

PRESERVICE TEACHERS' OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THEATRE AS A
TEACHING TOOL FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

A Thesis

by

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ABSTRACT

This research reveals preservice teachers' observations of their own experiences and their English Language Learners' (ELL) experiences while performing in a full-scale, bilingual production of *Peter Pan the Musical* in Italy. Though existing research supports the use of theatre in language learning, there is still very little research on the role of theatre for additional language learning.

The findings answer two questions. Based on preservice teachers' perspectives, how did participating in *Peter Pan the Musical* affect ELLs' development of English? And, how did participating in *Peter Pan the Musical* affect preservice teachers' empathy for ELLs? The 10 participants in the study were preservice teachers participating in the Texas A&M University Italy Education Study Abroad Program during the spring semester of 2014. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews before, during, and after the semester abroad, and through journal entries.

Analysis of the data revealed six common themes in the participants' observations: 1) English language learning was enhanced through the development of close relationships with preservice teachers, English immersion, songs, dances, and lines; 2) preservice teachers' empathy for ELLs increased while performing in Italian and interacting with ELLs; 3) motivation to perform for an audience was high; 4) theatre made learning fun; 5) positive attitudes already existed towards theatre; and 6) there are potential drawbacks to the use of theatre in ELL instruction.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the leaders, participants, and collaborators of the Italy Education Study Abroad Program from Texas A&M University and *Dante Alighieri Scuola Media*. It is also dedicated to the community of Castiglion Fiorentino, including the Santa Chiara Study Center. I am grateful for the vision and execution of this life-changing program, and for the beautiful relationships that allowed the study to take place. I hope the program goes on to benefit many more students and lives. *Grazie per avermi permesso di lavorare con tutti. Siete stati fantastici.*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

According to Stinson and Winston (2011) the idea that theatre can be an effective English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching tool is widely accepted among practitioners and researchers, but “more research is needed to help us understand how, why and under what circumstances the conditions for drama and second language pedagogy are most productive. Studies that take place in non-traditional educational settings, including community settings rather than schools and language classrooms, and studies with a focus on locally contextualized language usage would potentially add fresh understandings to this complex domain” (p. 9). The purpose of the current study was to reveal preservice teachers’ observations of their own experiences and their ELLs’ experiences while participating as performers in a full-scale, bilingual theatrical production of *Peter Pan the Musical* in Italy. The research focused on two questions: 1) Based on preservice teachers’ perspectives, how did participating in *Peter Pan the Musical* affect ELLs’ development of English? 2) How did participating in *Peter Pan The Musical* affect preservice teachers’ empathy for ELLs? Prior to the current study, it appears that there were no existing studies of a full-scale bilingual theatrical production undertaken with teachers and learners as performers in each other’s language. Therefore, the seemingly unique design of this program could offer fresh perspectives in a burgeoning conversation about the efficacy of theatre as teaching tool for ELLs. For the development of empathy for ELLs, researchers often recommend putting preservice teachers in their ELLs’ shoes as learners in a foreign language environment (Suarez,

2003; Warren, 2014; Cooper, 2010). Washburn (2008) finds that such an experience can develop empathy and a willingness to try various strategies to help ELLs in the classroom.

The production of *Peter Pan the Musical* was an enrichment activity for ELLs in a public middle school in Castiglion Fiorentino, Italy. Participation was free and open to any middle school student in the 1st or 2nd level, the equivalent of 6th or 7th grade in American public schools, who self-selected to be in the musical. The participants in the study, Texas A&M preservice teachers, performed in the musical along side their Italian language partners, so that each cultural group became the language tutors for their fellow performers. The lines between teacher and student blurred because every actor, whether teacher or student, worked together sharing a common performance goal, and each actor was required to perform in a foreign language. Italian students helped their preservice teachers with Italian comprehension and speech, and American preservice teachers likewise aided their Italian students. An English-speaking director conducted the rehearsal process, and all of the songs were in English, making the process an immersive one for the Italians. Ten preservice teachers were selected to participate in the study. There were 41 Italian middle school students and 29 American preservice teachers participating in *Peter Pan the Musical*.

The findings of the study relate to theatre as a teaching tool for ELLs and to theatre being a catalyst for the development of empathy for ELLs. The data revealed that theatre was an effective teaching tool for ELLs for the following reasons: 1) it was a powerful motivator; 2) learning and practicing songs and dances aided pronunciation and

memorization; 3) learning and practicing lines supported appropriate language usage; 4) working in an English immersion environment promoted conversational skills and comfort with the target language; 5) theatre encouraged close relationships between ELLs and preservice teachers; 6) playing characters and telling the story of the play made language learning fun; and 7) there are potential drawbacks to utilizing theatre as an ELL teaching tool such as the preference of some students for individual rather than collective learning. The study also found that the preservice teachers were more empathetic towards ELLs after participating in the musical than before they were engaged in the musical. The experience of learning lines in Italian helped them appreciate how difficult it is to learn a foreign language, and the friendships that they developed with their Italian students helped them cultivate a desire to be effective teachers for ELLs in their future classrooms.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrating Two Perspectives- Process and Product-Oriented Drama

The pedagogical implications of theatre are often discussed as two different approaches, process-oriented drama and product-oriented drama, because the terms indicate a separation in theory and practice. According to Holden (1981), drama is synonymous with the idea of ‘let’s pretend;’ “it asks the learner to project himself imaginatively into another situation, outside the classroom, or into the skin and persona of another person” (p. 1), where the focus is on “doing rather than on the presentation” (p. 8). Most of the existing literature on the role of drama in the ESL classroom is contained within the classroom and is considered process-oriented. Literature on the use of product-oriented drama as a teaching tool for ELLs usually refers to the preparation and performance of scenes or a play for an outside audience.

Moody (2002) identifies the polarity between those “who use process-oriented approaches and educators who define their methodology as product-oriented” (p. 135). In their seminal work, *Drama Techniques in Language Learning*, Maley & Duff (2001) introduce dramatic activities as a resource for language teachers and then provide detailed descriptions of activities in the following categories: introduction, observation, interpretation, creation and invention, word play, problem solving, and the use of literary texts, poems and songs. Their goal in this work is to encourage teachers to incorporate these dramatic activities into their classrooms and to aid them with that process. They are, however, strongly opposed to the inclusion of an audience for these dramatic

exercises. In their introduction Maley & Duff (2001) say, “let us be clear... we do not mean putting on plays in front of a passive audience. The stiff, self-conscious ‘dramatization’ of dialogues and short sketches... is not what we have in mind here... other people’s words, which have been mechanically memorized, can turn to ashes in the speaker’s mouth. They lose their savour even before they are spoken, and this we do not want” (p. 6). They appear to find rehearsed theatre useless for language learners, because of the emphasis on a final product. They go on to say that they do not want their students to focus on “some great final performance” (p. 6). Instead, they value process-oriented drama that takes place in the classroom with no audience present.

Yet there are others who argue that there are additional advantages to product-oriented drama including enhanced motivation for achieving a communal goal, teamwork, and self and peer teaching (Moody, 2002; Raquel, 2011). Via (1987) argues in favor of product-oriented drama claiming, “a play can give students a reason to use language” (p. 6) and “students with a definite, interesting goal progress faster and further” (p. 7). Raquel (2011) claims “product-oriented theatre activities allow students to use the target language in meaningful communicative situations” (p. 96). These arguments take us back to Moody (2002). He notes the lack of research and literature regarding the product-oriented approach, or theatre production approach, and says, “although a growing number of publications attest to the beneficial outcomes of process approaches to foreign-language teaching, most often in these works there is very little mention of product-oriented approaches” (p. 138).

In his research, Moody asks whether undergoing a process and achieving a product are really contradictions at all. Eventually he argues that though there are distinct differences in the two methodologies, they are in fact complementary perspectives. Moody conducted his research by analyzing two separate educational settings, one incorporating process-drama into a Spanish as a foreign language (SFL) classroom, and one incorporating product-oriented drama into an SFL classroom. He collected data through the observation of both SFL classrooms. There were some notable differences in his study groups. The process-oriented drama pedagogy was introduced to secondary school students who were at a beginning to intermediate level, where the product-oriented drama pedagogy was introduced to more advanced students at a liberal arts college. Moody's observation in the secondary classroom led him to conclude "that improvisation and other process approaches are frequently very effective, and that they allow learners to interpret the world through both their bodies and voices, in order to practice the gestures, movements, and utterances of the target language and culture in spontaneous and imaginative ways" (p. 138). However, he found that a process-oriented approach does not become effective until the participants are motivated by "learning goals [that are] visible and tangible... which show participants that an actual audience other than the teacher will ultimately value their efforts" (p. 136). This finding was largely responsible for his conclusion that "it is indispensable that product-oriented approaches are taken into serious consideration within the range of drama-based methods available to foreign-language teachers, not as a substitute for process approaches, but as an inherent option for drama-based pedagogy" (p. 154). His

conclusion was tempered by the reality that preparing and presenting a theatrical performance outside of the classroom can be time consuming. But he claims that the extra effort can yield positive results beyond those associated with process-oriented drama. One advantage being that “the learning process that unfolds as a play is studied, interpreted, and rehearsed [is] a highly democratic one” (p. 139). The preparations and finally the presentation of a play create a dialogue between students and teachers, among the group of actors, and ultimately, between the actors and the audience, requiring that students play an active role in their own education, sharing resources and a common goal. Sam (1990) also claims that while engaged in theatre the role of the teacher changes from the one dominating the learning situation to someone who is there to provide all the help the students need to play an active role in their own learning. Similarly, Bernal (2007) highlights how rehearsal times are an ideal arena “for natural language use and teamwork to evolve” (p. 28). The last advantage that Moody claims is that eventually, each student feels a “communal sense of pride” when the “full meaning of the play” is revealed to an audience (p. 154).

In an attempt to synthesize all of the information and literature applicable to the current study, I have employed the term *theatre* to encompass all references to drama, performance, dramatic or theatrical activities, drama and theatre arts, and references to the play and the musical. In this way I hope to emphasize that theatre includes both the process and the product, and the findings of this study refer to both simultaneously.

Theatre as a Teaching Tool for ELLs

Theatre has been utilized for language teaching and learning for decades according to Barnes (1968), Maley & Duff (1978), Holden (1981), and Via (1987). But the discussion of the use of theatre for second or additional language learning is a relatively new addition to this earlier conversation. Similarly, Stinson and Winston (2011) believe that theatre as a tool for second language teaching and learning it is a growing trend. They conducted a scan of recent TESOL conferences (formerly Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages) around the globe and discovered a growing number of presentations that have focused on the use of theatre, particularly process-oriented drama, for additional language teaching. They claim that more evidence of increasing interest in the field can be seen in the number of recent and forthcoming practical and theoretical texts being promoted by a range of publishers. They also mention the creation of a new publication, *Scenario*, an e-journal established in 2007, which exclusively publishes articles focusing on drama and second/additional language acquisition. Some of the reputed benefits are: the use of vocabulary and expressions in their proper environment; proper pronunciation and intonation for a given setting and character; building confidence in the learner's ability to speak English; motivating the student; building a better understanding of culture; removing focus from the textbook; involving the whole persona as a total physical activity; and encouraging empathy for the other (Heldenbrand, 2006; Holden, 1981; Even, 2008; Maley & Duff, 1978; Piazzoli, 2010; Rothwell, 2011; Via, 1987; Whiteson & Horovitz, 2002). And finally, theatre can make second language learning fun (Heldenbrand, 2006; Moody, 2002; Sam, 1990).

While surveying the existing literature on the use of theatre as a teaching tool for ELLs, I discovered that “the most common form of research practice lies in the realm of short-term, intervention-style projects, mostly in formal educational settings” (Stinson & Winston, 2011, p. 8), and that there are very few studies in existence where the participants went through the whole process of rehearsing and performing a play. The following studies do include theatre performances, but more importantly, they all use theatre to teach a second language.

Ryan-Scheutz & Colangelo’s (2004) study was conducted with 11 undergraduate students at the University of Notre Dame who were at varying levels of their Italian language and culture studies. The study was designed with the hypothesis that students would benefit greatly from participating in a full-scale production of a play in a total immersion environment. The researchers believed that “the wide range of communicative tasks necessary for actors, stage managers, and designers alike would lead to improved competence in interpersonal, interpretative, and presentational modes of communication” in their second language (p. 377). The researchers also predicted that participating students would gain confidence in their target language. All participants spoke English as their first language, but Italian was the only language used in rehearsal, production meetings, and performance. In 10 weeks, participants went through the full process of play production including text analysis, preproduction, rehearsals, and finally a performance of *La Marcolfa* by Dario Fo. Quantitative and qualitative data was collected to measure the affect of participating in the play on Italian language proficiency. The researchers used oral and written pre and post-production tests, and a

post-performance student survey of their perceptions of how their Italian language proficiency had improved. An analysis of the pre and post testing revealed general improvement in several areas: oral proficiency, reading comprehension, knowledge of language structures and idioms, and writing proficiency. The student perception survey showed that the participants felt positively about their second language learning. These results are valuable because they confirm positive growth among participants in all four areas of literacy; reading, writing, speaking and listening. However, the 11 participants were at varying levels of Italian proficiency, and it might have been interesting to see at what level students benefited the most from participating in the production.

Gorjian, Moosavinia, & Jabripour (2010) studied the effects of theatre pedagogy with their intermediate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) university students at the Islamic Azad University of Shiraz who were enrolled in English Drama II. Their research question was, “Will EFL students acquire a higher understanding of a play through a traditional or performance-based approach to teaching drama” (p. 8)? They worked with 60 students and divided them into a control group of 30 and an experimental group of 30. For a whole semester the control group was taught through conventional reading of drama content, while the experimental group was taught the same plays through their dramatic performance. The plays were the popular works Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* and Miller’s *Death of a Salesman*. In the experimental group the students were divided into small groups and chose their roles for each play. They were asked to memorize their roles outside of the classroom and then get ready to perform the scenes in the classroom. The control group surveyed the contents of the dramas in class

but did no role-playing or performance of the plays. To gauge both content awareness and attitudes towards the pedagogical approach, the researchers designed a 30-question post-test and a set of retrospective think aloud questions for the students. The control group and the experimental group produced significantly different results at the end of the semester. On the 30-question post-test, which included inference questions and theme analysis questions about the plays, the experimental group mean was 6.839 points higher than the control group mean. The analysis of the think aloud reports allowed the researchers to examine how much dramatic performance had affected their students' attitudes towards classroom environment, motivation, and class participation. The verbal results indicated that the experimental group "was much more motivated than the control group" (p 6), and that "students in the experimental group had a more positive view towards the style of teaching drama through dramatic performance; while the control group was sometimes dissatisfied with the class environment and the activities" (p 8). Though the study seems to reinforce the pedagogical benefits of using a dramatic arts approach to teaching in a content area, the researchers did nothing to gauge the improvement or lack thereof of the second language that the English Drama II students were using for this semester long study.

Raquel (2011) introduces her study by stating that product-oriented dramatic pedagogy provides second language (L2) learners with a number of opportunities to improve their L2 proficiency. Her study's aim was "to investigate whether learners' sociocultural background alters the L2 learning experience in a theatre production" (98). Her study was set during a full-scale production of the musical *Aladdin* at a tertiary

institution in Hong Kong. The participants in the study were all a part of the production. The study aimed to answer two research questions. The first question was what sociocultural factors shape the experience of English theatre productions in Hong Kong as a language-learning environment. The second question was whether or not theatre productions are good language learning environments in Hong Kong. Her hypothesis was that sociocultural factors will have a large impact on the use of drama pedagogy as a tool for L2 learning in Hong Kong, and, by extension, should be taken into consideration in any culture where drama pedagogy will be introduced. Raquel used a qualitative approach to gather her research data. She conducted pre and post in-depth interviews and questionnaires, and collected journals from select students and staff. The production involved 42 students and 12 staff volunteers. The students came from various programs and participated as actors or crewmembers. Although many first languages were represented in the group, the director and the choreographers were English speakers, so the official language of the production was English. After seven months of bi-weekly rehearsals, *Aladdin* was performed five times for audiences of around 600 people each night. The study found that the sociocultural factors present in a nontraditional learning environment such as the play were the same as those found in traditional classrooms, but that a more contemporary sociocultural factor influenced the students who decided to participate in the musical production. A traditional sociocultural factor in Hong Kong is the concept of collective society, which encourages students to be passive learners. In opposition, a more contemporary sociocultural factor, which influenced the play, is the desire to be interactive learners. Raquel found that many of the participants wanted an

opportunity to be in a participatory learning environment as opposed to their typically passive one, and do something that interested them and felt fun.

Development of Empathy for ELLs

Working with ELLs has become reality for American public school teachers and therefore should not be ignored in their teacher preparation (Lucas & Grinberg, 2008). According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA, 2006), upwards of 10 percent of the K-12 students in US public schools are ELLs. At the same time, the National Collaborative on Diversity in the Teaching Force, 2004, found that over 90 percent of preservice teachers in education programs in the US are white with little or no foreign language experience (p. 5). This lack of experience could potentially leave teachers unaware of the challenges that ELLs face in the classroom and ill equipped to fully empathize with and help their ELLs succeed (de Oliveira, 2011).

Preservice teachers' potential lack of empathy for ELLs could influence their attitudes towards working with ELLs and lead to confusion, frustration, and stunted language development (Washburn, 2008). In order to prevent these negative possibilities, it is important that preservice and inservice teachers learn strategies to work effectively with ELLs and develop empathy for ELLs. According to de Oliveira (2011) "the monolingual, predominantly white, teacher population that is still found in today's schools must engage in language experiences that will help them understand the difficulties and needs of ELLs in their classrooms" (p. 59). Suarez (2003) agrees, claiming, "a teacher who has never experienced cultural otherness may not be as effective with diverse students" (Suarez, 2003, p. 180). And she, along with de Oliveira

(2011) and Washburn (2008), found that the best solution for building empathy among preservice teachers is to put them in the shoes of ELLs by making them language learners themselves for a period of time. All three believe that the experience of becoming a language learner, in a setting where one does not speak the dominant language, builds empathy for the ELLs' experience and encourages the development of teaching techniques that can improve their ELLs' language development. In Washburn's words "an experiential learning activity develops empathy and can stimulate thinking about strategies for improving communication across the language barriers (Washburn, 2008, p. 248). The following paragraphs detail the design and findings of three such empathy-building activities.

De Oliveira (2011) describes a math simulation activity that she designed and implemented in Brazilian Portuguese intended to increase teachers' awareness of what learners feel when they are taught in a foreign language. De Oliveira used reflection questions at the end of the simulation to demonstrate how participating teachers have developed more empathy for ELLs. The article includes teachers' reflections collected from over four years of conducting the same simulation for different teacher groups. The simulation included two phases of instruction. The first phase was a math lesson in Brazilian Portuguese with no ESL strategies employed. The second phase was the same lesson, also in Brazilian Portuguese, but using ESL teaching strategies. The goal of the simulation was twofold, to first show the participating teachers how it feels to be in a classroom where they do not understand the language of instruction, and then to introduce strategies for ESL instruction in an experiential rather than a theoretical way.

In response to the first phase of the simulation de Oliveira found one word was used most often to describe the experience - frustration. The participants also reported feeling that the teacher didn't seem to care that they could not understand the lesson. The responses to the second phase most frequently addressed the differences in the two lessons and attempted to identify the ESL strategies used. Overall, the participants reported an increase in empathy for ELLs and an awareness of the importance of implementing techniques such as slower speech, using visuals, modeling, and other nonverbal communication.

Suarez (2003) revealed preservice teachers' reflections on becoming the linguistic other while participating in a study abroad program. While participating in the International and Cultural Linguistic Immersion for Second Language Teachers study abroad program, preservice teachers lived with Spanish speaking families in Venezuela and Mexico, attended Spanish lessons, and participated in local cultural activities. After the immersion experience, the participants reported a "shift of feelings of sympathy to empathy" (p. 181) for ELLs. The preservice teachers also reported that their "increased empathy would significantly affect how and what they taught" (p. 182). The article did not go into specifics about what teaching techniques were discovered or intended for future use.

Washburn (2008) conducted a language shock class for preservice teachers in order to help them develop empathy for ELLs and strategize ways to be more accommodating to ELLs in their future classrooms. In the shock class, he taught a lesson in Chinese, a language that none of the participants had any knowledge of, and then

asked for feedback as to how this experience made the preservice teachers feel. They reported feelings of frustration, confusion, isolation and boredom. He then asked them what strategies they wished he had used to better accommodate their inability to understand the lesson. They responded that they would have liked clearer body language, more pictures, slower speech and more frequent repetition. This class was only conducted once as a way to encourage preservice teachers to seek out additional training and familiarity with techniques for teaching ELLs more effectively. The emotional responses of being frustrated, confused, isolated and bored were intended to encourage empathy for ELLs' potential emotional responses to learning in an English-only classroom.

Faez (2012) does pose a legitimate argument that could call the pedagogical usefulness of an empathy building experience into question. He claims that empathy alone does not necessarily translate to more effective teaching techniques. He believes that all teachers, regardless of their perceived empathy or lack thereof, require appropriate training to address the unique needs of ELLs. Washburn (2008) does not refute this argument, but he does claim that these experiences may “encourage teachers to be more patient, look for extra materials, try harder to pronounce a strange name, wait a minute longer for a student to comprehend and formulate an answer, or take an extra five minutes to look up a word in another language” (p. 250). In other words, empathy can both encourage the implementation of helpful strategies, and also elicit the desire within preservice teachers to seek out the appropriate training that Faez (2012) encourages.

Now that the topics of theatre as a teaching tool for ELLs and the development of teacher empathy have been explored, the following chapters outline how the current research unfolded. First, an overview of the participants and a description of the study abroad program within which the study took place will be provided. Then, there will be a description of the data collection methods and an explanation of how the data was analyzed. Finally, the findings of the study will be relayed in detail.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in the study were all Texas A&M University students who were also participants in the Italy Education Study Abroad Program. Out of the 29 students participating in the study abroad program, 10 were selected to be a part of the study. The study participants were selected to represent the diversity of the larger group in age, gender, theatrical experience, and academic major. Seven of the participants were in their junior year of study, and three were sophomores. Out of the 10 participants, eight had participated in some form of theatrical production in the past, but only four of the eight had been a part of a production in the past four years. None of the participants had any professional theatrical experience. All of the participants were interdisciplinary majors. Four were focusing on early childhood through 6th grade, five on 4th through 8th grade, and one on special education. Nine participants were female and one was male, reflecting the demographics of preservice students at the university. All of the participants spoke English as their native language.

Setting and Context

The study took place in College Station, Texas and in Castiglion Fiorentino, Italy over the course of the 2014 spring semester. The Italy Education Study Abroad Program for which *Peter Pan the Musical* was created and performed was the latest of a biannual program for undergraduate preservice teachers from Texas A&M University who spent their spring semester in Italy teaching English at *Dante Alighieri Scuola Media*, a public

Italian middle school in Castiglion Fiorentino in Tuscany. During their teaching tenure, they rehearsed a bilingual musical with their Italian middle school students and performed it together with their students at the end of the program for the entire community of Castiglion Fiorentino in the city's beautiful historical theatre, the *Teatro Comunale*. Over the course of the seven years that the program has been in existence, the musical enrichment component has grown in size and notoriety within the community of Castiglion Fiorentino. The A&M preservice teachers are all required to participate in the musical as a part of the study abroad program, though they are not graded on their participation or performance. The Italian students choose whether or not they want to participate in the play, and they do not receive grades or school credit for participating. The number of Italian students choosing to participate in the musical reached 41 in 2014.

The program directors recognized the importance of including a theatre professional in the design and implementation of the musical component, so starting in 2012, I was brought on to oversee script development, rehearsals, choreography, production design elements, and staging of the musical. I took on the same responsibilities as the director of *Peter Pan the Musical* in 2014.

Preparations for *Peter Pan the Musical* started with the Texas A&M preservice teachers while still in College Station, TX. I adapted the musical script into a bilingual version that did not necessitate narration. Instead, characters either spoke in Italian or in English and the lines were distributed in a way that both English and Italian speakers could follow and understand the setting, characters, and plot. Below is a section of the script from *Peter Pan the Musical*, 2014:

(The Darling children and their mother are in the nursery. They hear their dog Nana barking outside.)

Wendy: That is her bark when she smells danger.

Mrs. Darling: Pericolo? Sei sicura Wendy? (Danger? Are you sure Wendy?)

Wendy: Oh yes.

(Suddenly the window blows open and Wendy screams. Mrs. Darling turns, startled.)

John: Is anything there?

Mrs. Darling: Tutto tace. (All quiet and still.)

The two characters onstage continued the action of the scene while also providing both language audiences with the most important word – danger (pericolo). In this example, an Italian student performed in English as Wendy and an A&M preservice teacher performed in Italian as Mrs. Darling. This relationship is indicative of the design of the script, keeping Italians and Americans onstage together in each scene. After completing the script, myself and the other program leaders cast the preservice teachers in their roles and divided them into production committees: set, props, costumes, and marketing, so that planning for supplies and construction could begin. Once in Italy, the marketing committee hosted a Peter Pan introduction party where interested Italian students could come together and watch a film of *Peter Pan* in Italian and meet the preservice teachers and the director. The film translation of *Peter Pan* was not the same as the musical, but it allowed the Italian students to see portrayals of the characters and comprehend the entire

story in their own language. Then auditions were held for the Italian middle school students. Everyone who auditioned was given a role in the production. Auditions were comprised of four elements completed individually but with everyone present. The elements were singing, speaking, movement, and mime. For *Peter Pan the Musical*, the participants, both American and Italian, were broken into three rehearsal groups, because the cast was so large. The first group was made up of the actors playing the Lost Children from Neverland and the Darling family from London. The second group was made up of the actors playing Pirates and Mermaids. The third group was made up of the actors playing Indians. Then, within these groups, each Italian student was assigned to an American language partner. In a few cases, preservice teachers had two language partners as there were more Italians participating than Americans. The goal of creating language partnerships between Italians and Americans was to allow for individualized attention and bonding between the preservice teachers and Italian ELLs. Language partners helped each other practice lines. This included memorization, intonation, and body language. The preservice teachers were also responsible for making sure that their Italian partners understood all of the directions, which were given in English, and for keeping their partners on task and prepared for each rehearsal and for the performance.

Rehearsals were conducted after school for two hours, four days a week, for six weeks, with usually one group of actors present: Lost Children, Pirates, or Indians. Occasionally, two groups were brought together to rehearse, and then all of the groups came together for the final week of rehearsals. We began each rehearsal with a warm-up

of the full body and voice. Then goals for the rehearsal were introduced and a section of the script was introduced or rehearsed. We chose to set blocking, or determine where the actors would be on stage for each scene, before focusing on the individual actors' lines as a way to map the story in the actors' memories. Dances and songs were taught and rehearsed, all actions were repeated multiple times, and each rehearsal allowed time for language partners to work on the lines and language together. The whole experience was conducted in English, and we used gesture and intentional body language to communicate with the Italian performers. English comprehension was required for the Italian students to perform their lines, the songs, and the choreography in the musical. Vocal projection and a poised stage presence were also rehearsed. A relaxed yet focused rehearsal atmosphere allowed the actors' confidence to build over multiple rehearsals. There was always an Italian English teacher present for each rehearsal who could translate when the Italian students had questions.

Peter Pan the Musical was performed twice on the same day, Monday, May 5, 2014, and approximately 500 people attended. The performance was free and open to the public. Family members, community members, and friends from far away came with enthusiasm to support the performers. The local television station filmed the performance and then ran it on television regularly for weeks after the show so that all of the performers could watch themselves on TV, and anyone who missed the live performance would have the opportunity to see it.

Data Collection

Data for the study was collected through semi-structured individual interviews and journal entries. The preservice teachers participated in interviews before, during, and after their semester abroad in Italy. They also wrote reflective journals weekly while in Italy.

The initial interviews were brief, and conducted individually on the Texas A&M campus in College Station, TX. The teachers were asked about their biographical data and expectations for their coming teaching experiences and participation in *Peter Pan the Musical*. The mid-trip interviews were conducted in small groups in casual settings around Castiglion Fiorentino such as the common areas of the Santa Chiara Study Center where the preservice teachers stayed and a local café. The mid-trip interviews lasted about fifteen minutes and consisted of questions regarding initial observations of the rehearsal process and the relationships being built with Italian middle school students. They included discussion of any observations of their ELLs' experiences learning English in the environment of the play, any reflections on their own roles in the play rehearsals, and any connections observed between Italian students in rehearsal and in the classroom. Before ending the interview, participants were encouraged to share any additional thoughts or observations on the play. The post-play interviews were also conducted in small groups and took place in the preservice teachers' hotel the night before they left Italy. These interviews were up to a half hour in length and focused on overall perceptions of the play as an English language learning enrichment program, their own empathy for ELLs, and how and why their perspectives on teaching ELLs may

have changed. Time was also given at the end of these interviews for any additional observations not prompted with specific questions.

The journal entries were written and collected weekly and allowed the participants the opportunity to reflect on the experience as a whole and on their internal journey while teaching and being a part of the play process. The participants were given very broad journal prompts asking them to: 1) describe their experience in Italy so far; and 2) talk about their time working with the Italian students in *Peter Pan the Musical*. Journaling allowed the participants to follow their own train of thought as it pertained to the experiences of their Italian ELLs and to their own individual experiences as preservice teachers and visitors in a foreign country.

Data Analysis

I read each journal entry for the first time when they were turned in on a weekly basis during the program. Then, after the semester ended, I read them all again to look for recurring themes which were coded for analysis. I did not transcribe the interviews until the semester's end, when they were also analyzed for the presence of recurring themes. Based on Moustakas (1994), I chose a phenomenological methodology for this study. When taking a phenomenological approach, "a researcher is concerned with the lived experiences of the people involved, or who were involved, with the issue that is being researched" (Groenewald, 2004). As I conducted the interviews personally and was also the director of *Peter Pan the Musical* in 2014, a phenomenological approach challenged me to set aside "preconceived beliefs or knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 22) and remain open and receptive to the

observations of the participants. Though there is some danger that the friendly relationships between the participants and myself could bias the participants' feedback towards what they believed I wanted to hear, I tried to mitigate this danger through the use of a phenomenological approach.

The journal entries and interviews were designed to answer the initial research questions. 1) Based on preservice teachers' perspectives, how did participating in *Peter Pan the Musical* affect ELLs' development of English? 2) How did participating in *Peter Pan The Musical* affect preservice teachers' empathy for ELLs? These two research questions were answered through the perspectives of the participants in the study, and analysis of the data led to the discovery of clear themes in the participants' observations.

In order to ensure ethical research, I took the necessary steps to ensure that all participants were informed and consented to be a part of the study, which was reviewed and approved by the Internal Review Board.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The themes which emerged were: 1) English language learning was enhanced through the development of close relationships with preservice teachers, English immersion, songs, dances, and lines; 2) preservice teachers' empathy for ELLs increased while performing in Italian and interacting with ELLs; 3) motivation to perform for an audience was high; 4) theatre made learning fun; 5) positive attitudes already existed towards theatre; and 6) there are potential drawbacks to the use of theatre in ELL instruction.

The three most frequently mentioned themes were; English language learning enhancement, the increase of preservice teacher empathy, and students' motivation to perform. Of these, English language learning enhancement was by far the most common, accounting for 48 percent of the total responses. Within this theme, however, the most frequent sub-theme was the enhancement of English language learning through close relationships with preservice teachers. In the chart below, each of the sub-themes for English language learning enhancement are represented separately in order to clarify the research, even though they are part of a larger theme. The sub-themes of English language learning enhancement are: lines, dances, songs, English language immersion, and the development of close relationships with preservice teachers. In the chart, the sub-themes are all marked with an asterisk.

Though the 10 participants differed in age, gender, theatrical experience, and academic major, there was no discernable variation in the results based on these differences.

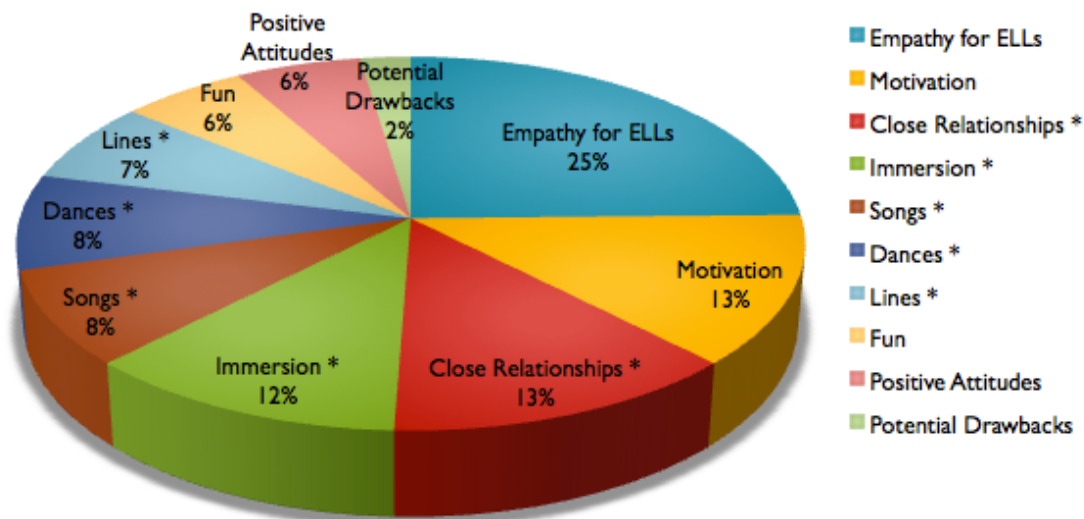


Figure 1. Frequency of Themes in Preservice Teachers' Observations.

Positive Attitudes

The study took place during a well established program, meaning that the community of Castiglion Fiorentino and the teachers and student body of Dante were all familiar with the constructs of the Texas A&M Italy Education Study Abroad Program and expectant of a positive group of well intentioned young teachers coming to their school. They were also looking forward to the spring 2014 performance of *Peter Pan the Musical*, and many middle school students were eager to be involved. The community's enthusiasm for the play seemed to play a big part in establishing the positive environment that the A&M preservice teachers found waiting for them in Castiglion

Fiorentino. Several of the preservice teachers mentioned the positive attitudes that they observed.

Alice¹: One of the warmest welcomes I have ever received was on my first day at Dante.

Another preservice teacher was impressed by the Dante students' positive attitudes about performing in a musical.

Rebecca: The day after our introductory meeting many of the students came up to me and told me they were going to try out! I know that in sixth grade, I would not have wanted to try out for a part in a musical, but the Italian students are very confident.

And yet another preservice teacher found this excitement to be infectious.

Emma: I am excited to start because I can see how excited the students are about it! Whenever I ask them about it [the play] they always answer with a smile. I think they will love getting to help us with our parts.

After moving into regular after school rehearsals, the A&M preservice teachers continued to be surprised at the ease with which the Dante students entered into the process.

Sarah: Our first play practice was very different than I expected. The students were engaged and open from the first moment. Even through the language

¹ The names presented are pseudonyms chosen to reflect the cultural origins and gender of the participants.

barriers and the newness of the whole play, the students committed to learning immediately.

Vanessa: I was surprised by how comfortable the students were with their singing parts. They weren't afraid to sing loudly even though they didn't yet understand all of the words.

Another positive attitude observed by an A&M teacher was the inclusive and non-competitive nature of the Dante students.

Alice: I have seen a drastic difference in the attitudes of the Italian students vs. American children. The students at Dante are very sweet and seem to all be friends with each other. I have not seen any bullying, buy only kindness towards one another in the classroom. One of our classes includes a child with special needs; the way that the other students treat this boy is spectacular. They work so hard to include him and assist him in any way they can.

English Language Enhancement during Peter Pan the Musical

During rehearsals, all of the participants learned and practiced how to present the story of *Peter Pan the Musical* through lines, songs, and movement. As an English-speaking director conducted the rehearsal process, it was a language immersion experience for the Dante students. One of the head English teachers from Dante was always present for translation and acted as the school liaison and chaperone during rehearsals, but she preferred to only translate when absolutely necessary. The initial observations of the preservice teachers had a lot to do with everyone's adjusting to the rehearsal process.

Kaitlyn: During actual play rehearsal, it is a joy to see the transformation within the students. At the beginning of the play rehearsals, the students did not know their parts, and they were loud and rowdy. However, their energy has been transferred in the right direction and they are now a part of an organized and upbeat production.

Sarah: Peter Pan is really starting to come along! Though some students seemed reluctant at first to become fully engaged in the acting portion of the musical, they are becoming more comfortable acting out their parts. One student had a part that required him to die off stage so he had to scream, which embarrassed him a little. Then everyone laughed. They started to loosen up and actually perform their lines and speak them loudly with confidence.

Rebecca: Peter Pan rehearsals have been going great! It's so much fun to watch how much these kids have improved already!

Sarah: I am impressed with how well the Italian students are saying and remembering their lines. Even after a few rehearsals I can see improvements.

And then, as time went on, observations turned to how drama might aid the Italian students in the development of stronger English language skills.

Kaitlyn: Practicing lines with Antonio², we had the opportunity to work on tone of voice and the proper inflection for each specific line. This was a good chance for him to connect appropriate emotional context to each of his lines and learn

² The references to Italian students are pseudonyms chosen to reflect the cultural origins and gender of the students.

English beyond just correct pronunciation by focusing on emotional feelings attached to vocabulary. Antonio enjoyed practicing his lines because he was more able to connect with his character.

Mary: Drama gives better understanding of what words mean and the emotions behind certain words.

Sarah: [The Italian English teacher] was talking to us today about how this program added so much to the students' learning of English. She said it was so effective because it was a physical and emotional learning experience for the students. They move and act out the words they are saying in the play, which reinforces their learning.

Preservice teachers observed that the Dante students who were participating in the play were able to connect what they were learning in rehearsals to their English classrooms.

Emma: The students wanted to really learn English and they were applying some of the lines they learned in the classroom.

Mary: I have noticed that the students who are in the play are also the most proficient in their classrooms. I don't know if they are more advanced because of the play or if they were already more advanced, but I know that the play is certainly helping their speaking abilities.

Kaitlyn: It came down to the fluency and the ease of their English. They knew us more and were able to spend more time with us, so they were more comfortable with us in the classroom. I feel like the play helped because we were in an all-English environment so to communicate they had to use English.

According to the preservice teachers, the Dante students were immersed in the English language throughout the rehearsal process. The analysis of the data revealed that this could be helpful to the Italian students.

Blair: As we were walking out, [the Italian English teacher] made a comment to [the director] that the students pick up the dance and lines when she only talks in English. At first I thought the comment was a little exaggerated until I thought about it. These students have to pay close attention, listen, and watch to understand what is going on, whereas if [the director] were to speak only Italian it would most likely go in one ear and out the other.

Vanessa: First we went over the song, and then [the director] broke down each dance move for the students. While she was speaking to the group, I felt like what she was saying was going through one ear and out the other. I was thinking maybe [the Italian English teacher] should say it again in Italian for them. But then I realized by having [the director] speak in English, it required them to pay more attention to the words. Pretty soon, the kids were all singing out loud.

The songs and dances in *Peter Pan the Musical* were a topic regularly discussed in the preservice teachers' journals. Drama alone does not necessarily incorporate singing and dancing, but for musical theatre they play an important role in furthering the action of the story.

Blair: After watching and listening to the singing, I truly believe that song helps the students learn English because they are able to memorize the melody and insert words to fit with the rhythm.

Alice: My first play practice was a blast. It was cool how I could laugh with an Italian student after messing up a dance move. Who knew that dancing could break a language barrier and create mutual laughter.

Emma: They really preferred the songs and dances because they were more confident using English in a group rather than individually. And they learned the English in the songs a lot faster than the lines. I guess because it had a melody. And their pronunciation was so much better in the songs.

The previous comments relate to the coming ones as they address the introduction of new vocabulary, not solely through the script and scripted songs, but through the casual interaction with native English speakers that the rehearsal process fostered.

Vanessa: The music introduces words that the students would not normally be introduced to, words that are not common in conversation.

Alice: At play practice I saw how communicating with the students in this informal setting as opposed to classroom-only relationships will significantly improve their English vocabulary.

Rebecca: These relationships are so sweet and allow us to help them with English even more as we talk to them at rehearsal and when we see them around town.

As the performance of *Peter Pan the Musical* approached, the preservice teachers began reporting breakthroughs in their Italian students' comprehension and confidence during rehearsal.

Emma: This turned out to be the best pirate play practice yet! We went through almost all of our scenes and it seemed that each child finally ‘clicked’ with his or her character. They all seemed to understand the meaning behind their lines and deliver them with more intent and emotion.

Alice: I could immediately tell that she had been practicing on her own. She no longer stumbled over unfamiliar words and mumbled them under her breath. Instead, Rosa sang each word loudly with pride, pronouncing each and every word clearly.

Blair: Then when the time came for him to speak his part he said everything correctly without his script! I am so proud of him!

Motivation to Perform

Several preservice teachers observed that their Italian students were very motivated to learn English and felt that this motivation was a result of their participation in the play.

Alice: It was great to see the students helping each other with lines they were having trouble saying or understanding. They would translate and help their classmates sound out words so they could better perform their parts.

Emma: He’s much more motivated to learn English because of the play. In the classroom he didn’t volunteer answers or talk.

Mary: These students are hard workers. I love seeing their enthusiasm during practice. I can also see how this play will build social skills along with language

skills. The students have to work with instruction, but they also have to come out of their shells to play their parts.

Sarah: It has been exciting to see the excitement of the students throughout the process. I can tell that they are taking great pride in both the play as a whole and their individual roles!

Theatre Made Learning Fun

Another popular topic of discussion was the element of fun. Many preservice teachers observed that the Dante students were having a lot of fun working on the play and concluded that making learning fun was an effective teaching tool.

Sarah: Because it is such a different way of being taught, the students get excited and participate because they enjoy the time they are spending learning English.

Jessica: They seem to be having a lot of fun in rehearsal. I am glad to see this because it shows the students that learning English does not always have to take place in a dull classroom setting.

Emma: I'm not sure the students are truly aware of how beneficial the play is for their English. They just think it's fun, which is how learning should be.

Caleb: I think this production has really helped a lot of the students with their English. It is such a fun way for them to learn and they really are dedicated to learning.

Potential Drawbacks

Some preservice teachers observed potential drawbacks to utilizing drama as a teaching tool for ELLs. One potential drawback is that the Dante students involved could

participate by simply memorizing their lines and still have no comprehension of the English words.

Rebecca: My language partner is doing so well. He understands how to read each line, but when I try to explain the meaning he has a hard time understanding me.

Another potential issue observed is that not all students thrive in a group setting and a play is a communal and inherently performative undertaking. One A&M teacher observed this to be true for her language partner.

Kaitlyn: During play practice in front of all the other children, his motions are often on a smaller scale, he speaks quietly, and he does not connect emotion to his lines. However, when we practice his lines in an individual setting, he does an excellent job incorporating emotion into his lines and dramatizing his character.

It should be considered that the level of anxiety to perform in front of an audience could be debilitating for some learners and thus measures should be taken to consider individual differences. In the case of *Peter Pan the Musical*, all of the Italian students participating wanted to be in the play, but that didn't prevent difficulties from arising at times.

Blair: My inability to speak Italian and his inability to communicate in English frustrates Franco. He hates not being able to get his point across.

Building Empathy for ELLs during Peter Pan the Musical

The program required both preservice teachers and Dante students to work together towards a common goal of performing as an ensemble in *Peter Pan the Musical*. And the

bilingual nature required every performer to take on the task of performing in another language, the language of their partner be it English or Italian. This team effort is true to the nature of any theatrical production. In their reflection journals and interviews the preservice teachers had much to say on the subject of role reversal – teachers being students, and students being teachers.

Kaitlyn: I thought it was interesting to see how the Dante students reacted to having the power to correct their teachers. It was obvious on their faces that they like the little bit of role reversal.

Emma: My favorite thing about this play is that it really puts us on the same level as the students. We are there to help them, but we are just as much out of our comfort zone as they are and I think that has really allowed us to bond with them.

Alice: I enjoyed seeing all of my classroom students at play practice and getting to know them better as friends.

Blair: My language partner was very patient with me and helped me practice each word slowly. To be honest, he giggled a few times because my Italian is not so great, but I took no offense; we are all language learners here!

Being on the same level with their Dante students laid the groundwork for cultural and language empathy building among the preservice teachers. Their observations of what it's like to be a second language learner reveal the effects of this new experience.

Vanessa: This gave me a picture as to what ELLs go through on a daily basis. I had to focus on certain hand gestures or expressions that gave me clues to what was being said.

Kaitlyn: It was really interesting to be on the side that doesn't know the language. I found myself using my observation and inferring skills, looking for gestures or non-verbal hints, and wishing the characters would slow down (their speech). I am sure our students learning English go through the same process.

These observations were made after watching an Italian version of a Peter Pan film at the introductory meeting. Once rehearsals began, there were more observations of being the language learners themselves.

Jessica: During rehearsal we ran through our lines together for the first time, and it was definitely a rough start. I was surprised at how I had more trouble pronouncing my lines than Anna Maria did. It was an eye opening moment though, because I felt as if I had traded places with my Italian students.

The preservice teachers were not singing or receiving direction in a foreign language, but they were required to perform dialogue in Italian.

Jessica: When I try to speak my Italian lines, the students think it is so funny and were constantly correcting me. I like this though, because it gives me perspective on how my students may feel during class.

Vanessa: After looking at my lines, I'm nervous to say them on stage and in Italian! I don't want to pronounce them incorrectly. This gives me a great

perspective into what ELLs experience. Because I am going through a similar experience, I can draw upon this as I work with Giorgio.

Rebecca: When I had to read my lines aloud all the students were laughing so I will definitely need a lot of practice! For the first time, I felt like I was placed in their shoes because it is very challenging to speak a different language.

Emma: Having to learn lines in Italian has shown me how hard it is for an ELL to try to learn a new language.

Kaitlyn: As much as I dread speaking Italian in front of the crowd, it makes me respect the students that much more in their efforts. I believe this exchange of similar experiences in learning a new language teaches both parties valuable lessons.

Mary: I had more empathy for the students learning English because I had to speak Italian and I had no idea what I was saying and the pronunciation was so hard.

Caleb: This play is certainly a challenge. I definitely have empathy for the students. I feel their pain when it comes to memorizing lines.

Because of their participation in *Peter Pan the Musical* and the relationships made with their Italian language partners, the preservice teachers learned how it feels to be a language learner. The empathy created for ELLs encouraged many of them to make plans for carrying this empathy to their future classrooms.

Kaitlyn: Learning my lines in Italian allows me to be in the position of an ELL and experience the other side of the equation learning what type of instruction and communication are most effective.

Mary: Teaching English Language Learners has made me very aware of how I speak. I want to be as clear as possible.

Sarah: Living in Texas it's obvious that we're going to have a lot of ELLs. But I never thought about how that affects those students. This experience has helped me become more aware of what I as a teacher need to do to help them grasp what is being learned.

Emma: I'd never thought about ELLs realistically. I always assumed that, yeah, I was going to have to work with Spanish speaking students living in Texas. But I never actually thought about how it affects them. I think this has definitely made me more aware of their struggles and it makes me more empathetic of what they're going through because I've been on the side where everyone else speaks another language. I definitely want to work with ELLs now.

The preservice teachers continued to reveal cultural empathy developed for their Italian students by making future plans and observations.

Sarah: I think play practice has been a wonderful experience for the Aggies and the Dante students. The Italian students interacting with Aggie students from a different culture, background, language, and from completely different prior experiences, is very beneficial for expanding their worldly knowledge.

Alice: A lot of kids I talked to were very eager to learn English because they said they wanted to be connected to the rest of the world.

Mary: I would love to do something like this for ELLs back in the states and find language partners their own age to help them so that they could bond more and make friends who speak another language.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Peter Pan the Musical was undertaken as an English language enrichment experience, rooted and grown out of the ESL classroom, but breaking through the classroom's limitations and bursting into life on the stage. Many of the study's findings supported existing claims about the benefits of theatre in second language pedagogy. The observations made by preservice teachers in the spring of 2014 support Moody (2002) and Raquel (2011) in their claim that theatre can enhance motivation for learning a new language by providing a communal goal, requiring teamwork, and providing an opportunity for self and peer teaching. The preservice teachers also corroborated the findings of Bernal (2007) who claims that rehearsal times are an ideal arena "for natural language use and teamwork to evolve" (p. 28). Preservice teachers' observations were in line with Heldenbrand (2006)'s idea that "learners want to enjoy the learning process and drama allows them to experiment with language, and laugh at the same time" (p. 37). The study found that there *is* value in product-oriented drama intended for an audience, contrary to the argument made by Maley & Duff (2001) that "other people's words, which have been mechanically memorized, can turn to ashes in the speaker's mouth." Preservice teachers observed that in several cases the performance element of playing a character who speaks English, such as a pirate named Smee or a Lost Boy named Curly, was preferable to speaking English while not performing. The young actor who played Peter Pan is a good example.

Kaitlyn: Lorenzo was so shy and he never spoke up in class or volunteered, but he was confident and outgoing and had a big personality as Peter Pan.

Emma: Franco was always in a bad mood and acted like a grumpy old man in real life, but when he got on that stage as a pirate he was not Franco, he was a pirate and seemed really liberated! And Gaia was another one who was not so confident in class but was a real performer.

This is not to say that all of the ELLs performing in *Peter Pan the Musical* were on the same level, or that their understanding of every word and phrase in the play was complete. There certainly were performers who did not comprehend all of the English to which they were exposed. But this was part of the point of the English immersion experience. One of the preservice teachers related her experience of learning lines in Italian to her overall Italian acquisition.

Mary: This program helped me learn more Italian. Because with some of my lines I didn't really know what I was saying, but then I would see the translation, and then I would speak it and remember what it meant. And then hearing other people talk around me I'm picking up those words and I know what they mean. And I have those words stuck in my head now, so I can build on them.

Another outcome of the program was the creation of a fun English language learning experience for the participating Dante students leaving them with a positive feeling attached to learning English.

Jessica: I know they had fun, they were crying because it was over, and everyone was taking photos.

For the preservice teachers, theatre provided an opportunity to build empathy for their Italian ELLs, which could, in turn, positively affect any ELL that these teachers encounter in their future teaching careers. While this study does not refute Faez (2012)'s argument that empathy alone does not necessarily translate to more effective teaching techniques, it does make a strong case for the value of empathy as a teaching tool. While participating in *Peter Pan the Musical*, preservice teachers not only witnessed first hand the challenges of their ELL performing partners, but they were also required to take on the same challenge in order to perform in Italian. Washburn (2008) believes that these types of experiences can reduce anyone, "on occasion, to the often frustrated and confused state that ELLs experience" (Washburn, 2008, p. 250). And he goes on to claim that these experiences can both encourage the implementation of helpful strategies, and also elicit the desire within preservice teachers to seek out the appropriate training that Faez (2012) encourages.

Even though the findings of this study may not be repeatable in their entirety in another community or program, the observations made by the A&M preservice teachers could still be useful as a reference for the development of new programs with the goal of enhancing second language acquisition through drama or developing teacher empathy for ELLs.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The purpose of the study was to discover in what ways participating in a theatrical production could enhance the language development of ELLs and the development of preservice teacher empathy for ELLs. The findings identified several themes for discussion on these two topics.

Rehearsals were a time for exploration and play. The concept of character was discussed as the combination of voice, given circumstances, and physicality, then put into action, necessitating communication beyond words. The language (lines) in the play were important, but not more important than the dancing, singing, and physical embodiment of fantastical characters such as pirates, Indians, various animals, and children who have the ability to fight and the magic to fly. Sam (1990) emphasizes the importance of the various theatrical elements in the teaching of a second language. He finds that dramatic activities, especially product-oriented activities, require the second language learner to communicate appropriately within the setting of the play and to develop a convincing character, a character who doesn't just speak the lines of a play, but understands how to speak them with her or his whole body in order to portray the true and intended meaning of the words. The preparations and finally the presentation of a play create a dialogue between actors and the director, among the group of actors, and ultimately, between the actors and the audience, requiring that students play an active role in their own education, sharing resources and a common goal.

By the end of the rehearsal process, the Italian students were comfortable with the whole story and their individual roles in sharing that story with the audience. They were also friends with the American performers. The time spent in rehearsal and working one-on-one with language partners allowed close relationships to form. Discussions were taking place before and after rehearsals that were about all sorts of topics, personal, political, cultural, and so on. The rehearsal process allowed everyone to be a student and a teacher at the same time, mutually working towards achieving a common goal – a fantastic performance in a foreign language – whether that language was English for the Italians or Italian for the Americans. Sam (1990) supports the finding that when engaged in theatre the role of the teacher changes from the one dominating the learning situation to someone who is there to provide all the help the students need to play an active role in their own learning.

The findings of the study revealed that the ELLs from Dante were immediately excited to participate in the musical. In rehearsals, they seemed motivated to work hard towards the portrayal of an entertaining version of the Peter Pan story to their public audience. The Dante students utilized their English lines to practice pronunciation, intention, appropriate emotional inflection, and tone of voice. They learned dances and songs in English by paying attention to intentional body language and gesture, and through repetition and context. Heldenbrand (2006) recognizes the benefits of this pedagogical approach to using the whole persona, making language a total physical activity. Even (2008) also emphasizes the importance of whole body communication utilized in theatre. She claims that “drama pedagogy stands out from other teaching and

learning approaches in that both kinesthetic and emotional dimensions are strongly brought into play—the learners have to physically act within a given situation and empathize with others” (p. 162). The preservice teachers witnessed a positive carry-over from theatre rehearsals into their English classrooms, claiming that the Dante students who were participating in the play were more fluent and confident using English than their peers who were not participating in the musical.

The preservice teachers also claimed that the relationships built with their language partners during theatre rehearsals aided the Italian students’ language acquisition through increased exposure to native English language speakers in school and around the small city of Castgion Fiorentino. As for the preservice teachers themselves, these close relationships and the experience of being performers on the same level with their students encouraged cultural empathy to develop for English language learners. Many of them claimed that being put in the position of performing in a new language allowed them to understand how it feels to be a second or additional language learner. Additionally, they claimed that this experience will help them be more understanding of the challenges that ELLs face and improve their techniques when working with ELLs in their future classrooms. Finally, the study revealed that the experience of rehearsing and performing *Peter Pan the Musical* was fun for both the American preservice teachers and the Italian students.

Kaitlyn: In the end it was just beautiful! The kids were happy and I had a blast!

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

The observations revealed in the study were from the perspective of participants who were intellectually and emotionally invested in the findings. There were no objective or outside observations shared. Also, I was personally invested in making the theatrical experience a positive and effective language learning opportunity. So it is possible that the study was skewed towards positive findings.

In addition to potential bias, the study had other limitations. Only the Texas A&M preservice teachers' observations were revealed and discussed in this qualitative analysis. It could have also been advantageous to collect the observations of other participating parties, such as the Italian middle school students themselves or their teachers and families. As this was a qualitative study, the results are not useful for providing statistical evidence of the efficacy of theatre as a teaching tool for ELLs. More directed assessment of language acquisition among Italian middle school students who participated in *Peter Pan the Musical*, in comparison with their peers who chose not to participate, could have been beneficial in the ongoing conversation about the efficacy of theatre as a teaching tool for English Language Learners.

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