (1986) stated that people who have integrative purposes realize more progress in language learning than those who have instrumental orientation. In one of the quotes, Denise emphasized the communicative purposes of language learning. For her, developing a communicative competence provides more security: “you feel yourself more uhm helpful or more safe if you travel somewhere and you know English. You can communicate and you can ask where you can find the place...”

On the other hand, the participants who failed to meet their desired ends, who displayed an instrumental orientation to language learning in the data, felt that their sense of self-fulfillment was impaired. They had a feeling that their language learning journey did not fulfill their dream to “become somebody.” Some, like Zanza, had a strong feeling of idleness. She expressed her admiration and appreciation of the host society. She said that she “admires Americans” because “they know how to build a country.” She wished to stay in the United States so as not to lose the progress she had realized in language learning. However, she felt that she had reached a dead end in the host society and was ready to go back home to her native country “to do something important” and “to be

important.” For Zanza, “being important” was translated in securing a professional career and getting a job. Similarly, Julian blamed herself for forfeiting her chances “to become somebody” by failing to get the required TOEFL (Test of English as Foreign language) score to be granted university admission in the United States. Julian referred to her feeling of not being “smart” in the host society in spite of her accomplishments in her native country.

Participants Had Different Perspectives of Viable Literacy Practices and Varied Perceptions of the Role of Grammar in their English Language Learning Experiences

There are different methods of instruction in the participants’ native countries and the University Center. Participants compared instructional methods in varied settings as touchstones as they processed what worked for them as learners. They were enthusiastic to being asked about what worked for them, and I take this to mean that recognizing their prior experiences had a positive effect on their perception of their learning experience.

All participants mentioned lecturing as the main method of instruction in their native countries. They were on the passive side of the continuum. They spent most of the time “listening” to the teacher. They preferred the interactive communicative approach used in the UC, where they learned while playing games and communicating together. They also appreciated the opportunities offered them to practice speaking. They mentioned grammar-translation as the main approach of teaching in their native countries. However, despite their disapproval of this method, their expectations of the UC align with the methods used in their native countries. Culture influenced students’ expectations from the learning environment. They expected an overarching role for grammar in English language instruction. This finding is in accordance with some previous SLA research studies which reported foreign language learners’ belief in the primacy of grammar (Inceyay & Dollar, 2011). When I asked Julian about the activities which helped her in learning English, she mentioned grammar. Other participants also mentioned learning grammar as an important constituent of language learning.

Grammar is the most important thing ... Yes it is the best I think. Because without grammar I can speak English of course but it is not pure English. But after learning grammar I speak more fluently more uhmm ... more umm accurately. (Julian)

“We start from middle school and high school and regular English classes only grammar, reading no speaking. (Su)

Even participants, who criticized grammar instruction such as Mitch, were focused on grammar and worried about how correctly and accurately they spoke by asking me for validation and correction during our interviews.

Grammar emerged as a particularly salient theme for participants that offers some key points for thinking about the literacy programs in the UC. The findings relevant to the participants' perception of the role of grammar reflected three trends. First, the majority of participants, about two thirds, emphasized the importance of explicit teaching of grammar. Second, some perceived it as counterproductive. Third, others believed that the integration of explicit teaching of grammar and communicative approaches helped their progress in language learning. The significance of these diverse responses for English language learning is that it furthers our understanding of how cultural background and previous normative teaching methods might contribute to adults' perceptions of and preferences for particular teaching methods. Further, and more significantly, using sociocultural theories and symbolic interactionism to interpret the participants' investment in grammar instruction suggests that grammar mastery signals a clear path to achieving language fluency and the psychic rewards and professional access that might come with it. In this attempt to understand and interpret what this method symbolizes to the participants, namely access and fluency, we can understand why there is such emphasis, even passion, about this topic. In other words, the reference to grammar in this research project is not just about grammar, it is about what it means and symbolizes to the participants.

Participants Had a Feeling of Nothingness in the Host Society and Wanted to Do Something

“Important”, Which Was Not Possible Because of the Language Barrier.

“It’s difficult someone come here someone come here before in his country he is working and he is active and come here just nothing just stay in the home” (Rouj).

Some spouses had a feeling of idleness in the host society. They perceived much of their daily activities as doing nothing. Their pursuit to do something “important” or even to “be important,” recurred in the body of data which reflected the significance of understanding the participants’ perceptions of their secondary positionality in the host society. In a class activity where residents were asked to draw a pie chart to represent their daily routine, some residents had a blank section of more than ten hours and labeled it nothing. One of the residents’ husbands who was attending this class reminded his wife that this was the time she took care of their children. In another instance in another class, when I asked the residents about how they spent their day when they were not at the UC, they replied “basically doing nothing.” Moreover, in an intermediate English class discussion, Zanza stated that she was ready to go home “to do something important.” This feeling of idleness was also associated the residents’ secondary positionality where their sojourn was not voluntarily or for primary reasons as their partners. Participants, such as Zanza, Rouj, Rina, and Milati perceived that they were just spending time in the host society. Participants, as Denise, Rouj, Hend, and Julian, were conscientious of their supportive and nurturing role associated with their secondary positionality, which was reflected in referring to being “helpful” for others; namely husbands and children.

The same finding was reported in a study conducted on working-class women in adult basic education in Philadelphia and later in another setting in North Carolina by Wendy Luttrell (1997) who attempted to explore the participants’ view of “what it meant to become somebody.” Participants in these research studies considered earning high-school diploma to be their gateway to “become somebody.” Doreen, one of the participants in this study, did not see dropping out of high school as the “end” of the “world.” However, she, together with another participant, reported that they returned back to school to earn their diplomas to “feel like [they were] somebody.” Luttrell pointed out that in

spite of the fact of their strikingly “different backgrounds”, the participants perceived attaining the diploma as a marker of identity (p. 1). Luttrell (1997) pointed out that there was consensus among the participants that the diploma was not the only sign or proof of intelligence. Nevertheless, the society’s established rules influenced their perception of their worth and spurred their attempt to define this sense of worthiness in terms of the social rules. Similarly, this tension was reflected in the current research study between the participants’ individual sense of self-worth and the social framing/rules of progress in the host society. Some participants’ sense of self-esteem was accomplished by developing a level of proficiency necessary for facilitating communication. Other participants perceived the TOEFL, admission to graduate college, or employment as tools for shaping their identity in the host society. Failing to achieve these goals shaped their perception of a debilitated self-worth. For example, Julian perceived herself as a “child” and “not smart” in the host society as compared to being an “adult” and “intelligent” in her native country, Korea. Others, like Zanza, wanted to go back to their native country to reclaim their sense of self-worth by doing “something important.” This finding is particularly important in highlighting the secondary sojourners’ perceptions of their positionality in order to guide more research to address their dilemma. It also sheds light on the social and psychological implications of the language learning barrier.

Participants Experiences of Change and Language Learning Hopes for the Future Were Associated with the Duration of Residence in the Host Society

I didn’t uhm didn’t want to change my life but my husband want to ...get a chance because in America there are many chance for veterinarian so uhm I respect my husband and also I thought I could get a job in America ... teaching Korean that’s why I study English. (Julian)

Some participants, such as Julian, shared with me her feelings about the change in her life. She was unwilling to come to the United States, but her respect to her husband made her give up her career as a teacher of Korean language to accompany her husband. She also had hopes that she could pursue a professional career in the host society. However, some obstacles delayed the fulfillment of her hopes. Building on Gee’s (2005) discourse analysis methodology, Julian, in this utterance, is

making connection between her previous status before adopting the “change” and after the “change.” The significance of the word “respect” is that it justifies why she has adopted the change. The situated meaning of “respect” for Julian means giving priority to the person whom she respects, even if it were at the expense of her personal inclinations. Furthermore, the situated meaning of language learning for Julian is a means to fulfill her hopes for career development.

The other important recurrent pattern was the influence of the duration of residence on the participants’ perception of the learning experience and environment, as well as their overall experience in the host society. Participants, who have been in the United States for a longer time, tend to be unhappy about their progress in language learning, and overall experience regarding their professional career. When asked about their satisfaction with their progress, the two Korean students were dissatisfied. They both blamed themselves for what they perceived as a slow progress. Julian, who has been in the United States for one year, said that she was “really depressed.” Su, who has been here for three years, mentioned that it is slower than she has expected. Again she blamed herself for being “lazy.” Others who have been here for a short time are more optimistic and excited to be relieved of their job responsibilities in their home countries.

Furthermore, the purpose for learning English influenced the participants’ perception of their sense of fulfillment in language learning and overall experience in the host society. For example, the participants who have stated communication and making friends as their purpose for learning English were more satisfied with their progress and learning experience than those who were studying English for career-related objects, such as taking the TOEFL or GRE tests. However, their dissatisfaction is not only for failing the test or not taking it, but is also attributed to other issues such as cost of university education in the United States (such as the case of Julian), and holding inappropriate visas for studying or employment (such as Rouj).

As the UC Was Liberating to the Residents, It Was Also Confining Because of the Power Relations Evident in the Data, Particularly Interviews, Which Was Limiting to the Production of Other Potential Meanings

The UC's liberatory context was at some times intermittently confining to the residents' interaction with teachers and staff. In one of my conversations with Zanza, she shared with me that "we were always worried about speaking with administrative staff because of language...with teachers may be okay." This conversation took place off the UC grounds when Zanza came in a short visit two years after her departure from the United States and after I stopped teaching there. In this conversation we talked about many topics which we have never treaded before. We were both relieved from our teacher/student roles which confined us in some ways to specific discourses and negotiated meaning produced in interaction within this restricted context of our positionalities in the UC space. The meaning created was in relation to our respective roles and symbolized the eminence of power relations in our previous and current relationship. Thus a plausible interpretation of the participants' positive comments on the literacy program could be attributed to the power relations in the interviewer (teacher)/ interviewee (student) relationship. This sense of power relations was created in the process of interaction between the researcher as a teacher and figure of authority and the participants as students. Their nice comments could be out of respect to the teacher's positionality, which raises the question about their responses had the interviewer been someone at the same level of power.

Further, power relations in the residents/University Center relationship were evident in assuming an authoritative role by using a teaching method and model which the administration had used out of belief of their superiority and compatibility with all learning styles. However, these power relations have been leveled to a certain degree by listening to the residents and responding to their requests to include explicit grammar instruction in the curriculum. Nevertheless, we should not celebrate responding to the residents' requests as an end result, but we should consider it "an ongoing

project” (Crotty, 2003, p.157) of negotiating a reciprocal relationship in the process of liberation, justice, and equality.

This finding is relevant to my study as it is not conducted to provide a sense of complacency about the UC space. This finding provides a critical interpretation of the participants’ perception of their experience to promote critical reading and deep reflection on their authentic perception of their experience. It is meant to go beyond what was explicitly said and make inferences of other potential meanings developed in relation to the participants’ disempowered position. This serves the scholarly knowledge about international students learning English in UC programs by providing information on power relations involved in language learning in informal settings.

Conclusion

Using different theoretical frameworks to interpret the data analysis provided multiple potential meanings to one set of data and facilitated the exploration of multiple layers of meaning ultimately formulated into the findings presented in this chapter. Shifting the focus from one theoretical lens to another was eye opening to potential interpretations. Choosing from the sociocultural, critical, or symbolic interactionism approaches to interpret the data was a challenging task. The sociocultural framework focused on the social context of language learning and the practices which facilitated or impeded language learning. It also highlighted the students’ perception of the learning context and the process of making meaning of the learning environment. On the other hand, the critical theory shed light on the power relations and equity issues in the relationship of the students and their surroundings. It was intended to question existing power relations to negotiate the formation of an ongoing process of transformation of existing relationships and to seek “emancipatory knowledge” which is coupled with action (Crotty, 2003, p. 159). Equity and social justice are two core values guiding this process. Finally, the symbolic interactionism lens helped explore the residents’ beliefs and perspectives of their learning experiences and what they symbolize for them as well as the different meanings created in the process of interaction within the UC setting.

In conclusion, this research study was not meant to classify people according to their nationalities and generalize patterns of similarities and differences across different cultures. It rather aimed at shedding light on the experiences of the spouses who came in the United States for secondary purposes. Each of them had unique experiences and circumstances. However, they all mutually contributed to the creation and recreation of each other's experiences because of the unique interactive space available in the host society. Thus they created a third space and hybrid discourses which were both effected and affected by cross-cultural interaction.

The next chapter includes some vignettes to provide insight into the lived experiences of the participants and the researcher in the third hybrid space of the UC. They are like puzzle pieces. When put together they could portray a scene of the participants' daily life in the UC. These vignettes are intended to narratively highlight moments of mutual interaction among residents, staff members, and learning space with a view to provide a snapshot of the process of meaning construction in relation to others and to the learning space. Some snapshots could be considered critical incidents in the participants' lives and provide reference to some pedagogical and social implications for future reflection on the participants' learning experience and positionality in the host society. The narratives in Chapter 6 focus on primarily showing, rather than telling, what is important in the settings.

CHAPTER VI

SNAPSHOTS: LIVED EXPERIENCES IN A HYBRID SHELTERED SPACE

Welcoming Classrooms for English Language Learners

Creating welcoming classrooms is of paramount importance for all students, particularly English language learners. Creating a sense of community in the classroom, valuing students' cultural backgrounds and providing students with a safe environment to share their thoughts and experiences are all practices which help in producing welcoming classrooms. By exploring the students' perceptions of their learning experience, this research study helped identify their diverse worldviews of what constitutes viable learning practices and traditional schooling; the surface and symbolic meaning of their learning experience and sojourner positionality, the tension between their spousal roles and aspirations, as well as hopes and possibilities. The findings of this study indicated that the UC symbolized a hybrid space for transition into the host society and provided opportunities for developing communication skills. Nevertheless, there were limited spaces for the secondary sojourners' career advancement, which necessitated calling attention to the unforeseen ramifications of their positionality.

In the *Everyday English* class, I teach survival vocabulary and basic communication skills which the students need in their everyday life. Students in this class are diverse in terms of

ethnicity, age, cultural and linguistic backgrounds and the level of English proficiency. I use thematic planning in my lesson plans by selecting a topic and planning activities, exercises, and reading material, which are relevant to this topic. I always select topics which are appealing and pertinent to the students' prior experiences following Freire's (2005) model of critical literacy. We always start our first class with a brief introduction where students introduce themselves and show us on the map the location of their country. In every lesson, we read a brief story which we try to connect to our own experiences, compare and contrast life styles in the United States and the students' home countries, similar situations we have experienced as the main characters in the story, and discuss how the students would act in similar situations.

Camilla, (a pseudonym) one of my adult students, is a Mexican woman who started attending my English language class two years ago. Camilla accompanied her husband and children from Mexico to the United States of America. Her husband came to pursue a doctoral degree in the field of veterinary medicine. The first time she attended my class, her husband escorted her. He introduced her and told me that she did not speak English and left. Camilla sat by another Spanish-speaking student, Sabrina, who was relatively more proficient in the English language. Sabrina helped Camilla in translation and explanation of what was going on in class. Over the first semester, Camilla was shy and unwilling to participate in class activities, even those which require minimum communication skills. She would always pass, giving me a warm and friendly smile, and greeting me with a nod whenever our eyes met. I did not push her to participate in class and at the same time I wanted her to start practicing her language skills.

Eventually, I found out that Camilla was not shy as I first thought because when I observed her with her Spanish-speaking classmates, she was always talking and starting conversations with them. Then which practices in the classroom were intimidating to Camilla and other new comers? What could make them more comfortable and more willing to participate in class? How could I help them feel included and feel that it was safe to share their thoughts no matter how limited their language skills were?

I remembered Friere's (2005) words about the importance of prior experience and its favorable impact on students' motivation and comprehension of texts. Respecting the students' cultural background and inviting them to share it in class help them feel relevant and motivate them to participate in activities. In practice, cultural comparison is one of the principles of the ACTFL guidelines for foreign language teaching. Thus, I prepared a lesson plan on culture and invited the students to share some artifacts from their cultures. We started this class by students showing us their countries and city of permanent residence on the map. They then shared their artifacts, one at a time, and talked about their particular significance to them. Students were allowed to use words, gestures, and all other means to express themselves. In the beginning, I reminded them that it was not a presentation and that they were welcome to share with us whatever they feel comfortable with. I also referred to the notion that perfectionism is the enemy of language learning and that it was alright to make mistakes and learn from our mistakes. The main point was to practice using the English language to communicate their ideas in a safe environment.

Camilla's turn came, and I was wondering whether she was going to pass as usual or take the risk. Fortunately, she decided to give it a try. She showed us her country, city of permanent residence on the map, and shared her artifacts. Her words were brief, said in fragments and she was not using full sentences. Every now and then she would use a Spanish word and refer to her friend Sabrina for translation but, in general, she was communicating in a relatively comprehensible manner. I was able to make sense of at least 50% of what she said. For me, I considered her mere participation to be a great progress, and I wondered about her goal of language learning. I gave her enough time to express herself. I did not correct her pronunciation directly so as not to hurt her feelings. After she finished, I rephrased what she had said by saying that this was Camilla's contribution, how about you Mr. Paul? I also used some of the words she mispronounced as new vocabulary words, wrote them on the board, read them and came up (as a class) with the meaning (or different meanings) of each word. I believe that on this day Camilla realized in practice that the classroom environment was not threatening, and

it was safe for her to talk without the fear of being ridiculed or made fun of because of her limited language proficiency.

Camilla's attitude brings to mind Krashen's concept of "the affective filter" (Brown, 2007). Krashen pointed out that if the classroom environment is threatening or uncomfortable, the students' affective filter is raised thus blocking students' learning, whereas when the learning environment is favorable, this filter is lowered down allowing students to learn and realize optimum benefit of the language input. Thus, the affective medium is of prime importance for boosting the students' cognitive abilities. I believe that the icebreaker activities, discussions, sharing food and information about our diverse cultures, as well as selecting topics, which the students could relate to, helped Camilla feel that we shared many common aspects, which exceeded our differences. The most important common ground was our humanity. As human beings, one of our basic instincts is to communicate. No matter how many mistakes we would make, we can still communicate, at least, we have to try.

My experience with Camilla opened my eyes to the importance of kindness in the curriculum. Respect and valuing students' needs, which are emphasized in the UC mission, are considered aspects of kindness in the curriculum which promote success (Bolin, 2010). My pedagogical practice is informed by a deep belief in the importance of kindness as a foundational curriculum that promotes learning. Respecting the students' cultural background, being compassionate, and caring are all aspects of kindness in the classroom, which I embrace in the classes and I believe other UC teachers do, too. Some students felt this practice by referring to UC teachers as "friends." This aspect became salient in Julian's contrast of the UC with a formal ESL model which she perceived as being disrespectful to her culture and dropped out eventually.

My role as a teacher was not to impart knowledge to the students, but rather act as a facilitator of learning whose job is to create a welcoming and friendly environment, which will motivate them to seek the knowledge themselves. This warm environment could be established by focusing on

common characteristics which we all share as human beings, selecting topics of universal interest, incorporating our everyday practices, such as shopping and cooking in literacy activities. Further, as O'Reilly (1993) put it, emphasizing both feelings and intellect are important for “peaceable classrooms,” and I would add that they are of equal importance for creating welcoming classrooms. In the same vein, the data from the UC indicated that providing the students with authentic learning experiences in a safe and welcoming environment helped incorporate the cognitive and affective aspects of learning in the UC pedagogy. This contributed to the participants’ favorable perception of the UC and calls for replicating similar models in other universities to facilitate sojourners’ socialization into language learning.

Cooking Together

“The more people have to do with each other in everyday life, the more likely they will be to identify each other as fellow individuals, rather than primarily by reference to their collective identifications” (Jenkins, as cited in Pollmann, 2009, p. 537).

It is 1:30 p.m., time for the cooking demonstration. I have to logoff the computer and head to the UC kitchen to get the ingredients ready for Marco, a resident from Eastern Europe, to demonstrate how to make bread and cupcakes. This was not his first time to volunteer to cook for our class. Marco is a plumber in his native country. He accompanied his wife to pursue a doctoral degree in the university. He comes to classes regularly and was able to create many friendships with other residents. He always has something funny to share in class. It is always lively with him being around.

There are still ten minutes left for the cooking demonstration to start. I remembered that I had to print out the recipe. How many copies should I make today? Every time, I make ten copies, but maybe today I need to make 20 because it is Marco who is cooking. Fortunately, I have everything ready right on time: ingredients, copies of the recipe, attendance sheet, and my observation notebook.

Marco came and checked the ingredients and prepared the utensils he would use. People started to come, all women this time as usual. They signed in the attendance sheet. Then they offered to help him with preparing the ingredients he used. In a few minutes, the kitchen was buzzing with

people: a few helping Marco, some watching the demonstration and listening carefully to the cooking instructions, and a small group sitting on the chairs chatting together and occasionally stand up to check on the progress of the cooking procedure.

As the number of people increased, it started to get warmer and warmer in the kitchen as compared to the cold weather outside. The lively conversations in the kitchen were situated within a serene, static, and quite outdoor setting. Whenever I look through the kitchen glass door, I do not see any sign of movement in this cold cloudy day. Only leafless and evergreen trees were standing still highlighting a stark contrast between liveliness and lifelessness.

After preparing the bread dough, Marco put it aside to rise and started to work on the cupcakes. While Marco was mixing the ingredients, one resident reading the labels realized that the liquid vanilla had alcohol and some of the residents were not supposed to eat or drink anything with alcohol because of their religious beliefs. Marco thus decided to make another batch without this vanilla. Samira and Milati helped put the cake decorating kit together. Cindy and Riva sprayed the muffin pan. After baking the cup cakes, it was time to decorate them. Marco realized that the spout was small and would not allow for the icing to come out. Hafeeza suggested using a spoon instead. Ghada advised him to press the air out. Then Salima took action by asking him to give her the decoration kit and she poked the bottom with a tooth pick which made it work. They were all excited as the problem was solved and they took turn decorating the cupcakes.

Now 40 minutes have passed, the bread dough was ready. Marco cleared the working area and demonstrated how to roll it. Residents started to move closer to the counter to try rolling the dough. Marco was a perfectionist. He kept adjusting people's work to make it look as it should be. Then he garnished bread loaves with melted butter and herbs and placed them in the oven to bake. In a few minutes, the aroma of fresh bread filled the space. Every now and then a staff member or people using other spaces in the building came in and asked about what we were cooking that day.

Soon participants started to talk together in small groups, chatting about everyday life, errands to run after the cooking demonstration, and food they will prepare for dinner that day for their

families. The aroma of the fresh bread and cupcakes was mixed with a blend of about five languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, and Arabic. It was hard to tell which was which, but it was easy to tell they were using different languages by observing the groups sitting with members from their same cultural background and listening to them speak in multiple tongues. There was also an instance of cross cultural exchange at this moment, as Hafeeza (from Egypt) was teaching two staff members and three residents from China and Mexico how to write their names in Arabic. This circle of cross-cultural communication was getting bigger as more residents joined this group to check out what they were doing. Occasionally, someone would ask whether the bread and cupcakes were ready or not yet. This snapshot of residents' interaction reflected the language learning facilitation of cross-cultural communication and intercultural dialogue among residents in a safe, welcoming, and "peacable" place.

Finally, the moment came the bread and cupcakes were ready. The bread looked exactly the same as bread made in fancy bakeries in town. Some participants asked if they could make some tea to enjoy drinking with the bread and cupcakes. We made the tea and everyone was ready and eager to sample. The taste was as scrumptious as all participants expected. It became warmer and warmer in the kitchen. We had to open the outside door to allow some fresh air in the room. Conversations resumed among diverse groups. This time English was used while sharing the bread and tea. Words sometimes fell short, and some residents had to use gestures, ask for translation, or mime to convey what they wanted to say. The messages ultimately went through. The place was vibrating with laughs, smiles, and loud voices.

After that participants asked for some extra baking tips and thanked Marco. Then we presented him with the UC thank you gift and everyone jumped in to help clean up. Some women left to pick up their children from the Childcare Room. Others lingered to continue their conversations, and the rest moved to the Great Room to socialize while waiting for the school bus as it drops their children off at the UC. The kitchen was empty and quiet again. It started to cool down, too. I made sure everything was in place, turned off the lights, and locked the room. It was then ready for the

children staff to use for the children programs that were to start in less than 15 minutes. I was lucky again this week. We were out of the kitchen right in time. I hoped we would manage to do the same the coming week.

Still I had some paper work to turn in. I filled out the evaluation of the demonstration, attendance sheet, and returned the keys. My daughter should be here in any minute in the school bus. I saw the bus from the window, so I took my bag and waited for her in the hallway with the other residents waiting for their children inside and outside the building. Finally, the bus arrived. I greeted her, gave her a hug, and escorted her to the Great Room to join other children in the children's program. I said goodbye to the residents who were still there in the hallway and left. It was time to go home.

Marco developed facility with language and was able to create friendships with people from other language groups. Marco's story is typical of other sojourners' experiences in that he accompanied his wife to the host society, leaving behind his plumbing profession. However, it diverges from other stories in that he was able to secure a job as a plumber and resumed his career path. This raises questions about gender issues involved in the comparison between male and female sojourners with secondary positionalities that are beyond the scope of this study and could be potentially addressed in future studies.

Gardening Women's Night

Previous Women's Night themes this year included crafts: making bracelets and cards. Another one was a formal tea party in which the Great Room was decorated. We put cloth table covers on all tables, used Chinaware, and served fancy finger food. Other themes were: Zumba Night, Food Decoration Night, Spa Night, and Fashion Night.

Today, the theme is a Gardening Women's Night. It was a breezy spring day. Women's Night was scheduled an hour earlier than usual because we were to have an outdoor activity today. The grass started to turn green. The trees were blooming, and birds could be heard chirping all around the

place. The skies were clear, but it was still cool. A light jacket was needed to make us feel comfortable.

I clocked in and pulled out the lesson plan for the event, an attendance sheet for the participants' to sign in, nametags and prizes for the winners in the games. I started to read the lesson plan and review the specific residents' objectives I determined for that night. They were: participants will communicate with those different than themselves by means of conversation and interaction while doing activities about gardening and plants; residents will have an opportunity to practice their listening and speaking skills by means of listening to instructions of different activities and practicing doing them; residents will learn about gardening, local plants, and how to prepare their plots for planting; residents will connect and learn about other women in the community; residents will have fun in a safe and welcoming environment.

Then I reviewed the activities which included gardening tips: preparing plots for planting, plants that grow in this city, companion planting, vegetable and flower gardening tips (handouts will be placed on each table for the participants to read. Activities include making stepping stones to use for landscaping the UC front yard. We will also do pot painting and give a prize for the most creative entry. After that we will plant flowers in the painted pots.

By the time I finished reviewing the lesson plan, other staff members who were scheduled to work that time came in. We went together to the storage room to get out the gardening tools and other supplies for Women's Night. We took everything to the Great Room where the program would start before going out to do the stepping stones and plant the flowers in the pots. We set up the refreshments and waited to greet the residents on their way into the room. We were all excited and looking forward to having some fun.

The residents started to come to the Great Room, signed in, and sat with their friends. The room was full of chats, laughs, and music. We greeted them and invited them to have some refreshments before starting the activities. We visited with residents and chatted with them while eating the light refreshments together. Yara told me that she loved gardening and that she "had a

green thumb.” She wanted to learn more about plants that would survive in this city and some gardening tips to help her in planting her plot that she reserved through the UC. She asked some questions about the meaning of some words and terms in the handout with gardening tips placed on her table. She wrote down the meanings, folded the paper, and put it in her pocket.

It was time to go out to work on the stepping stones. We covered the patio’s floor with scrap paper to avoid staining the wood. Then we used round molds and marbles and worked in groups of three to make the stepping stones. Then we put them on the side for the next day to dry. Then each woman picked a pot, paint brush, and started to paint the pot. Some painted flowers, others painted butterflies and bees, palm trees, and some blended colors together to create abstract designs. There were different forms of arts and representation of artistic forms. The conversations never stopped and so did the laughs. Some finished early and others took forever to perfect their work. We announced that the prizes will be given at the end by means of participants’ votes.

Then the residents planted the flowers in the pots and took them inside. They displayed them on a 5x1 meter table by the east side window of the room. Each pot was assigned a number and the women were asked to vote for the one they think is the most creative. Number six was the winner by popular vote. It was Adele’s pot. Once the results were announced, Adele screamed and started clapping her hands. She got her prize and opened it to show to everyone.

It was eight O’clock, time to wrap up and say goodbye. We concluded the event and invited them to stay as long they wanted. We started to clean up and most of the women joined us to help with wiping the tables, throwing away the trash, and putting everything back in place. We thanked our helpers and went back to the staff office to fill out the event evaluation sheet. Everything went as planned: participants from different countries socialized together using the English language, they learned some gardening tips, decorated the UC front entrance with stepping stones that stayed there for more than two years, and most importantly had fun time together.

Recreational events such as Women’s Nights created a safe space for communication in an unintimidating informal atmosphere. Although women mainly clique with same linguistic group

members during these events, they are guided into communication by means of structured activities. Some participants, who assessed their progress in language learning in relation to their ability to communicate in such events, developed a positive perception of their experience. This perception was created in the process of interaction with other residents and staff in the sheltered UC space.

Grammar Grammar Grammar

It is Monday again, ten thirty O'clock, time for the Grammar Class. I teach the Intermediate Class from nine to ten thirty, and then followed by the Grammar Class, back to back. Right before ten thirty, more students start to come. About six more students came in for the Grammar class, adding a total of 18 students. This class has always been popular. Is it because of the content of this class or is it at a more convenient time than the early morning class?

I greeted the students, passed around the attendance sheet, and distributed the handout for today's lesson. The schedule was as usual. I planned to start with an icebreaker related to the topic, ask the students to brainstorm what they know about the topic, provide explicit instruction of the grammatical concepts, give examples to illustrate the use of the taught concept, invite the students to share examples, read a text highlighting the concepts, and finally work on exercises to ensure the students' understanding of the concept.

Our topic was "adjectives". First, we started with brainstorming on what does the word adjective mean. Then I asked them to give examples which I wrote on the board. For the icebreaker, I wrote down some common adjectives on index cards and attached one with clothes pins on the back of each student's shirt. I asked them to go around, read the adjective on the back of other classmates, and give them clues that would help them guess the adjective. They could use words, gestures, miming, but they should not mention the adjective. At first, there were few minutes of silence. Then the students started to mingle. The place was buzzing with questions, guesses, and laughs. One after the other started to guess the attached adjective. Everyone who guesses the right answer gets a mini Kit Kat chocolate bar. The second step was for each student to put the adjectives in sentences and then share with the class.

After class, Yuli approached me and told me that she had fun that day. They are adult students, yet playing games and adding a sense of humor to class makes them more engaged. Having fun is not an anomaly of being an adult. It helps in creating engaging classrooms for adult learners. It was also one way for integrating explicit grammar instruction, per students' request, within the Communicative Approach for language learning. It was like meeting the students midway by incorporating their cultural model of language learning as form and rule instruction into the UC's pedagogical tenets of language teaching. This integration of students' beliefs and expectations together with curriculum planners' views provides an example of providing "peaceable" classrooms that are capable of scaffolding students' learning because they start with the concepts familiar to the students and build on them.

"I Breathe in English"

"Unfortunately, we have to go home. It is better for my husband. I am but worried about my English. Here I breathe in English." These were Zanza's words when we were chatting together right before the *Everyday English* class, one year after we had our interview. When she first came to the United States, Zanza mentioned that she felt "deaf" because she could not understand English. Her progress was phenomenal. When I interviewed her earlier after only eight months of her arrival, Zanza was communicating fluently although she mentioned that she did not learn English in her native country.

Zanza's case is an example of what second language learning and progress or lack of progress in learning symbolize for the participants. For Zanza, lack of proficiency symbolized some form of disability which impaired her ability to communicate with others. Realizing progress symbolized a lifeline that facilitated her survival in the host society. However, going back home would deprive her of this means of subsistence in her journey of language learning. Zanza was worried about losing what she learned, but she still wanted to go home to resume her professional career which was disrupted by accompanying her husband in their temporary sojourn in the United States.

Similarly, Su's slow progress symbolized for her a sense of guilt for not doing enough to become proficient in English despite others' help. She stated that everyone was trying to help her, but she was "a bad woman." She took it lightly, but her words were very powerful in expressing her inner feelings of her self worth as regards progress in language learning.

Also, lack of English language proficiency symbolized a lack of agency for Julian as she felt that she was a "child" in the host society as compared to being an "adult" in her native country. This was how she felt she was and how she described people's treatment for her in the host society.

For Hend and Denise, lack of proficiency symbolized dependence, as they became dependent on their husbands to translate and facilitate their communication with others. All their everyday life activities, such as shopping, making appointments, answering phone calls were mediated by their husbands.

For others, language proficiency symbolized academic advancement, job opportunities, success, agency, ability, and self fulfillment. It is thus important to consider the implications of the spouses' experiences in that language learning is not an end in itself, but rather a means to fulfill their goals. Their purpose of language learning goes far beyond the sum of the four skills targeted in the UC. Awareness of the participants' perceptions, goals, and symbolic meaning of language learning is but an initial step toward understanding their lived experiences.

Intermediate English

Our plan for that day was to practice descriptive writing and to learn key vocabulary words needed for description. When I was planning for this class, I was thinking about different choices. I eventually decided to use an art activity since some of the regular class participants, such as Mitch, expressed an interest in art. I put white and colored paper, markers, water colors, glue, magazines full of pictures, scissors, and other art supplies on the table. I started class by giving the students an overview of our lesson and wrote the topic "description" on the board. I asked them to draw, paint, create a collage, or think about a symbol or image that would best provide a description of their physical appearance, personality, or feelings. According to the plan, the students could work on the

activity in the classroom, outside on the lawn, or any space at the UC. They were given thirty minutes to complete this stage of the activity. I allowed sometime for them to think about the media they will use for the description activity. It was easy for some, such as Mitch, to develop a plan in a short time. Others needed more time to decide.

The next step was for the students to describe in writing their artwork and explain to class the connection between their art work and their personal description. The students had to work in the classroom to write their description. They started to come back to the classroom in groups or by themselves. Then they sat on the table, exchanged few conversations, and then started to write. I went around the table and saw creative pieces of drawing, collages, and paintings.

Sharing with others was the last step to complete this task. When I invited them to share, some of the residents were hesitant and others were prompt in expressing their willingness to share. Mitch was among the hesitant residents, but Simon volunteered him and he accepted. Mitch's creative representation of his self portrait was a drawing of an ocean, an island in the middle of the ocean, and a tree cut and pasted perpendicularly on the island. Mitch said that this lone tree represented him in the United States. He stated that he felt isolated and lonely similar to this tree surrounded with water from all sides. He said that he had many friends in this city, but he still felt disconnected from all of them. There was a tone of sadness which was hard to miss in Mitch's voice. He added that he participated in social activities inside and outside of the UC, but deep inside he felt lonely.

In spite of Mitch's level of English language proficiency, he was very eloquent in using artistic forms, both drawing and imagery, to describe his inner feelings. The metaphor he used was thought provoking about implicit experiences of the residents. From their explicit behavior, it is apparently seen that they were having social interaction, developing new social relationships, and enjoying their time with new friends. However, deep inside, their true feeling of self in relation to their immediate surroundings was inconspicuous and kept as a locked secret. Mitch's revelation highlighted the discrepancy between appearance and reality. For me as a researcher, it highlighted the

value of incorporating observation and interviews as research methods as they both helped me develop a deeper understanding of the residents' experiences.

Implications: So what?

This research study helped explore the participants' diverse perceptions of their experience and unravel the stated and implied meanings of their experience as learners and secondary sojourners. It would not have been possible to learn about the variation in perception, occasional discord between stated and implied meaning, and symbolic reference of the participants' experiences without conducting this study.

The research study findings reflected the residents' diverse perceptions of their learning experience in the UC in particular and life in the host society in general. There were many similarities in their perceptions, such as their feeling of helplessness at the outset of their joining the program, difficulties they faced inside and outside the classroom in communicating or navigating their way through in the target culture, the lack of addressing listening and speaking skills and a focus on grammar-translation as a teaching method in their native countries, their approval of the Communicative Approach Method and Multiple Intelligences teaching model adopted at the UC with some participants having reservations about them, grammar as an important component of the literacy program, and perception of their secondary positionality with all its connotations and implications for their career advancement.

At the same time, each one of the participants was unique in other aspects, such as the purpose for learning English, proficiency goals, motivation orientation, description of his or her experience, interpretation of success or failure to realize progress in language learning, and response to his or her predicament of secondary positionality. This variance in the participants' perception of their experiences and in my interpretation of their responses implies that the deeper meaning of their experience is generated in the process of interaction and in relation to the *members' meanings*. Unique and diverse perceptions of the same experience also imply that meaning is not stable but rather fluid as it is determined in relation.

Furthermore, regardless of the participants' similarities or differences, it is apparent that language was not anecdotal to their experience in the UC in particular and host society in general. It was rather core and center of their journey and should be regarded as such. For them, grammar symbolized proper English and ultimately language mastery. Language in turn symbolized success, self-fulfillment, access, empowerment, liberation, agency, and independence. Therefore, at the UC level, it is important to consider these elements when planning classes for the residents. It is an informal setting, but still some residents' expectations go beyond survival communication skills to include grammar and academic content that could help them prepare for standardized tests required for college admission. Even students who do not have academic plans in the United States, grammar instruction could be a stepping stone that would facilitate their socialization into language learning as it builds on their background knowledge of what constitutes second language learning. Also, incorporating multiple methods in the program will help accommodate the students' diverse needs and scaffold their learning.

As for ESL prospective teachers, the symbolic meaning of grammar to international language learners implies that first, teachers need to address the tension in the ESL field regarding the viability of implicit or explicit grammar teaching. It is important to raise ESL teachers' awareness of some students' adherence to rules (Ellis, 2011) and what grammar symbolizes to them. It is a matter of teaching explicitly through "metacognition" in letting teachers know that grammar is a symbolic area for English language learners, particularly in a culture dealing with form, so they may have a tendency to focus on accuracy rather than on fluency because of these students' desire to "get it right" and acquire a sense of expertise from grammar mastery. Second, on the students' side, the inclusion of grammar is also relevant to the issue of language and identity. For some students, knowing the grammar might help them develop a sense of accomplishment, as Mitch when he stated that he "got the grammar." This feeling of being experts might counter the spouses' uselessness feeling or the lack of confidence or the sense that "if I got the grammar" I have got the language acquisition down... so when they do not have the grammar, then it might underscore the feelings of frustration from not

being a master of the new language. They may gain affirmation for their performance in grammar. It might be a particularly salient site of measurement for their progress in language learning and consequently identity (Bailey, 2014). Another suggestion would be drawing on Freire's (2005) concept of the value of background knowledge in literacy education by using the residents' knowledge of grammar, familiarity with explicit grammar teaching, and their stories as content for their ESL literacy development.

Also, due to the specific temporal nature of the UC and transient situation of the residents, there may just not be enough time for them as sojourners to overcome the preoccupation with grammar and thus demonstrate the gains to oneself that one might feel authentically represents SLA. It would be unrealistic to require that the UC programs accommodate all the residents' needs as their language skills develop and as one resident stated "outgrow" its purposes.

Furthermore, as seen in the findings of this research study, the participants' perceptions of the UC depended on their expectations from the program. For some participants, the UC was more than an adequate potential space for second language learning and socialization. However, other participants "outgrew" the UC's specific purposes and had hopes beyond the scope of the UC. Thus how can the university facilitate extending their hopes and dreams? This requires higher educational institutions to rethink their admission policies to be more inclusive of sojourners by offering alternative academic programs, non-degree certificates, and professional development workshops that do not require student visa status or standardized admission exams. These programs could address different fields of study and award certificates of completion for participants. Such programs could help sojourners polish their skills and provide them with a sense of accomplishment, which will promote their sense of self-fulfillment. Kovach and Hillman's (2002) description of goal theory provides a theoretical underpinning for this claim. They explained the goal theory as that the achievement of short term goals helps in enhancing self-esteem and perception of the individual's ability to achieve. Further, it promotes the perception of the likelihood of fulfilling long-term goals which consequently strengthens students' willingness and efforts to succeed.

In addition, universities could adopt a competency model as inspired by the language socialization theory described by Gunderson (2009). This model values integration of language learners into the language and culture of the host society. Both the linguistic and sociocultural competencies are developed “interdependently” by comparing and contrasting cultural practices in the native countries and the host society. This model facilitates intercultural communication and reflects accepting the other (Gunderson, 2009) as peer and not from a deficit perspective. It could be implemented by creating structured service project opportunities for the sojourners, where they could be invited as guest speakers, presenters, or teachers of their own language, culture, or field of study. This could be also fulfilled by mobilizing their expertise in international events held in the university. Nevertheless, language is the sole medium for implementing these ideas, thus language learning should be foregrounded in community development programs targeting international sojourners. It is the key tool for sojourners to pursue an alternative path for self-fulfillment in transient settings in order to give purpose to their life in the host society. This should be coupled with creating opportunities for “social contact” as Perrucci and Hu (1995) stated that it would allow for improving language proficiency and promotes “understanding” and “acceptance” (p. 506).

Similarly, the same implications of the need for integration of the sojourners’ skills and area of expertise apply for mainstream families in transient situations. They also need guidance and access to available resources that would allow them to share their knowledge and feel that they are “doing something important” in the transient space by providing learning opportunities for the native resident communities.

As for the issue of acculturation, employing this model, although not perfectly fitting in this context, was helpful in shedding light on the participants’ experiences and making meaning of data in relation to the stages involved in this model. It helped me understand some residents’ feelings of frustration, sadness, or excitement. It could be used as a framework to raise teachers’ awareness of the affective aspects of second language learning. Brown’s (1986) perspective of the culture shock stage as a learning opportunity could be employed to train teachers to be effective guides in this journey.

Beyond the UC program, the implications of this study are that ESOL literacy programs are significantly important in informal settings. However, they should not be merely regarded as language learning centers, but should be considered in terms of what they symbolize for the sojourners as they are considered a way out of their secondary positionality dilemma and a tool for social adjustment and socialization in the host society. Just as the importance of social influence on community-based literacy programs has been well documented in previous studies (Prins, Toso, & Schafft, 2009), so does this study imply the primacy of second language learning on the sojourner learners' social wellbeing and adjustment in the host society.

Kindness in the curriculum and employing the ethics of care would provide a viable theoretical underpinning for implementing the arrangements mentioned previously. The discourse on kindness and caring has been mainly associated with children education. However, they are crucial in the adult learning setting is as much as they are important for children. The pedagogical practices of kindness and care would help address the affective aspect of learning and contribute to the creation of welcoming spaces necessary for promoting learning, progress, and mutual understanding. It highlights the humanitarian value of relationships among all stakeholders in the learning process which bodes well for the specific learning context and extends these values beyond the boundaries of this space to include relationships in the wider world context. Participants will most likely construct positive meanings of their lived experiences in relation to others within this framework. The findings reflected some participants' perception of kindness in the UC learning space realized by teachers' tactful treatment of students as adults and equals, responsive teaching by addressing the students' needs and requests for special classes, topics, or explicit teaching methods to be incorporated with the Communicative Approach of language learning.

For future research, I suggest conducting critical studies that focus on the transient positionality of sojourners to raise awareness of their predicament in the host society, particularly those who later adjust to an immigrant status with a view to shed light on the power relations associated with their positionality and implications for their career development. The focus could be

on the participants' collaborative work to redress oppressive circumstances as inspired by Freire's (2005) work. Other suggestions could be focusing on gender issues involved in the sojourners' experience and their secondary positionality. Mitch was the only male interviewee in this study, and he was the only participant who made the decision that he could not continue with his spousal role and left together with his wife without her fulfilling her academic plans. I could not make any claims based on this piece of data. However, further studies employing a feminist approach could help further explore gender issues to understand how sojourner spousal status may differ for males and females.

On the local level, other studies could be conducted to do a program evaluation to assess the goals and objectives in relation to the participants' needs and expectations. It would also be interesting to conduct future research to explore the meanings teachers create in the process of their interaction with the residents. In my view, I see the UC as a two-way learning and cultural awareness space that provides an authentic dialogical educational experience for both residents and staff members. The UC facilitates teachers' socialization into the residents' cultural background in as much as it provides for the residents' socialization into language learning and the host society. Thus a further suggestion is that this study could be replicated to provide an *epic* perspective instead of the *emic* perspective sought in the current research study. By adopting an epic perspective as defined by Barcelos and Kalaja (2011), the potential researchers could help reflect on their perception of the learning environment and process in relation to the residents' perception of the same experience with a view to develop a better understanding of their perspective in relation to each other. In this case different stakeholders' perceptions are not regarded as secluded entities but in relation to each other and in relation to the world.

As regards analytical lenses, I recommend substituting the SLA lens of the *Affective Filter Hypothesis* with other theoretical frameworks from the affective domain of second language learning. Other frameworks could be more promising in highlighting the difference between learning and acquisition and avoiding the nuances associated with Krashen's language *Input Hypothesis*. In

addition, employing other theoretical lenses from the field of literacy and identity construction would help explore more meanings of the participants' experience in relation to their transitional identity. This could include Gee's (2000) theory of identity, particularly his concept of *institutional* and *affinity identities*. The former is developed by virtue of institutional affiliation, as for example the secondary positionality of the participants in the current study. The latter is voluntarily constructed in relation to others in the process of group membership.

In conclusion, the UC has a less visible but vital function to make student families comfortable and happy to help students be successful at the university. Other universities' investment to replicate similar centers would help accommodate international students' needs together with their families, which will lead to higher retention rates., which would in turn translate into maintaining an important source of income and recruiting new students when current students share their experiences with their friends and families in their home countries. Perrucci and Hu (1995) stated that universities' involvement with international student organizations' activities help the students develop positive perceptions of the host society. At a broader humanitarian level, they will also provide optimum opportunities for establishing authentic multicultural learning venues for facilitating cross cultural communication, global knowledge exchange, understanding, and acceptance. These centers would act like cosmopolitan units for exchanging intercultural dialogues among sojourners and natives and could complement some study abroad programs by facilitating native students' learning about other countries and cultures. As reflected in this research study, residents had diverse cultural backgrounds, diverse beliefs and perceptions of learning. Exploring these differences helped unravel a deep unifying experience, which is their secondary positionality with a spectrum of associated *member meanings*. Focusing on this common ground would be more productive in understanding and accepting *the other*.

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APPENDICES

Appendix (1): Themes

Theme 1: Foreign language anxiety before starting the language programs (transcription)

Theme 2: Students referred to the importance of explicit grammar instruction.

Theme 3: Participants have various perceptions of the role of grammar in learning English.

Theme 4: Methods of instruction in the native country versus the methods in the University Center

Theme 5: The residents have different purposes for language learning, primarily communication and academic or professional development. (transcription)

Theme 6: Experiences with the learning environment and feelings about progress: Creating a welcoming environment is crucial for promoting language learning, communication, intercultural communication, and acculturation (transcription)

Theme 7: Language learning facilitates cross-cultural communication

Theme 8: Motivation seems to influence perception of progress in language learning:
Instrumental versus integrative orientation to motivation and perception of progress

Theme 9: The duration of residence seems to affect the residents' perception of their learning experience.

Theme 10: Spouses in the University Center follow their husbands/ wives, but mainly husbands who came to the US for a core purpose. (transcription)

Theme 11: Spouses clique with members of their cultural group (informal observation). Language learning helps in breaking the clicques. (informal observation and transcription)

Theme 12: Bonding of language learners from different cultural backgrounds (transcription)

Theme 13: Language learning provides security and independence. There is also an interrelationship between language learning and the sense of identity. (transcription)

Theme 14: Language learning is empowering and liberating. (transcription)

Theme 15: Another emerging theme in the data is the spouses' pursuit to do something "important" or even to "be important."

Theme 16: Culture influences perception of language learning, learning environment, and progress.

Theme 17: Progress in language learning is associated with a shifting sense of agency.

Theme 18: Changes and hopes are reflected in the residents' responses.

Theme 19: availability or lack of support was another theme which recurred in the body of data.

Appendix (2): Interview Questions

1. How long have you been in the United States of America?
2. What are the ESL classes you attend in the Family Resource Center? (Following Patton, 2002, I started with asking about present activities)
3. What do you think about these classes?
4. How do you feel about your progress in language learning? (Following Patton, 2002, I moved from activities to feelings about this particular experience)
5. How do you rank your level of proficiency in the English language when you were in your native country? (Following Patton, 2002, I moved from present to past activities)
6. How did you perceive this status? (Following Patton, 2002, I moved from activities to feelings about this particular experience)
7. Why do you study English?
- What do you think English will help you do?
8. How did you learn English in your native country?
9. What are the activities which helped you in learning English in the Family Resource Center?
10. What are the methods and activities that you had in your native country, but you miss in this program?
11. What do you like about the literacy programs at the Family Resource Center?
12. What do not you like about the literacy programs at the Family Resource Center?
13. How did learning English help you get along with others in Stillwater?
14. Tell me some of the things you have done to experience life the American way.
15. How do you feel about your language learning experiences in the FRC? (following Patton, I asked about feelings after behavior)
16. How do you define your ethnic background and why do you define it that way? (Following Patton, 2002, I did not start with demographic questions)

17. What were the goals you have aspired to achieve in language learning?
18. How do you see your level of language learning?
19. In your opinion, why do you think you have reached this level?

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Wednesday, February 19, 2014 Protocol Expires: 2/18/2017

IRB Application No: ED09123

Proposal Title: Adult International Students' Beliefs and Perceptions of Literacy Programs and their Self-Fulfillment in Language Learning in a Small University Town

Reviewed and
Processed as:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): **Approved**

Principal Investigator(s) :

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Approvals are valid until the given expiration date, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office **MUST** be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB. Expedited and exempt projects may be reviewed by the full Institutional Review Board.

- The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

Signature: _____

Signature: Shelia K

Shelia Kennison, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Wednesday, February 19, 2014
Date

VITA

Soha Elfeel

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: THE BELIEFS AND PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS'
SPOUSES OF LITERACY PROGRAMS AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Professional Education Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2014.

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Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in English Literature at Cairo University/College of Arts, Giza, Egypt in 1990.

Experience:

January 2014-May 2014: Teacher Assistant, College of education, Oklahoma State University.

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2005 – December 2012: Community development assistant at the Family Resource Center, Oklahoma State University

2002-2003: Teacher of Arabic language, The Saudi Arabic School, Stillwater, Ok

1998-2000: Teacher of Arabic language, The Saudi Arabic School, Chicago, Illinois

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