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A CASE STUDY OF NON-NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

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**A CASE STUDY OF NON-NATIVE ENGLISH-SPEAKING INTERNATIONAL
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN A COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

By

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M.A., Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages, Southern Illinois University, 2008

DISSERTATION

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Requirements for the Degree of

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to the participants of this research and the students throughout my teaching career who have encouraged me to complete this study. You have motivated me to learn, teach, and enjoy life. They say if you love your job, you will never have to work another day in your life. If I ever had a bad day, I knew you would find a way to make me laugh. Thank you for reminding me that I am not only teacher, but I am also a student. I would also like to thank the wonderful teachers and administrators of my department who helped me complete this study. Thank you for your love, help, and support. I would also like to dedicate this study to my family, especially my mother and father, who sacrificed a lot for me to be here and whose prayers led me to succeed. To my loving grandmother, Teresa Macias who taught me never to give up. I would also like to thank my daughter for believing in me and I am sorry that this study took time away from you. Last but not least, I would like to dedicate this study to my best friend, my husband who supported me and helped me through this study. We did it together! I thank and love you all.

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ABSTRACT

The social identity construction of international students studying in the United States is important to the field of second language learning and the study of identity. A Social Identity and Communities of Practice (CoP) framework were used to understand how participation in a CoP informed the identity of non-native speaking university international students studying in the U.S. The focus of this study was to investigate how participation in a CoP informed the identity of non-native speaking international university students studying in the U.S. I proposed that these frameworks provided a foundation for understanding how participation in a CoP for non-native English-speaking university students informed their international student identity. Furthermore, this study showed how participation in a CoP contributed to the participants' sense of belonging. Data collected for this study included audio recordings of the group and individual interviews, notes from the observation of the CoP, audio recordings of the CoP observations, and notes of researcher's thoughts. Several major themes emerged including: *Identity, Language, and Aspects of Communities of Practice*. These themes described why this group of students decided to belong to this

particular CoP, their motivation for attending and participating in this CoP, and their experiences in the CoP. Results of this study addressed that participating in a CoP helped participants inform their international student identity and a sense of belonging.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	xii
List of Tables	xiii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
Identity	3
Identity and language.....	6
Community of Practice	8
Background of the Problem	9
Statement of the Problem.....	16
Purpose of the Study and Questions Addressed	17
Conceptual Assumptions, Researcher Stance, and Operational Definitions	18
Conceptual assumptions.....	18
Researcher stance.....	18
Operational definitions.....	20
Rationale and Theoretical Framework.....	21
Importance of the Study.....	22
Scope and Delimitations of the Study.....	22
Chapter 2 Review of Related Literature.....	24
Evolution of the Framework	24
Major Changes in CoP to Present	25
Different Applications of CoP	25
Education and medical fields.....	26
Business.....	28

Related Perspectives	29
Activity Theory/CHAT.....	29
Sociocultural Theory.....	31
Language Socialization.....	32
Social Identity Theory.....	34
Key components and tenets.....	34
Major contributions to SIT.....	34
Different perspectives on SIT	36
Second Language Acquisition.....	36
Related Perspectives	37
Ethnic identity.....	37
Cultural identity.....	37
Identity theory.....	38
Chapter 3 Methods	43
Research Design and Overview	44
Participants.....	44
Selection of the Participants and the CoP.....	45
Recruitment of the CoP.....	46
Permission from the group.....	47
Recruitment of participants and consent.....	48
Data Collection	48
Observations.....	49
Interviews.....	50

Initial interview.....	51
Group interview.....	51
Final interview.....	52
Researcher’s journal.....	52
Data Analysis.....	53
Transcription.....	53
Tools.....	53
Procedures.....	54
Trustworthiness.....	56
Privacy.....	56
Confidentiality.....	57
Data storage.....	57
Software security.....	58
Other confidentiality measures.....	59
Chapter 4 Results.....	60
Description of Research and Participants.....	60
Anna.....	62
Barbie.....	62
Brian.....	63
Cris.....	63
Mary.....	64
Monique.....	64
Trump.....	64

Research Findings	66
Aspects of Communities of Practice	70
Mutual engagement	70
Joint enterprise	79
Shared repertoire	91
Identity and Language	98
Self-identity	99
Social Identity	108
Feelings about language proficiency.	112
Summary	116
Chapter 5 Discussion	118
Discussion of Results	119
Identity and language	119
Aspects of Communities of Practice	126
Mutual engagement	126
Joint enterprise	129
Shared repertoire	130
Limitations	134
Implications	137
Future research	137
Practical applications	139
Suggestions for intensive English language programs.	139
Recommendations for universities	141

Suggestions for adult ESL educators.....	142
Suggestions for international students.....	144
Conclusions.....	144
Appendices.....	150
Appendix A Initial Interview Questions.....	151
Appendix B Focus of Group Observation.....	152
Appendix C Group Interview Questions.....	153
Appendix D Possible Final Interview Questions.....	154
Appendix E Transcription Rules.....	155
References.....	156

List of Figures

Figure 1. Conversation group. 65

Figure 2. Research Findings. 70

List of Tables

Table 1: Possible Codes	55
Table 2: Observation Participants and Observation/Interview Participants	61
Table 3: Themes, Subthemes, and Components	69

Chapter 1

Introduction

Moving to a new country can affect a person's social identity. According to Ullman (1998), the experience of moving to a new country may have a great impact on a person; some people experience this alteration more "as an act of recreation than as a temporary period of adjustment" (p. 1). Ullman stated that these changes are complex and they necessarily continue to redefine the notion of self.

In the case of international students, some factors may hinder their adjustment to a new country and social identity. Research showed that some factors impact the way international students adjust to United States university academics (Briguglio, 2011; Loach, 2004; Osborne, 2012; Thanasoulas, 2001). For many, learning English is one of those challenges (Ikegulu, 1999). Ikegulu explained that some international students struggle with the language of social communication and instruction thus making it difficult to learn in English-speaking classrooms. According to Ikegulu, students usually enter college with high levels of reading ability, but with limited conversational skills or they need more help in reading, writing, and speaking.

International students face problems adjusting to the English used in the new setting because they are "taught by non-native speakers of English or speakers of a local or national variety of English, which possesses different discourse conventions, different vocabulary, and different grammar" (Osborne, 2012, p. 1040). Osborne argued that the variety of English is not their only difficulty. Regardless of the students' level of English, international students may have never used Academic English, which may be not only difficult for the international student, but also for native English-speaking students. Several authors have found that

language barriers within a group may make it difficult for an individual to position him or herself in a community, thus possibly having an effect on their identity (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982; Norton & Toohey, 2010). International students' experience may also cause identity conflict within various groups, due to the adjustment of a new culture and the judgments and misperceptions of their culture (Brown & Brown, 2012; Gudykunst, 1998; Hofstede, 2001; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). However, individuals in groups who have established and share social identities may be better able to communicate with other groups (Eastman, 1985).

Previous studies have also shown that international students who participated in activities in either American or international student groups had a positive experience studying in the U.S. International students who reported frequent positive cross-cultural contact with Americans through activities such as discussions and outings were less likely to experience loneliness and homesickness, and they had a better experience in the U.S. compared to other international students in this study who did not participate in any group activities (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006). Research shows that international students who establish and participate in ethnic communities are able to "better maintain their cultural identities and reproduce aspects of their native cultural environments" (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998, p. 700). Bonds created in these communities may help international students cope and resolve problems during their adjustment period (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998). Social identity is acquired when an individual feels that he or she has become a competent member of a group (Eastman, 1985). These groups help build communicative competence and knowledge, which may establish an individual's social identity (Eastman, 1985). In the following sections, I will

explain different theories on identity and how they are crucial in helping an individual become part of a community or group.

Identity

In the previous paragraphs, I discussed various factors both the positive and negative impacts that can affect the social adjustment of an international student's identity. In this section, I will examine the theories of social identity, how participation in groups influences identity, and how identity and language play a crucial role in becoming part of a group.

Theories on identity deal with social formation, cultural interpretation, and markers of membership (Wenger, 2006). One of the main contributors to social identity was Tajfel (1972). According to Tajfel, social identity is defined as "the individual's knowledge that he/she belongs to particular social group together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership" (p. 31). Another author on the work on identity was Giddens (1991), who defined identity as the ongoing continuation of how the "self" comprehends who it is through the interactions with others and how the "self" understands and labels itself. Therefore, it can be conjectured from the definitions of social identity that an individual's awareness is based on his or her feeling that they belong to a group by interacting, and being able to establish that they belong to a group.

Similar to the work of Giddens (1991), Holland, Lachiocotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) stated that identities are unplanned and emerge from activity or cultural resources; therefore, groups are "caught in the tensions between past histories that have settled in them" (p. 4), and are affected by present discourses. It is through activity and social interaction that the meaning of identity is processed (Burke & Reitzes, 1991). Burke and Reitzes explained that individuals use their identities as thermostats to look at different interactions, which help

people to engage in behaviors that either maintain or reestablish affiliation between identities. Wenger's (1998) concept of identity is similar to that of Burke and Reitzes (1991). He stated that we define who we are by the ways we experience ourselves through participation and continue to reify our identity. In other words, participation can help an individual form and continue to shape identity.

To better explain the concept of developing identity through participation, Tonso (2006) stated that identity is not something that people express about themselves or something that just appears, but our learning communities can shape it. Several authors suggested that identity is shaped through the negotiation of meanings through experience (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Norton, 1997; Wenger, 1998). Wenger pointed out that identity is shaped in our communities through a person's ability and inability, and building identity is created through negotiating of meanings in experiences of membership in social communities.

Conversely, from an anthropological perspective, Barab and Duffy (2000) stated that it is not only meanings that are produced by interactions, but both identities and experience are shaped. The explanation for this production is that communication established and created by all of the components are "individual, content, and context" (Barab & Duffy, 2000, p. 29). It is hard to distinguish between the development of knowledge skills and the development of identities; both come from the participation of an individual and both are important to a community of practice (CoP) (Barab & Duffy, 2000). As mentioned previously, it is hard to differentiate the development of identities versus knowledge skills because they come from the participation of an individual in a CoP. Although, it would be

interesting to look at these two concepts, I only looked at participation in a CoP and whether it had an influence on international student identity.

Identity has thus been defined, discussed in regards to interaction and participation, but it is important to discuss the construction in social contexts. Identity is complex due to its construction in social settings (Wenger, 1998). Our identities incorporated the past and the future in the process of negotiating the present (Wenger, 1998). Norton (1997) applied these same concepts to her view on identity. Norton described identity as how people understand their relationship to the world and how these relationships can lead to something different for the future. A comparison of these concepts on relationships pertains to work of Montgomery (2010). According to Montgomery, membership in a social network, or social capital, requires advantage both socially and educationally. Therefore, membership or relationships made are discussed here as being part of an individual's social capital. Bourdieu (1986) considered social capital as credentials people acquire through their social connections to help keep their social positions and power. Bourdieu believes that these credentials entitle individuals to economic, social, and cultural capital. Similarly, Wenger (1998) asserted that participation and reification work together to influence a CoP. Wenger claimed that participation in a practice “can have control over meaning that can be created in context and the kinds of person that participants can become” (p. 93). According to Wenger, the practice serves as a sense of stability when power differences favor specific purposes. Bourdieu, Montgomery, and Wenger’s construct on social capital speaks to a class discussion I had with former students about university experiences and goals. In a class discussion focused on literature and academic integration into the academic curriculum, some students stated that learning English and passing the TOEFL exam (Test of English as a Foreign Language) was

important to their perception of themselves as students and discussed the opportunities that came with passing the TOEFL. One student stated that his scholarship, funded by the government, had strict policies on passing the TOEFL exam. Another student expressed that passing the TOEFL exam was very critical, because it would help him find a better job in his country and help him be part of an elite community. Students not only discussed the importance of this test, but also stated that they formed study groups to help pass the exam and would share TOEFL books and notes within their group. Although this research is not focused on how identity is informed after students return to their home country, this example helped me understand why students form a CoP and why they participate in them.

Identity and language. Identity has been influenced by social interaction, negotiation through group membership, and how one positions himself or herself in an environment. I have not yet discussed identity in relation to how an individual obtains identity and how language is used to express his or her identity. Montgomery (2010) claimed that we show and construct our identity. However, Davis (2006) comparatively added looking at identity through legitimate peripheral participation. Davis (2006) stated that, "legitimate peripheral participation expands the understanding of identity development in context and provides a language with which to express the processes that occur in identity development" (p. 2). Concerning speaking, Maynard (2001) recommended that talking helps the learner with information "not only about how to proceed, but also about meanings, norms and ways of knowing that are peculiar to the particular community of practice" (p. 41). According to Ochs (1993), speakers may use a verbal act or stance in an attempt to construct not only their own identities but also the social identities of their interlocutors. Ochs noted that a community depends on its members and their knowledge of "social convention", this in turn builds social

identities (p. 289). Moreover, particular discourses supply individuals with terms that help create and negotiate identity (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). In other words, language is used as a tool to communicate, construct, and help an individual negotiate identity within a CoP.

Research showed that language also influences how a person is viewed in society; for example, "personal judgments and many other societal evaluations are grounded in the individual's ability to talk well and make a good presentation of himself or herself" (Gumperz, 1982, p. 4). For instance, Heller (1987) argued that it is through language that a person gains or is denied access to networks. Aguilar (2010) asserted that "language(s) allow the participants in a social encounter to attribute and claim identities as they interact, and gestures and intonation are other instances of meaning-conveying language-related resources that allow the construction of identities" (p. 15). In previous sections, language helped to construct identity, but in this section, it is a tool to gain access to networks.

Language can be utilized as a means to help gain access to networks, but it can also cause problems for individuals. Gumperz (1982) addressed that problems can arise in communication when people come from different backgrounds thus creating alterations to a person's identity. An example of Gumperz's statement would pertain to the difficulty some international students have when moving to the U.S. and using English. Morita (2004) stated that it 's hard to speak when language is a barrier, and it may create a problem when negotiating identity in a CoP.

Identity has been explained in many different ways in the previous sections, however, for this study, I looked at how participation in a CoP for non-native English-speaking

university students informed their international identity. I will explain the research design of this study in Chapter 3.

Overall, identity pieces discussed in previous sections, state that identity shapes our communities through a person's participation, and building identity is created through negotiating of meanings in experiences of membership in social communities (Wenger, 1998). In the following paragraphs, I explain how the CoP framework posits that through participation and how it influences identity.

Community of Practice

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share a common interest in something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly (Wenger, 2006). However, the word community suggests that there are shared images that involve behaviors, language, and other components that describe the importance of a community (Christiansen, 1999). Wenger (2006) stated that people interact in groups old or new and their identities influence one another. Wenger (1998) added that belonging to a society or to a group shapes our identity. To Wenger, identity is a negotiated experience. He stated that we define who we are by our engagement in communities of practice. Wenger (1998) suggested that participation shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do. Wenger outlines the importance of identity through community membership and the sense of belonging in the following section. The components include some of the following aspects:

- a) mutual engagement: being included in what matters is a requirement for being engaged in a community's practice, just as engagement is what defines belonging;
- b) joint enterprise: it is the negotiated response to the type of situation in the community

and is not just a stated goal, but creates among the participants relationships of mutual accountability that become an integral part of the practice ; c) shared repertoire: It includes the discourse by which members create meaningful statements about the world, as well as the styles by which they express their forms of membership and their identities as members. (p. 74-83)

Mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire are all part of the components that help clarify what aspects are important in belonging to a CoP. However, the most important attribute of Wenger's discussion on a CoP is that identity is shaped through belonging and participating in a CoP.

Wenger (1998) clarified that identity is commonly classified as self-image, but an identity "is a layering of events of participation and reification by which our experience and its social interpretation inform each other" (p. 151). Wenger pointed out that as we experience life and develop relationships with others in the world, we build layers that make up our identity through a combination of participation and reification. As Wenger explained, bringing participation and reification together through the negotiation of meaning, we construct our identity.

Background of the Problem

For the purpose of this study, I utilized the definition of international students used by Stevens, Emil, and Yamashita (2010) and Ikeglu (1999). Stevens et al. classified international students as "individuals enrolled in higher education institutions who are on temporary student visas and are non-native English speakers" (p. 348). Ikegulu defined international students as non-immigrants who are temporarily living in the U.S. for a period of time to pursue higher education; by law they are to return to their countries of origin. For this study,

I focused on international university students who have come from non-English-speaking countries to study at postsecondary institutions in the United States.

In the following sections I will discuss studies on international students. I will describe both positive and negative effects of forming a CoP. In some studies, a CoP was either difficult to develop due to barriers such as language or cultural differences in the host environment. Nevertheless, results showed that not being a part or being part of a CoP affected the identity of international students. In a study conducted by Koehne (2005), results indicated that being part of a community was easier for one group more than another because a community was established with other international students. For the international students in Morita's (2004) study, building a community was difficult because the English language appeared to be a barrier affecting their identity. Halic, Greenburg, and Paulus (2009) also found that students' language barriers affected the way they accessed the academic community of practice, thus making it difficult for them to negotiate the meanings of their new identities. In other studies, international students formed a CoP, which helped their academic experiences and success (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Montgomery & McDowell's, 2009). In the sections below, I will discuss how each study looked at participation in a CoP and how it discussed identity. These studies are relevant to the background of the problem because they discuss how language can affect the identity of an international student. Not being able to participate in groups because students feel that their English is not proficient enough, informs the identity of the student in negative ways. The importance of this study is to understand how participation in a CoP contributes to a sense of belonging. Without feeling an individual belongs to a group will discourage him or her from participating and adapting to an academic environment.

Koehne (2005) interviewed twenty-five international students from South East Asia, China, Europe, Africa and South America. The participants were graduate and undergraduate students at three universities in Victoria, Australia. Koehne looked at the components of constructed storylines; about who they are as international students and reconstructing story lines about self. Koehne found that most international students talked about being part of a community of international students and made these groups of friends in their English language courses before they started their university studies. Other results from this study showed that students made friends with other international students or people they lived with, but many students complained that they were unable to make friends with Australian students. Many students complained about their lack of contact with domestic students and had a lack of interest in forming friendships with them. Koehne concluded that Australian culture was a factor in the difficulty of students adjusting and trying to make friendships. Koehne found from this study that students create two identities between the culture they come from and the culture they are studying in, and they find a way to negotiate between the two. The students in Koehne's study talked about the shifting between both cultures as part of who they are and their identity as international students. Based on this research, the identity of international students was influenced by the host culture and of their own culture, but a community of international students was created because the international students in this study found it difficult to make friends with Australians. The students formed groups from previous English classes taken together, the places they lived in, and from groups of fellow nationals.

In another study on international students and a CoP, Morita (2004) studied six female, first-year master's degree students from Japan in three different departments—

language, education, educational studies, and Asian studies. All participants were born in Japan and considered Japanese their first language and were classified as international students from Japan. Morita found significant challenges for the international students relating to identity. The analysis from Morita's study suggested that "students were negotiating discourses, competence, identities, and power relations so that they could participate and be recognized as a legitimate and competent member of a given classroom community" (p. 583). The results of Morita's study supported Stryker's and Burke's (2000) contention that group membership could either "reinforce or impede various forms of participation" (p. 291). Morita found that students created different identities for themselves and saw themselves as less competent because they did not participate as much in class and were worried about what other students and the teacher felt about them. These types of feelings are related to what Arensdorf (2008) discussed as a learners' existing linguistic development. Arensdorf explained that individuals attribute these kinds of feelings because they feel they lack communication skills.

This next phenomenological study conducted by Halic, Greenburg, and Paulus (2009) explored the experiences of non-native English-speaking international students regarding language, culture, and identity. The findings of this study suggested that language and cultural identity are essential to the academic experiences of non-native speakers. The participants were eight international graduate students at a university in a southeastern city in the U.S. A mixed purposeful sample was used to find participants. According to Halic et al., the following criteria were used to select participants: a) English was not their native language; b) English was not the primary language of communication in their country nor had they lived before in a country where English was the spoken language; and c) their

experience of living abroad was not recent, specifically 1-3 years. Participants were from seven different countries--Brazil, China, Korea, Russia, Turkey, Thailand, and Venezuela. The participants' age range was from 24 to 38 years. Three of the participants were female, and five were male students. The students were contacted by email or phone to participate in a one-time interview. The one-on-one interview was conducted, and questions were open-ended. Halic et al. (2009) characterized that the findings were broken down into 4 themes:

Mastering the language: *You know you sound wrong*, The meaning of language proficiency: *English is alive*, Language and academic identity: *I feel I'm in-between*, and Joining a new community of practice: *You have to start all over again*. (p. 79)

In Halic et al.'s (2009) study, English was seen as a form of access to other cultures. English was used as the primary form of communication to both American and international student cultures. Halic et al.'s findings showed that the characteristics of the American educational system were hard for their participants as they tried to negotiate the meanings of their new identity. Research from Halic et al.'s study revealed that participants had difficulty accessing the academic community, because of the English language proficiency and differences in home academic culture.

Contrary to Morita's (2004) study, language did contribute to the identity of the participants, and it affected their participation in a CoP. To highlight the importance of participation, Arensdorf (2008) stated that if an individual stops participation, this may lead to the limitation of linguistic development and "the ability of a learner to participate in a community of practice is critical to their development, both academically, and personally" (p. 7). Other difficulties that might limit international students from building their academic identity are being rejected from a group. Montgomery (2010) observed that the strength a

social network provided might have a negative effect when individuals are not included, as they are viewed as someone who is different. Montgomery (2010) proposed that social capital has an influence on the relationships that international students form in their experience in Higher Education. Montgomery (2010) explained that the transition from home to host country causes international students to lose social capital that was established in their countries of origin. Conversely, research on international students building a CoP with other international students or with students with similar cultural background has proven to be successful in helping build healthy relationships, self-esteem, and adjust to the new culture (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009).

A CoP has helped international students build strong relationships. For example, Montgomery and McDowell (2009) conducted a qualitative research study on a group of seven international students. The study sought to investigate the role of social networks in the academic and personal experiences of international students. Snowball sampling was used to select the students, and more than one nationality was included in the study. The study was focused on the factors that were "involved in the international student's experience of social contact and focused on the relationships that students formed both in their academic activity and the environment that surrounds the classroom" (p. 456). The results of this study showed that the international students in this group formed an active CoP at a Chess Club to support each other. The students would help each other with homework, proofreading papers, and discussing different aspects of their work. Montgomery (2010) stated that it is easier for groups to work together when they share the same values and ideas. In the case of the CoP of the international students in this study being part of a CoP helped them get through difficult times in adjusting to a new culture.

Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) conducted a similar study to that of Montgomery and McDowell (2009) on international students building a CoP with students with similar cultural backgrounds. Researchers in this study found that a group representing 175 international students from a variety of nations had established strong relationships with people with similar cultural backgrounds and the second group of 51 international students who had not developed relationships with people from similar cultural backgrounds. Nationalities of the groups were not provided. Results showed that the number of strong relationships with students from similar cultural background had the most stable relationship with the personal adjustment of international students. Al-Sharideh and Goe specified that the connection between assimilation of American culture and individual adjustment relied on the number of strong relationships built with international students from similar cultural backgrounds while creating relationships with Americans was based on the personal adjustment. However, the study showed that becoming too integrated with an ethnic community could cause problems to the self-esteem of international students. The researchers suggested that personal networks with Americans could help international students assimilate to American culture.

Although language was not discussed in the first study as being part of the problem for international students creating a CoP, the local culture was. For Halic et al. (2009), language was one of the factors that hindered students' ability to build on their new academic identity. Halic et al. (2009) and Koehne's (2005) studies both suggested that international students had problems adjusting to a new culture. The international students in Koehne's study pointed out that they could not get used to the casual culture of their host country and were unable to make friends with domestic students. Imagined communities for the international students in Koehne's study could not be established because of culture, because

as Koehne's study explained "there is a crucial link between language and cultural identity and perceived personal attachment to present, past or imagined communities" (Montgomery, 2010, p. 99). All of these studies show that international students try to negotiate their own identities to fit into a community, whether forming their own community of practice or seeking to join a community of practice.

In conclusion, each study discussed in the paragraphs above pointed out different experiences students had by belonging to a CoP, but in all of the studies researchers reported the influence a CoP had on the identity of international students. Some studies mentioned students were able to feel like they belonged to a group while others struggled to join them.

Statement of the Problem

I believe that it is important to consider the study of identity and international students for a number of reasons. First of all, there is a need for more research on understanding how non-native English-speaking international students construct their identity through participation in a CoP (Morita, 2004). Secondly, there is lacking research in understanding how identity plays an active role in the interaction of international students (Norton, 2000). Thirdly, attention needs to be paid to international students in the United States since the United States since it is the leading country in international student enrollment (Ortaçtepe, 2013). Given these points, there are only a few articles in the United States (Ortaçtepe, 2013) that focus on social identity construction of international students in L2 socialization research.

The studies discussed above are extremely useful because it sheds light on the lack of research in the United States on how participation in groups informs the identity of international students. In addition, how participation in groups can help students adjust to

another environment. To support the premise on the importance of this study, I will point out other researchers who agree that further research on identity is needed (Halic, Greenberg, & Paulus, 2009; Haugh, 2008; Koehne, 2005; Montgomery, 2010). Haugh argued that previous research on identity "premised on the assumption that what international students say can be equated with their identities, without critical attention being paid to the way in which their identities emerge as a conjoint interaction" (p. 207). When researching articles for this study, I found international students clumped into one group in regard to how individual groups of international students adjust to a new academic community. Koehne emphasized that "international students cannot be defined as the 'the other' in opposition to local students, but need to be examined more carefully in their own right as agents who both reconstruct their own multiple subjectivities" (p. 247-248). Norton (2000) argued, "SLA theorists have struggled to conceptualize the relationship between the language learner and the social world because they have not developed a comprehensive theory of identity that integrates the language learner and the language learning context" (p. 4). Based on the recommendations of researchers (Haugh, 2008; Koehne, 2005; and Norton, 2000), there is lacking research in the area of understanding how identity plays an active role in interaction, because research on identity negotiation and participation has commonly been studied in the classroom. Research is also needed in studying interactions outside of the classroom (Block, 2007; Duff, 2002). Therefore, a study on the way international students construct their identity through participation in a CoP outside of the classroom environment needs consideration.

Purpose of the Study and Questions Addressed

The social identity construction of international students studying in the U.S. is lacking in literature. Understanding this growing population of students is not only important

in the field of second language learning but also relevant to American universities who depend on the funding of these students. Therefore, the purpose of this dissertation was to investigate how participation in a CoP informed the identity of non-native English-speaking university international students studying in the U.S.

This dissertation addressed the following questions:

1. How does participation in a CoP for non-native English-speaking university students inform their international student identity?
2. How does participation in a CoP contribute to a sense of belonging?

Conceptual Assumptions, Researcher Stance, and Operational Definitions

Conceptual assumptions. A number of researchers have argued that language plays a key role in identity formation (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Collier, 2001; Norton, 1997; Christiansen, 1999; Montgomery, 2010; Morita, 2004). Norton and Toohey (2002) characterized language learning as being part of a learner's identity because it carries great value; a person can be judged based on the way he or she speaks. It is argued that socialization to language and socialization through language is a bidirectional process (Ochs, 1986). Language socialization defines success as the ability to communicate in the language of a particular community and to act according to its norms (Kramsch, 2002). Therefore, I assume that learning a new language in a different setting will instigate at the very least, some minor shifts in one's identity. These descriptions of language and identity were important to this study because they helped me look at identity through a CoP.

Researcher stance. I firmly believe that looking at how non-native English-speaking international university students construct their identity through participating in a CoP is an area of research that needs consideration. This belief stems both from investigation of the

professional literature and personal and professional experiences. As an educator in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), I feel that it is my responsibility to continue learning about the experiences of international students.

I am not an international student, but I am a wife, friend, and teacher of non-native English-speaking international students. Understanding how international students construct their cultural identity through participation in a CoP is not just research, but rather it will serve as a guide to help me understand the experiences of those I love and teach. Over the past ten years, I have taught international students and have studied in the field of TESOL. Interest in this topic came from working, socializing, and listening to the experiences of international students as they tried to participate in new communities. In many of these discussions, language or culture played a significant role in the ways they sought to adjust to their new community. This study helped me learn more about a CoP and perhaps more about their role in identity formation.

I took an interest in this research far more than I could have imagined I would. My personal journey in becoming an academic is related to this study. I never felt that I would be able to get to a doctoral program. I struggled and still struggle in some areas of academia and within myself. I grew up only seeing white professors in the academic community. The professors I knew who were Ph.D.'s taught Spanish. Even though my parents went to college, I still felt that higher education was something difficult to achieve. Sometimes our culture puts barriers on what we can and cannot do and we grow up letting ourselves believe that we cannot do any better. For example, when I went to do my Master's in Illinois, the Mexican people I met thought that I was there to work in the local orchard. To some people it has not clicked that women or for that matter, a Mexican woman, could ever be a doctor/earn

a PhD. It was not until I came to study at this university in the southwest that I had Latina professors in my department. Being able to talk to other teachers who were Latina or who worked with students from similar backgrounds as myself helped me work on my own cultural stereotypes that I was building inside of me. I'm not saying that I still do not struggle or that I still don't get offended when people see me as a walking phenomenon because I am doing my Ph.D. All I can say is that I'm working on this part of my identity.

Furthermore, I have learned that the only thing in this world that can make you feel that you are not worthy to accomplish your goals is yourself. Through hard work and keeping the spirit of a student, you can learn, and teach yourself how to achieve the goals you set out for yourself. With regard to the same topic, it has been a long and hard journey to understand how an academic community works and how to use it to help me reach my goals. I see the same struggle in the students I teach. Through my own personal experience as a student and a teacher, I have learned that there are communities that you belong to that do not always offer the support you need, but luckily, I have become part of a CoP that has helped me through my dissertation process. The doctoral group that I am a part of has helped me build my academic research skills. Participating in my doctoral group, working with my students, and being a student has helped spark my interest in this research and has helped me shape my identity as a researcher.

Operational definitions. For the purpose of this dissertation I used the following definitions:

- A) Community of Practice as a focus (CoP)—is a group of people who share a common interest in something they do and learn how to do it better as they regularly interact (Wenger, 2006).

- B) Community of Practice as a theoretical framework—used as an approach to understanding how people work together in a group to reach a common goal.
- C) International Students—for the purpose of this study I employed the term used by Stevens, Emil, Yamashita (2010) and Ikeglu (1999). Stevens et al. (2010) classified international students as “individuals enrolled in higher education institutions who are on temporary student visas and are non-native English speakers” (p. 348).

International students, as defined by Ikegulu, are non-immigrants who are temporarily living in the U.S. for a period to pursue higher education; by law, they are to return to their countries of origin. For this study, I focused on international university students who came from non-English-speaking countries to study at postsecondary institutions in the United States (Reid, 1997).

- D) Social identity— social identity is an individual’s awareness that he or she belongs to a group and feels that they belong to a group by interacting, and being able to establish to themselves that they belong to a group.

Rationale and Theoretical Framework

In this research, I used the theoretical framework of Social Identity Theory (SIT) through Communities of Practice (CoP). “Social identity is defined as ‘the individual’s knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social group together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership” (Tajfel, 1972, p. 31). I discussed SIT in detail in Chapter 2 and how it is used through a CoP. CoP was classified in two different forms in this study as defined in the operational definition section. CoP was used as (a) focus, as a group of people who share a common interest and come together to learn and interact

and (b) as an approach to understanding how people work together in a group to reach a common goal.

Importance of the Study

The importance of this study was to figure out if participation in a CoP for non-native English-speaking university students helps inform their international student identity. The information of this study would be of interest to researchers in the fields of identity and students who would like to learn about the influence of a CoP in their lives. This study also contributed to the lack of research in the field of identity and helped understand how participation in a CoP may help international students' sense of belonging. To add to this perspective, Haugh (2008) argued that previous research on identity focused on international student identity, but lacked attention in understanding how "identities emerge as a conjoint interaction" (p. 207). From a researcher's standpoint, this study is relevant and timely for current topics in higher education, which I have seen as an area of interest in TESOL Quarterly. Nonetheless, the contributions of this study should be of value to universities who are trying to keep their international student enrollment and learn how they can better serve this diverse group of students.

Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The purpose of this research was to look at the experiences of non-native English-speaking international university students and to investigate if participation in a CoP informs their international student identity and their sense of belonging. In this research, I only look at non-native English-speaking international university students. I did not observe international students that came from countries where English was one of the official languages. In this research, I only included non-native English-speaking international

university students attending a university in the southwest. I used a pseudonym for the participants and the site of the research. This study was qualitative and included a thematic analysis. I looked for themes across the data collection. I discuss how I conducted my study in detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

This chapter discusses the origin of Social Identity and Communities of Practice, the two major frameworks that were used to support this study. The chapter examines how the frameworks were used in different fields and how it has changed throughout the years. Furthermore, this chapter will review related and different perspectives of these two frameworks. In addition, this chapter looks at the key components and major contributions made to the frameworks.

Evolution of the Framework

Wenger is the scholar associated with Communities of Practice (CoP), although Jean Lave was also critical to the development of this framework. Wenger continued to refine the concept of CoP in his 1998 book *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. The fundamental tenets of CoP are frequently associated with activity theory/CHAT (Cultural-Historical Activity Theory), sociocultural theory, and language socialization. I will describe these approaches in detail later in this chapter.

Wenger (1998) argued that the concept of CoP has been around for many years; however, the term “communities of practice” emerged from Lave and Wenger’s 1991 book *Situated Learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Lave and Wenger were at the Institute for Research on Learning in 1988 investigating how people learn. As documented in their 1991 text, they began to talk about learners as apprentices and were unclear of what this meant to their research. Later their observations suggested that people learn from watching and doing. Lave and Wenger (1991) noted that “mastery of knowledge requires newcomers to move toward full participation in the sociocultural practices of a community” (p. 29).

According to Lave and Wenger (1991), learning viewed as situated activity has as its central defining characteristic a process that is called legitimate peripheral participation.

Major Changes in CoP to Present

In 1998 Wenger's book geared towards knowledge management. However, in his book, Wenger discussed that he and Lave in 1991 pointed out that the concepts of identity and CoP were relevant to their argument, but they were not given the spotlight and were left unanalyzed. Therefore, Wenger has given specific attention to identity and discussed how it influences a CoP in his 1998 book. Cox (2005) agreed that communities of practice were not clearly defined by Lave and Wenger in their 1991 book; it was not established until 1998 in Wenger's book. Wenger's definition of a CoP, contended Cox, is a group that coheres through '*mutual engagement*' on an '*indigenous*' (or appropriated) enterprise and creating a common repertoire. Cox explained that Wenger focused on identity and that Wenger particularly stressed the importance of trajectories through different levels of participation in a community and the tensions of multi-membership of various communities as a fundamental dilemma for the individual.

Different Applications of CoP

In this section, I will discuss various applications of CoP. CoP has reached areas in academic, business, government, education, health, and the civil sector, and it has been expanding into other fields of research. According to Cox (2005), the "ambiguities of the terms community and practice are a source of the concept's reusability allowing it to be appropriated for different purposes, academic and practical" (p. 527). Wenger (2010) found that "in an organization in the private and public sectors, CoP has provided a vehicle for peer-to-peer learning among practitioners" (p. 187). Wenger's (2010) additional work used

with communities of practice has extended into different disciplines. Wenger stressed that it would be impossible to list all the applications of the concept used for CoP.

Education and medical fields. CoP is utilized in education and the medical fields. As assessed by Wenger (2010), in education, communities of practice are primarily used for professional development, but they also focus on learning and education (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Block, 2007; Greeno, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Norton, 2010). Other researchers (Cole & Meadows, 2013) on CoP and education proposed that communities of practice be used in foreign language education instead of a “nationalist paradigm” (p. 121). They suggested a model that would help “reimagine identities in foreign language classrooms” and made suggestions for foreign language programs (p. 121). Suggestions proposed to the field on education are “starting to influence new thinking about the role of educational institutions and the design of learning opportunities” (Wenger, 2010, p. 187). Norton (2010) noted that many language classrooms in the community serve as an example for past communities and can be viewed as an imagined community to help promote an identity for the future.

Other contributions to research and education come from Maynard (2001) who studied a group of student teachers in a CoP. The study explored student teachers' learning to define what the role of teachers acting as mentors might be. The study looked at seven teachers. The first study documented the different stages of student teachers' learning and focused on practical teaching competence, and the second and third studies looked more closely at the content of teachers' practical professional knowledge of students. Maynard's (2001) findings suggested that using learning and participation as a framework for exploring student teachers school-based education helped the participants become members of the school's CoP.

Moreover, CoP is utilized in the teaching of professional development. Buysse, Sparkman, and Wesley (2003) examined the CoP framework and stated they hoped it would “stimulate dialogue among researchers and consumers about new ways of connecting what they know through research with what is done in special education and early intervention practice” (p. 265). According to Buysse et al. (2003), the CoP model was looked at to help transform traditional ways of educational research on practice. Furthermore, Buysse et al.’s (2003) arguments have important implications for understanding how researchers can work together, instead of working separate, to reach the educational community.

According to Wenger (2010), other fields that CoP have extended to are in healthcare, where patients start to form their CoPs. Cox (2005) stated that at times, a CoP serves as a conceptual lens to help examine a situation and the social construct of meaning. Cox maintained that a CoP is also used to refer to the virtual community or informal group to facilitate knowledge sharing or learning. An example of both Wenger and Cox's discussion on how CoP is used as a conceptual lens to facilitate knowledge sharing and learning was a study done in the field of health care. Other researchers (Barab & Duffy, 2000; Davis, 2006; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Morrell, 2013) questioned if legitimate peripheral participation within a CoP could have an influence on students and how this, in turn, helped them to adopt a professional identity.

Furthermore, in a study done by Davis (2006), professional identity was found. Davis used a case study to investigate the images of helping and conceptualizations of practice held by participants. Students in Davis's study assessed that having a supportive practice within the community helped the development of their identity as an occupational therapist and strengthened the way other healthcare professionals viewed them. Davis also found when the

community worked as a team "participants felt that patients and other health professionals had a greater knowledge of the scope of the practice of occupational therapy" (p. 5). The conclusion of Davis's study suggested that for students to be successful on their paths to becoming occupational therapists, attention must be paid to the quality of the CoP, and both the student and the CoP are responsible for professional identity development.

Business. CoP has also been used to examine the way companies and employees come together and help each other solve problems. McDermott and Archibald (2010) posited that at many businesses, employees form groups to share knowledge and attack common problems. McDermott and Archibald claimed that the use of CoP has been successful because they can develop global processes, resolve troubled implementation and guide operational efforts (p. 84). However, McDermott and Archibald stated that CoP is being used differently from its predecessors (referring to Lave and Wenger). McDermott and Archibald proposed the following, but they differ from their forebears in some important respects. The deviation from Lave and Wenger's theory of CoP is what is proposed by McDermott and Archibald, in which some CoPs work best if they have clear accountability and management oversight. Wenger's (1998) theory of CoP regarding authorization stated the following:

Institutional authority is a crucial aspect of negotiability, but the two should not be conflated. There is a difference between assigning institutional decision-making authority versus privileging some perspectives through design while marginalizing others. Leadership, power, and policies all have the potential to become resources for negotiating meaning, as much as they can thwart the process. (p. 261)

Wenger (1998) clarified that management and authorization could all be negotiated; the main point is that individuals can find common ground with authority figures. Amin and

Roberts (2006) noted that the existence of a CoP might not be evident to its members because one of the important functions of a CoP is to help a group work together to reach a common goal.

Related Perspectives

The following theories in this section are branches of CoP. I will compare and contrast Activity Theory/Cultural Historical Theory (CHAT), sociocultural theory, and language socialization. There are possibly other theories that have branched out from CoP, but these are the theories that I found closely related to CoP.

Activity Theory/CHAT. In this section, I will discuss the establishment and the founders of activity theory/CHAT as presented by Lompscher (2004) and Davydov (1991). From my research, I found that Activity Theory/CHAT has come from a long line of contributing theorists. Lompscher (2004) assessed that CHAT was developed by Russian psychologists in the 1920s and 1930s. The approach came from Vygotsky and his colleagues A. N. Leont'ev and A. R. Luria. Lompscher stated that activity theory was developed within cultural-historical theory, which helped establish the foundation for human sciences.

According to Lompscher (2004), CHAT has philosophical positions of classical German idealism, which were further developed by Marx. The philosophical positions as mentioned by Lompscher have other contributors. Davydov (1991) gives the credit to idealist philosophers Kant, Fichte, and Hegel. As noted by Lompscher, Vygotsky wanted to get out of the field of psychology, and he did so by focusing on activity theory.

Davydov (1996) asserted that Vygotsky developed the foundation for activity theory but was unable to refine it. Davydov discussed that Hegel and Marx were some of the contributors who were able to improve activity theory. Lompscher (2004) explained that

Vygotsky developed the idea about zones of proximal development and zones of actual performance by cooperation; this was the starting point of activity theory. "Vygotsky's work led others such as Leont'ev to form together with the famous troika, which became a vosmyorka: five young people (Zaporozhets, Bozhovich, Slavina, Morozova, and Levina)" (Davydov, 1996, p. 38). These innovators continued the work and helped develop CHAT.

Activity theory has influenced the development of communities of practice. Lea and Blake (2004) clarified that an activity theory deals with the relationships among participants within the system and what they perceive as a cultural tool. Zondiros (2008) suggested that a CoP approach examines the system relationships between people, while activity theory can be used as a lens to examine the relationships among participants within any of these systems. "Activity theory considers systems as being: a) historical development, b) mediated by tools, c) dialectical, d) analyzed as the relationships of participants and tools and e) changed through the zone of proximal development" (Zondiros, 2008, p. 454). Zondiros wrote that within a CoP a newcomer participates in historically developed communities within an activity system. Zondiros explained that individuals use some material to achieve their goals and enter in a CoP. Moreover, this helps them to think in ways that they would not have done before because of their exchange in this new community. Zondiros concluded that a newcomer brings new ideas to a CoP, and this contribution changes them and the others in the CoP.

Lea and Blake (2004) pointed out that the communities of practice theory was created as a "heuristic device: a way of exploring and understanding learning outside the formal structures of educational institutions" (p. 454). Zondiros (2008) explained that an individual could be part of many structures or communities of practices as they like because learning is

something inextricably linked to these communities of practice. Zondiros also stressed that the definition of “knowledge transmission” presented by Lave and Wenger in 1991 helped practitioners to think in a different way about how students learn through participation in practice. According to Zondiros, knowledge transmission helps teachers reflect on their roles and how to act in a learning environment. Lave and Wenger affirmed that learning comes from participation in the community and involves engagement to help members in the community. The same concept can be applied to activity theory. Similarly, Lea and Blake asserted that activity theory allows practitioners to ponder on how the same intentions might be achieved by using different practices by using similar tools. However, Zondiros argued that CoP and activity theory differ when it comes to using technology as a tool. Zondiros explained that activity theory considers technologies as a part of the mediational tools used by individuals within activity systems; these tools help the subject to achieve their objectives. Zondiros asserted that activity theory goes more in depth compared to CoP because it accepts that these tools can be used in many different ways to reach the same objectives.

Sociocultural Theory. In the subsequent text, I will first discuss concepts of sociocultural theory and the relationship of this theory to communities of practice. Lantolf is known for adapting the theoretical perspectives of Vygotsky to the acquisition of language as a sociocultural phenomenon (Boxer, 2006). Boxer stated that sociocultural theory, in contrast to language identity and language socialization, is connected to the role of discourse as a mediating tool for social interaction and the development of higher order processes. Regarding learning, Hall (2007) maintained that sociocultural theories propose that learning is an active process and that the context has an important role in learning. Wang (2007) pointed out that sociocultural learning takes a learner-centered approach, rather than just

viewing individuals. Wang stated that sociocultural theories are more focused on the important roles that social relations, community, and culture play in cognition and learning. Hall maintained that the sociocultural approach is a social one, where the learners can interact with each other and use the new tools. Hall explained that the learning environment must be authentic and that it must contain particular types of people who would use these kinds of tools such as concepts, language, symbols in a natural way. The authentic environment, as mentioned by Hall, is further developed in the Situated Cognition Theory of Lave and Wenger (1991) who proposed that learning occurs best in an environment. As communities of practice (Lave, 1991) the most significant tool in sociocultural theory is language (Hall, 2007). According to Hall, the application of sociocultural theory to communities of practice is that the knowledge is part of the environment that it belongs to and people in that community uses the tools of that field in their regular interaction and collaboration.

Language Socialization. In this last section, I will discuss how language socialization is defined and used to understand learning and how it related to communities of practice. Duff (2010) stated that language socialization represents an introduction “to language and literacy development in particular communities and settings that are informed by anthropology, sociology, (socio) linguistics, and education” (p. 172). Duff stated that other contributors come from cultural psychology and neo-Vygotskyan sociocultural theory. However, a language socialization framework for studying linguistic and cultural development originates from the early work done by Schieffelin and Ochs in 1986, which focused on L1 (first language) socialization (Boxer, 2006).

The cultural context of language socialization includes what people of the community believe about language and its use, values, and ideas concerning language and its speakers (Park & King, 2003). Language socialization defines success as the ability to communicate in the language of a particular community and to act according to its norms (Kramsch, 2002). Park and King (2003) also identified that language socialization studies focus on naturally occurring interactions. These interactions that Park and King described are with and around children and analyze the ways that community's norms are expressed.

Duff (2010) indicated that the foundation of language socialization comes from the language being learned through interactions with others who are more proficient in the language and its cultural practices. Similarly, in a community of practice learning is achieved through engaging in the community (Wenger, 1998). According to Duff, it is those who are more proficient in the language “provide novices explicit and (or) implicit mentoring or evidence about normative, appropriate uses of the language, and of the worldviews, ideologies, values, and identities of community members” (p. 172). The explanation provided by Duff is similar to Wenger's concept of old-timers versus newcomers in a CoP. Old-timers pass down knowledge to newcomers. Ochs (1986) pointed out that “veteran and novice participants coordinate modes of communication, actions, bodies, objects, and the built environment to enhance their knowledge skills” (p. 107). However, in CoP, old-timers must let newcomers build their own identities and find different ways to participate or contribute to the CoP (Wenger, 1998). Lave and Wenger's contributions to this form of learning and participation is now shaping research on language socialization. According to Duff, language socialization research has gone in different educational directions that focus more on older learners in a variety of activity settings. Duff stated that the term “apprenticeship” from Lave

and Wegner's research in 1991 is being used to apply new ways of thinking and acting in a CoP.

Social Identity Theory

Key components and tenets. In previous paragraphs I have discussed related theories to CoP. In the following sections I will discuss different theories on identity, and studies that discuss the influence on identity through group participation. In addition, I will discuss the importance of collaborating both identity and CoP.

Turner and Onorato (1999) characterized social identity as a person's self-concept based on his/her membership within a group. This definition established the term I used for this study to define *a sense of belonging* because it is an individual's awareness that he or she belongs to a group. Social Identity Theory emerged from trying to explain intergroup discrimination in a minimal group paradigm (Tajfel, 1972; Turner 1975, 1978; Turner & Onorato, 1999). In the paradigm Billing, Bundy, Flarnent, and Tajfel (1971) found that the mere social categorization of people into distinct groups could produce intergroup behavior in which participants favored ingroup others over outgroup others. Tajfel (1972) and Turner (1975) argued that the social categorization of participants in the paradigm created a social identity for them and participants accepted the assigned social category membership depending on the situation. As indicated by Tajfel and Turner participation in a group plays a crucial role in the identity formation of an individual.

Major contributions to SIT. The following section will describe different positions of SIT, including discussions of ethnicity, gender, society, and the social construction of identity. Although some of these points are not the focus of my study, it is important to discuss different positions of SIT. In defining how social categories are created, Hecht, Jung,

Krieger, and Warren (2005) stated that ethnicity, gender, and political affiliation are all parts of a structured society, and individuals belong to various social categories and form identities based on memberships of these social categories. This position is important to the study because international students belonged a CoP of all international students. Participants were fearful of joining other CoPs that had native speakers of English because they felt their English-speaking skills were not proficient enough to use. The social categories portion and the forming of memberships of this paragraph will be discussed in Chapter 5. As I discussed earlier in Chapter 1, the works of Bourdieu (1986) and Montgomery (2010) who both indicated that membership of social networks, or social capital requires advantage both socially and educationally. Montgomery's study was based on international students and a CoP. Montgomery discussed that some international students lose social capital when they move to a new country because they do not have the support of the community they once belonged to. They have to form new groups and when forming new groups their social capital is lost because they do not have the language skills to be part of these new communities, thus losing social capital. Therefore, membership or relationships made are part of an individual's social capital and it helps establish power and position. Moreover, Hecht et al. (2005) stated that society is internalized by individuals in the form of social identities on the basis of social categories. "Social identities, in turn connect individuals to society through group membership influencing individuals' beliefs, attitudes, and behavior in their relationships with members of other social groups" (p. 259-260). However, Erickson (1996) had a different position on social identity. Erickson indicated that social identity cannot be justified by one single category throughout the entire encounter. Erickson stated "our social identity is situated in the interaction at hand; we perform it as we go along, and

we do so conjointly with the other interactional partners” (p. 295). Ochs (1993) maintained that people actively construct their social identities rather than passively live out some cultural prescription for social identity (p. 296-298). As Erickson pointed out, social identity can change depending on where we are and who we meet; therefore, the contribution of these different positions on SIT gave me some insight on how to shape my interviews and what I had to look for during my observations. Although my main focus is not on social capital, it is a factor that is hard to ignore. I do not know why these students have decided to participate in a CoP and I do not know how it will shape their identity.

Different perspectives on SIT

Second Language Acquisition. In previous sections I discussed social identity with regard to social capital and the construction of social identity. However, social identity has been used in previous literature to help with studies on second language acquisition when there was not a theory to help understand identity (Peirce, 1995). For example, Pierce (1995), coming from a poststructuralist perspective, used social identity to explain second language acquisition. Studies using social identity theory were used, according to Pierce (1995), because “SLA theorists had not developed a comprehensive theory or social identity that integrated the language learner and the language learning context” (p. 12). Pierce based her elaboration of SIT on Heller (1987) who stated that learners gain access to social networks wherein opportunities for speaking are created, and that language is the medium through which learners develop and negotiate their identity. Moreover, Pierce discussed that power relations played an important role in the interactions between the language learners and target language speakers. Again, social identity has been used to help understand the importance of learning about negotiation of identity within social networks and also to understand how

participating in groups has helped open opportunities for individuals. All of these concepts are traced back to social relationships and discusses how access to a CoP may shape identity.

Related Perspectives

The following theories shared similar aspects with social identity theory; ethnic identity, cultural identity theory, and identity theory. In researching social identity, I recognized that these theories shared common features about language, culture, and identity. I will briefly describe the most important facets of these theories and how they have been used with research of international students.

Ethnic identity. In this section I describe ethnic identity and the importance of self and the changes that are made through membership (Hecht, 1993; Phinney, 1996; Weinreich, 1986). “Ethnic identity involves associations with one’s ethnicity (traditions, peoplehood, heritage, orientation to the past, religion, language ancestry, values, economics, and aesthetics) and culture (social organization)” (Hecht, 1993, p. 34). Phinney (1996) defined ethnic identity as referring to “an enduring, fundamental aspect of the self that includes a sense of membership in an ethnic group and the attitudes and feelings associated with that membership” (p. 922). Weinreich (1986) assessed that ethnic self-identity is not a static process but one that changes and varies according to particular social contexts. Thus, ethnic identity is important to understanding social identity because members are influenced by the associations of their past, culture, and what they bring to a group and how they form a group.

Cultural identity. In defining culture identity, Collier and Thomas (1988) explained how “one level of multiple identities are formed and managed in intercultural communication” (p. 99). Collier and Thomas pointed out that, "communication is said to be more intercultural to the extent that intersubjective cultural interpretations are revealed in

discourse" (p. 99). According to Collier and Thomas, the approach to culture identity is established when one is communicatively competent. Collier and Thomas suggested that these rules/systems are an approach to understanding the study of identity in intercultural communication. However, Collier and Thomas argued that the experience of intercultural contact varies for participants, through definitions of personhood. Like social identity, cultural identity depends on the individual's competence that he or she belongs to a group.

Identity theory. Identity theory and social identity theory both emerged from questions about self or either questions on understanding discrimination in groups (Stryker, 1968; Tajfel, 1972; Turner 1975, 1978; Turner & Onorato, 1999; Wells and Stryker, 1988). Identity theory began with questions about the origins of differential salience about identity in persons' self-structures and why identity salience may change over time (Stryker, 1968; Wells and Stryker, 1988). These questions led to the development of theory concerning ways in which people are tied into social structure and the consequences of these ties for identities (Stryker & Burke, 2000, p. 287). Schlenker (1985) indicated that identity theory explains the relationship between society and individuals on the basis of roles. In the framework, a role refers to "the functions or parts of a person performs when occupying a particular position within a particular social context" (Schlenker, 1985, p.18). A person's role stated Branton (1965) is a pattern of social behavior that appears appropriate to the expectations of others and to the demands of the situation. Hecht, Warren, Jung, and Krieger (2005) maintained that identity is formed in opposition in relation to others, especially roles that include social aspects. Like social identity theory, identity theory focuses on the importance of membership and how membership in a group influences not only 'self' as the individual, but also an individual's role in society, again social capital.

My main focus of this chapter was to define and discuss the history of SIT and CoP. I described key tenets that were branched out or had similar components of SIT and CoP. In the following section, I discuss how these theories connect to practices in regards to research on international students.

Previous sections in this paper discussed different theories on CoP and identity. The background of these theories has helped shaped my understanding of SIT and CoP and has helped me understand how identity may be influenced by group membership and participation. However, I will discuss studies that were done on identity and participation in a CoP. These studies will help set a foundation for understanding how participation informs identity and a sense of belonging. Studies on the role of identity and culture of international students were conducted by Allen, Byon, Drane, and Mohn (2010). Research from this study discussed how sports was used as a vehicle for socialization and maintenance of culture identity with international students attending American universities. Participants from this study were categorized by Asian, South Asian, Latin American, European, British/Canadian/Australian, Middle Eastern, and African. Four universities participated in this study: two from the South, one from the Mid-West, and one from the West. Allen et al.'s study found that for some students, sports was a way to maintain a sense of their home by participating in a familiar sport with other international students of the same or similar cultural background, and it was also a helpful way to adapt to a new environment. Other results showed that international students joined a sport just to stay fit. According to Allen et al., the overall goal of this study was to help American universities understand the different needs of international students and how sports could be used to help the international student population matriculate into the larger campus community. Allen et al.'s study is an example

of how a group of students used a CoP to help them adapt to their new host environment. The community was brought together by a shared practice (Wenger, 1998); this in turn helped their sense of belonging.

Osborne (2012) conducted another study on identity and international students. Osborne used Tajfel's (1981) concept of social identity theory to take a closer look at how identity affects the relationships of students studying abroad. Osborne observed from Tajfel's (1981) social identity theory that there are three social psychological processes which contribute to the formation of social identities to the experiences of international students studying abroad: (a) social categorization; (b) social comparison; (c) psychological work (p. 1036). According to the work of Tajfel (1981), social categorization occurs when human beings naturally categorize based on the way a person looks or speaks. Tajfel (1981) described social comparison as when groups are made and then compared and evaluate themselves with other groups. In other words, the reason that people of the same group form groups together is that they are looking for the familiar to make them feel comfortable or gain a sense of belonging. This was the case of the results of Osborne's study. Osborne found that forming groups with other international students helped them feel comfortable; however, he suggested that this might delay the development of a new identity (acculturating to the host country and learning English). Although Osborne's study focused more on language and identity, it discussed the importance of how participation in a CoP helps international students create a sense of belonging to the individuals who formed them.

Although the next study did not investigate a CoP, it included how an international student struggled to re(construct) his social identity within the host country. Ortaçtepe's (2013) first study came from a longitudinal, mixed-method study with eight Turkish graduate

students in the United States, which later led to a narrative case study. Ortaçtepe's study explored the identity (re)construction of Erol, a Turkish doctoral student in the United States. According to Ortaçtepe, Erol struggled to (re)construct his social identity, gain access to social networks, and had trouble adapting to the target community. Ortaçtepe argued that previous studies on ESL learners (e.g., Burnapp, 2006; Haugh, 2008; Koehne, 2006) did not focus on international students' identity in regard to negotiation and had no reference to their language socialization. Ortaçtepe adapted research on L2 learning from Schieffelin and Ochs (1986) in understanding how persons become members of social groups through language, and used this in the study to apprehend the social and academic contexts that international students are involved in. Secondly, Ortaçtepe's study looked at the L2 socialization of one international student by gathering how his experience as an international student allowed him to process the (re)construction of his social identity in a new environment. Results from Ortaçtepe's study revealed that Erol's negotiation of social identity was difficult as he struggled to gain access to groups and form relationships, which did not allow him to be accepted as a legitimate speaker. Ortaçtepe's findings show that Erol was unsuccessful in being part of a social group, which might help improve his language and social skills. According to the findings, Ortaçtepe assessed that Erol's "investment as a doctoral student revolved not only around academic development but also around the social development through which he could participate in different social networks and/or communities of practices" (p. 226). Erol met and knew other international students who came from similar backgrounds as his, but felt he could not build meaningful relationships with them and wanted to learn English. This study shows different findings from Montgomery and McDowell (2009) who found that being a part of CoP with other international students

helped students integrate into the new academic community. Erol wanted to form meaningful relationships with people and tried on several occasions to talk to domestic students but was unsuccessful. As mentioned previously, this study did not focus on a CoP, but it did discuss how trying to join a CoP was difficult for Ortaçtepe's participant.

In conclusion, this chapter served as a background on the theoretical perspectives that exist on understanding identity and a CoP. Both CoP and Social Identity aided in understanding the research questions on informing international student identity and how participation in a CoP contributes to a sense of belonging. Furthermore, topics in this chapter discussed historical antecedents of the theoretical perspectives and how they have come to be used in different disciplines, besides second language acquisition. In addition, I reviewed several studies on the construction of the identity of international students within CoPs, and I found that there is a paucity of studies that focuses on the social identity construction of international students in the United States from a language socialization perspective. Based on the recommendations of (Haugh, 2008; Koehne, 2005; Norton, 2000), there is lacking research in the area of understanding how identity plays an active role in interaction. Other researchers have affirmed that more studies are needed in the United States since it hosts the largest amount of international students in the world (Coughlan, 2011; Ortaçtepe, 2013). As Brown and Brown (2013) stressed, due to the fierce competition of other English-speaking countries it is important for universities to educate themselves on this growing population of students. In conclusion this section has served as a background of theories that helped shape my methodology. This chapter set the foundation for understanding the significant role participation plays in informing identity and how belonging to a CoP may help an individual's sense of belonging.

Chapter 3

Methods

This research is a case study of non-native English-speaking international university students participating in a Community of Practice (CoP). This study focused on the following two questions:

1. How does participation in a CoP for non-native English-speaking university students inform their international student identity?
2. How does participation in a CoP contribute to a sense of belonging?

My goal in this research was to understand and study the ways international students construct their self-identity through participation in a CoP outside of the classroom environment. In the rest of the chapter, I explain my research plan.

Creswell (2002) recommended using a case study as a methodology when the problem to be studied "relates to developing an in-depth understanding of a 'case' or bounded system" (p. 496) where the purpose is to understand "an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals" (p. 496). According to Creswell (1998), the system is bounded by time and place, and it is the case being studied. Creswell (1998) explained that a case could be a program, an event, activity, or individuals. Regarding this study, the case I studied was a CoP.

Patton (1990) suggested that case studies are valuable in creating an in-depth understanding of particular people, problems, or situations in comprehensive ways. Doing a case study provided me the tools necessary to analyze and understand how international students construct their self-identity through participation in a CoP outside of the university classroom environment. I understood that looking at how participation informs identity might

have been difficult. However, Yin (2009) noted that a case study investigates a phenomenon within its setting, even when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not apparent. For this purpose, using a case study helped me understand and compare these different experiences within the group, highlighting the emphasis on the study of identity.

Research Design and Overview

I utilized a case study design to examine one CoP of international university students. This CoP consisted of a group of seven international university students who met regularly in a classroom. These CoP participants voluntarily participated in a conversation group that met once a week throughout the semester. This CoP was hosted by an English language program on a campus at a university in the U.S. southwest. Students did not call the group the CoP. CoP comes from the framework used in this study, which is defined in Chapter 1 under operational definitions.

I observed every session of the CoP, but one. During the observations, I took notes of my thoughts and reflections as researcher notes. Additionally, I conducted three interviews with four CoP participants who were willing to participate. These interviews consisted of an initial individual interview, one group interview, and a final individual interview. Specific information on how I conducted these interviews, recorded, transcribed, and analyzed them will follow later in this chapter. Detailed information on my data collection and analysis procedures follow later in this chapter as well.

Participants

The university where I conducted this study enrolls international students from various countries around the world including Brazil, Korea, China, Iran, Colombia, and Saudi Arabia. It is from this student body that I recruited my participants. The students' ages

that participated in this study varied. The involvement of both men and women was significant to this study. I believe that women and men often experience life differently, especially when they are from different cultures. Due to this, I had the involvement of both males and females in this study. I will explain participant recruitment later in this chapter.

There were two groups of participants for this study. The first groups, which I refer to as observation participants, were those who gave consent to observe and document their information in the CoP. The second group, which I refer to as interview participants, comprised of those who only consented to participate in individual and group interviews. Members of the CoP either consent to be observation participants and/or interview participants. In the sections below I discuss how I selected the CoP, recruited the CoP, gained permission from the group, and how I recruited and had participants consent to participate in the study. The reason there are two types of participants is that students had the option to participate fully by being observation/interview participants or observation only participants. As mentioned previously, observation participants only gave me consent to observe and document the group sessions.

Selection of the Participants and the CoP. The CoP I selected was a group of seven international students who voluntarily met regularly to work together on conversation skills. I limited my desired group size to 20 or less because according to Morgan (1997) smaller groups are more beneficial when the researcher is looking for each participant's reaction to a topic because they give each participant more time to talk. The conversation groups were created by the English language program to give students enrolled in the program an extra hour of conversation practice. The groups were lead by English instructors of the program or student volunteers interested in working with international students.

Participants were students at the university where I conducted the study. There were not any non-university students in the CoP. Once I identified the potential participants, I chose those international students, who came from non-English-speaking countries. I limited my participants this way because there is a difference between learning English as second language versus learning English as a foreign language (Ahmed, n.d.). According to Ahmed (n.d.), ESL students' literacy skills vary from learner to learner. For example, some have little schooling in their first languages and others have lived and worked in English-speaking countries and have strong communication skills. On the other hand, EFL students may have years of grammar and vocabulary practice but may need help with other areas of English, such as listening, speaking and writing (Ahmed, n.d.).

Recruitment of the CoP. I recruited an established CoP set up by the university English language institute at a research-intensive public university in the southwestern United States. The English language institute offered English conversation groups for international students. The conversation groups were offered throughout the semester and met once a week. There were two different groups that met at two different times during the day. The English language institute had several different programs established for the students enrolled in their program. These programs included a book club and a writing club, to name a few.

To get access to the department, I met with the Academic Manager in charge of the program and with the teachers of the conversation groups and asked permission to announce the research. When I received permission from the manager and the teacher of the conversation groups, I visited the groups. During the visit, I described my research to the conversation groups. Following, I explain how I gained permission from the group.

Permission from the group. There were two conversation groups available to observe. I chose a specific CoP for my research project because all of the group members granted me permission. In addition, I chose one out of the two conversation groups I visited because the one I observed had more diversity. To obtain permission from the group, I first described the study to the group and answered any of their questions. I explained that I would like to get their permission to do observations. After I explained the study, I asked one of the group members to pass out the ballots after I left the room and gave them time to answer questions. I asked that individual to have students fold their ballots and put them in a provided envelope with my name on it. The question on the ballot read, “Are you comfortable with Linka Crosby observing this group for her dissertation research? Please circle Yes or No.” Once all of the ballots were collected, the envelope was sealed, and I asked the volunteer before the ballots were answered to drop off the envelope with the teacher assigned to the conversation group. The envelope had my name on it. I returned to pick it up from the conversation group teacher. There was no way of knowing which students voted yes or no. I proceeded with the recruitment of research participants after a CoP group unanimously agreed to allow me to observe their group. Both groups agreed to give me permission to do the research but, as mentioned previously, I chose the more diverse group. I went to talk to the teacher of the group I did not select for the research and let her know that I would be observing the other group. I also chose the other group because the teacher told me that attendance was not good at the first meeting. If I did not get permission from these groups, I would have to find another group to speak to, such as the other conversation groups that came from different departments from the university.

Recruitment of participants and consent. I then proceeded with the consent process. I asked the group which gave me permission to observe to meet with me after one of their meetings to go over the consent process and discuss the different types of interviews. I went over the consent process with them and let them know that in order to participate in the study they must be (a) over 18 years old, (b) be an international student at the university where I conducted the research; if they were non-university students in the CoP, I would either choose another CoP, or I would not include them as study participants, (c) be an international student who comes from a non-English-speaking country. I talked with them and saw if they met the recruitment criteria. I explained the different ways that they could participate in the research project, as either an observation participant in the CoP and/or as an interview participant. I let the group know that I would use pseudonyms to refer to them in this study. I asked students if they had any questions about the study and answered any questions they had. I then asked them to put their consent forms, signed or unsigned, in an envelope that I passed around the room. At a separate location, I reviewed the assigned consent forms. When I attended the next group meeting, I individually spoke with each of the individuals who signed a consent form and verified that they met the criteria stated above. I tried to talk to the participant before and after the meeting so that I did not disrupt the flow of the meeting.

Data Collection

Data collected for this study included audio recordings of the group and two individual interviews (initial interview and final interview), notes from the observation of the CoP, audio recordings of the CoP observations (not transcribed, only used as a reference to clarify observation notes), and notes from the researcher's journal. The different forms of

data collection for this study helped with triangulation and contributed to reducing biases and limitations of this study (Maxwell, 2005). I took notes in my research journal during the observations and interviews. Maxwell (2005) recommended the use of taking notes to help the researcher capture their thoughts, and to help them think about the data. According to Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), notes also serve as memories, details of events, and feelings that are essential to the research. I described observations, interviews, and types of notes to be used in this study in the sections below.

Observations. I visited the selected CoP during their regularly scheduled meeting during the semester. I attended the conversation group every Monday throughout the semester for one hour. Multiple observations allowed me to follow up on the experiences from the beginning, middle, and the end of the semester. All group members consented to be participants in the observations and for me to audio record the group sessions. I used pseudonyms that were either created by me or chosen by the participants. This information is disclosed in Chapter 4.

Observations helped me draw inferences about different points about this research that may not have been acquired in interviews (Maxwell, 2005). During the observations, I focused on what was happening in the group, took notes, and looked for certain statements that reflected social identity. See Appendix B for questions to guide the observations. I considered communication between participants and how they utilized the time in the conversation group to talk about the subjects presented by the teacher. I also looked at the examples given and the questions they asked about using English to fit in with native speakers. I looked at how the observation participants offered suggestions to other group members based on experience. During all interviews and observations, I took notes to help

me think of possible outlying themes. These notes served as a reflection of what I had observed for the day and how I could relate it back to my research questions. I audio recorded the observations, but did not transcribe them. The audio recordings were used to help clarify my observation notes.

Interviews. I conducted three sets of interviews, one initial individual, one final individual interview, and an intervening group interview. All interviews were conducted in English. Students struggled during interviews. Therefore, I rephrased the interview questions and gave examples. See Appendix A, C, and D for the protocols for these three interviews. The initial interview was conducted after the first observation. I interviewed each observation/interview participant individually. The final interview was conducted before the group interview, near the end of the semester. Again, I interviewed each observation/interview participant individually. The final group interview was conducted towards the end of the semester to get information about what participants thought about participating in a CoP as time went on. In the final group interview, all participants were interviewed.

I recorded all interviews with a portable digital recorder. I also took notes in my researcher journal. I labeled these notes as "interview notes" and the participant's pseudonym. These notes helped me to compare the interview responses with what I saw during the observations.

The interview questions I asked focused on participation and identity in a CoP. I wanted to know if participation in a CoP helped the participant inform her/his identity. I audio recorded and took notes every time I interviewed the participants. Using both the recorder and my notes helped me jot down certain points while I recorded and gave me a

chance to go back and listen and clarify my notes (Nelson, Silverman, & Thomas, 2010). In the sections below, I provide more information on the interviews.

Initial interview. I scheduled the initial interviews as soon as I obtained informed consent from the interview participants. I met with four participants individually, and with their permission, I recorded the session. The interviews took between 60-90 minutes. I met participants at a place of their choosing on campus where they felt comfortable. If they did not have a location in mind, I suggested the main university library. At this particular library, I reserved a secure and private room. I provided the participant with a copy of the questions to follow along, and I also read the questions to the participant. See Appendix A for questions on the initial interview. The initial interviews helped me identify potential themes for the observations.

Group interview. I conducted one group interview towards the end of the semester. Although I am referring to these interviews as a group interview, the group I interviewed did not comprise of all CoP group members. Participants for the group interview were made up individuals who volunteered to be interviewed in a group interview setting. Interview participants participated in only one group interview. There were only four interview participants, so I did not need to schedule several different times to interview participants in a group interview. The number of participants was important because having more than six participants per interview would substantially reduce the amount of time that each participant could speak during the group interview. The interview lasted for 60 minutes. I met participants on campus at a place they felt comfortable. Students suggested the campus library, where I reserved a room appropriate for a small group meeting. This gathering was

used to ask questions about participating in a CoP. Group interview questions can be found in Appendix C.

Final interview. The final interview was an individual interview with each of the interview participants. This interview took place near the end of the semester. I scheduled interviews with the students when I saw them before and after the conversation group meetings. These interviews took between 60-90 minutes. As with the first individual interview, I met with participants on campus at a place they felt comfortable. I asked participants to clarify questions that arose from the review of their transcript of the initial interview, the group interview, and notes from the previous CoP observations. I additionally repeated some of the questions from the initial interview to obtain additional information and addressed questions about the observations. I asked similar questions as I asked during the first interview, with extensions and probing for more details. Moreover, this helped me clarify the experience of the student throughout the course of the meetings in the CoP. The questions of the final interview are in Appendix B.

Researcher's journal. I kept a researcher's journal to record my thoughts and impressions during and after interviews, observations, and during data analysis. I was not able to record brief thoughts and ideas after I finished my observations because I had to teach a class. However, I was able to take notes during and after the interviews, after I entered data, and when I went over my notes. There were also times that I was able to reflect about the study and I wrote it in my journal. The journal served as a record of my thoughts and as a development of my research or unanswered questions that I had. Moreover, this acted as a reflection of what I had read in previous research and what I observed in the CoP. I also used

the journal to write down questions I had, and it helped me look back and think about my research questions.

Data Analysis

I used thematic and two-step coding for the data analysis component of this study. Thematic and two-step coding allowed me to analyze and reanalyze categories and make comparisons within my research. In the following sections, I discuss how I transcribed, the tools that I used to transcribe and code the data, and the procedures I used to analyze the data.

Transcription. Here is a brief description highlighting some of the procedures I used for transcription. I transcribed the interviews using Express Scribe Professional transcription software for slowed playback and start and stop playback using foot controls. I transcribed everything literally and did not summarize the recorded transcriptions, following Dresing, Pehl, and Schmieder's (2013) suggestions on transcription rules. I did not correct the English language used in this study. I believe it was important to keep the originality of the transcriptions to capture the meaning of what participants were trying to portray. See Appendix E for Transcription Rules. Paying attention to transcription is essential for the analysis of the data and helped make a difference in answering the research questions. Therefore, I went over transcriptions multiple times to confirm their accuracy.

Tools. I used a software called Dedoose to help me code the data. Dedoose is an online software that allows for collaborative coding. To be more specific, Dedoose is a software as a service application (SaaS), which facilitates the coding and analysis of qualitative data and the integration of demographic and other quantitative data ("Coding and Analysis," 2012).

Procedures. For the analysis process of this research, I used thematic and two-step coding using Dedoose, an on-line qualitative software program that allowed for collaborative coding and review of the ongoing analysis. Dedoose allows collaborative partnership on projects. Members of the doc group I belong to looked at my data and gave me feedback on codes. I first analyzed the data and came up with codes. These codes later turned into themes. Saldaña (2013) pointed out that "themes consist of such ideas as descriptions of behavior within a culture; explanations for why something happens; iconic statements; and morals from participant stories" (p. 267). According to Saldaña (2013), a theme is an extended phrase, or it can be a sentence that identifies what a unit of data is about or what it means; its characteristics can be determined at the "manifest level (directly observable in the information) or the latent level (underlying the phenomenon)" (p. 267). I looked for themes across all three types of data and paid attention to outlying themes and consider how these patterns helped me explain the research questions. Taylor and Bogdan (1989) explained that "themes are defined as units derived from patterns such as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, or folk sayings and proverbs" (p. 131). Therefore, I developed themes to help me understand the ways international students construct their self-identity through participation in a CoP. However, a code is different from a theme.

Coding data is different from identifying themes. Saldaña (2009) explained that codes are "often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 3). Saldaña (2009) clarified that a theme is an outcome of coding and it is "not some- thing that is, in itself, coded" (p. 13). Using the suggestions from Saldaña's manuals on coding for qualitative research, I started looking for codes while collecting data and also after

I had read the transcriptions of initial interviews. Moreover, this helped me identify questions that began to emerge during the initial interviews and observations. These questions guided my focus during subsequent observations. As I reviewed the data, I looked at words repeated in the data from the interviews and the observations, which helped me create possible codes. The following examples are from my researcher's journal where I posited possible codes from the data.

Table 1:

Possible Codes

Vocabulary Practice	Free to ask questions	Comfortable
Improve Conversation	Help each other with pronunciation	Group
Meet friends	Debate on topics	Leader
Same level of conversation	Sharing	Participate
Confidence	Equality in the group	Talk more English
More time to talk	Give each other examples on topics we don't understand	
Relaxed Environment	Friends	
Opportunities to have a different role	Happy	

This process was ongoing and recursive. The initial codes I identified from the first transcripts and observation notes were refined as I collected more data. This process helped me go back and re-code the initial data as I refined the coding scheme. Hay (2005) explained that this type of coding is necessary; it helps differentiate overall themes, and will later lead

to a more in-depth interpretation of patterns. The development of codes and coding excerpts led me to a deeper understanding of patterns and themes as I looked at the data.

I created descriptors in my analysis to help me link each participant to different sets of data. I first uploaded information about the participants in the group. For example, I added information about the participants, such as a male participant. I also broke down my data by codes and by fields in the Analysis Workspace; this workspace helped me create charts and graphs. When media had been connected to Dedoose, I was able to see several forms of data examples/layouts that helped me visualize the results.

Trustworthiness

I added two critical friends from my doctoral writing group to give me feedback. Yin (2003) suggested that novice researchers should ask help from their team members in the analysis phase to give feedback on integrating data to help answer the research questions. Moreover, this is possible on Dedoose, which allowed participants to join a project. My critical friends were allowed to make memos (add comments to my data) and created excerpts that they commented on. However, they could not develop new codes, change the codes that I applied to excerpts or delete excerpts. The use of critical friends added to the trustworthiness of my data analysis. I also worked closely with the doctoral group I belonged to and presented the data to them. When I created themes, I shared examples from the data to see if I was capturing the meaning of the data and asked if it related to my research questions. In addition, I met weekly with the Co-Chair of this dissertation to show her my work.

Privacy

According to the Panel of Research and Ethics (2015) privacy and ethics have two primary components. First, privacy and ethics refer to an individual's right to be free from

intrusion or interference by others. Secondly, they note that individuals have privacy interests in relation to their bodies, personal information, expressed thoughts and opinions, personal communications with others, and spaces they occupy. To ensure privacy, some participants chose their pseudonyms; others were assigned. I used pseudonyms in all areas of research collected, for example, conversations over the work with the committee, doctoral writing group, and formal settings. Also, I used only pseudonyms on my researcher's journal, notes of the observation, digital recordings labels, and transcriptions to ensure that private information regarding participants will be unidentifiable. Additionally, I did not ask for personal information from the participant that is not directly related to this study. Nor did I document any such information that the informants spontaneously provide that is not related to this study.

Confidentiality

The Panel of Research and Ethics (n.d.) stated that confidentiality refers to the obligation of an individual or organization to safeguard entrusted information. The ethical duty of confidentiality includes obligations to protect information from unauthorized access, use disclosure, modification, loss or theft. In the following sections, I discuss the general measures I took to ensure confidentiality. These measures primarily relate to data security.

Data storage. I took several measures to ensure that the data I collected was stored in a secure place and manner. I stored the data at an off-campus location at my home because I do not have an office at the university where I can securely work on and store my data. I used pseudonyms in all written documentation, aside from the consent forms (which I stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office, protected by a home alarm system), and the written list of participant names and assigned pseudonyms (which also were stored in a locked file

cabinet, in a separate locked filing cabinet in my home office). However, if someone had obtained access to the consent forms or the pseudonym list, I did not evaluate this risk as serious. If it were known that the participants were involved in a research project, (1) the transcripts and observation notes (stored separately) would be unlikely linked to the individual participants, and (2) the information the participants provided would not include personal information.

In addition to paper documents, I had data in electronic format on a personal Mac laptop and on a backup, encrypted flash drive. I was the only person who had access to the laptop. When I was not using my laptop, I stored it in the filing drawer and locked it. I was the only person who had access to the password for the laptop. I used data encryption on both my laptop hard drive and the backup flash drive. I used FileVault disk encryption provided by Mac. Further information provided by Mac stated that disk encryption in OS X uses the government-approved encryption standard, the Advanced Encryption Standard with 256-bit keys (AES-256). According to Mac, the disk encryption encodes the information stored on a disk so that it cannot be read unless the login password is entered.

Software security. Dedoose has full-encrypted data transmission, file storage, and backup feature. Encryption keys are stored in Dedoose, which allows Dedoose to assist users in project recovery. According to the Dedoose website (2014), the project-specific encryption feature is a fully cloud-based solution. To use this feature, I had to hold an additional encryption key. Then I needed to enter a private key to view the project. To provide the highest level of security for the data in this project, I chose to use the additional encryption key for this project.

Other confidentiality measures. I took other confidentiality measures regarding destroying data collected and stored in paper and electronic formats. I maintained digital recordings of individual and group interviews and group observations, until publication of this study. I kept electronic copies of the transcripts, notes from the interviews and observations, and my researcher journal until the publication of this study. I had a master list of the participants' real names and their pseudonyms on a sheet. I maintained a link to names and pseudonyms until I completed data collection and completed transcription of all interviews.

I destroyed these electronic files by moving these files to the trash folder of my computer. I followed the procedures for assuring that the trash would never be seen again by clicking and holding the trash icon on my Mac trash option. The icon changed to *Secure Empty Trash*. I then selected this, and the files were permanently deleted. I will destroy all written forms that would identify the participants after I have published my dissertation by shredding them.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate how participation in a Community of Practice (CoP) informed the identity of non-native English-speaking university international students studying in the U.S.

This dissertation addressed the following questions:

1. How does participation in a CoP for non-native English-speaking university students inform their international student identity?
2. How does participation in a CoP contribute to a sense of belonging?

Description of Research and Participants

Before presenting the findings, I will describe the context of this research. This study was conducted at a university in the Southwest. Students who participated in this study were part of an English as a Second Language (ESL) conversation group that met once a week for a semester in a classroom. The conversation group was a class created for ESL students studying in the English language program to get an extra hour of practice with listening. The class met every Monday for an hour. The instructor who led the group was an ESL teacher. The teacher's only role in the group was to facilitate conversation through the use of games, activities, and lessons. She was not part of the data collection. My role was only to observe. However, the ESL instructor asked my opinion on some of the topics discussed. At one point, I was asked to explain the directions of a game. However, the objective of this course was to give students an extra hour of practice with listening, speaking, and conversation in English outside of their scheduled classes from the English language program. Activities presented in the group ranged from American History to listening and speaking games. All participants

were international students who came from non-English-speaking countries. Below is a table of observation participants and observation/interview participants.

Table 2:

Observation Participants and Observation/Interview Participants

Observation Participants	Observation/Interview Participants
Brian	Barbie
Anna	Trump
Cris	Monique
	Mary

Note. This table represents the types of participants in the study.

As Table 2 illustrates, there were a total of seven members. All seven members of the group chose to participate in the observations portion. Only four out of the seven chose to participate in both the observation and interviews. Observation participants were those who gave me consent to observe and document their information in the CoP. Interview participants were those who consented to participate in individual and group interviews. All names used in this study for observation and interview participants are pseudonyms. While the interview/observation participants chose their own pseudonyms, I chose those for the observation only participants. The pseudonyms of the four-observation/interview participants were Mary, Monique, Barbie, and Trump. Trump was the only male participant who was an observation/interview participant. The only observation participants were Brian, Anna and Cris. Brian was the only male among the observation participants.

In the following paragraph, I provide a brief description of each of the participants. I describe them in alphabetical order. In order to protect the participants' privacy, I will not

include details that might inadvertently reveal their identity. This includes race and ethnicity, age, and how long they have been in the U.S. I am aware that this information is important in understanding identity, but revealing this information could breach confidentiality. In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 3, I will not disclose the native language of the participants in the group. Disclosing this information could lead to the identification of participants in the study.

Anna. Anna was an observation-only participant. She attended every group meeting. She was one of the youngest participants of the group. She was at the mid-level of the English program. Anna seemed shy and sat with the same classmate throughout the study. She often spoke her native language in the group with Cris. They were the only participants who spoke their native language in the group. While Anna participated in the group, she was not the most active member. She talked during the group sessions, but mostly stayed at the end of the table with Cris. When they arrived for each session, they walked into the classroom together. It was not until the end of the semester that Anna started talking more with the rest of the group about topics that were not related to her classes in the English language program.

Barbie. This observation/interview participant was one of the mature group members. Compared to the other participants, Barbie was a more emerging English learner. During the observations, I noticed she took more time to respond to questions presented in the group. I also observed that she did better working on activities that were one on one. A professional in her home country, she wanted to learn English and also learn about American culture. Barbie worked well with the other participants and usually sat at the front of the classroom. She talked to other participants and shared her comments with them. During her interviews it

often took her some time to answer the questions. As a result, I encountered that I often rephrased the questions during the interviews and provided examples of possible answers as a model. This was not needed for the rest of the observation/interview participants. Barbie chose her pseudonym after I provided her with several examples, Barbie being one of them. She laughed when I mentioned Barbie and chose that as her pseudonym.

Brian. This observation-only participant was one of the younger group members. He was in a higher level of the English language program. While shy at the beginning, he later started talking and asking more questions in the group. He asked me questions about greetings and responses to certain questions in English. He always sat at the same location with Mary and Monique. Brian was very inquisitive. If he heard a new word and did not understand it, he would ask the group or Monique for an example. It appeared that he had a lot of trust in Monique and Mary, because he sat with them all the time in the conversation group. Monique mentioned to me that they were classmates for their English language classes and he sat with them in class too. He did not choose his name; I gave it to him because he was not an interview participant. I did not feel that I had to confirm the pseudonym name with him because he was not an interview participant.

Cris. Cris was an observation participant and one of the youngest participants of the group. She was at the mid-level of the English program. Cris spoke her native language in class with Anna and they always sat together. She was reserved rather than shy, and tended to speak when she had something important to say. Cris got along with other group members, but she did not interact with the other group members, unless it was part of the activity for the day.

Mary. Mary, an observation/interview participant, is in her mid-adulthood years. She had worked in her country in a professional field before coming to the U.S. Speaking and learning English were very important to her. She decided she would speak English as much as she could and told her classmates that she only wanted to speak English in their group and in class. She worked well with all of the people in the group. She helped other students who had trouble with the activity and would try to talk with everyone. Mary sat at the front of the class during each session. She appeared to be very kind and supportive of her classmates. Mary was very patient and tried to help other students in the group. She spoke gently to her peers and the teacher.

Monique. Monique was also an observation/interview participant. She is in her early-adulthood years and regularly sat in between Mary and Brian. She helped Brian when he had questions and was very kind and patient with him. If I were to give the participants nicknames, I would call Monique the big sister because of the way she worked with Mary and Brian. Monique seemed to get nervous during individual interviews because she was trying very hard to speak clearly. During our group interview, she was less hesitant and did not worry about making mistakes in English. It appeared that she was relaxed and calm because she was around her peers. Like Mary, Monique was very driven to learn and speak English, but she reported that she felt uncomfortable around native speakers of English. I suggested Monique's pseudonym, and she agreed to it.

Trump. This observation/interview participant is an older individual who has participated in a number of conversation groups, in this and other universities. He chose the name Trump and seemed to relate to the outgoing and successful nature of the U.S. Presidential Candidate Donald Trump who is also a business professional. He initially

explicitly positioned himself the leader of the group, while later during the group interview he stated that all the participants were leaders. His behavior within the conversation group setting appeared to contradict the statement. Throughout the entire semester, he remained a vocal participant, overly directing the other group members during the activities and offering suggestions about life and school. Trump tried to work with all of the members in the group. If they did not understand something, he tried to give examples. If there was a task that students did not know how to organize, he organized it. He asked for help when he needed it. He was very vocal in the group and with other group members. He tried to make the environment fun, and students often laughed a lot at his jokes. He wanted to learn English to help him with his business, but also to help other students. He attended a number of English conversation classes offered at the university and at other local colleges to practice English.

Group dynamics were an important aspect of the study. Students came in early every Monday to have lunch and sat and talked about their classes, books they were reading, and what they did on the weekend. The figure below demonstrates the conversation group seating arrangement:

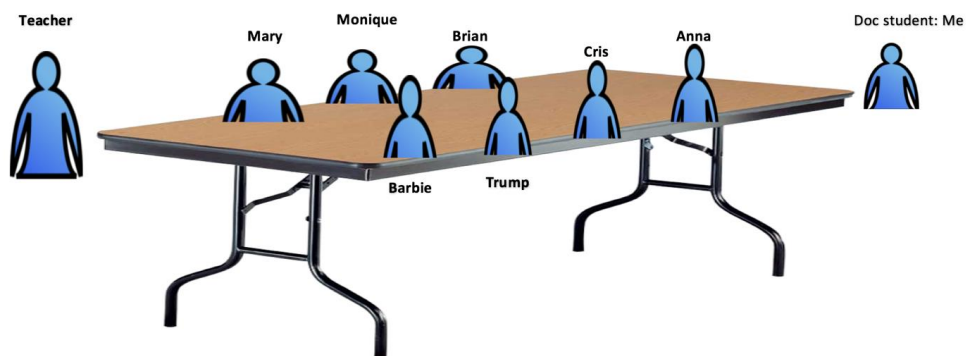


Figure 1. Conversation group.

Students tried to sit at the same seat every time they came to the group. When a student was absent, students would replace that chair, and sit in the empty seat. They either sat in this empty seat to be closer to the board or to help out a classmate. Figure 1 above demonstrates what the classroom setting was like. The room was spacious and gave the students the accessibility to complete a variety of activities. Students were able to move desks around without any complication to do puzzles, games, and work in small groups. Common activities included American History, puzzles, games, and *What If* scenarios. Students enjoyed games that included grammar the most. From the data, it appeared that students were able to relate to one another because they had taken the same classes and gave each other tips on how to work with different teachers. They talked about books they were reading and joked about not revealing the ending so that other students had the opportunity to read the book. Some students took trips during the break with each other and other classmates in the program. The group dynamic was mostly competitive because the conversation group consisted of a lot of games. However, students helped each other even though they were not on the same team. At times they shouted out or whispered the answers, so that their classmates could learn from the activity.

Research Findings

The data I analyzed included field notes of my observations, which included what observation participants did and said, transcriptions of two individual and one group interview (a total of eight interviews) with all four observation/interview participants, and my researcher's journal. As a result of this analysis, I identified three major themes: *Aspects of Communities of Practice, Identity and Language*. These themes described why this group of students decided to belong to this particular CoP, their motivation for attending and

participating in this CoP, and their experiences in the CoP. Before elaborating on these themes, I will briefly describe the process of analysis. This information was also included in Chapter 3, but will be used here to reestablish how the process was used. In an iterative process using the Dedoose online data analysis software, I identified a variety of codes that correlated to salient excerpts of the participant transcripts and observation notes.

As I began to cluster and organize these codes, I developed a number of super ordinate categories under which the codes appeared to cluster. These super ordinate categories became the themes for this analysis. The study showed that there were many facets to Identity. The theme *Identity* in this study represented *Self-Identity* and *Social Identity*. *Self-Identity* and *Social Identity* were subthemes of Language and Identity. The results showed that the CoP established a sense of belonging. Belonging to a group of international students made the participants feel comfort and support, because they were among people who experienced the same struggles in learning English.

In addressing the research questions, the findings show that the CoP informed their international student identity because they felt they belonged to a group of international students. This sense of belonging to a group is social identity. However, they did not feel their English was sufficient enough to use outside of the CoP, which affected their self-identity when using English. What I am saying here is that identity was part of the study, but the findings show that it was best represented under *self-identity*, where students discussed how they felt about using English. This affected how they viewed themselves as speakers of English. Students discussed that language proficiency was an obstacle in speaking in their ESL classroom, if they were in large groups of students or when they had to use English with a group of Americans. Students stated that they would rather stay quiet than participate in

English to "save face" in front of others. In addition, the theme *Language* was linked with *Identity* because students discussed the importance of language proficiency and the reasons for learning English, which influenced their social identity.

Additionally, as I looked through the emerging organization of the data and themes, I noticed other codes were very similar to the components used to represent the main aspects of communities of practice: mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire (Wenger, 1998). Therefore, I decided to use these main aspects to represent one of my themes, called *Aspects of Communities of Practice*. This theme and its components were identified in my data and supported my analysis. Creating themes from the literature is not uncommon. According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), "themes come from both the data (an inductive approach) and from the investigator's prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (an a priori approach)" (p. 88). Therefore, I used Wenger's (1998) descriptions of the main aspects of CoP as the formal definition for one of my themes.

All of the themes that emerged had several subthemes. The subthemes helped explain the reasons for being part of group of international students. The subthemes and components are from the data and were defined from my findings in the data. Table 3 contains a list of themes, subthemes, and components.

Table 3:

Themes, Subthemes, and Components

Aspects of a CoP	Language and Identity
1. Mutual Engagement: <i>Belonging</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive Feelings • Comfort • Friendship 2. Joint Enterprise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning • Participation • Support 3. Shared Repertoire: <i>Shared Purpose</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for Speaking • Small Groups 	1. Self-Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of Being Othered or Othering • Saving Face 2. Social Identity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language proficiency as an obstacle to speaking in the group • Feelings about Language Proficiency • Reasons for Learning English

Note. Themes, Subthemes, and Components from the data.

In the following paragraphs, I will describe each of the themes, subthemes, and components. In addition, I will provide examples from different forms of data collected (interviews, observation notes, and from my researcher's journal) that I think best represent each theme, subtheme, and component. In the following paragraphs, I will first talk about *Aspects of a CoP and then about Identity and Language*. The data showed that being part of the CoP helped to establish social identity for the participants, but it also influenced how they used and thought about English. In addition, being part of the CoP helped students reflect on their own self-identity as international students participating in a group. A model of this representation can be seen in the figure below.

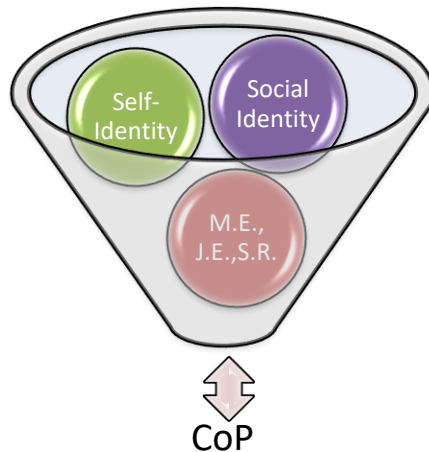


Figure 2. Research Findings.

Aspects of Communities of Practice. The theme Aspects of Communities of Practice was used as an approach in understanding how people work together in a group to reach a common goal. The focus of this study was to investigate how participation in a CoP informed the identity of non-native speaking university international students studying in the U.S. I believe that this framework provided a foundation in understanding how participation in a CoP for non-native English-speaking university students informed their international student identity. Furthermore, it showed how participation in a CoP contributed to their sense of belonging. This theme not only served as a framework, but it appeared in the data. The codes first emerged from the data, which led them to become a theme that was very similar to the aspects of a CoP. Therefore, I used CoP as a theme to capture the results from the data and to support the subthemes, *Mutual Engagement, Joint Enterprise, and Shared Repertoire*. These subthemes will be described in the following paragraphs.

Mutual engagement. The subtheme Mutual Engagement is the interaction between participants that leads to a formation of a shared meaning or common purpose (Wenger, 1998). What made mutual engagement possible for the practice was belonging to the group.

The students participated in an English conversation group to improve their English by coming to an extra hour of conversation outside of their classes. From the observations and comments made in the interviews by participants, they felt comfortable and safe to speak English in the group. For the participants, belonging to a group was more than just participation; it meant that their voices would be heard and that they were engaged in something that was important to them. In the group they were able to express themselves without feeling the pressures of trying to speak English proficiently. Students helped each other with vocabulary and cultural understandings of the way people interact differently from their individual cultures. The subtheme *Belonging* best represented Mutual Engagement. The components *Positive Feelings, Comfort, and Friendship* emerged as part of *Belonging*.

Belonging. Belonging was a subtheme from Mutual Engagement. *Belonging* represented how students were able to be part of a group where other members understood what they experienced as international students, and that in this group they were able to practice English in a safe environment where they would not be judged. From the data, I identified that *belonging* best represented the operational definition of social identity from Chapter 1. Social identity is an individual's awareness that he or she belongs to a group and feels that they belong to a group by interacting, and being able to establish that they belong to a group (Tajfel, 1972). The following examples from the data represent the sense of belonging to a group.

Students expressed that speaking English fluently was very important to them and they felt that this group was a safe place for them to make errors, and help each other with pronunciation, grammar, and speaking. For example, Monique stated that she felt comfortable speaking English with a group of international students versus a mixed group of

American students. In the following excerpt, Monique discussed her feelings about preferring to belong to a group of international students:

Linka: Would you go? Would you go if there was a small group of Americans who met? Because remember when you leave [name of program] you might have to go to study groups, would you feel comfortable going to study groups?

Monique: I would not feel comfortable, but if I had to go, I would go.

Linka: Why would you feel uncomfortable?

Monique: Because I prefer, not I prefer but, I feel more comfortable with international, with international students than with American students.

Monique did not want to speak English with native speakers because she thought she was not fluent enough. She stated, “When one person speaks very well English, I don’t feel comfortable maybe this person knows all my problem words, or my bad pronunciation.” In this example, the participant addressed that she only felt she belonged to a group when the group could identify with her. Her identification for belonging was being an international student of this conversation group.

At the group interview, participants were asked if the group had helped them become friends. Three out of the four participants said yes. Trump said the group helped him because the members in the group shared similarities in the way that they speak, meaning the level of English.

Trump: Because our English is very similar.

Group: (laughs)

Trump: We understand.

Mary: We understand each other.

Monique: We understand each other.

I also asked participants if being part of the group had helped them get American friends. I asked if the things that they had learned in the group had helped their English-speaking skills. One participant gave a very good example. The example below is of Mary's second interview.

Linka: Do you have any friends outside of [name of program]?

Mary: Yeah.

Linka: You do? American?

Mary: One American friend.

Linka: Has the conversation group helped you talk to her in some things?

Mary: Actually I think, it's my aunties boyfriend's daughter and at first we lived together for a month, and actually it was my first semester here. I didn't talk to her very much cuz my conversation was not very well but last time, two weeks ago we had dinner together and just me and her, so I talked to her more and she is a little bit surprised that I talked to her a lot. So think I improved a lot, I think, yeah.

From the examples above and from observations in the group, students would have not attended this non-required group without feeling a sense of belonging. It was an extra hour right after their English classes and some of the students had other important commitments, but they still kept on coming each Monday. Two aspects of belonging that were particularly silent were positive feelings that the group members had about the group and the sense of comfort that the group members felt. In addition, Mary felt that being part of a group and the things she was learning in the group helped her to communicate better with her American friend.

Positive feelings. The component positive feelings came from the subtheme *belonging*, and it described how students felt about participating and why they continued to come to the group. This subcomponent came from the data. It was an important subcomponent because it helped to understand how it helped students inform their international student identity and their sense of belonging to a group of international students. Monique decided to be a member of this group of international students and not other groups because she said she felt good, relaxed, safe, and it was a fun hour to practice English. She stated:

Monique: For me, I feel good in this class, not important, I am this class, but I like to be here.

Linka: Ah, you like to be here. Why do you like to be here?

Monique: Because for me, it's a funny hour to speak English. It is a good way to relax and say.

Linka: And to say whatever you want?

Monique: Yeah, and speak everything different things or [in English! Yeah [and feel safe about it].

Monique was very worried about speaking English with large groups, being around native speakers outside of the group, and preferred to speak English with international students. In the data above, discussing belonging, Monique stated the same concept about feeling comfort and safety, and this was apparent in the component *Positive feelings*. Another participant, Mary, described her interaction with the group as a positive one. The information below described her positive experiences in the group:

Linka: Ok, my question I have is tell me about your interaction with other people in this group? What do you do in the group and let's start with the first one? Tell me about your interaction in this group. So when you are interacting and talking with people, how do you feel being part of this group when you are talking with them? How does this make you feel about yourself?

Mary: I think um, it makes me feel um, more confidence, because that is a small group and we can share our opinions and um sometimes maybe a little bit shy to maybe with the teacher or instructor, they ask me question in the class. Maybe I am a little bit shy or I need time to think to answer the question, but in a group it is more easier. More relax, yeah and I don't need to worry the the I need the answer the question immediately. I have time to think about it and discuss so.

In this example, Mary stated that being able to talk was important to her. She mentioned in another section, under *Small Groups* that she did not like to talk in large groups because she did not like the teacher to correct her in front of everyone. She also said that she did not feel she had sufficient time to speak because her English program classes were large and were short to practice English. Mary stated that this group helped her feel confident about herself, which expressed positive feelings about belonging to a group of international students. In regard to the group interview, the same positive feelings were noted in individual interviews. In the group interview, Trump stated that he attended this group because he enjoyed it. He said, "I think it is actually our group is the conversation group we have our classmates who want to improve their conversation and we have many activities in our conversation class, so yeah I like the enjoy the time." Again, all examples used from the data in this section discuss how belonging to a group of international students helped their sense of belonging. Students

expressed positive feelings about belonging to this group of international students. Three out of the four participants stated that they had a positive experience in the group, and this is one of the main reasons they continued to participate in the group.

Comfort. The component being comfortable while participating in the group was an important factor to the participants. *Comfort* in the data came from the subtheme *belonging* and it meant consistency in attendance and familiarity with group members. For example, the second interview with Monique showed that comfort was a very important factor for participating in the group. She indicated that she felt comfortable the whole time she was there, but that her comfort level changed towards the end of the semester.

Linka: Pretty much you get along here, maybe because those people are your classmates. How do you feel when you talk to other people in the group? [Yeah, comfortable.] Do you feel comfortable? Are they kind to you?

Monique: I feel comfortable. Yeah, more comfortable now, than the beginning.

Linka: Why? How has it changed from the beginning to now?

Monique: Maybe the beginning, is... I am comfortable the whole year, the whole semester. Maybe now, we have a better group and I feel more comfortable, yeah. ah, certain, closer, yeah. You feel closer to the other people. Maybe the time, every day, every Monday to see the same person talk with the same person you feel comfortable and closer with them.

Trump stated that he felt comfortable in the group as well. He felt that his group members were committed to the group because they attended regularly.

Linka: You feel that it is a friendly group?

Trump: So, I also think I want to make good feel, good feeling each other. Most people in this group, we have I think the most important is the there is responsibility, this group is an important group. Our member has not changed our member is always continued the same persons that is think that is important. But if another activity so many changes the group member.

Both participants felt that regularity in the group created comfort, because the same members kept attending every Monday and were dedicated to the group. Other observations show that Barbie, Brian, Cris, and Anna demonstrated comfort in the group as well. During the beginning of the semester, Brian was hesitant to ask questions from the group. However, towards the end of the semester he asked more questions to different members of the group. He used to rely heavily on asking Monique and Mary for help, but he later asked for help from different members of the group. Cris and Anna started to talk less in their native language with each other and moved closer to the group but this depended on the day. There were times that they did talk more in their native language. I believe this could have been on the difficulty of the topic and relied on their second language to help each other. In the following example from the observation notes, I noticed that Anna and Cris appeared calm and open to participate with the group. In addition, all members appeared to be comfortable participating in the group.

Barbie moved to the middle of the group. There was no gap between Barbie, Anna, and Cris. Today the group looked very calm and open to joke about topics with each other. They also asked more questions to each other and to the teacher about words they did not understand.

I think that Anna and Cris tried to ask Trump or Monique for help, because they were closer in seating arrangement to them. In addition, Barbie was speaking more in the group and in the group interview. She still took her time to respond to answers, but tried to participate to reach her goal of practicing English.

Friendship. The component *Friendship* is what belonging or being a part of the group meant to some of the participants. I am drawing from the operational definition of social identity, as defined in Chapter 1. Social identity is an individual's awareness that he or she belongs to a group and feels that they belong to a group by interacting, and being able to establish to themselves that they belong to a group (Tajfel, 1972). The component *friendship* emerged from the subtheme *belonging*. Mary and Monique made most of the comments about friendship. However, other participants made indirect comments on this theme. Both Monique and Mary agreed that friendship had developed in the group and attended the group to make new friends. In the following example, Mary stated the group helped her meet new friends and learn about different cultures:

Linka: How does it make you feel to be part of a group you told me you like to be in your classroom, but how does it make you feel to be part of that group? What does it make you feel like a person or like a [nationality] student?

Mary: Hum, hum, it's really, I'm really happy that I am in this group cuz um, I can know different friends.

Linka: Umhum

Mary: Not just my classmates, the same, and I can learn different culture, countries culture. So, I think it's good experience for me.

However, in the final group interview, Mary said her idea about participation had changed over time.

Monique: I think we feel more comfortable in class and we are friends now.

Mary: Friends.

Monique: We are friends now and more free to.

Mary: Easy talk.

Mary did not initially state that belonging or being part of the group helped with friendship. She said being part of the group gave her confidence. Mary talked about how this group was helpful for her because she learned from others. As I mentioned previously, friendship was probably not the main goal for attending the group for the participants, but it could have emerged because they participated in a group every Monday and came together because they had a common goal and that was to learn English.

Although friendship does not correlate with the definition of mutual engagement (interaction between participants that leads to a formation of a shared meaning or common purpose), it was a component that developed because of mutual engagement. I have labeled it as a subtheme. The data suggested that because students shared a common purpose and felt that they belonged to this group, they were able to build a bond and friendship. Four out of the seven participants in this group traveled together and ate lunch together. All group members were also friends on Facebook.

Joint enterprise. The subtheme *Joint Enterprise* means the process of how people are involved and how they work together to pursue a goal (Wenger, 1998). The students in the conversation group worked together to pursue their goal of learning English. Learning was a component shared by all participants. Participants kept going to the group because they felt

that they were learning and practicing English. This contributed to their sense of belonging to a CoP. They learned from playing games and explaining things to each other. Learning English was also important for their future plans. Participation was another component. Students participated by helping each other and challenging each other through competition. However, Trump reported that it was more than just learning, it was a part of life. This group was a way for him to teach younger students about life. His example and those from other participants are shown in the succeeding paragraphs. Furthermore, the following components that were produced from Joint Enterprise were: Learning, Participation, and Support.

Learning. The component learning characterizes how students established norms for participating in the group to learn English and the procedures they took to make sure they were learning. In order to pursue this goal, some students would make it a point not to speak their native language and other students would try to speak as much English as they could. For example, Mary was determined to practice English. She set requirements for herself in the group. In the first interview with Mary I noticed that she sat in a certain location in the group. Mary stated that she wanted to sit with people who wanted to speak English in class.

Even though Monique and I know another student who speaks [language], when we are together we always speak English. We have the same, how do I say it, we wanna speak English, we want to learn English, so we try not to speak our native [language]. Both Mary and Monique sat at the same location every Monday, and I never heard them speaking their native languages in front of each other. They established these learning goals to help them improve their English. They not only established these goals in the conversation group, but they mentioned that they set these goals for themselves in their ESL classes.

For Barbie the conversation group topics did not matter; she stated that she learned something no matter the topic. Her goal was to learn and practice English. Even though she had trouble understanding English in different contexts, she did her best to apply what she learned in the conversation group to everyday situations. She said that she had trouble talking to people at the hospital. Particularly, when she saw a doctor or a nurse, she would write down her symptoms and then translate them to English. Barbie stated that her ability to adapt to English might have grown from her conversation group. For this participant, the conversation topics were not important to her. She used the skills she was learning in her conversation group and applied them to a variety of settings. She said, "I have to choose a something or a word topic or that adapts to the conversation or something. I think it is useful." Barbie stated that she adapted the different topics, scenarios, and vocabulary that she learned from the conversation group and applied them to everyday situations.

During the group interview some participants stated they were learning from the group and saw how other students were improving in their confidence to speak English. Mary and Monique discussed how the group had helped Brian talk more and give him confidence. Barbie joined this discussion and stated that before she was participating in the group, it was hard to communicate with her host family. She said she was learning in the group because she was able to apply what she learned with her host family.

Linka: Do you think it has helped you in your own classes to free to talk more? Show more confidence?

Monique: Yeah

Mary: Yeah

Monique: Because Brian talks more.

Mary: Brian talks more.

Monique: He prefers to come with us and do the activities and before he=

Mary: Before he separate=

Monique: He was separate and alone and now he will say, “May I join you?” I said, come with us.

Barbie: Yes, first I live, I am living with my host family the first time last semester, there was distance. Gradually step-by-step more closer.

From reviewing the examples above, both Mary and Barbie took charge of how they wanted to participate in the conversation group to help them reach their learning goals. Mary established that she would only use English in the group and sat with people who wanted to do the same thing. Barbie, on the other hand, used the information she learned in the group, regardless of the topic, and learned how to apply what she learned to different contexts. Furthermore, when Mary, Monique, and Barbie were asked if the group had helped them learn more, they all stated it had. Mary and Monique also mentioned that it had helped Brian out the most.

Participation. The component *Participation* represents the way participants used the group to pursue their goals to learn English by participating regularly and speaking English as much as possible. The following excerpts from the data are examples of how students used participation to learn English in the group. The first example was taken from the initial interview with Monique.

Monique stated that she participated in this group because she wanted to learn English. She said this group gave her an opportunity to practice English and interact with other people.

Linka: Ok basically these questions are about the group. How this group kind of makes you feel, this is an overview of what we are going to talk about.

The first question I have for you, is, um, so you are participating in this conversation group. So tell me about that. Why did you decide to participate in this conversation group, versus any other group you have heard about?

Monique: Because this group, ah for me for me was ah a great opportunity to speak English and to learn English better.

Linka: Um hum.

Monique: To speak with other people and interaction.

As mentioned previously, Monique and Mary were dedicated to participating and attending the group. She only missed one session of the group, spoke English all the time, and was an active member of the group.

Trump attended multiple conversation groups and never missed a session. For Trump, participating in the group meant improving his English skills. He said,

This group means to me ah, so my to improve my English skill, so I participation in this conversation group I want to talk as many times to another person. I want to hold another student's ideas. This is this group goal and target.

Trump spoke a lot in the group. He even talked to the more reserved observation participants, Anna and Cris. He set his goals on talking as much as he could to practice English. He felt that it was the groups' goal to talk as much as they could to practice English.

Although Anna and Cris participated in the group, they tended to speak their native language with each other for support. As mentioned previously, they slowly started participating with the rest of the group members. They would try to practice their English by

asking other group members for help and asking them to clarify answers and statements. They did not miss any of the group sessions, and towards the end of the semester were more engaged in the activities with other group members. From the samples provided above, students participated in the group to help reach their goals of learning and practicing English.

Support. The component *Support* refers to how students help one another in the group. Support was the last subtheme under joint enterprise. Trump emphasized that competition was a form of support that would help students in their future endeavors. Other students like Mary and Monique showed that listening and explaining information to their group members was being supportive. In addition, there were a plethora of non-verbal cues that demonstrated the support that group members provided to each other. For example, the observation notes showed that students changed positions in the group over the course of time. Across the semester, Cris and Anna moved closer to Trump and Barbie. Trump believed that these students moved closer to the rest of the group because they were a small group. He said that the students came regularly to the conversation group and were dedicated to learning. Although Trump did not state that the students moved to the front because they felt supported, the data shows otherwise. Students moved closer to each other when one student was absent. For example, Mary moved closer to Brian and took Monique's chair when she was absent one day and took the role of helping out Brian. Monique usually helped out Brian the most. She explained unfamiliar vocabulary to him and gave him examples of terms that were unfamiliar to him. She said that Brian always asked her for help in explaining tasks. She said, "he always, can you explain me. He asks, "Can you give me an example?" Because sometimes, he don't um doesn't understand the game or something." She said Brian asked the most questions in the conversation group because he felt more comfortable there.

She said this conversation group was an extra hour of practice that helped students who were shy to speak up. She said, “Because it’s an extra hour speak with your partner. Maybe it’s a funny hour and maybe, you, he's very shy, maybe he broke this, this the the the difficult he has to relationship with other person. He broke this.” According to Monique, the students supported each other in the group and in their regular classes. She stated in the previous examples that the group helped to support Brian to speak more, because he was very shy. The excerpt “he broke this” meant that before Brian was very reserved in his English classes and in the conversation group and with Monique’s help and his conversation with group peers, he was able to build confidence.

I did not interview Brian (observation participant), but from what I observed in the group and from Monique’s interview, it appeared that the conversation group served as a support system for students who were shy and uncomfortable speaking English in front of others. For example, I observed Brian’s transition from being very reserved at the beginning of the conversation group, to becoming outspoken towards the end of the group. He did not speak to me in the beginning of the group and later when we both arrived early to the conversation group, he would ask me questions about how certain greetings were used. He began to ask questions to Trump and would make jokes with him during the group session. He also started asking more questions to the teacher.

The other two observation participants Anna and Cris followed the same patterns. They both were very reserved in the class, Anna more than Cris. Anna rarely spoke to other classmates in the group. She mostly spoke with Cris because they were both from the same country and took English language courses together. Anna participated in the group, but not as actively as Trump, Monique, and Mary. These three participants spoke the most. Anna

started speaking to her conversation peers later in the semester. To see if the conversation patterns changed before and during the group, I arrived about 10 minutes earlier to see if both Anna and Cris would engage in conversations with the rest of the group before the group started and they did. They talked about what they had done in their English classes and to complain about homework. Most of the time they came in earlier to eat their lunch with the rest of the group members. Over the course of the semester I felt that the participation, trust, and support changed for Brian, Cris, and Anna. An example of this was portrayed when students played the game Guesstures. In this game students are placed in teams and have a certain amount of time to act out the cards they have chosen. The team the students are in need to guess what the other team is acting out in a certain time frame or else they lose a point. This was the first time I had observed Cris so active in a game. She was very enthusiastic when acting out her scenarios. Her team was trying to support her in doing their best to understand what she was acting out. Anna was yelling out the answers as quickly as she could to get the concept. While the other team was acting, I saw Monique explaining the different vocabulary words used in the game to Brian. When it came for Brian to act, he appeared to be having fun in the game and did his best to find different ways of explaining his selected cards to his group.

At first Anna, Cris, and Brian were the most reserved participants and later started engaging more in the group by talking more in the conversation group and arriving to the conversation group earlier. However, they never changed the side of the table they sat in and always sat next to the same people. Although it appeared that this change was due to trust and feelings of support, they still sat with the people they probably felt the most comfortable

with. These comments are only based on observations, because Cris, Anna, and Brian were not interview participants.

Other forms of supports came from the entire group. When the teacher explained an unfamiliar word and Barbie did not understand, the rest of the group gave several examples until Barbie understood. Students began to bond more in the group over the semester. Cris and Anna moved closer to Trump and Barbie and asked each other for help. If Trump or Barbie did not know the answer, either Cris or Anna would ask for help from the group members across the table (Mary, Monique, and Brian). For example, on the third week of the conversation group, while the students were playing a game, I noticed that Cris who was usually shy in the group was doing very well expressing herself in the game. Equally, the group supported Brian. If he did not understand something, everyone in the group tried to help and explain the meaning to him. Monique tried to give examples, definitions, and scenarios. In the following example of my observation notes for one of the conversation groups, I witnessed some students supporting one another in the group:

Today is the seventh week of the meeting in the group. The activity for the day is strange questions and a game. The students get a sheet of paper. They have to talk across from each other on the topic they are given. Topic 1: Would you like to read minds or have the ability to fly? Students have 4 seconds. The next 45 minutes they are dedicated to talking about an opposite point of view. Topic 2: Would you rather be poor or rich and ugly? Topic 3: Would you be ok never touching a human again or technology? The students stated that they did not understand, so they asked to see Trump's paper. Topic 4: Would you rather not be able to use your hands or walk? Topic 5: Would you like to be the 1st or last to die out of your friends? Students have

to give logical reasons. Then they have to switch their original decisions. Topic 6: Would you rather save the life of one person you are close to or save the lives of 5 random strangers? The group shared points and go back and forth between points.

This type of talking structure appears to be helping discuss their points. Students are laughing at the strange scenarios.

In the activity above, Trump showed support by letting his classmates see his paper. He shared his ideas with the rest of the group to help them understand the scenarios. The group showed support in this activity when they switched their original decisions. They used critical thinking skills and discussed points back and forth to help each other understand the scenarios. Support was also shown in the form of teaching or correcting, or providing responses when needed. For example, on the fourth week of the conversation group, students were given an assignment on putting the U.S. map together. Trump started putting the puzzle together and directing students where each state was. That day I wrote in my observation notes the following comments:

I noticed that Trump took over the assignment. He started putting the puzzle together right away. This activity should be a group effort and Trump is telling students what parts to grab to put the puzzle together. There was not a lot of communication because Trump is talking to himself. The group just let him take over the puzzle.

They worked very little on helping because he was telling where the pieces went.

At that point in time, those comments were reported because that is what was observed.

However, during the second interview with Trump, I made it a point to ask Trump questions about our previous interview and about my observation notes. One of the questions was about how he worked with this group when putting together the puzzle and why he started

telling his group members what to do. Trump stated that he reacted in that way because he was a businessman. He said, “I think is my character, my personality, because I am a little bit different, I am a business man. I like win the game.” Trump continued the conversation explaining that his team did not know where the American states belonged and he had experiences building puzzles and that is why he decided to take charge and tell everyone where things belonged. The following excerpt below from the data explains his reasoning for why putting the puzzle together would help his group members.

The layout, because it is very important and then the next time my members, I want give a chance to another group member, it is more easy, but the first thing is the layout, make it very difficult. They find it difficult; some people said I don't know. How can they make the puzzle? I'm just make first the layout and then, so you remember. I just layout and I decide the place and some my group member they make another part.

Trump was unique in verbalizing how his form of support was beneficial for the group. This form of support appeared to be bossy on Trump's part, but it appeared that he genuinely wanted to help group members. These dominant characteristics may have been due, in part, to his self-identity as a leader of the group. For example, he stated that “I want to teach it to them, the membership, it is very important and so this class is not in regular class, but it is important to studying at the university life or school life.” No other participant expressed support as teaching students about life, except Trump. Although, it may have appeared that Trump was bossy and domineering instead of supportive to his group. After speaking to him, I found out that he sincerely wanted to help his classmates, and was supporting them the best way he knew how.

Support was also shown in the form of competition. The group dynamic was probably pre-determined by the group leader (the ESL teacher). The activities consisted of many games and activities that engaged students in competition, such as, Guesstures, puzzles, Apples to Apples, and Cranium. Nonetheless, students seemed to be comfortable engaging in the activities and were competitive. For example, during a game of Apples to Apples, I observed that students would correct each other, either one-on-one or as a group. The following example was from observation notes:

Students are then asked by the instructor to choose some words from a game called Apples to Apples. Students have about a minute to select cards and then have the other group members explain the same concept as the game before by choosing a word and explaining its difference from the rest of them. The two [nationality] girls talk in [language] and ask each other what each word means. The rest of the groups are still speaking in English. The [nationality] girls are up first with their words. They choose Aliens, Caterpillars, Mash potatoes, and glitter. The instructor has decided to join in on the game. Brian asks what an alien is. Everybody laughs at him. Monique and Trump make a joke about Brian's comments because Trump likes to give hard explanations about grammar. Brian then is trying to explain the word selfies, but says it wrong and the group helps correct his pronunciation. They supported each other by yelling out correct answers to the game Apples to Apples when the other student was wrong.

During this game, students did not seem to be offended by correction, but rather appreciated the help from their classmates and joked around with each other. However, Trump was the

only participant who stated that games played in the group taught competition. He indicated in the second interview that competition is a part of life and a skill that is needed to survive.

We are all always competitive, competition, each game or any activity. I think, so some teams have very strong, strong mind...a lot of students they enter the school every time they get competition. They get competitions, after they graduate school and when they want to go to job, very very difficult, ... I think that school is very important place, especially university because after university they can find a job. At that time, it is not easy; they have to make their future.

Trump meant what he said about competition. During the conversation group, he challenged the rest of the students. He tried to come up with the best answers in the games, responded to difficult questions, but gave praise to students who had better answers than his. Trump also wanted to learn English for business, but this was not discussed as much in our interviews. His emphasis was spent more on talking about how to help the group.

Shared repertoire. The subtheme *shared repertoire* means a shared purpose for being in this group. Sharing similar ideas and feelings about being in this group, and how they did things in the group was another theme in the data. The main subtheme was shared repertoire, which came from the literature, but was found in the data. Students discussed that this group not only gave them an opportunity to speak English, but that it was the right amount of students. They had the opportunity to participate in the group without feeling lost in a large group of students as they had once felt before in other groups. The subtheme of shared repertoire was shared purpose. The components that were developed from the data of *Shared Purpose* were: Opportunities for Speaking and Small Groups.

Shared purpose. Shared purpose is a subtheme of Shared Repertoire describing shared reasons for being part of the group. The students in the group demonstrated that they had a common purpose for being part of the group. This common purpose was to speak English by practicing it in the group. This component came from the data.

Trump stated in his second interview when discussing group dynamics that this group had a common purpose for being in the group. He said, “we have just one reason, I think that is everybody said that they want to speak English well: our goal and our target.” He mentioned the same phrase before in the first interview when discussing participation. The fact that he mentioned this phrase twice during two different interviews demonstrated that his purpose did not change.

Mary described the same feelings about shared goals in the group in her first initial interview. She stated that other group members shared her feelings for speaking English with each other.

Linka: So I noticed you sit with different people?

Mary: Yes, because we wanna speak English. Even though Monique and I know another student who speaks [language], when we are together we always speak English.

Linka: Oh Together?

Mary: We have the same, how do I say it, we wanna speak English, we want to learn English, so we try not to speak our native [language], so.

Although this was an initial interview, it was apparent in all of the observations that all interview/observation participants shared the same view. All of the participants only spoke English and this helped them practice it.

However, in the following example, Monique mentioned that the group shared more than their feelings on practicing English. She said, “in this group, maybe we have the same level, we have the same English maybe we have the same, we feel the same.” She stated in the group interview that she felt comfortable with a group of international students versus a mixed group comprised of international students and native speakers of English.

Furthermore, this group gave her an opportunity to talk and learn English.

Monique: Because this group, ah for me for me was ah a great opportunity to speak English and to learn English better.

Linka: Um hum.

Monique: To speak with other people and interaction.

She not only spoke about participation in this group because they had a shared purpose for practicing English, but she mentioned that being part of a group of international students that shared similar experiences and struggles as hers made her feel part of the group.

Opportunities for speaking. A component of shared purpose was opportunities for speaking. Opportunities for speaking means students joined and attended the group regularly to have opportunities to speak English. This subcomponent came from the data. All four participants expressed that the group gave them an opportunity to practice English outside of class. However, each participant stated opportunities for speaking English differently. For some participants it meant opportunities with comfort and for other participants it was a way for them to apply what they learned in their classes. The following examples from the interviews described opportunities for speaking.

Barbie participated in the group because she said, “I can talk with another class people.” She stated in the rest of the initial interview that she would have participated in

more conversation groups, but she had transportation issues. The time of the conversation group that met every Monday was helpful to her schedule.

Similarly, Monique said that the group was good and she got to participate and speak English. She said, “For me, I feel good in this class, not important, I am this class, but I like to be here.”

Linka: You said in the classroom you feel unsafe speaking English? [Yeah.], but they are all international students? [Yeah!]

Monique: [Yeah.] I can't explain you, [Could you explain it in [language], if you could?] [Translated to English]: I just don't know how to explain it to you Linka.

Maybe because it is not like a class that you are learning about material or something like that. You can talk about different things or funny things. You feel more comfortable participating. It's not like talking about what you think about abortion? (laughing). I am using the topic about abortion, because this is the topic we are having a debate on in our class. I think the topic is harder. We have a lot of people in our regular classes, I don't know.

Monique liked the conversation group because it was an opportunity to speak English, but comfort was also important to her. She mentioned in the interview that she attended a conversation group in the summer, but stopped attending because the group size was too large. For Monique speaking English was an important factor, but she also wanted to feel comfortable while participating. Monique said that a large group of students made her feel uncomfortable, and she was not able to participate as much as she wanted. As mentioned before in the participation section, she wanted to practice English. It was difficult for her to practice English in a large group.

Mary wanted to improve her conversation skills, but stated that the regular class time at the English language program was not sufficient, and it was difficult to speak because it was a large class. She said, “in the class you have, um, fifteen students in class you can’t talk with them in the whole class, so I think that attending conversation group, I can improve my conversation skills.” Like Monique, Mary stated that the opportunity to speak English and participate had to do with the amount of students in a group. She too wanted to practice her English-speaking skills, but felt uncomfortable in a large group. She felt that too many students took away her opportunity to speak English.

Trump felt that conversation was the best way to improve his English. However, he believed that he should practice what he learned in class and apply the speaking skills out of class at the conversation group. He stated the following information:

I am [name of program] student. I am studying ESL class in the [university]. I want to improve my English, so, but conversation is the best way for improve English. So I attend the conversation group [name of program].

Trump attended the conversation group to have opportunities to speak English outside of class and to apply what he learned in class. Although each participant had a different way to use the conversation group for other opportunities for speaking English, they all attended the group to get extra practice outside of the English language program.

Small groups. Another component of shared purpose was the ideal size of a small group. This subcomponent came from the data. All observation/interview participants did not like large conversation groups. Barbie described why she liked this small conversation group, “there is many opportunity to talk and have to talk.” She stated why she did not like large conversation groups: “in large group in big group, there is no need to talk.” The excerpt

below described Barbie's experience with a large group and why she was hesitant to join this conversation group:

The first time I didn't come to conversation, because last semester in July. A lot of students come and it became a very big group. So, I felt strange and not so good. At first I didn't join this group, later she said no, there is not so many people, so I said I go.

Barbie did not like large groups because she did not have the opportunity to talk, and she joined this group to practice speaking English.

Mary mentioned the same about large groups and gave an example about how large groups affected her learning conversation skills. She stated that she was in the group to help her improve her conversation skills. She expressed that it was difficult to practice conversation skills in her regular classes in the English language program she attended.

Mary: I want to improve my conversation skills. Because maybe in the class you have, um, fifteen students in class you can't talk with them in the whole class, so I think that attending conversation group, I can improve my conversation skills.

Mary felt that large groups hindered her from improving her conversation skills. She did not like large groups because there were 15 students in class, and the class time was short.

Monique also disliked larger groups. She said she felt more comfortable in a small group versus a big group. She gave an example about her classes in the English program.

Monique: I agree in our class for example, ehh, there are two people who are always talk with the teacher you never find the opportunity maybe to talk or something. In this group you have the same opportunity maybe. I think.

She stated in the interview that the conversation group gave all the students in the group an opportunity to talk and participate because it was a smaller group.

Like Mary, Trump had the same opinion about large groups and time. He stated that in a large group it was very difficult for students to speak because of the time limit and the amount of students. He liked the conversation group because it was small. He said, "I think this class is fifty minutes arrange and sit and introduce anyone so it very fast and spend time." He indicated that this group was easier to organize because students already knew where to sit and the routine. In a large group, students scrambled in to get a seat and that wasted time. Barbie agreed with Trump on the size of the group, she stated, "Small group has less people but easy to talk." In the following group interview, all participants agreed that a smaller group was better:

Linka: Do you think it is more effective that way because it is a small group? It makes it easier for you to participate with each other.

Monique: Yes, I think so.

Mary: Because in our class we have fourteen students and last semester we had ten, this semester it is different, more different than last semester. Last semester ten people, is easier. You don't have too many chances to talk.

Barbie: Last semester our class is only four.

Monique: Only four.

Barbie: After the Ramadan only [two]. That's good, private teacher.

Group: (laughing)

Mary: The teachers can focus on you and talk to you more.

Linka: You had private tutor.

Trump: You pay more.

Monique: You should pay more (laughing).

Barbie: So now, the teacher more easy to care because the final for students, so they can talk easily or friendly, this let us to good points. Good relationship with the teacher, only four.

Students stated that a small group was better because it not only gave you special attention from the teacher, but you were able to form a good relationship with the teacher. In addition, they had more opportunities to talk and practice English.

Identity and Language. The theme *identity* in the data represents how students viewed themselves when using English. Students were very critical of their self-identity. These themes derived from the data. Students described *experiences of being othered or othering* other international students. Under identity I noted the subtheme *self-identity*. Under the subtheme self-identity I identified the components *experience of being othered or othering and saving face (avoiding public embarrassment)*. I did not use any operational definitions for the theme self-identity, because the definition came from the data. The explanation of my reasons for not using an operational definition to define *identity* will be explained in Chapter 5, under discussion of my results. Moreover, language in the data represented how students' social identity was influenced. Students described how *language proficiency was an obstacle in speaking to a group, feelings about language proficiency, and reasons for learning English*. Language was a powerful factor in the data. Students shared that they wanted to speak perfect English and did not want to participate unless they sounded like a native speaker. These factors described above informed their self-identity as ESL

learners and as international students. In addition, it informed their social identity as participants of a group of only international students.

Self-identity. Self-identity is a subtheme that represented the perceived obstacles students created about themselves when using English because they thought their English skills were not proficient to use in social contexts with native speakers of English. This subtheme came from the data. In the example below, Trump described his feelings about being in a group with international students versus participating in a group with native speakers of English. He said that it would depend on the situation. Here are his examples:

When I met American native, so I am very considerate, and very concentration because of they are always use the English, but I always consider my English, grammar, pronunciation, and any thing, because I think depends on my character is that I want to make the perfect person.

Trump said he neither disliked nor minded the idea of participating in a group of native speakers of English, but he felt free to speak his mind if he were in a group with international students. He said if he were in a group with native speakers, he would worry about his pronunciation and grammar. Trump said he would want to sound perfect in English to communicate with the native speakers. Trump stated that he was self-conscious about using English around native speakers, and felt he needed to speak better. He acknowledged that he is a competitive person and wanted to sound his best when speaking to native speakers.

Mary was part of the same discussion with Trump in the group interview. Mary added that she did not mind native speakers; what bothered her was the group size. She preferred working in small groups to speak English. She said she felt embarrassed if the teacher corrected her in a large group of students. Mary said she knew she did a good job in the

group speaking English, but felt embarrassed in large groups. Mary's example indicated that she felt pressure and anxiety in large groups and felt safer in the conversation group because it was not class based.

Self-identity was difficult for Monique in regard to her speaking abilities in front of native speakers. Throughout the interview, Monique was given scenarios involving working with native speakers. Her comments throughout the interviews show that she was reluctant to work with native speakers and worried about her self-image. In the following example, Monique discussed why she would not want to speak English with American students. She said, "I prefer to speak English with foreign students, not with American." She said that international students understand her better, and she understands them. She stated that she did not feel comfortable when other people speak English very well. She said, "When one person speaks very well English, I don't feel comfortable maybe this person knows all my problem words, or my bad pronunciation."

The example above showed that three out of the four students interviewed did not feel comfortable speaking English in either large groups or with native speakers of English. They felt self-conscious about using English even when a hypothetical situation was given about using English. Students created perceived obstacles about their use of English, especially pronunciation. They did not want to make speaking or grammatical errors.

Experience of being othered or othering. The component *experience of being othered or of othering* is defined as students' feelings about not being able to speak English fluently. This component came from the data. Also, it represents how some conversation participants treated other students because they did not want to speak English. I identified that three out of the four participants declared that they were embarrassed to use English because of the

fear of not speaking fluently or of not knowing what to say to Americans when conversing with them. Participants also othered themselves by not being able to speak English. They also othered other students who did not want to speak English. Participants wanted to improve their language skills and sat with each other during class to avoid speaking the native language of their classmates. I will give examples from the data of othering and being othered in the following paragraphs below.

The following example is a hypothetical question I asked Monique about speaking to native speakers of English. Monique othered herself for not thinking she could speak English proficiently. Monique was worried about speaking fluently when she spoke to native speakers of English. The following example showed how she expressed the difference between native speakers of English and being part of a group of international students.

Monique: Yes because in this group, maybe we have the same level, we have the same English maybe we have the same, we feel the same. In the same, not level of English, but in the same.

Mary: We can talk what we want to talk.

Monique: But in the American group they are the queen, they speak very well English. They are more comfortable in the group. Maybe you feel less.

Mary: Yeah, not the [same].

Monique: [Like small.]

Monique: Not at the level of English of the people, the feel quality. Here in this group I feel equality, with (name of students) but with an American group I don't feel equality for them.

Monique othered herself because she felt she did not sound fluent enough to speak to native speakers. She also described the difference of belonging to a group of international students versus belonging to a group of native speakers of English. In addition, she described how being part of a group of native speakers would make her feel. She othered herself by stating she was not the same and would not feel like an equal in a group of native speakers of English.

In the following example, Trump felt othered because he was not able to understand the terms being used in a conversation with native speakers. Trump stated that he wanted to talk more, but it was difficult at times.

I want to talk to them any topic, but theirs conversation is very fast and they use idioms, so many idioms, and slangs, so sometimes I don't understand. When I attend that time, just ten or fifteen minutes, I always conversation to another person but after fifteen minutes I don't have any.

Trump felt othered, because he wanted to speak more, but could not understand some of the expressions the people were using in their conversation. In the last example that I provide, I observed that not only did the participants felt othered, but they othered other international students.

Mary described a situation when she, Monique and Trump decided to sit next to each other because other classmates wanted to speak their native language. Mary stated that maybe it was the age difference that other students did not really focus on learning English. She said:

We really want to improve our conversation. So, last time, I told him I don't want to sit with the same language classmate, we want to speak English. So, that is why I sit

with Monique and Trump. We always sit together speak English, no [native language] or [native language].

Barbie, like her classmates, othored herself about her use of English. In the following example below, she described an occasion when English was difficult for her to use. She could have said that she was an international student learning English, but she added my English is not very good.

Barbie: Shopping is not difficult. The hospital is difficult. I faced a difficult situation. I talked to a nurse, she said yes yes. Hospital language is another language. I said yes yes, I think so too. (laughing) So I write down my symptoms for the record. I bring my dictionary. First I told I am international student and my English is not very good.

I observed othering other participants during group meetings. During the first observation, students were setting up to do an activity. The following example provided are from observations notes.

The instructor writes down four words on the board and students have to figure out what is different about each word. Students work in groups to complete this task. The students decide who to work with in groups. When the instructor calls on them to explain their answers, Monique, Mary and Brian said it was time for the [country] team to give their answers. The instructor then calls on them by the name of their country. In the following example, I included some notes from my observations.

“Andrea and Cris sit away from the group and the group calls them team [country]. They talk mostly in [language], [language], and in English.” From this early observation, I noticed that Cris and Anna isolated themselves from the group. I was not able to interview them and ask them why they did this because they were not

interview participants. Not only did Anna and Cris isolate themselves by only speaking their native language with each other and sitting at the far corner of the table away from everyone else, but the group othered them by calling them the [country] team. They did not call them by their names, but rather identify them by their country of origin.

Throughout the semester Anna and Cris progressed. They started talking more to the group, but they still kept a slight distance. The following example below was from the observation notes towards the end of the semester.

Chit Chat before the group: I got to the class earlier to see if the students were talking before the group. The students are talking about their other classes. Before Anna and Cris did not talk to the other group members that much. Students were discussing the levels of the classes. They ask about the teacher and if the levels are difficult.

Monique does not speak to them in [language]. She spoke to them in English. Anna and Cris speak to each other in [language]. Trump stated that he would teach the Low Intermediate Level and then he will go to Harvard. All 7 students were there today.

In the two examples provided above from the observation notes, Anna and Cris still kept on communicating to each other in their native language. The first example from the observation notes was from the first observation and the next example was taken on the second to the last observation. Anna and Cris still othered other group members by speaking their native language with each other. The second example also shows that Monique chose not to speak to them in their native language. Monique stated she only spoke to them in their native language once. I never observed Monique speaking to them in their native language. The

following example below is from the initial interview with Monique discussing that she only spoke to the [country] team in their native language once.

Linka: Trump, not, [not the girls from [country] or the [nationality] girl]. Do the [nationality] girls ever talk to you in your [language]?

Monique: No, only once. She wanted to know about the eh, volleyball team, here in the United States at [name of university], and she asked me.

Linka: Did she ask you in [language]?

Monique: Yeah, in [language]. She told me, do you speak [language], I said yes, and she told me better. And she speaking in [language].

Linka: Do you think every time since then you speak in English?

Monique: Yes, in the group talk in English always.

Linka: Why do you think she spoke to you in [language] the first time? Was it the first meeting?

Monique: Yeah, she, if they speak me in [language] what I feel? It's not bad for me.

Linka: Was this the first time you guys met or was it the first or second time that you met that she asked you that question in your [language]?

Monique: The first time.

Linka: Ah, so she was trying to get to know you.

Monique: Because in the first class we played three things about you, two, ok, to true and one false. And I put in one thing that I play volleyball and she likes volleyball.

For this reason, she told me, she asked me in [language].

In the example above, Monique only spoke to Anna and Cris in [language] once even though Monique said it was ok with her to speak [language]. However, she said they always spoke English in the group. These findings will be discussed in Chapter 5 in more detail.

The examples provided in the sections above described how the participants othered themselves because they thought their English was not good enough, felt othered because they did not know what people were saying in a conversation with native speakers, and othered other international students because they preferred to speak their native language in class. This leads back to the research questions on how belonging to a group of international students helps their sense of belonging. Although English had helped establish a sense of belonging amongst a group of international students, it also caused students to other groups of students who did not know their native language or share their beliefs on using English. Students showed having a difficult time using English outside of the group and preferred to belong to a group of international students and speak English in the conversation group. These concerns will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Saving face. The component *saving face* represented students' feelings and thoughts about remaining quiet to maintain respect and avoid humiliation when using English with native speakers. This component came from the data. Students declared that they would rather not talk to native speakers if they were in their group to avoid embarrassing themselves.

In an interview with Monique on the topic of participating with native speakers of English at the university, she said this would be difficult for her and she would not feel good. She said she would not talk because she would be shy. She stated, "yes, I am shy and I am not comfortable speaking English with people who speak very well English." Monique would

not talk in the group because she felt shy and uncomfortable. She said if she had to go to the group she would go, but she would not participate in the group if it were by choice.

In the following example, Mary, Trump, and Monique discussed what would happen if Americans joined their conversation group.

Trump: If native American attend here, after fifteen minutes later it is very silent.

Mary: Yeah, like but with my American friends, I will talk less, than in with my class or [international students].

Monique: [International friends.]

Monique: Always.

Mary: Cuz maybe I think my English is not good enough, or I am scared if I say something wrong, make me feel embarrassed or something.

Monique: I think that we think that our English is always less than the really English or the level we have, maybe for this reason maybe we don't speak more.

Speaking English with native speakers was difficult for Monique. Her last comment in this section not only represented thoughts about herself, but she also spoke for the whole group.

Saving face appeared in the data as a form of not being able to speak when trying to have a conversation with a native speaker. In a conversation I had with Brian during the group session, he said that he wanted to communicate with the head of the English language department, but he just froze. He said he knew the answer to the question, but could not say anything. The following example below is from the observation notes.

Chit Chat before the group: The teacher asked the students some questions before the group started. She struck up a conversation with the group members about what they were eating and where it was from. Brian is usually shy, but he started talking to me

today. Today he brought cookies for the group. I asked him if that was his lunch and he said yes. I asked if he liked American food and he said no. I asked him if he liked to cook and he said yes and that it was not a problem. He said that time was a problem. He said can I ask you something, and I said sure. He said that the boss of the English program said hi to me and I knew the answer, but I couldn't answer. He said, I couldn't say anything.

The examples used in this group discussion represented three out of the four interview/observation participants' feelings and thoughts about using English. Students stated that they would rather not speak and avoid humiliation when using English with native speakers. Furthermore, Brian, the observation only participant stated that he could not speak when a native speaker spoke to him. In addition, one participant spoke for the group and stated that they (the group) thought their English level was less than what it really was. Students in these examples stated that it was difficult for them to speak in groups with native speakers of English because of their level of English or their perceived levels of English proficiency.

Social Identity. The subtheme social identity derived from the data. Earlier in this chapter I discussed how the component *belonging* in the subtheme *Mutual Engagement* described the operational definition of Social Identity by Tajfel (1972). However, this subtheme on *social identity* emerged from the data, drawing from the operational definition of social identity. This subtheme emphasized how English affected the social identity of the participants in the group. The subtheme *social identity* defines students' feelings about using English in a group of international students versus using English with native speakers. Students distinguish these differences and described how it would inform their social identity

when belonging to a group. Furthermore, the data showed that students had similar and different purposes for learning English. All of these findings represented how participation in a CoP informed their international student identity.

Language proficiency is an obstacle in speaking to a group. This component of social identity represented the obstacles and fears students described about speaking to a group in English. This component came from the data. Participants described how speaking English in a group with native speakers of English was difficult for them.

In the example below, Monique described how it would be difficult for her to use English in a university classroom with native speakers of English. Monique answered a hypothetical question about using English in a group of native speakers at the university. She said that it would be difficult for her, and she would not feel good using English.

Linka: Say you had to go to the university and you had to go to a group and they were all Americans. [This is different for me]. Monique: This is difficult for me; I don't feel good.

Linka: How would react there? Would you talk a lot like you talk here?

Monique: Maybe don't talk.

Linka: Because you feel shy?

Monique: Yes, I am shy and I am no comfortable speaking English with people who speak very well English.

Linka: So you feel that this group makes you feel safe?

Monique: Yeah, because there are people who have the same level like me and do wrong words like me. For these reasons.

Although this was only a hypothetical question, Monique created an imaginary self-image about herself and her use of English. She felt that her English was not good enough to use with a group of native speakers.

Unlike Monique, Trump attended several groups. In the group interview, he described that he did not attend a study group with native speakers, but he attended a social group with his roommates. He said that having American roommates helped him attend social groups, but that it was very difficult to talk to another person. He stated that the conversations were very fast and they used a lot of idioms and slang that he did not understand. He said, “When I attend that time, just 10 or 15 minutes. I always conversation to another person but after fifteen minutes I don’t have any.” In this example, Trump mentioned that he attended social groups with roommates and tried to make conversation, but using English was difficult for him. He said he was able to hold a conversation for about 10 to 15 minutes, but after that it was difficult to continue the conversation because of the use of slang and idioms.

Trump also stated that he felt that his pronunciation was a problem. He said it was difficult to speak with a group of native speakers and that they tended to check his pronunciation. In the following example below, Trump discussed how speaking in English was an obstacle for him.

Linka: And you are trying to get the pronunciation of a native speaker?

Trump: Yes, right, they always check my pronunciation. So, what I know from my pronunciation problem. I have problem because um, I think the pronunciation is right, but when they heard my pronunciation they don’t understand. It’s a big problem.

Trump indicated that English pronunciation was a problem for him, but was more concerned because he thought what he was saying in English was correct.

Mary's example was different from the other participants. She gave an example about being in her English language classroom. She said that it was stressful for her to speak in the classroom because she felt she needed to answer the questions being asked immediately. She said that she needed time to think in English before she answered the questions. Mary stated that she felt better in smaller groups of people because she had time to think, and she did not feel the pressure to answer right away. In other examples throughout the interviews with Mary in speaking with native speakers of English, she said she did better with one-on-one situations. Even though she was in a large group with international students, it made her shy and uncomfortable. Overall, using English in large groups was a problem for her whether it was international students or domestic students.

Barbie did not state that English was an obstacle to speaking to a group; however, in my reflection journal, I wrote the following information about her:

I went back to listen to Barbie's initial and final interviews. A thought just came to me. I read how she learned from the group, but I think I really saw only a few points where she said she feels comfortable with the group because they understand her. I think because of her level of English, it was difficult to make out a lot of what she said and I feel her thought process is different. When I ask a question, she gives an example first without using transitional words or phrases to help me understand her thought process. She gives examples first and then explains briefly how it relates to my question.

Monique, Trump, and Mary gave explicit examples on how speaking English in large groups was difficult for them. Monique did not want to attempt it because she did not feel comfortable speaking English with people who spoke it better than her. Trump found it

difficult to speak English in large groups when native speakers started to use slang and idioms. Mary, on the other hand, found it difficult to speak English in large groups, regardless if the group were native speakers of English or international students. From observations and the researcher's journal, I saw that Barbie was taking longer to talk to the group. She needed extra examples to clarify activities and it took her more time to participate compared to other students.

Feelings about language proficiency. *Feelings about language proficiency* describes students' feelings on language proficiency and how these affected their socialization with native speakers of English or just using English in general. This was a component that came from the data. To reiterate, this was only a group of international students, but questions and comments during interviews were made on how students felt about socializing with native speakers of English outside of the group. For example, in a conversation about culture the group started to discuss the importance of English proficiency. Trump stated that in his culture, people are very shy.

Trump: In my culture, I just talk about [nationality], they are very shy. They need perfect. When they participation in groups, with Americans, one or two [nationality], they never say anything.

Mary: We want to speak perfect English.

Trump: They always want to speak perfectly.

Linka: That's hard that's not going to let you participate.

Trump: So [nationality] and [nationality] very difficult to learn [English].

Mary: And [country] too.

Trump also added that it was very difficult to improve his English when he participated with other international students all the time. Again, he stressed the importance of his concept of language proficiency. Trump stated in the example below that he does get to practice his English with the group of international students, but he wanted more practice with native speakers of English.

Linka: Does it help you to be with other intentional students, to practice?

Trump: Yes, uh, uh, I living in house. There are two American guys. So, and they are my roommate. So, after class when I back to home. I always talk to the roommates.

Linka: About what you learn here in this group? To refresh your conversation skills.

Trump: Yes, right. Because, when I study school in class it's just class communication. So, I want to talk to many times to foreigners. To native English. So, but it is very difficult in the class.

Linka: Why do you think it is difficult?

Trump: Because, the almost, the students, the same situation, they are foreigners, they are international students. So I think their English skills is not well. (laughing). So, every time very similar conversation.

These statements described that the perception of language proficiency is embedded in the students' concept of what it means to sound native like. These perceptions impeded their ability to participate with other groups that were not international students. In the following example, Mary stated that she was happy that there were not any people in the group who spoke her native language. She said she often enjoyed speaking her native language, but then she went back to English, because she needed to improve on her English and speaking her native language was not going to help her.

Linka: So are you happy that you can go to this conversation group and there are no [nationality]?

Mary: Yes, of course.

Linka: So do you find it helpful?

Mary: Yes.

Linka: Why?

Mary: I think it's like happy, if I know, he or she can speak [language], ah, I just talk to him or she in [language]. I don't know maybe sometimes I will forget that I should speak English and talk in [language]. Afterwards I speak [language] and I will say no no. Then I will speak English. But I always want to speak English to improve.

The two student participants did not want to speak English in a group unless they sounded perfect; however, when they were in the group with international students, they spoke freely and participated frequently in conversations. However, Trump felt that he was not getting sufficient English skills that he needed to learn American English. He stated that he was getting to practice English, but not the type of English he wanted to learn. He wanted to talk to native speakers of English.

Reasons for learning English. The component reasons for learning English depicted the participants' reasons for learning English. The reasons for learning English varied for each student. This component came from the data. Learning about the culture along with language was important for Barbie. Trump and Monique, on the other hand, wanted to learn English to get a job in the U.S.

Barbie described in her interview that one of the reasons she decided to participate in the conversation group was to learn English because it was very important to communicate and to learn about American culture.

Linka: So you said, you decided to participate because of your time. Was there anything you thought was important for joining this group?

Barbie: To learn to English, but they think it very important to communication to talk with the culture.

In addition, she found American culture different from her own. In other conversations throughout the interview, she talked about her job and working for American customers. She described the different customs of Americans. She needed English for work, but she also was interested in learning about the culture.

Trump and Monique were not interested in attending college in the U.S. because they had degrees and had a profession. Trump wanted to learn English to get a job in the U.S. and wanted “to make American money.” He also wanted to improve English skills by attending multiple conversation groups offered by the university and at a local college. He stated that he wanted to learn more and did not feel he was learning enough because the course was only one semester. In addition, he felt he was not progressing in his English skills because international students do not speak English at a fast rate.

Trump: Umhum. Yes, um, so actually, so um this group, it just one semester group because it is very difficult to improve a long English sentence. Improve English is very difficult and I think um, I think, ah, this ah, this ah, the conversation class is helpful to me, but on the other hand, it’s not help to my English improve because it is a short time and just one day a week. Just one day a week, but almost foreign or

international students they ah, they know. English is not the fast improve, or fast speak English and but the objective of this class is to help to me what we don't know because when I attend this class the next day is very fast improve, it's not, it I think the ah, this school [name of program] they have to make a lot of class and a lot of activities so that is one of each class or one of the methods, one of the helpful, to help international students and so I think this questions.

Monique also hoped that learning English would get her a job in the U.S. However, she did not participate in other groups that included native speakers. Although she stated that she had a conversation partner, she said this was her only group, but she did have a conversation partner. Monique knew that practicing English with native speakers would improve her speaking skills, but she was not comfortable with the idea. She preferred the small international student conversation group with the teacher who was a native speaker.

All three participants were not planning to attend college because they all had graduated and had professions. Barbie wanted to learn the language because it was important to her profession, but she was also interested in learning about the culture. Monique and Trump were interested in getting jobs in the U.S. Mary did not state why she wanted to learn English, but I assumed it was for work, because she had a full time job back home and was planning to return after she finished the English language program.

Summary

The themes in the data Aspects of Communities of Practice and Language and Identity represented how participation in this CoP (the conversation group) for non-native English-speaking university students helped to inform their international student identity. These themes also depicted how participation in a CoP contributed to their sense of

belonging. All forms of data showed that students participated in the group to improve their English-speaking skills but stayed in the group because they felt they belonged to a group of international students who shared similar experiences. Moreover, they stayed in the group because they liked the group size and shared a common purpose: to practice English. While most of the emphasis of the results were focused on the CoP and the sense of belonging, I found that the initial operational definition for social identity was better represented under the component *belonging* because social identity is an individual's awareness that he or she belongs to a group and feels that they belong to a group by interacting, and being able to establish to themselves that they belong to a group (Tajfel, 1972).

In addition, the results from the study showed that identity had many facets. The theme *Identity* was used to define *Self-Image*. Self-image is a subtheme of *Identity* from the study that represented the perceived obstacles students created about themselves when using English because they thought their English skills were not proficient to use in social contexts with native speakers of English. Identity as a social construct was apparent in the data; however, it was a stronger aspect in the subtheme of Mutual Engagement. Students felt they belonged to a group of international students, which influenced their own identity. Students demonstrated that they belonged to a group because they actively participated in the group, reported having positive feelings by being part of a group of international students, and they were friends inside and outside of the group.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate how participation in a Community of Practice (CoP) informed the identity of non-native English-speaking international university students studying in the U.S.

This dissertation addressed the following questions:

1. How does participation in a CoP for non-native English-speaking university students inform their international student identity?
2. How does participation in a CoP contribute to a sense of belonging?

CoP and Social Identity provided a framework for this study. The focus of this study was to investigate how participation in a CoP informed the identity of non-native English-speaking international university students studying in the U.S. I proposed that these frameworks provided a foundation for understanding how participation in a CoP for non-native English-speaking university students informed their international student identity and how participation in a CoP contributed to a sense of belonging. In presenting the findings, I will discuss how the data addressed the research questions and review how this study and the findings support or challenge research in the field of communities of practice and international students.

The study showed that there were many facets to identity. The operational definition for Social Identity appeared as a component of Mutual Engagement under the theme *Aspects of Communities of Practice* and under the theme *Language and Identity*. In addressing the research questions, the findings showed that the CoP informed international student identity because participants felt they belonged to a group of international students. This sense of

belonging to a group is social identity. The theme *Identity* was combined with *Language* because I found that they complemented each other in the data. In this study *Self-Identity* was found to best represent Language and Identity as well because language affected the way participants viewed themselves as international students using English. These components affected their self-image and were significant findings in this study. Members did not feel their English was sufficient enough to use outside of the CoP, which affected their *self-identity* and *social identity* when using English. For this reason, the theme *Language* was combined with the theme *Identity* because students discussed the importance of language proficiency and the reasons for learning English.

Discussion of Results

These findings provide a greater understanding of the ways participation in a CoP for non-native English-speaking university students can help to inform their international student identity and contribute to their sense of belonging. In the following sections, I will discuss these results in correlation to literature in the field of international students and CoP.

Identity and language. In this study, I found that *identity* represented how students viewed themselves regarding their English-speaking levels. The emphasis of this study focused on social identity and the sense of belonging. I found that social identity was also part of the subtheme Mutual Engagement. I identified that the operational definition of social identity was apparent under the subtheme Mutual Engagement. As I discussed in Chapter 1, “Social identity is an individual's awareness that he or she belongs to a group and feels that they belong to a group by interacting, and being able to establish that they belong to a group” (Tajfel, 1972, p. 31). The component *belonging* encompassed the definition of social identity and belonging. *Belonging* was how participants in the group expressed their reasons for

wanting to be in the CoP and what made the CoP possible. This definition on social identity can also be viewed in Chapter 2 on the section of social identity and where a sense of belonging is discussed. Results from the study showed that another component of the various representations of identity was used to denote the subtheme *Self-Identity*. Again, this subtheme came from the data and was not discussed in Chapter 2 because these are findings. Self-identity exemplified the perceived obstacles students created about themselves when using English because they thought they were not competent to use English in social contexts with native speakers of English. Morita (2004) stated that it is difficult to speak when language is a barrier, and it may create a problem when negotiating identity in CoP. However, students did not have trouble speaking English to each other in the group. Ochs (1993) noted that a community depends on its members and their knowledge of "social convention," this, in turn, builds social identities (p. 289). Speaking English in the group did not affect their ability to negotiate their social identity in a CoP of international students. Furthermore, identity as a social construct was apparent in the data. It was, however, a stronger aspect in the theme of Mutual Engagement. What made mutual engagement possible for the practice was belonging to the group of only international students. Being part of this group helped their sense of belonging because they felt comfortable being part of a group of students who shared similar values on English and were experiencing what it was like to be an ESL learner. Participants felt that this group supported them while trying to reach their goal of learning English. The data also revealed another component of Identity, which I labeled *self-identity*. This subtheme was labeled under the theme Language and Identity because it was a representation of how students viewed themselves when using English with native speakers. Participants stated that they were not good enough to use English in social

contexts. In addition, students othered other students and themselves because some participants did not want to use English in a certain way and some students felt more comfortable speaking their native language, which isolated the group and the way they participated. All of these components informed the social and self-identity of the group.

Results of this study suggested that students were very critical of their *self-identity* when it came to language proficiency in English. These findings, when it came to English language proficiency, add to the previous understanding of why international students tend to form groups with other students who have similar cultural backgrounds. The participants in this study did not feel proficient enough to speak to large groups or mixed groups (including native speakers of English). Therefore, they sought CoPs that they perceived would help them reach their goals and make them feel that they belonged. Halic et al. (2009) stated that this fear of language proficiency was one of the factors that hindered students' ability to build a new academic identity.

Halic et al.'s (2009) findings support the research on *language proficiency as an obstacle to speaking in the group*. This data showed that students experienced obstacles and had fears about speaking to a group in English. These findings support other research. Lee's (2014) study disclosed that English language learners struggle between the status between native speakers and non-native speakers and tend to accept their identity as non-native speakers of English. In other words, Lee found that students struggle with the terminology and the concept of what it means to be a native speaker and get discouraged because they feel they will never reach native like status. Lee stated that accepting the identity as a non-native English speaker may lower the learner's confidence in speaking English. According to Lee, this may cause learners to feel that they are not legitimate and proper speakers of the

language. Also, students who do not feel competent to speak English will not talk to avoid public humiliation.

Three out of the four interview participants in this study reported not speaking on certain occasions to prevent public embarrassment around large groups, large classes and speaking with native speakers. I analyzed these comments within the component *saving face (avoiding public embarrassment)*. Research has shown that international students are likely to have learned classroom etiquette that involves saving face and respecting the position of the teacher, and listening instead of being an active participant (Rosado & White, 2014). The findings suggest that some members have been culturally accustomed to being silent participants in the classroom, but may also have a fear of speaking in large groups or with native speakers because they feel they are not proficient enough to speak English. Points established above discuss how international students struggled with their social identity. However, findings discussed below show the opposite.

Results indicate that students in the CoP did not struggle with their social identity in this conversation group because they had the supportive components that form a CoP: Mutual Engagement, Joint Enterprise, and Shared Repertoire. According to Wenger (1998), when we are in a CoP of which we are a full member:

We experience competence, and we are recognized as competent. We know how to engage with others. We understand why they do what they do because we understand the enterprise to which participants are countable. Membership in a CoP translates into an identity as a form of competence. (p.152)

This study focused on understanding the identity of international students and how they negotiate their experience in a group of international students. Students reported having

positive experiences working with international students. However, students had different perspectives about themselves when they discussed using English and who they felt comfortable using English with. For example, when discussing their feelings about English, students said that the group made them feel confident, but if they ever had to use English in a university setting with American speakers, they would stay quiet and not talk. These findings are not just important for this study, but for future studies on understanding how a CoP can help foster transitions into participating in mixed groups of students working together. This study also revealed how students felt about themselves when it came to English and with whom they used it. For example, in the interviews, participants acknowledged that they thought they would have problems working with American students if they had to go outside of this group because of their language skills. Interestingly, studies show that not only are international students hesitant to work with domestic students, but domestic students have concerns about working with international students because they believe there will be language barriers and cultural differences (Croese, 2011). For these reasons, these results will have significant implications in helping English language institutes prepare international students for university life, both academically, and how they can learn to work with different groups of people

Language in the data expressed students' feelings about English language proficiency and native speakers of English. Although the conversation group only consisted of international students and one American instructor, students shared their feelings about working with American students and speaking to them outside of the group. Language was a dominant factor in the data. Students shared that they wanted to speak perfect English and did not want to participate with groups that encompassed native speakers of English unless

they sounded like a native speaker. These feelings were apparent in the interviews together. Students regularly spoke about wanting to speak perfect English or native-like. They expressed that they preferred to speak English with international students, especially the students that were part of their group because they were at the same English level.

Language, in this study, represented *Feelings about Language Proficiency*. Feelings about language proficiency described students' sharing their opinions on language proficiency and how it affected their socialization with native speakers of English or just using English in general outside of the group in their English language classes and meeting Americans. Heller (1987) argued that it is through language that a person gains or is denied access to networks. Although students were not part of a group of native speakers, they were hesitant to speak to me during our first interview. I felt that my status as an English teacher affected our first interviews. Some students stated that they got nervous because I knew more English than they did and this made them nervous.

Also, students spoke about the difficulties they had when talking to native speakers of English. Most challenges discussed in the study came from the use of understanding slang and idioms. Moreover, students shared that in some of their cultures, students do not speak unless they know they sound proficient enough to express their ideas, and perhaps this was holding back their ability to learn English. This lack of confidence may cause students to have trouble adjusting to a new academic setting. The findings from this study are similar to the work of Andrade (2006), Beck (2008), and Galloway and Jenkins (2005) who found that English language skills are essential in helping international students adjust to a new academic environment because it affects their confidence and ability to learn.

Further findings indicated that students had a particular reason to learn English. Students discussed that English played a significant role to their jobs and what they wanted for their future. Money and employment opportunities were the main discussions of this topic. Students also pursued learning English in different ways. Monique was very adamant about her position in not socializing with Americans but yet wanted to learn English for work. She did not need to obtain another degree and felt the conversation group was sufficient to reach her goals. On the contrary, Trump had a different approach to learning English and used all possible recourses. He chose to have American roommates, attended all of the conversation groups and activities provided by the English language program, and attended other conversation groups at a local college. The approaches to learning English for these two participants were very different. These results may be due to the character and different motivations each student had. Another participant, Barbie wanted to learn English to learn about American culture and attend the university. She elaborated on wanting to learn English to talk to people and to be able to express herself when she went to medical appointments. She said it was difficult for her to communicate with individuals in the medical facilities and translated all of her questions for the doctor before her appointments from her native language into English. She indicated that even though she tried to translate everything, she had a difficult time understanding everything.

In discussions of early studies on second language motivation and investment, one controversial issue is that second language learners are motivated by instrumental and integrative motivation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). In their work, Gardner and Lambert identified that instrumental motivation consists of employment or going to college and integrative motivation involves learning the language because there is a genuine interest in

being part of the culture. However, Norton (2000) argued that the investment of each learner is different and cannot be conformed to a specific purpose for learning English. She stated that investment in language, “conceives of the language learner as having a complex social history and multiple desires” (p. 10). Other researchers such as Lamb (2004) maintained that the motivation of different groups of second language (L2) learners is debatable. Therefore, the findings of this study demonstrate a different motivation for each learner. Monique and Trump invested in learning English for business and employment purposes, and Barbie wanted to learn about the culture.

Aspects of Communities of Practice. The main components of this study were: Aspects of CoP and Identity and Language. I will discuss mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire as one unit because they are the essence of a CoP. I will also discuss what a sense of *belonging* to a group of international students means, and the two other major subthemes, Self-Identity and Social Identity.

Mutual engagement. Mutual engagement represented the interaction between participants that lead to a formation of a shared meaning or common purpose in the group. The common objective of the group’s meeting was to learn English, but what kept the group together and made the engagement possible in the CoP was belonging to the group. According to Tajfel (1972), social identity is defined as “the individual’s knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social group together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of the group membership” (p. 31). The definition of a sense of belonging comes from this operational definition, since the framework includes both CoP and Social Identity. In other words, Tajfel believed that individuals have to feel that they are valued, and their contributions are important to a group. For the students, belonging meant that they were able

to be part of a group where other members understood what they experienced as international students, and in this group, they were able to practice English in a safe environment and not be judged. This group helped to inform their international student identity because they reported feeling comfortable and reinforced by the group to speak English without feeling the pressure of large groups or a classroom. Participants were among other international students who strengthened their sense of belonging.

Students stated that they felt positive feelings as a result of being part of the group and participating. Students reported feelings of confidence because the group was small and they had more time to talk and ask questions about English. One student said that knowing other students who shared similar feelings as his, concerning the enthusiasm to learn English, made the group enjoyable.

As a result of this group, friendships grew, and a majority of the participants often took trips with each other during the holidays. Although only three members in the group shared a common language, they were able to become either Facebook friends (to keep in touch) or close friends (spend time out of class together). The forming of groups by people of similar backgrounds and interests is consistent with findings in existing research on international students. Research by Harrison and Peacock (2007) reported that people of similar backgrounds tend to form strong friendships, and network members tend to have similar characteristics, such as shared interests. Conversely, some students were not expecting to make more friends and others were.

The findings in mutual engagement reinforced the importance of belonging to a group to help the practice meet its common goal of learning English. According to Wenger (1998),

anything it takes to make mutual engagement possible is a vital factor of any practice. In regard to identity in a practice Wenger stated the following:

Identity in a practice is defined socially not merely because it reified in a social discourse of the self and of social categories, but also because it is produced as a lived experience of participation in specific communities. (p. 151)

Wenger's point is that identity is a layering of events of participation. He states, "our experience and social interpretation influence each other" and that these "layers build upon each other to produce our identity as a very complex interweaving of participative experience and reificative projections" (p. 151). Basically, Wenger is stating that our participation in the world not only in a CoP helps to inform identity.

According to Wenger (1998), an "identity translates into a form of individuality defined with respect to community" (p. 152). In other words, Wenger believes that being part of a community informs your individual identity. Wenger's point here is significant to the findings on identity in regard to being an influence to self-identity and to social identity. Students in this study demonstrated that participating in a group of international students not only informed their self-identity as international students, but it also informed their sense of belonging. The study showed that students would not continue to be active members of the group if they did not feel like they belonged to a group or be active members of the group if they did not share the same goal of learning English. Comfort, positive feelings, and friendship added to the participants' sense of belonging and held the cohesiveness of the group.

According to Ogbu (1991), Staton-Salazar (1997) and Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998), participating in groups and building friendships with other international students are a good

foundation to transition to the host culture. Their studies specified that the connection between assimilation of American culture and personal adjustment relied on the number of strong relationships built with international students from similar cultural backgrounds while creating relationships with Americans was based on the personal adjustment. However, their studies showed that becoming too integrated with an ethnic community could cause problems to the self-esteem of international students. The researchers suggested that personal networks with Americans could help international students acculturate to American culture.

Joint enterprise. Joint Enterprise represented the process of how the participants were involved in the group and how they worked together to pursue a goal of learning English. Participants kept attending the group because they felt that they were learning and practicing English. According to Wenger (1998), the enterprise is joint not in that everybody believes, does, or agrees on the same thing or agrees with everything, but in that it is commonly negotiated. Students negotiated the way they learned English by suggesting activities to the teacher and shared their ideas in the group. The teacher was open to new suggestions and asked the students what games and activities they would like to do for the conversation group. Participation in the group took on the form of helping one another. Students not only learned from the ESL teacher, but they learned from each other, helping with vocabulary, speaking, pronunciation, grammar, and American culture.

Students also learned from competition in the group. The competition in the group was different from most traditional groups that take pride in beating other groups. The participants in the group whispered answers to opposing groups to help other members learn. Support was another factor in the group. Students found a way to support each other through their respective aspirations. Some participants showed that being patient and taking the time

to explain things was a form of helping each other learn. One member felt that learning and competition were a part of life and a skill needed for survival. Although it appeared that this participant was aggressive, domineering, and sexist, he was the opposite. He cared deeply for his classmates. He talked about how he wanted them to succeed and hoped this class and the competition in it would help prepare the younger participants for life. He believed that school was a crucial place for learning and was very appreciative of the group and services provided by the program. This finding supports and coincides with the work of Montgomery (2010) who found that academic facets of support are important for international students and are part of the elements that help them to adjust to their new environment. Also, learning is constructed through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice (Wenger & Lave, 1991). Therefore, results support that the participants negotiated and engaged in the CoP to learn and help them adjust to a new environment with the support of the group.

Shared repertoire. Shared repertoire represented the shared purpose of being in the group. Students discussed sharing similar ideas and feelings about being in the group and how they did things in the group. One major component of the group was group size. Students mentioned quite often that they did not like participating in large groups. Students even discussed that they stopped attending a group offered in the summer because it was too big and it did not allow them to participate.

Students shared the common goal of having the opportunity to speak English, and a large group did not offer these opportunities. Students reported enjoying the group because they had an extra hour of opportunities to speak English without feeling the pressure of speaking in a large group or class. This finding supported the work of Morita (2004) who

found that international students created different identities for themselves and saw themselves as less competent because they did not participate as much in class and were worried about what other students and the teacher felt about them. Morita's study suggested that "students were negotiating discourses, competence, identities, and power relations so that they could participate and be recognized as a legitimate and competent member of a given classroom community" (p. 583). Although Morita's study had a mixture of native English-speaking students and international students, it can still attest to how large groups can affect a classroom environment; especially when students do not feel comfortable speaking English in large groups or being corrected by the instructor. Other findings in this study suggested that students preferred or liked the idea of working one-on-one with a teacher or smaller groups. This finding supported the work of Harrison and Peacock (2007) who reported that "English language makes one-to-one interaction simpler and more rewarding, but without the shorthand of shared cultural experiences, meaningful communication can still remain elusive" (p. 5), showing that international students tended to form or seek other CoPs that help them feel supported, safe, and focused on meeting their goals.

Results in this section also showed that students reported experiences of being *othered* or *othering* other international students who did not want to speak English. This had a great impact on their *Self-Identity*. Similarly, Hall (1990) argued that othering of ethnic minority communities by dominant societal forces causes self-othering to occur. To take a case in point, I identified that three out of the four participants stated that they were embarrassed to use English because of the fear of not speaking fluently or of not knowing

what to say to Americans when conversing with them. Participants also othered themselves by thinking they were not able to speak English fluently.

By extension, *othering* reflects other aspects of identity. In Fanon's (1952) view, "the question of identification is never the affirmation of a pre-given identity, never a self-fulfilling prophecy—it is always the production of an "image" of identity and the transformation of the subject in assuming that image" (p. 29). In other words, what Fanon believes is that we internalize an image of ourselves and aspire to reach a self-imposed image. The essence of this argument is that participants in this study isolated themselves with other people who wanted to speak only English because this might be a way to reach their goal of becoming native-like or the closest to native-like. According to Tsuda (2008), the next highest class in an "English-centered global society" are ESL speakers (p. 51). To take a case in point, this explains the repetitive comments by participants on wanting to "sound native-like." Students not only segregated themselves in the CoP, but students reported not sitting with certain students in their ESL classrooms. In theory, students may have created a social class system in their English language classes or, as Tsuda (2011) labels it, the "English Divide." Participants stated that they only sat with other students who wanted to speak English in their ESL classes to avoid speaking their native language and reach their goal of learning English and sounding native like.

On the other hand, students had a common purpose for belonging to the group; they wanted to speak English and practice as much as possible. However, one participant stated that their shared purpose was more than just practicing English. She said that it was that she was practicing English with a group of international students who shared similar experiences and struggles, and this made her feel part of the group. Research studies show that

international students would rather be with people who share similar experiences or who share similar backgrounds (Choi 1997; Quintrell & Westwood, 1994; Trice, 2004; Volet & Ang, 2012; Ward & Masgoret, 2004).

Findings in this section reinforced the importance of the group and the continuance of participation throughout the semester. Overall, the CoP had both positive and negative contributions to the participants. I will first discuss the positive contributions of being part of a CoP and then the negative aspects. Belonging to a CoP of all international students helped to inform the identity of the participants. Students felt a sense of belonging to a group, which made it easier to participate in the activities. Components such as comfort, positive feelings, and making new friends contributed to their sense of belonging. For these reasons, students were able to learn, participate, and felt supported by their group members. Students had a shared repertoire for participating in the group and wanted to improve their English. They had a safe place to speak English and were comfortable being part of a small group of international students.

However, being part of the CoP had some negative components. Thoughts of *Language and Identity* were greatly discussed in the research. Results from the study showed that the self-identity and the social identity of participants were informed negatively by the CoP. Students othered other international students in the group and othered themselves. They discussed not being proficient enough in English to speak in large groups and speaking to native speakers. Two participants from the group spoke their native language most of the time and othered other group members by continuing to speak their native language in the group. The rest of the participants *othered* them for their actions and called them by their nationality rather than by their names. In addition, a selected group of participants chose to

sit with each other because they wanted to speak English only and decided not to speak their native language in front of each other. All of the components represented above show how the CoP negatively informed the identity of these individuals.

Furthermore, the CoP informed the social identity of the group. All of the participants stated that language proficiency was as an obstacle in speaking to a group. They all felt the same about language proficiency. Participants stated that their English was bad and that they had trouble understanding native speakers. They preferred to speak English with international students because they said they understood each other. Negative comments about themselves were mentioned repeatedly in both initial/final individual interviews and in the group interview. Students believed that it was very difficult to understand English and that native speakers believed they were, as Monique stated, “the queen”, meaning they are native speakers, thus they speak English better than us. I posit that these negative comments about themselves and about native speakers not only informed their self-identity but it also informed the social identity of the group. These results are similar to the work of Tajfel and Turner (1979). They claim that this type of behavior can be attributed to the belief system that the “nearer are members of a group to the ‘social change’ and the ‘intergroup’ extremes, the more they will tend to treat members of the out-group as undifferentiated items in a unified social category” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 36). The essence of this argument can attest to the hegemony of English around the world and the impact it has on learners of English. The standpoint of hegemony of English is discussed at the end of this chapter.

Limitations

Like most research studies, this study also had limitations. Methodological limitations of this study were the lack of focus on subjectivities, such as age, class, race, ethnicity, and

individuals with disabilities. I did not focus on these areas because the sample size of the group was small and students could easily be identified in the research. During the time of the data collection, there were only two conversation groups that included a more diverse group than the other. Identifying race and ethnicity would have compromised the study. Students could easily be identified in the research. Age of the participant would have also contributed to identifying members because of the group size.

Components not discussed in the study were negative feelings about the group. For instance, students felt a sense of belonging in the CoP. They did not report that they felt a sense of alienation, subordination, and exclusion outside of it. However, they did say they preferred to be a part of a group of international students because as Monique said, “we understand each other.” Meaning, they were in an ESL program together, learning English, and experiencing difficulties learning the language. Conversely, the study also showed that the proverb rings true, “birds of a feather flock together.” Moreover, students expressed that even though they did not belong to a group of native speakers, they did not want to be part of one because they felt their English was not proficient enough. Also, students stated that it was easier to make friends with international students in their classes and their conversation group because they had similar English levels.

Another limitation was that I only focused on non-native English-speaking international students, but it was purposeful because the study focused on international students who come from those countries where English is not an official language. It is beyond the scope of the research to have included international students who come from English-speaking countries.

I also recognize that I was only able to interview one male participant, and it would have been helpful to interview the different experiences of each male participant in the CoP since male's experiences might be different. Furthermore, I felt that I did not explain myself clearly when discussing the differences between the observation and interview participants to the group. I read the consent form to the group and explained the differences between the ways students could participate in the study. However, I think the wording of the consent form was complicated for the students. Likewise, I should have taken into consideration the level of English in the group and found a better way to check if students comprehended the details of the study. I suggest practicing on the delivery of the questions with a professor, other ESL teachers or doctoral students in a research group before presenting the study to the students. I believe this impacted the number of participants that consented to be part of the study. I was only able to get four members to be observation/interview participants out of the seven. The whole group experience is important in understanding the sense of belonging to the group.

Also, I would have preferred to have additional time with the students for each observation. I observed the group and then I had to leave five minutes earlier to go and teach my class. I could have used the additional time to reflect on what I just observed, or followed up with students right after the group to discuss questions that I wrote in the observation notes. In conclusion, time is vital and crucial in getting the authenticity of the research and the experiences of the participants. Scheduling time after data collection to reflect on observations is a critical piece of the findings.

Implications

Future research. Qualitative research, such as studies that draw from a Community of Practice (CoP) framework, might be appropriate for researchers in the field who seek to understand how participation in CoP helps international students inform their international student identity and how participation in a CoP contributes to their sense of belonging. Studies on international students are important for universities and programs, which seek to improve their international student services, as well as retention and matriculation rates.

Research using CoP as a framework may further inform our understanding of development and use of groups to help international students transition or adjust to a new academic environment. Qualitative research on international students may further address the complex issues of how universities and programs can support international students transition into a new educational setting. The framework used in this study may be helpful in exploring future research on the transition from English language programs to the university. Following this transition will help to see if English language programs are assisting in helping the transition to university life by preparing international students to work with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Also, this research underlined topics on identity. Understanding how participation in a CoP for non-native English-speaking university students informs their international student identity may provide a unique perspective that could help educators, universities, and researchers better their understanding of how to work with international students. In this study, the identity of the individuals who participated in this group of all international students was clearly informed by the CoP. Being part of the group helped their sense of belonging, but it also brought up topics on how language was difficult to use in a group. One

participant said that he felt that the group was helpful to pursue his learning goals, but that he needed to practice with native speakers as well to improve his English. Studies on how CoPs inform the group both positively and negatively should be taken into consideration. In addition, further studies that explore concepts of identity and CoPs may support teachers and scholars to best address how to help students adjust to different groups and to advocate for better support services for them.

For future studies on understanding how participation in a CoP informs international student identity, researchers can look for available groups provided by programs, the university, or groups formed by international students. I suggest that the researcher seek out groups where participants cannot be identified. Seeking out these groups can help the researcher include the information that I was not able to include in this study: age, class, race, ethnicity, and individuals with disabilities. Including these components makes a richer study by getting an understanding of the experiences of the participants as they negotiate their experiences as international students from different cultural backgrounds. Also, including a group of international students who come from both non-English-speaking and English-speaking countries would help to understand the experiences of international students and how belonging to a group of international students helps their sense of belonging while trying to adjust to a new academic environment. Moreover, research is needed on whether experiences of international students who come from countries where English is an official language are different for international students who come from countries where English is not an official language. Furthermore, future researchers should work on their recruiting methods and how they present their study to participants. Depending on the level of English of the participants, it would be a good idea to practice the recruitment and consent process

beforehand. This would help avoid misunderstandings and help the researcher get more participants for the study.

Finally, there is a need to collaborate on research designs that address questions regarding social identity, self-identity, and cultural identity and how participation in a CoP helps to inform international student identity. In addition, to research on how participation in a CoP contributes to a sense of belonging, models of legitimate peripheral participation have been used to help understand how old comers help new comers adjust to a new environment (Back, 2011; Consalvo, Schallert, & Elias, 2015; Hougaard, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991). By collaborating, researchers can help support universities and programs to prepare to work with international students and establish support groups to help with the transition to university life. These issues reflect the need to study the importance of preparing international students to transition to academic life and to help universities and programs understand what support is needed to improve the quality of life for this student population.

Practical applications. This study has practical recommendations for English language programs and universities who provide services to help international students transition to the university. It has implications for educators who work with international students to prepare them for academia. More importantly, it has implications for international students who are having difficulties adjusting to a new academic and social environment.

Suggestions for intensive English language programs. Lack of cultural and academic adjustment for international students has been viewed as detrimental in helping international students transition to the university environment. However, research shows that international students who are active members of ethnic communities are able to maintain their cultural identities and adjust better to a new environment (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998;

Montgomery, 2010). Al-Sharideh and Goe (1998) argued that bonds created in international communities might help international students cope and resolve problems during their adjustment period. English language programs are the first resources that can help international students build ethnic communities. Providing students with a variety of groups (e.g., chess club, soccer club, movie club, conversation group, dance club, etc.), volunteer opportunities, and conversation exchanges can help support students to establish a sense of belonging. Kim and Yang (2010) found that international students who volunteered in the community felt a strong sense of membership.

Results from this study confirm that participation in a CoP is helpful in supporting international students' identity and sense of belonging. However, these groups can be used as stepping-stones to get students involved in matriculating into the university and into the host culture. Results from this study showed that students were worried about participating in groups that included domestic students because they felt their English skills were not proficient enough. According to Lee (2014), English language programs can help motivate students to change their views on what it means to be native-like or proficient.

English language programs can help learners break away from the dichotomy by showing them that language is just a set of symbolic tools used to mediate relationships between people. When students realize this, they can gradually shift away from the perspective of treating English as a subject matter they need to master to become native speakers. Instead they can start to adopt a new perspective of treating English as a toolkit that they learn to approximate to assume certain identities in the target community. (p. 36)

Therefore, it is important for English language programs to encourage students to view language as a tool rather than a limitation. To help students practice this motto, English language programs can create external groups outside of class that involve both domestic and international students, such as board game club or a movie club. University departments on campus can also encourage domestic students to participate in these clubs by offering fellowships or course credit for participation.

These findings will have significant applications in improving the well-being of students as well as benefit the English language program. Based on my experience as an ESL teacher, the enrollment of English language programs has a lot to do with location, but activities and additional programs that give the students an opportunity to practice their English outside of the class have been one of the main incentives for high student enrollment in English language programs.

Recommendations for universities. The implication of the study for universities is to be vigilant and make an effort to embed programs and activities designed for international students. The study suggests that international students are weary of participating in groups that include domestic students. Recent studies have shown that international students who belong to a CoP with other international students or with students with similar cultural background has proven to be successful in helping build strong relationships, self-esteem, and adjust to the new culture (Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Ogbu, 1991; Montgomery & McDowell, 2009; Montgomery, 2010; Staton-Salazar, 1997). As indicated by the studies above, creating groups and classes that help integrate international students into a new culture have been helpful.

Hiring advisors from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds can motivate students to seek academic help and advisement. Student and health services should hire more international staff or hire counselors who work with the international student populations. However, I recognize that in many cultures seeking out mental health counseling is not acceptable, but providing workshops that help students learn how to deal with change and transition may be helpful (McLachlan & Justice, 2009).

Universities need to inform staff and faculty of all of the sources available to international students. Many staff members are unaware of the services offered to international students (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Faculty members need to improve their awareness of the different challenges of international students, not just academically, but emotionally (Robertson et al., 2000). Instructors can encourage international students and all students to come and speak to them during their office hours. If students are hesitant to talk in class, instructors can encourage students to speak to them after school, if they have any questions or concerns. That is, this suggestion may help students who come from cultures where the teacher is seen as right, and they should not be challenged, to take an initiative to speak to the instructor without feeling the pressure of the whole class looking at them. Also, this is an excellent opportunity for the student to get to know the instructor one on one. This step may encourage the student at a point to get involved in class discussions, because they feel comfortable in the class environment.

Suggestions for adult ESL educators. Adult ESL teachers can help establish the skills needed to adjust to a new cultural environment by facilitating activities that involve students participating on campus. If international students are not introduced to working with domestic students, they may have a difficult time adjusting to a new culture. Morita (2004)

found that international students created different identities for themselves when working with domestic students. Students in Morita's study saw themselves as less competent because they did not participate as much in class and were worried about what other students and the teacher felt about them. Although students in the study did not participate in a mixed group of international students and domestic students, they talked about not wanting to participate in them because they thought they were not proficient in English. For these reasons, I strongly urge adult ESL educators at the university level to facilitate activities that involve student interaction with domestic students. I also encourage teachers to invite international students from previous semesters as guest speakers to help encourage students and to talk about what helped them adjust to a new program. This creates mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. Another suggestion would be to get students familiarized with all of the services available on campus. Creating scavenger hunts that require students to get acquainted with different services available on campus are helpful in getting students to learn about where they can go if they need medical assistance, tutoring, library services and an overall experience of what the university offers. Other suggestions would be to take students to workshops available to all students on campus, such as mental health and college skills workshops. Teachers should also get in touch with the librarians, tutoring, and health services on campus that can create specialized workshops for international students. All of these services are free and available to students, and it will introduce students to the services available on campus and get them involved on campus with other domestic students. All of these suggestions give students an opportunity to practice their English-speaking skills and can help them transition to the university environment when they complete the English language program.

Suggestions for international students. Studies showed that international students who participated in activities in either domestic or international student groups had a positive experience studying in their host culture (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006; Al-Sharideh & Goe, 1998; Montgomery, 2010). In addition, international students who reported frequent positive cross-cultural contact with domestic students through activities such as discussions and outings were less likely to experience loneliness and homesickness, compared to other international students who did not participate in any group activities (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006). For these reasons, international students need to take an initiative to get involved in the activities provided for them by the university or English language programs. As the studies above mentioned, students have a better probability of matriculating into the new environment when they make an initiative to learn and participate in the host culture. Knowing the university's culture will improve learning (Robertson et al., 2000). Furthermore, as an ESL educator and a friend of international students, I can attest to the different experiences international students have when they learn and participate in the host culture. Students not only learn the language, but they become more knowledgeable individuals. They also help to educate others on misconceptions about different cultures and bring different perspectives to the university. Therefore, it is imperative that international students participate and interact with the host culture, to help promote cultural understanding and learning; this is the premise of what university doctrine is based upon.

Conclusions

The findings of this study revealed that for these non-native English-speaking international students, participating in a CoP of only non-native English-speaking international students helped to inform their identity and their sense of belonging.

Additionally, the group cohesiveness found in this study was not just about participation or about sitting aimlessly for an hour to waste time; students invested in learning. Students were able to acquire social identity because they felt they belonged to a group (Eastman, 1985).

Furthermore, this study showed that identity was strongly reflected under *self-identity* because of the way participants viewed themselves as ESL learners. When discussing use of English and how students saw themselves using English, students used words such as, "my English is not good", "I want to sound like a native speaker", and "I think that we think that our English is always less than the really English or the level we have. For this reason, maybe we don't speak more." Reflecting on these comments, I believe that students unconsciously influenced each other. Students internalized these dominant ideological processes. Tsuda (2011) calls this internalization process mind control or colonization of the mind through the Hegemony of English (p. 256). He stated that English influences the "thoughts, beliefs, and values" of language learners (p. 256).

Participating in a group of international students had many positive benefits, but it also showed how English proficiency influenced the minds of the participants. Students did not only come together because they wanted to learn English in the group with international students, but they had shared perspectives on their views of English. Wenger (1998) stated that people participate in a CoP because they have mutual engagement. On the surface, students participated in the conversation group to learn English and felt comfortable in the environment of international students, which informed their international student identity. However, at large, I believe that the CoP may have also influenced the way they view themselves as speakers of English and informed their international student identity in both a positive and negative manner.

Being part of the group had both positive and negative aspects. The CoP served as a safe place to learn and practice English amongst students who shared similar goals and experiences. Students engaged in the group and acknowledged that they were members of a group of international students. The comfort and protection of the CoP members reflects the framework of Social Identity and CoP, engagement and acknowledgment that a person believes they are part of a group. I found that this was a positive aspect of the group. However, negative aspects in this CoP showed that participants came together with a shared purpose that they wanted to practice more English because their English was not proficient enough. What makes my statement plausible is that students reported in both individual and the group interview that they prefer to socialize with international students. They participated in activities for international students, were close friends with international students, and preferred to only socialize with other international students and avoided speaking to native speakers. This form of participation and nonparticipation is a representation of Wenger's (1998) argument that "the mix of participation and non-participation through which we define our identities reflects our power as individuals and communities to define and affect our relations to the rest of the world" (p. 167). Therefore, this study showed that participating in a CoP for non-native speaking university students informed their international student identity both positively and negatively, because it did help to contribute to a sense of belonging to a group, but it also strengthened their individual and group identity that they were not proficient in English.

This showed me that marginalization was apparent in the minds and beliefs of the participants. English served as hegemony in the minds of the participants, who continually stated that they wanted to have perfect English and sound like a native speaker. Participants

such as Monique and Trump said they wanted to learn English to get a job. Trump stated that he wanted to learn English to get American money. According to Tsuda (2011), the hegemony of English operates to reward the successful learners of English: they will gain high-paid jobs, achieve higher social statuses, and individual accomplishments" (p. 256). Students also reported that they wanted to sound like a native speaker of English, which engages their identity and how they use language. According to Norton and Toohey (2002), language learning not only involves identities of learners but it is also a complex social practice because there are value and meaning ascribed to words and this value and meaning are attributed to the person who speaks the language. These comments can reflect Tsuda's perspective on English and how the English language influences the thoughts, beliefs, and values of people learning English. He maintains that through learning English as an ideological power structure many people will assimilate to the dominant English ideology and devalue their own language and culture.

The results of this study contradict the work of Tsuda (2011) who argues that language is not just a tool or a medium. He stated that it represents a way of thinking and can affect people's emotions. According to this view, it is hard to decide how we should approach teaching English. However, the findings from this study showed that a CoP helped to establish that English should serve as a tool (Lee, 2014). These results have important implications for the broader domain of using CoP to foster new learning environments for international students transitioning from their home culture to a host culture. Also, these implications are important in establishing teaching styles and missions for English language programs. However, these suggestions do not come without dilemmas in the way we approach English language teaching. Tsuda (2008) proposed an approach to this dilemma:

(a) Monolingual Approach refers to the position that a common language for international communication should be adopted. If we decide to take a monolingual approach, we should then decide which language should be adopted as an international common language; (b) A Multilingual Approach is an approach that does not choose a particular language as a common language, but practices the use of all the language concerned. This approach is concerned about the establishment of equal status among different languages, because it believes that having equal status among different language will lead to the equality in communication and the equality among people; (c) The Global Scheme Approach is any type of international endeavor to deal with English Hegemony and English Divide. (p. 53)

If I chose to use a critical theorist perspective, I would choose the Global Scheme Approach. Even though I agree with Tsuda up to a point, I cannot accept his overall conclusion that English cannot be used as a tool or a medium. It can be utilized as a tool if we apply the English Hegemony Approach. I believe English should serve as a tool for a source of empowerment but, at the same time, not forgetting that other languages are significantly important and valuable to learn and are needed to promote cultural diversity.

Equally important is the issue of what we can do as educators to help work through issues of self-marginalization to help support diverse classrooms. My view is that English language programs use CoPs as a foundation in helping students transition to a new academic context. I still maintain that some activities involve domestic students in helping foster new learning environments and practice working with new groups of people. Although some might object that this may lead international students not to participate in mixed groups (international students and domestic students), I would reply that language socialization is

important in giving students an opportunity to talk and learn about each other and, most importantly, to give each speaker of English his or her own voice.

Appendices

Appendix A Initial Interview Questions	151
Appendix B Focus of Group Observation	152
Appendix C Group Interview Questions.....	153
Appendix D Possible Final Interview Questions	154
Appendix E Transcription Rules.....	155

Appendix A

Initial Interview Questions

1. You are participating in X group, tell me about that. Why did you decide to participate in this group?
2. Tell me about your interactions with other people in your group. **Prompts:** What do you do in the group? Give me an example of some things you might talk about. How does this make you feel to be part of this group? How do you feel when you are talking to other people in this group?
3. Tell me how you see yourself as a group member. Tell me more.
4. I'm interested in your thoughts on group participation:
When I say group participation, what does that mean to you?
What does participation in X group mean to you?"
What does it mean for you to be a member of this group?
Prompt: What do you like about spending time with the person/s and/or group/s you mentioned?

Appendix B

Focus of Group Observation

1. Do students show support for each other in the group? For example, do they find ways to explain confusing topics or situations in their group or offer advice to each other?
2. Were there any situations or comments made by students that showed that they felt support in the group?
3. What do participants say or do that reveals their positionality as a group member?
4. Do students offer advice to other group members?

Appendix C

Group Interview Questions

1. Tell me about X group.
2. I'm interested in your thoughts on group participation:

When I say group participation, what does that mean to you?

What does participation in X group mean to you?"

What does it mean for you to be a member of this group?

This research project is about identity of international students. When you participate in X group, what does it mean to you to belong to a group of international students?
3. What did you think about participating in this particular group? Do you feel that your idea of participating in a group has changed over time?
4. In the beginning you said this... Has anything changed since then? Do you think that this group has impacted the way you describe yourself as an international student participating in a group? What words would you use to describe how this group makes you see yourself as a group member?

Appendix D

Possible Final Interview Questions

1. You are participating in X group, tell me about that. Tell me about your experiences in this group. Probe: Have you had any experiences that really stuck out in your mind? That left an impression on you? Can you tell me about that? What was important about it for you?
2. Tell me how you see yourself now as a group member. Has this changed while participating in this group? If yes, how so? Tell me more.
3. Tell me about your interactions with other people in your group. **Prompt:** What did you do in the group? What did you talk about? How did it make you feel to be part of this group? How did you feel when you were talking to other people in this group?
4. Do you feel that this group has helped you integrate with other groups on campus who are not international students? Could you please explain your answer further?

Appendix E

Transcription Rules

1. Dialect and colloquial language will all be translated as well. 2) “Merged” words will not be transcribed as such, but approximated to standard written language. For instance: I’m-goin’ to the movies” will be transcribed as “I am going to the movies”. Syntax errors will be transcribed as is. 3. Disconnection of sentences or abrupt stops within a word will be indicated by a slash: /. Pauses will be inputted as full stops in parentheses; for example, one second (.), to three (...) seconds. Longer breaks will be entered with the pause length in parentheses. Consentient or confirmative vocal interjections by the interviewer (like ‘mhm’) will not be transcribed. Interjections by the interviewee such as ‘mhm’, ‘ehm’ and ‘uh’ will not be transcribed. Monosyllabic answers, however, (positive: ‘mh=hm’, ‘ah=ha’ or negative: ‘hm=mh’, ‘eh=eh’) will be included in the transcript, if appropriate as ‘mhm (affirmative)’ or ‘hm-m (negative)’. Emphasized words and utterances will be capitalized. If there is a personal “I”, (or an emphasized “a” in the beginning of a sentence) I will underline it in order to indicate emphasis.

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