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The Impact of a Problem-Posing Approach on Student Engagement in an ESL Classroom in a Mid-Atlantic State

Beverly Anne Richardson Jewett

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THE IMPACT OF A PROBLEM-POSING APPROACH ON STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN
AN ESL CLASSROOM IN A MID-ATLANTIC STATE

by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to our almost two-year-old daughter. While some consider my efforts and long hours of research and writing as taking time away from my family, I firmly believe it was a contribution to our family and society. I hope I have set an example of the importance of continuing to follow your curiosity through learning and having faith in the journey.

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Ephesians 4:1

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There have been many people with me on this journey. First, I give thanks to my husband who has been a constant and gracious encourager. Second, I thank my parents for being supportive through all my educational endeavors. As retired public-school educators, their service to our community is inspiring. Third, I appreciate all other family and friends who have been positive and patient with me as I have progressed through this program. I have had some amazing people cheering me on. Everyone has been examples of unconditional love and dedication. Fourth, I extend gratitude to my committee members, especially for my Chair, Dr. James Kirylo. This process has been a journey, but Dr. Kirylo continued to be a voice of encouragement, patience, and positivity. Finally, I appreciate the many students and colleagues I have worked with through the years. You have inspired me to wonder, try new things, and pursue quality.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of a problem-posing approach on student engagement in an ESL classroom at a community college in a Mid-Atlantic state. This study took place during the Spring 2019 semester with seven participants, two males and five females. Data were collected through pre- and post-surveys, pre- and post-interviews, student work artifacts, informal interviews, and field observations. The results of the study revealed that the students perceived an increase in their own engagement through a problem-posing instructional approach. Furthermore, the results revealed increased students' value of collaboration, an environment that disarmed the fear of speaking, and connections to the workforce as key themes of the data collection.

Keywords: problem-posing approach, student engagement, ESL, adult learners

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

EL.....	English learners
ESL	English as a Second Language
L2	second or target language
PoP	Problem of Practice
SLA.....	Second Language Acquisition

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

As the 21st century evolves, education in America continues to face challenges associated with meeting the learning needs of all students. The population of students learning English as a second language has expanded over the past few decades. Cosentino de Cohen, Deterding, and Clewell (2005) highlight that English learners (EL) are increasingly attending schools across the United States; however, 70% of the EL students are enrolled in only 10% of America's schools. Typically, these schools are geographically located in urban areas. The student demographics of these schools typically include disproportionate numbers of economically disadvantaged or minority students. Consequently, EL students are separated from English-speaking peer role models (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010).

The foundation of the United States was built on immigration. Thus, people across the nation have always been learning English as a second language. The United States experienced a large influx of immigrants who were learning English as a second language (ESL) at the beginning of the 20th century (Lemann, 2000). Unique to that time, the global economy was substantially different. Also, only 6% of youth graduated from high school with a diploma at the turn of the 20th century (Lemann, 2000). Presently, 84% of youth graduate with a high school diploma in four years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Across the nation, adult education programs have expanded to meet the needs of

the growing ESL population coupled with the increased need for jobs in the 21st century to have some level of postsecondary education (Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, 2014). Adult education programs may include Adult Basic Education, community college programs, or matriculation at four-year institutions. The purpose of postsecondary programs is to support training for career pathways of high-demand fields, align with community and regional needs, or provide qualifications in a desired field (Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, 2014). While the educational offerings for adult ESL students grows nationally, the same scenario is occurring locally in the researcher's context of a community college. Conversations among educators and professors of all content areas are about what instructional practices are best for meeting the needs of ESL students.

The notion of “‘one teaching style fits all,’ which is attributed to a teacher-centered instructional approach, is not working for a growing number of diverse, student populations” (Brown, 2003, p. 49). Perhaps, utilizing a learner-centered focus may be helpful. A learner-centered approach primarily focuses on student learning rather than the teacher. A learner-centered approach considers what the student is learning, why the student is learning, and how the student is learning (Weimer, 2002).

It is not uncommon that instructors or educational practices incorporate a banking approach (Itin, 1999). Within the banking approach, teachers transmit knowledge to students paralleling a teacher to student flow of information. However, Paulo Freire (1970b) suggests a learner-centered focus of a problem-posing approach. The problem-posing approach allows teachers and students to freely discuss things paralleling a teacher *with* student flow of learning. Both students and teachers learn. This approach

“challenges teachers and students to empower themselves for social change, to advance democracy and equality as they advance their literacy and knowledge” (Shor, 1993, p. 24).

Within the researcher’s practice and context, student engagement among students was powerful. Student engagement resembles the extent to which students engage with activities that are likely to lead to productive learning (Coates, 2006). When students perceive they are a part of a learning community, they are more apt to be engaged and note satisfaction with college (Zhao & Kuh, 2004). Student engagement is linked positively to learning outcomes related to critical thinking and grades at the college level (Carini, Kuh, & Klein, 2006).

Statement of the Problem of Practice

As an instructor that worked with students at a medium-sized community college, the researcher often observed students commenting on their increased willingness to talk in the ESL class as compared to other classes the students were taking. Sometimes, these students said they were scared to ask questions in their other classes because they may be made fun of in regards to their pronunciation of words. Another student commented that they loved the ESL class simply because there were opportunities to talk. He described his science class as a class where he sits, listens, and must read to learn, which is very challenging.

At a recent English department professional development meeting, a topic was discussed involving how to engage students in talking more about their writing. A goal was to increase students’ ability to read, respond, and provide feedback about their own and peers’ student work. Recently, another ESL instructor observed class.

She commented that a challenge she faced with adult learners was how to get them to talk more about the content. The challenge was nestled in students having similar proficiency levels in writing but not in speaking. A natural debate had broken out in class after the instructor-researcher had introduced the topic of doping in sports with a picture and YouTube video. The observing ESL instructor and instructor-researcher wondered what had ignited the contribution of a diversity of thoughts from participating students.

Therefore, the identified problem of practice (PoP) was framed in a community college setting serving a region characterized by both suburban and rural areas. The researcher, in the capacity of a college ESL instructor, taught writing composition classes. These were the only ESL course offerings at the community college presently. The community college was considering redesigning the course pathways to align with students' needs. As a result, more course offerings would be available. The ESL courses were a part of the English department.

The instructor-researcher recognized a thread related to students' engagement during the writing composition courses. Drawing on professional experience, she knew the value of student engagement related to students' learning. Initially, students simply made eye contact while other students did not. Some students nodded their heads, but only when the instructor-researcher made eye contact with them or said their name. When answering questions, students' answers were evasive and did not connect to content being taught. The instructor-researcher quickly recognized that a low level of student engagement was occurring. In order to enhance student learning,

the instructor-researcher needed to reflect and adapt the instructional practices she used.

Noting the idea of student engagement is underlying to student learning prompted the instructor-researcher to figure out what she can do in her classes to foster engagement and participation. She wondered how a learner-centered approach may impact student engagement in the ESL classroom. Thus, she designed an action research study to examine the influence of a learner-centered focus using a problem-posing approach on student engagement within the ESL classroom.

Drawing on past and ongoing professional experiences, the instructor-researcher recognized the importance of teacher and student dialogue as student engagement. For students, confidence in receiving and expressing the language, practice accessing background experiences, and applying content occurs during student talk. It is mutually beneficial for teachers. Based on the instructor-researcher's experiences, teachers can gain insight into the prior knowledge of students, gain informal assessment information about student learning, and build student-teacher relationships through participating or observing conversations.

Research Question

What is the impact of a problem-posing approach on the engagement level of seven students in an ESL class at a community college?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a problem-posing approach on the student engagement of seven students enrolled in a writing composition course for ESL students at a community college in the mid-Atlantic region. Drawing on

the work of Freire (1970b) and Shor (1993), a problem-posing approach has a learner-centered focus that promotes critical thinking and dialogue among students and teachers. Through dialogue, the teacher and students learn from each other as solutions or alternatives are generated. Within the problem-posing approach, the teacher and students create a collective purpose of co-inquiry into meaningful student experiences or problems. Through dialogue, the teacher and students learn from each other as solutions or alternatives are generated (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1993).

Auerbach (1992) highlights five aspects of the problem-posing approach. As a way of teaching critical thinking skills, the aspects provide a fluid structure for adult learners to gain confidence and comfort to think critically. The five aspects are the following: (1) describe the content, (2) define the problem, (3) personalize the problem, (4) discuss the problem, and (5) discuss alternatives to the problem. Teachers facilitate the discussion of the problem from concrete to analytical by progressing through inductive questioning. Ultimately, the problem-posing approach assists students to identify the problem, determine its relevancy to them, distinguish the causes of the problem, generalize to others, and create possible solutions for the problem.

The instructor-researcher aimed to provide opportunities for dialogue during 12 on-campus class sessions, which participants attended. While using the problem-posing approach, the instructor-researcher sought to explore the research question. The purpose of this research was to determine how to foster increased student engagement as demonstrated through dialogue by EL students.

Based on the work of Coates (2006), student engagement was defined as the extent to which students engage with activities that are likely to lead to productive

learning. In search of improved student engagement of EL students, the researcher designed an action research study utilizing a problem-posing approach.

Brief Overview of Methodology

The action research study took place in a community college in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The college served students from six counties and one city. Enrollment at the college was about 5,600 students. The mission of the college was to provide workforce development and college transfers. Students could earn associate degrees and certificates. The college aimed to provide students with access to affordable, high-quality educational programs that support the vitality of the community.

The seven participants of the action research study shared commonalities and differences. All participants attended the same ESL course. The participants were placed in the class based on their scores on the ACCUPLACER® test. All the students were learning English and were at similar proficiency levels. The ages ranged from the category of 18-19 years to 40-49 years. Their educational background included high school experience, other Adult Basic Education courses, or degrees conferred in foreign countries. Two males and five females participated in the study. Their backgrounds and positionalities reflected diversity, as their home countries included Thailand, United States (Hawaii), Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, and Palestine.

According to Fraenkel, Waller, and Hyun (2015), action research includes four basic stages: “(1) identifying the research problem or question, (2) obtaining the necessary information to answer the research question(s), (3) analyzing and interpreting the information that has been garnered, and (4) developing a plan of action” (p. 591).

Rather than a linear process, action research is cyclical in nature. The final stage informs the development of another research problem or question(s).

During the first stage, the problem of concern was clarified. The instructor-researcher recognized that students were anecdotally sharing that they felt more freedom in the ESL classes to talk, ask questions or discuss issues. Not sure if a conscious or subconscious instructional practice was occurring, the instructor sought to improve student engagement by enhancing the quantity and quality of oral communication opportunities through dialogue. To address this concern, the instructor-researcher explored how to use a problem-posing approach within her instructional delivery.

The second stage of the study involved determining the type of data needed and how to collect it. The implementation phase of the research plan took place during the Spring 2019 semester at a community college. The research plan included the measures of pre-intervention and post-intervention semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, pre-intervention and post-intervention survey of students' attitudes of student engagement, and field notes.

The third stage of the action research cycle included analyzing and interpreting the data collected. Student Engagement Surveys, student interviews, field notes, and artifacts were analyzed for emerging trends and relevant patterns. Using emergent coding, the interviews, observations, and field notes were analyzed to ascertain if there were any emerging themes. Commonalities among the data were considered. The numeric values of the Likert-scale surveys were analyzed comparatively.

Developing an action plan was the final stage of the action research cycle. Implementing changes based on the findings was a key aspect of the action plan

(Fraenkel, Waller, & Hyun, 2015). The instructor-researcher developed an action plan to include instruction and implementation of the problem-posing approach within other courses of the English department. Furthermore, the researcher considered how the problem-posing approach may be applied to Workforce Development classes. The findings were shared with all student-participants as well.

Significance of the Study

Efficacious teachers are more likely to persist with struggling students (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). Furthermore, efficacious teachers are more likely to innovate or experiment with instructional practices, pursue improved instructional delivery, and investigate instructional materials (Allinder, 1994; Guskey, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988). By harnessing teacher self-efficacy, the instructor-researcher sought to enhance the local context of student engagement in ESL classrooms.

As a current ESL curriculum specialist, the instructor-researcher was experienced in instructional design. This study assisted in informing ESL instructors regarding how to determine the best way to enhance student engagement as demonstrated by dialogue within instructional practice. As a result, the study would determine whether the problem-posing approach is advantageous for student engagement. Thus, this action research study was relevant to educational research because these issues were presenting in multiple settings across the nation as the enrollment in ESL programs continued to increase (Saunders & Marcelletti, 2013).

The significance of the PoP within the local context provided implications for instructional leaders, college leaders, and instructors/professors was apparent across various higher education settings. The utilization of a problem-posing approach often

positively influenced student engagement in ESL classrooms. Consequently, students typically had increased opportunities to practice oral communication while demonstrating learning.

Action research as a methodology was chosen for this PoP because of its benefits. The action research was deeply contextual and inquiry-based. The role of the researcher impacted all intricacies of the study. The relationship between the action researcher and context was mutualistic. The action researcher benefited from nuances and examination of the context while the context benefited from the influences of the action research process.

Expectations of validity, reliability, generalizability, and transferability of findings were just as important to action research as they were to empirical research. Efron & Ravid (2013) highlight validity as accurately measuring the issue being examined while reliability represents the consistency of the measurement tools. Both were important qualitative methods and quantitative methods. Of note, action research was context-dependent aligning with the intent of action research to solve a local problem. Consequently, the intention of the study was to generate knowledge rather than to be generalizable to a broad context or demonstrate external validity.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the study were related to the participants and timing. The study faced the limitation of a small number of participants (seven total) participating in the study, meaning generalizations cannot be made. The scope of the action research study may be considered a limitation although representative of a local problem. The sample of seven participants within the same class at a community college may be considered a

limitation because of the lost statistical power. The sample of participants also limited the scope of different languages and cultures where English is a second language.

Herr and Anderson (2015) note the importance of the researcher determining her positionality by exploring her relation to participants and setting. The action research intended to study the problem-posing approach within the instructor's writing course for EL students. Consequently, she was assuming an insider positionality as a practitioner hoping to contribute to her knowledge base or critiqued practice (Herr & Anderson, 2015). A possible limitation of the study was the implication of power that was associated with her role as an authority figure, which may or may not have impacted the authenticity of participants' actions and responses.

Dissertation Overview

Chapter One of the action research dissertation includes background information pertaining to the PoP and the associated research question. Chapter Two describes scholarly literature contextualizing the primary topics of the study: ESL themes, a problem-posing approach, and student engagement. After a description of the local setting, Chapter Three provides details of the methodological approach used for the study. Chapter Four highlights the findings and interpretations of the research. Implications of the study and recommendations for further research are included in Chapter Five. An action plan for conveying the findings to participants and for sharing results with other instructional leaders within the college also is included in Chapter Five.

Positionality Statement

Within the proposed PoP, the researcher was the instructor within the classroom context. Her daily and long-term mission was to promote the success and wellbeing of all

students and staff. Naturally, the researcher's positionality and subjectivity influenced her as an instructor. The instructor-researcher defined her role as providing insight to strengthen the skills and/or learning of students within the language domains of reading, listening, speaking, and writing.

As the practitioner assuming the role of researcher in this study, the instructor-researcher's autobiographical positionality was imperative (Chavez, 2008; Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). Her cultural heritage was a legacy of middle-class Americans with a nuclear family. She was raised in a middle-class environment. Many extended family members lived nearby fostering daily interactions, while some extended family members lived in neighboring states.

The instructor-researcher's ancestry included English, German, Scandinavian, and Cherokee heritage. Living in a rural area in a mid-Atlantic state, her exposure to diversity was in terms of socio-economic class. Throughout her PreK-12 education, she had minimal exposure to diversity. In fact, the EL student population was less than 20 students for the school division during her elementary years. For her hometown school division, she coordinated the ESL program that served 10% (about 900 students) of the student population, noting the growth of the ESL population within the region. She had friendships and daily interactions with African American peers. She did not remember this as a representation of diversity, but rather a naturally occurring phenomenon. During her childhood, her recollection of diversity was in terms of socio-economic status of peers or families.

The rural area transitioned to a bedroom community of commuters to a nearby metropolitan area. Thus, over the previous 15 years, her interactions with diversity

significantly increased in terms of socio-economic class, ethnicity, racial identification, sexual orientations, academic/professional background, and political beliefs.

She identified as a middle-class, Caucasian female. She earned three degrees from the University of Virginia. Her interactions with diversity significantly increased in terms of socioeconomic class, ethnicity, racial identification, sexual orientation, academic/professional background, and political beliefs. Her college years resembled years of growth. She was exposed to a vibrant international community on grounds (campus), traveled internationally, and became more attuned with geopolitics. She was curious about the implications of diversity in education due to minimal exposure as a child and increased exposure as a practitioner. She believed the problem-posing approach was an inclusive practice that supports both equity and social justice.

Merriam et al. (2010) highlights women face complexities of insider/outsider status within and across cultures. Thus, the instructor-researcher was not immune. As a senior in high school, she was the first salutatorian in years for her high school. Within her school division, she was the youngest female school administrator. Also, she was the youngest female in the role of a division-level leadership position. Her research decisions were focused on promoting social justice and inclusion for all learners while empowering students to create their own journey of success rather than society's projected path of success.

Definition of Terms

1. **Action research:** according to Herr and Anderson (2015), the historical trajectory of action research within education is a progression to form solutions related to social justice. The nature of this form of research is “constructivist, situational, practical,

systematic, and cyclical” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 7). Action researchers pursue problems related to their local context and areas of interests. The research is intentionally planned and leads to application coupled with the generation of another research question. Consequently, action research is systematic inquiry by an educator to solve a problem within the local context.

2. **English as a Second Language (ESL):** programs supporting the second language acquisition of English by students.
3. **English Learner (EL):** students learning English as a second language.
4. **Instructional practice:** teaching practices that guide interaction among students and/or content to promote learning (Danielson, 2011).
5. **Oral communication:** students’ primary skills of listening and speaking, pronunciations would be considered a secondary skill (Murphy, 1991).
6. **Problem-posing approach:** an approach to learning that helps contextualize knowledge as the teacher and students pose questions as catalysts for learning (Freire, 1970b).
7. **Second language acquisition (SLA):** process by which people learn a second language
8. **Student engagement:** the extent to which students engage with activities that are likely to lead to productive learning (Coates, 2006).

CHAPTER TWO: Review of Literature

In this chapter is a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings from which second language acquisition and the problem-posing approach are presented. First, the historical context, developmental stages, and theoretical base of second language acquisition will be described. Second, the historical context, theoretical base, and five aspects of the problem-posing approach will be detailed. Finally, the review will discuss how the problem-posing approach may enhance student engagement in the ESL classroom.

Second Language Acquisition

Historical Context

In the United States, ESL instruction has existed since the 1800s. Thus, multiple languages other than English have been used as the language of instruction in both public and private schools across the United States for centuries (Crawford, 2004; Ovando & Wiley, 2003). In 1850, after the annexation of the Territory of New Mexico, curriculum could be presented in English, Spanish, or both languages (Leibowitz, 1971; Woodrum, 2009). Also at that time, more than a dozen states legally allowed instruction in other languages than English (Schmid, 2001). For example, in public schools, instruction was occurring in languages including but not limited to the following: Czech, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Spanish, and Swedish (Crawford, 2004; Kloss, 1977).

At the end of the 19th century, instructional practice shifted towards assimilation of one culture and one language. Ovando and Combs (2018) explain the movement towards assimilation of one culture and one language began then. An influx of 8 million immigrants at the turn of the century created a power struggle between established immigrants in America and the immigrants arriving as part of the influx. By 1920, a paradigm shift had begun. According to Higham (1992), schools began focusing on Americanizing immigrants. In addition, 15 states had now legally demanded English-only instruction in schools. Consequently, the paradigm for “English-dominant cultural and language homogeneity became established as a pattern within schools” (Ovando & Combs, 2018, p. 51). Contributing factors of the paradigm shift included standardization, bureaucratization, a perceived need for national unity during the two world wars, and capitalizing on national gains focusing on common goals (Gonzalez, 1975; Tyack, 1974).

During the 1920s, the United States Congress passed immigration legislation establishing a quota system for immigration. According to Crawford (1992), there were less immigrants coming to America, and many second-generation immigrants did not continue using their home language. Therefore, the use of bilingual education and ESL faded out of school instruction for about 50 years.

Repression of indigenous languages by the United States government occurred between the 1850s and 1950s. Ranging from Spanish to various languages of American Indian groups, speakers were mandated to participate in English-only instruction. At times, speakers were separated from families and sent to boarding schools to learn English (Ovando & Combs, 2018). Originally there were over 300 languages spoken in

the United States; now, 169 languages remain (Siebens & Julian, 2011). Of the remaining languages, only 16 are being passed to the next generation (Krauss, 1996).

After World War II, there was a reemergence for the need of Americans to speak a foreign language. It was noted as a weakness of the American forces during the war (Rivas-Rodriguez, 2005). The desire for the United States to compete internationally grew during the Cold War and the Space Race, initiated by the Soviets' launching of *Sputnik*. In 1958, federal funding supported increased foreign-language teaching with the passage of the National Defense Education Act (Ovando & Combs, 2018).

ESL instruction traces its roots to the beginning of the 19th century. ESL was originally taught to support Americanization of immigrants (Williamson, Rhodes, & Dunson, 2007). Throughout the 1940s, the professionalizing of the ESL field began as teaching English as a foreign language abroad to students began and textbooks were created (Alatis & LeClair, 1993; Ovando & Combs, 2018).

The field of ESL expanded in the 1960s as a result of increased immigration and refugee youth coming to America coupled with increased attendance of international students at American higher education institutions. The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 disbanded the immigration quota system (Kammer, 2015). As a result, the number and diversity of immigrants increased.

The 1968 Bilingual Education Act offered three main goals: (a) enhancing English skills, (b) enhancing native language skills, and (c) supporting the cultural heritage of students (Leibowitz, InterAmerica Research Associates, National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1980). Subsequent reauthorizations over the next few decades expanded funding, provided protection against discrimination, expanded

services to English speaking students, created developmental bilingual education, began professional development and training of teachers, and expanded grant-funded instructional programming (Ovando & Combs, 2018). Recent legislation has continued to define, support, and expand the integration of ESL instruction within school reform, curriculum development, instructional design, and accountability measures.

Due to the influx of immigrants and non-native English speakers, there are challenges facing SLA that are relevant to ESL instruction. Recruiting and retaining qualified instructors or teachers, obtaining and allocating appropriate resources to support instruction, and changes in federal policy impacting accountability measures are current barriers facing ESL instruction across the educational settings of elementary, secondary, and postsecondary (Eberly, Joshi, & Konzal, 2007; Mitchell, 2018; National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003). In addition, the focus of adult ESL instruction is to prepare students for daily life, workplace readiness, and with the academic skills needed to be successful (National Center for ESL Literacy Instruction, 2003).

While facing these challenges, emerging trends of program design, instructional practices, and integrating research and practice have surfaced. According to The National Center for ESL Literacy Instruction (2003), flexibility is a key component of ESL programs because the diversity of populations served has increased. Thus, the program designs and instructional perspectives need to reflect a wide range of choices. Choices may include scheduling, content, duration, and location. These choices help enhance the quantity and quality of learning opportunities while accommodating the daily lives of adult EL students. Due to the demand of ESL classes, it is common to find large class sizes and multi-proficiency level makeups of classes (National Center for ESL Literacy

Education, 1998; Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, 2003).

The purpose of adult ESL classes is to provide EL students with opportunities to learn how to access information and concepts that are needed to be successful in the various roles they will face in their daily lives. Also, creating lifelong learners is a goal. Currently, there are typically two pathways of adult ESL programming in the United States. One pathway is associated with Adult Basic Education. This pathway typically includes classes that cover topics of life skills, family literacy, literacy/civics, vocational topics, and workplace readiness. Another pathway is the academic pathway. The intent of the academic pathway is to prepare students to meaningfully access content during their program of studies at postsecondary institutions (National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003).

Recently, the quality of ESL education has faced challenges. Due to the increased diversity of EL students and their instructional needs coupled with new immigrant settlement trends, ESL program quality has been impacted (Hayes, 2000; Van Duzer, 2002). Immigrants are settling in areas where ESL programming has had to be newly developed or was nonexistent.

Although ESL programming is being developed, instructional best practices for adult ESL instruction are prevalent. The instructional best practices include: (1) incorporating principles of adult learning, (2) using a variety of instructional strategies including a participatory focus, (3) integrating relevant content, (4) eliciting prior experiences, and (5) providing courses with a variety of scheduling, intensity, and flexibility (National Center for ESL Literacy Education, 2003).

Developmental Stages

The definition of SLA is often times notated as L2. Second language acquisition refers to people of any age learning another language other than their native language.

Haynes (2005) clarifies five stages of SLA. The stages are (1) pre-production, (2) early production, (3) speech emergence, (4) intermediate fluency, and (5) advanced fluency.

During the pre-production stage, there is a silent period for EL students. Students may have about 500 words of receptive vocabulary (Haynes, 2005). Yet, they are not speaking during this stage. It is important to note that some EL students will copy and repeat everything someone says. This is called parroting but is not considered production of language.

Hill and Bjork (2008) characterizes the second stage of SLA as students having limited comprehension of language. During the early production stage, students are able to use keywords and/or familiar phrases while producing one or two-word responses. Students typically are at this stage after learning the second language for six months to one year.

Haynes (2005) shares that students in the speech emergence stage of SLA have about 3,000 words in their vocabulary. Students typically enter the third stage of SLA after about one to three years of learning a second language (Hill and Bjork, 2008). This stage is highlighted by students having good comprehension and making grammatical and pronunciation errors, although often misinterpreting jokes or idioms. Students can speak in simple phrases and ask simple questions (Haynes, 2005).

The fourth stage of SLA, intermediate fluency, is characterized by EL students having a vocabulary of about 6,000 active words (Haynes, 2005). Students are more

freely willing to express opinions, concerns, and thoughts while speaking in more complex language organization. Students typically enter this stage after learning a second language for three to five years (Hill and Bjork, 2008).

The final stage of SLA is known as advanced fluency. At this stage, students have accomplished cognitive academic language proficiency in the second language (Haynes, 2005). According to Hill and Bjork (2008), EL students have a close to native proficiency level of language.

All language learners progress through the same stages in the same sequence. However, the amount of time spent at each stage varies by the learner. Learners from different backgrounds go through the same language development stages as noted by research on interlanguage and error analysis (Ellis, 1989). “Second language learners acquire a knowledge of a L2 in a fixed order as a result of a predisposition to process language data in highly specific ways” (Ellis, 1989, p. 42). While there is common acceptance of the stages of SLA, students progress at various rates.

Theoretical Base

There are many theories attempting to explain second language acquisition (SLA), yet no singular theory is definitive. Theories of SLA began to emerge in the 1970s. Corder (1967) suggests that SLA parallels acquisition of one’s native language. Corder’s hypothesis originates from psycholinguistic theory as he thought a learner’s errors should be studied to shed light on how teachers may adapt their teaching to the student’s needs for learning. Consequently, Corder challenged the behaviorist theory of SLA.

In *Interlanguage*, Selinker (1972) describes various aspects of SLA from a

psycholinguistic theoretical basis. For SLA, students have independent linguistic systems. Each linguistic system processes the first and second language.

The significance of interlanguage theory lies in the fact that it is the first attempt to take into account the possibility of learner conscious attempts to control their learning. It was this view that initiated an expansion of research into psychological processes in interlanguage development whose aim was to determine what learners do in order to help facilitate their own learning, i.e. which learning strategies they employ. It seems, however, that the research of Selinker's learning strategies, with the exception of transfer, has not been taken up by other researchers. (Griffiths & Parr, 2001, as cited in Taka, 2008, p. 32)

During the 1970s, research in SLA explored Corder and Selinker's ideas of error analysis and transitional strategies while continuing to refute behavioral approaches. In the 1980s, Stephen Krashen's theory of SLA became widely accepted. Krashen (1985) suggests that SLA is associated with the amount of comprehensible input.

Comprehensible input is one-way input from the second language, and it aligns with the instructional linguistic level of the EL. Thus, the input is neither too easy nor frustrational. Furthermore, the scaffolding theory of comprehensible input is $i+1$ paralleling Lev Vygotsky's (1962) *zone of proximal development*.

Using Vygotsky's (1962) sociocultural theory, some interactionist theorists explain that EL students gain proficiency due to learners interacting more with advanced proficient speakers. EL students function in their zones of proximal development due to scaffolding structures (Vygotsky, 1962). Repetition, linguistic simplification, and modeling are examples of scaffolding structures frequently used.

In practice, Goldenberg (2008) suggests teachers can employ comprehensible input in multiple ways. Providing directions both orally and in writing, using vocabulary that is understood, and guided practice are ways to increase the frequency of comprehensible input. Furthermore, visual aids, prediction guides, graphic organizers, realia, and supplemental materials can be used. Similar to Corder (1967), Stephen Krashen's (1996) theory suggests that SLA occurs subconsciously similar to first language acquisition. SLA is dependent on receiving messages that the learners can understand; thus, the importance of comprehensible input exists.

Long (1985) and Pica (1994) present an interactionist theoretical perspective on SLA. These researchers suggest that there is a two-way communication component to SLA. Using conversation fosters SLA under certain conditions. Meaning is negotiated during conversations through a variety of modifications like confirmation checks, checks for understanding, repetition, and clarification (Ariza & Hancock, 2003). Negotiation is identified as "modification and restructuring that occurs when learners and their interlocutors anticipate, perceive, or experience difficulties in message comprehensibility" (Pica, 1994, p. 495).

Furthermore, the interactionist theoretical perspective clarifies the meaning of comprehensible input is negotiated and increased as a result of conversations.

When learners are given the opportunity to engage in meaningful activities they are compelled to "negotiate for meaning," that is, to express and clarify their intentions, thoughts, opinions, etc., in a way *which* permits them to arrive at a mutual understanding. This is especially true when the learners are working together to accomplish a particular goal. (Lightbrown, Spada, Ranta, & Rand,

1999, p. 122)

While interactionist theorists often consider input *to* and *from* the language learner, Swain (1995) suggests a strong consideration of comprehensible output. The comprehensible output theory attests the critical importance of output. “Output” means the product of language acquisition paralleling what the learner has learned (Swain, 2005). The output has four main functions (1) enhances fluency, (2) initiates awareness of language knowledge discrepancies, (3) promotes opportunities to experiment with language forms and structures, and (4) collects feedback from others about language use (Swain, 1995). The process is highlighted as,

In producing the L2 (the second, or target language), a learner will on occasion become aware of (i.e., notice) a linguistic problem (brought to his/ her attention either by external feedback or internal feedback). Noticing a problem “pushes” the learner to modify his/her output. In doing so, the learner may sometimes be forced into a more syntactic processing mode than might occur in comprehension. (Swain and Lapkin in Chapelle, 1997, p. 2b)

Consequently, comprehensible input and comprehensible output are integral aspects of SLA. SLA theorists explain the interactions of comprehensible input and comprehensible output positively impact SLA as meaning is constructed.

Problem-Posing Approach

Historical Context

Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and theorist, was born to a middle-class family. After his family lost their economic security, Freire (1996) never forgot the literal experience of hunger as a child, sharing,

It was a real and concrete hunger that had no specific date of departure. Even though it never reached the rigor of the hunger experienced by some people I know, it was not the hunger experienced by those who undergo a tonsil operation or are dieting. On the contrary, our hunger was of the type that arrives unannounced and unauthorized, making itself at home without an end in sight. A hunger that, if it was not softened as ours was, would take over our bodies, molding them into angular shapes. Legs, arms, and fingers become skinny. Eye sockets become deeper, making the eyes almost disappear. Many of our classmates experienced this hunger and today it continues to afflict millions of Brazilians who die of its violence every year. (p. 6)

This realization led to his understanding and rejection of class borders coupled with a lifetime commitment to social justice, critical knowledge, and social action (Shor, 1993). Freire's critical pedagogy revolutionized education systems on a global perspective. Critical pedagogy suggests teachers and students can learn together by constructing meaning together. Rather than domesticating students, students experience liberation as a result of critical pedagogy (Shor, 1993). The intention of critical pedagogy is to improve literacy and knowledge of students while they participate in social action, advance democracy, or promote equality (Shor, 1993).

Furthermore, Freire (1974, 1985, 1998) perceived the world as continually evolving. Through conscientization, Freire firmly believed social change can be accomplished through detailed analysis of the context of daily life (Freire, 1970a). Conscientization is the "process in which human beings participate critically in a transforming act" (Freire, 1985, p.106). There are two sides of power, the oppressor and

the oppressed. The oppressor has power and a voice, while the oppressed is without power and silent. Freire suggests that domination always has gaps of tension or problems. The relationship is established mutually. Freire shares, “It is not the dominator who constructs a culture and imposes it on the dominated. This culture is the result of the structural relations between the dominated and the dominators” (1985, p.72). Through conscientization, the oppressed may achieve freedom through participating critically in a transforming act.

Consequently, Leonard and McLaren (2002) explain that Freire believed that education is a political act. Through aspects of student-teacher relationships, classroom dialogues, content selection, and classroom management, politics are consistently interwoven throughout classroom decision-making. Critical pedagogy is a process that creates a classroom atmosphere that honors democratic spaces through dialogue. The problem-posing approach affords the opportunity for democracy to cultivate among teachers and students. A transformative relationship is built between the teacher and students, students and learning, and students and society.

As a commitment to critiquing domination while challenging inequality and social injustices, Freire sought to challenge the elite who promoted their culture and values as societal norms (Leonard & McLaren, 2002). Freire, Faundez, and Coates (1989) argue that any standardization in education is a reflection of the oppressor enforcing their views. Through a process of conscientization, a problem-posing approach aims to help the oppressed critically reflect and act on their social context compared to being encultured through the banking approach of education.

Theoretical Base

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1972) first details the banking approach to education. In banking education, teachers deposit knowledge into students. Banking education is education as the practice of domination. Teachers attempt to control students' thinking. The purpose of banking education is to adapt students to their oppressive contexts. Students are considered passive objects while being treated as marginal stakeholders in society. Interconnections between students are nonexistent.

Freire (1970), drawing on his life experiences, challenges the banking approach that is commonly found in the American education system. Rather than students being simply receivers of knowledge, Freire suggests the problem-posing approach as a foil to the banking approach. Within the problem-posing approach, students are orchestrators of their learning. The purpose of the problem-posing approach is education as the practice of freedom. The relationships between the teacher and students are equitable. Thus, both the teacher and students teach and learn from one another.

Shor (1993) explains that the problem-posing approach allows students to *do* education as compared to having education *done* to them. Students shift from simply answering questions to questioning answers through the problem-posing approach of critical pedagogy.

Freire (1970) contends that dialogue is misconstrued in education. Dialogue is different than conversation. Dialogue in an academic setting is centered on a subject or topic. Exchanging of ideas occurs through dialogue. In addition, dialogue occurs when students work cooperatively to define their world. By examining lived experiences, students collectively name common trends or create next steps of action.

Adding a layer of engagement, the problem-posing approach includes participatory action research (Freire, 1970). This approach allows students to determine possible solutions to their problems through a community-led dialogue. Students collect information from their peers, analyze it, and then discuss the next steps of action. Collectively, the problem-posing approach expands the capacity of students engaging in the dialogue.

In conclusion, while Freire recognized the complexity of the class struggle, he continued to argue that analyses of oppression must always include a component of class analysis. He suggests an educational approach that attempts to engage people who have been marginalized by eliciting their lived experiences and knowledge. While many progressive education movements continue to still utilize the banking approach, Freire (1970) contends the problem-posing approach is the only way to transform the world by using emancipatory education.

Five Aspects of the Problem-Posing Approach

Within the problem-posing approach, the teacher and students create a collective purpose of co-inquiry into meaningful student experiences or problems. Through dialogue, the teacher and students learn from each other as solutions or alternatives are generated (Freire, 1970; Shor, 1993).

Auerbach (1992) highlights five aspects of the problem-posing approach. As a way of teaching critical thinking skills, the aspects provide a fluid structure for adult learners to gain confidence and comfort to think critically. The five aspects are the following: (1) describe the content, (2) define the problem, (3) personalize the problem, (4) discuss the problem, and (5) discuss alternatives to the problem. Teachers facilitate

the discussion of the problem from concrete to analytical by progressing through inductive questioning. Ultimately, the problem-posing approach assists students to identify the problem, determine its relevancy to them, distinguish the causes of the problem, generalize to others, and create possible solutions for the problem.

Nixon-Ponder (2001) examines adult literacy and its interaction with problem-posing. Problem-posing starts by teachers consciously listening to students' issues. Through informal conversations or listening to students during breaks, teachers can note topics that continually resurface. Then, teachers select familiar topics and present them in codified form to students. Codified form includes a representation of a meaningful topic by a form media such as a photograph, drawing, narrative, or written dialogue, texts from newspapers, signs, community brochure, food stamp form, insurance form, school newsletter, cartoon, or magazine (Wallerstein, 1983). Consequently, each codified topic elicits both personal and social conflicts within each student.

For students, the first aspect of the problem-posing approach is to describe the content. Teachers share a code with students. Because experiences or concerns of students are the catalyst for the selection of the codes, they are relevant to the students. The students are given time to examine the code, then the teacher asks questions such as: "What do you see in the picture (photograph, drawing, etc.)? What is happening in the picture (photograph, drawing, etc.)? or What is this dialogue (story, article, message) about? What is happening in the dialogue (story, article, message)?" (Nixon-Ponder, 1995, p. 3).

During the next aspect of problem-posing, students discover and define the problem presented in the code. It is possible that students may discover and define

multiple problems. If multiple problems are discovered, the teacher asks students to determine one problem to focus on while the other problems can be used in future activities. At times, students identify two problems that are interdependent; then, the students can proceed by attempting to solve the problems together (Nixon-Ponder, 2001).

Then, the teacher shifts to a facilitator role. The teacher guides students with the following questions: *How does the problem make you feel? What does the problem make you think about?* The goal is for students to internalize the problem by connecting the topic to their own daily lives, background experiences, or cultures. It is important for the teacher to ensure that all students have an opportunity to share their thoughts. However, if a student is uncomfortable sharing then they do not have to share. At this point, students may learn that peers have experienced similar events, have commonalities among their lives and cultures, or affirm their being (Nixon-Ponder, 2001).

Discussing the problem occurs next. During this aspect, the facilitator should be intentional to allow conversations to flow freely without creating barriers or expounding beliefs on students (Nixon-Ponder, 2001). The facilitator uses the following questions to guide the discussion towards the political causes and social reasons of the problem: *Why does this problem exist? How has this problem impacted you?* The purpose of this step is to create a safe environment for students to openly discuss problems that impact them while gaining ownership over the dialogic conversation.

Finally, alternatives to the problem are uncovered (Nixon-Ponder, 2001). Students create possible solutions or alternatives to the problem. By highlighting advantages and disadvantages of the solutions, students become aware that they have the answers to their problems. It is important for the facilitators to encourage students to uncover several

alternatives to the problem or topic so that the solutions are practical and attainable.

It is important to note as a caveat that the five aspects are not formulaic in nature but rather fluid and discussion-driven. In practice, the problem-posing approach allows both the teacher and students to assume the role of both positions so that learning occurs for both. The problem-posing approach allows both teachers and students to deeply explore problems within a social and personal perspective lens. Problem-posing “offers students a forum for validating their life experiences, their cultures, and their personal knowledge of how their world works. Problem-posing is dynamic, participatory, and empowering” (Nixon-Ponder, 1995, p. 4).

Student Engagement

Multiple definitions and understandings of student engagement exist. Hu and Kuh (2007) define student engagement as “the quality of effort students themselves devote to educationally purposeful activities that contribute directly to desired outcomes (p.3).” Coates (2007) highlights five key components of student engagement: (1) active and collaborative learning, (2) participation in challenging academic activities, (3) formative communication with academic staff, (4) involvement in enriching educational experiences, and (5) feeling supported by the learning community.

Derived from constructivist learning theory, student engagement mirrors active learning as students construct their knowledge. Learning is a result of social interactions of language, real life experiences, and interaction among the learners. Building connections between new ideas and experiences with existing ideas and experiences enhances learning (Bransford & Schwartz, 1999). The students are considered to be central in the learning process.

Jean Piaget (1970) suggests learning is the process of learning schemes, assimilating the schemes, and possibly accommodating the schemes (Ozer, 2004). Participatory approaches including the problem-posing approach utilize the cooperative learning groups. Based on constructivism, cooperative learning groups seek to capitalize on the contributions to learning that social interactions make.

Lev Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory noted the relationship between cognitive process and social activities of student engagement. The sociocultural theory posits learning occurs as students solve problems within their zone of proximal development. Consequently, student engagement strategies using peer group work align with the sociocultural perspective of constructivist theory.

Student engagement is well accepted as an important contributing factor on student achievement and learning (Kahu, 2013). Both the constructivist theory and sociocultural theory provide a theoretical perspective for the purpose and rationale of student engagement. While differences between the theories exist, both theories suggest that the generation of new knowledge is facilitated through social collaboration and interaction.

Conclusion

Chapter Two began with a discussion of second language acquisition and the problem-posing approach. The historical context, developmental stages, and theoretical base of second language acquisition were described. Then the historical context, theoretical base of the problem-posing approach, and frame of thinking were detailed. Finally, the review discussed how the problem-posing approach may enhance student engagement in the ESL classroom.

Furthermore, the goal of this study was to determine how to improve student engagement in an ESL classroom at a community college. An equally important goal was to design and to implement a problem-posing approach to support a research gap for adult English language learners. By facilitating dialogical pedagogy, the aim for this study was to create more engaged learners. This research can assist in addressing the needs of adult English language learners who struggle with listening, speaking, writing, and reading to create productive citizens. In the next chapter, the methodology of the study is shared along with setting, participant, and instrumentation information.

CHAPTER THREE: Action Research Methodology

Statement of the Problem of Practice

This action research study sought to explore the impact of the problem-posing approach on student engagement in an ESL classroom. Within the local context, there was an influx of English learners and staff shortages/turnover coupled with federal compliancy demands. Within the ESL classroom, low-level student engagement occurred at times as recognized by behaviors and student responses (see Chapter One). When the instructor-researcher used more participatory instructional activities, then student engagement increased. Also, students anecdotally shared appreciation for the freedom and safety to talk and discuss in the ESL classroom. In the capacity of the ESL instructor, the instructor-researcher wondered how using a problem-posing approach would influence student engagement.

In this chapter, explanations of the research design and a description of how the study unfolds are shared. Then, characteristics and relevant information related to the participants of the action research study are highlighted. Following details of the participants, the data collection measures of interviews, observations, and survey are explained. To promote transferability, the procedures of the study in the local context are detailed. Before a summary of the chapter is shared, the data analysis of emergent coding is explained.

Research Question

The following research question was examined: What is the impact of a problem-posing approach on the engagement level of seven students in an ESL class at a community college?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a problem-posing approach on the student engagement of seven ESL students enrolled in a writing composition course at a community college in the mid-Atlantic region. Drawing on the work of Freire (1970b) and Shor (1993), a problem-posing approach has a learner-centered focus that promotes critical thinking and dialogue among students and teachers. Through dialogue, the teacher and students learn from each other as solutions or alternatives are generated. The instructor-researcher aimed to provide opportunities for dialogue among participants during 12 on-campus class sessions. While using the problem-posing approach, the instructor-researcher sought to explore the research question. The underlying purpose of this research was to determine how to foster increased student engagement as demonstrated through dialogue by EL students.

Based on the work of Coates (2006), student engagement is defined as the extent to which students engage with activities that are likely to lead to productive learning. In search of improved student engagement of EL students, the researcher designed an action research study utilizing a problem-posing approach.

Action Research Design

Herr and Anderson (2015) highlight the historical trajectory of action research within education as a progression to form solutions related to social justice. Efron and

Ravid (2013) describe the nature of action research as “constructivist, situational, practical, systematic, and cyclical” (Efron & Ravid, 2013, p. 7). Practitioner researchers generate knowledge and create inquiries rather than being recipients of information. Action researchers pursue problems related to their local context and areas of interests. The research is intentionally planned and leads to application within the local context, while generating another research question.

Consequently, the methodology of action research was most appropriate to address this study’s research question. The research question was derived from the researcher’s local context. Based on the historical background of the local context and conversations with professors within the English department and instructional leaders, action research allowed the researcher a flexible methodology to attempt to capture an inquiry-based solution. Furthermore, the research questions were situational, practical, and cyclical, aligning with strengths of action research methodology (Efron & Ravid, 2013).

Setting and Timeframe of Study

The context and setting of the study are important. Using a wider lens of perspective, the study took place in a community college of about 5,600 students in the mid-Atlantic region. The community college served six rural, agricultural counties and one city. Access, academic rigor, student success, community impact, professionalism, intellectual viability, and diversity were values that the college esteemed. A majority of the students (79%) were enrolled on a part-time basis. The college offered one-year certificates, two-year associate degrees, continuing education, and workforce training. The college had agreements with the state’s four-year universities for automatic transfer

of students pursuing bachelor degrees.

Since the action research study was a qualitative research design, constructs existed. Student engagement was a construct of the study measured qualitatively. It was measured through observations, interviews, and surveys.

The role of the practitioner as the researcher in the study was important to consider. A key aspect of action research methodology was the positionality of the researcher (Chavez, 2008; Efron & Ravid, 2013; Herr & Anderson, 2015). Within the proposed PoP, the researcher served as the sole ESL instructor for the community college. Responsibilities of the instructor included instructional design, informal advising, assessment and evaluation of students, and vertical alignment of curriculum to the ESL pathway.

As the ESL instructor, the researcher provided insight to strengthen the skills and/or knowledge of students with the intent to enhance student learning. Within the study, the instructor-researcher collaborated with participants. The practitioner-researcher considered the participants equal. That is, she intended to teach and learn from them and expected the same.

The study occurred over six weeks during the Spring 2019 semester. The class met twice a week for one hour and 45 minutes, because it was a four-credit class. Thus, a total of 12 class sessions composed the timeframe of the intervention phase of the study.

Participants

The participants for the study were volunteers of the population of students enrolled in the ESL class for writing composition at the community college. While there were 19 students in the class, seven students were actual participants in the study. After

an information session detailing the study was held in class, the seven students volunteered to be participants and completed a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix A). The participants reflected characteristics of the population based on years of experience, gender, age, and educational attainment.

Inclusion criteria for the participants included students enrolled in ESL 13 Composition of Writing. Each student either passed the prerequisite ESL class for writing composition (ESL 12) or was placed into the class based on their ACCUPLACER® score (200-300). Students who completed ESL 12 the previous semester had the researcher for their instructor. The participants included one who attended the community college full-time, while six participants attended the community college part-time. Another inclusion criterion was that all participants have a first language that is not English. Participant consent was another inclusion criterion. According to Tracy (2010), participant consent supports an ethical qualitative research design. Aligning with the ethical quality criteria of qualitative research design described by Tracy (2010), participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

This study had seven participants for various reasons. The feasibility of gathering data is a quality criteria of qualitative research (O’Cathain, 2010). The sample size of seven students was beneficial because it allowed triangulation to occur, represented the collective population, and enhanced the instructor-researcher’s feasibility to gather and analyze the data collection.

Five participants were females, while two participants were males. One participant was in the age range of 18-19 years. Two participants were in the age range of 25-29 years. Four participants were in the age range of 30-39 years. Home countries of

student-participants included the following: Iraq, Afghanistan, Thailand, United States (Hawaii), Syria, and Palestine. Five students began college at the study's community college, while two students began college elsewhere. One student-participant had earned a Master's degree. Two student-participants had earned Bachelor's degrees. Four students had earned high school diplomas. For two student-participants, this was their first academic term enrolled at the community college. This was the second academic term of enrollment for two student-participants. Three student-participants had been enrolled at the community college for three to four academic terms.

The seven student-participants are described below. For the purpose of the study, pseudonyms were used for names and places.

- Maria was a female who was 30-39 years old. Her home country was Afghanistan. She began college at this community college; it was her first academic term. She had a sibling who had attended college. She had a high school diploma. She attended college full-time.
- Jen was a female who was either 18 or 19 years old. Her home country was Thailand. She began college at this community college; it was her second academic term. She had a sibling who had attended college. She had a high school diploma. She attended college part-time.
- Younis was a male who was 25-29 years old. His home country was Palestine. He began college at this community college; it was his third or fourth academic term. He had a sibling who had attended college. He had a high school diploma. He attended college part-time.

- Baram was a male who was 40-49 years old. His home country was Syria. He began college elsewhere; it was his second academic term at this community college. His siblings and spouse/partner had attended college. His highest degree of attainment was an associate's degree. He attended college full time.
- Grace was a female who was 25-29 years old. Her home country was the United States. She was from Hawaii, where her first language was not English. She began college at this community college; this was her third or fourth academic term at this community college. Her spouse/partner had attended college. She had a high school diploma. She attended college part-time.
- Lucy was a female who was 30-39 years old. Her home country was Afghanistan. She began college at this community college; it was her second academic term. Her mother, father, and sibling attended college. She had a high school diploma. She attended college part time.
- Hanna was a female who was 25-29 years old. Her home country was Iraq. She began college elsewhere; it was her first academic term at this community college. Her mother, father, and siblings had attended college. She had a bachelor's degree. She attended college part time.

As described earlier, validity and trustworthiness are quality criteria of action research studies. However, it is also important for positionality to be considered as a quality criteria (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Positionality relates to action researchers' relationships with their context and participants. "Positionality can contain elements of both insider and outsider or change during the research process" (Herr & Anderson,

2014, p. 37). Thus, it was important to navigate the implications of the researchers' relationships within the study.

Herr and Anderson (2015) note the importance of a researcher determining her positionality by exploring her relation to participants and setting. While the researcher sought a collaborative relationship with the participants, it was an assumption that the title of the ESL instructor may inaccurately apply knowledge or expertise to the researcher during collaborative conversations, when in fact, the participating students might be more knowledgeable in the area. The inquiry-based research design sought to mitigate any perception of power associated with the instructor-researcher's role while promoting nonthreatening collaboration. The researcher was a participant-observer in the study.

Research Methods

Grounded in the theoretical foundations of John Dewey, action research studies promote the importance of the human experience and active learning in creating knowledge (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Action research studies have been widely accepted in applied fields including education, agricultural, and organizational development (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

The scope of the study was qualitative by design. Consequently, it was important for the qualitative data to add value to the study. Reflexive practice, ethical standards, noteworthiness of the problem, relationship to theoretical framework(s), and flexibility are quality criteria of qualitative research that should be considered (Creswell, 2015; Durdella, 2017).

Reflexive practice refers to the researcher seeking to examine her positionality within the context. Subjective values, biases, or preconceived notions of the researcher are examined and presented (Durdella, 2017). The positionality of the instructor-researcher was discussed in Chapter One. The action research study should consider various ethical standards. Procedural ethics regarding the participants and professional and institutional obligations with human research participants were upheld (Durdella, 2017).

Ethical standards, another quality criterion, are accomplished through cultural awareness and sensitivity coupled with adherence to procedural ethical guidelines. The findings provide a “significant contribution” (Tracy, 2010) to the literature base, because minimal literature exists on this topic. As a result of adhering to the quality criteria, the findings and interpretations of the study provided insight into instructional design for the adult ESL classroom.

Quality criteria exists for action research to contribute to its local context and transferability to other contexts. It is important for validity and trustworthiness to be considered as quality criteria in the research design of the study (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Validity also is imperative in an action research study. Strong validity increases transferability of the study and findings to other contexts, although action research is not necessarily conducted to make generalizations. Validity refers to the trustworthiness of inferences drawn from the findings (Herr & Anderson, 2014). The degree to which the findings generalize to a larger context is referred to as external validity. More importantly, for action research, internal validity relates to the soundness of a study. The

internal validity refers to how trustworthy the findings of the study are (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

Trustworthiness refers to the credibility of the findings. The researcher's interpretations of the findings must align with the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). While qualitative methodology can connote subjectivity more than quantitative methodology, it is a methodological approach that still seeks rigorous and robust findings that are trustworthy (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Efron and Ravid (2013) share strategies to enhance trustworthiness. Searching for alternative interpretations, triangulating findings, contextualizing the findings within a theoretical framework, and employing self-reflexivity are ways for the researcher to increase trustworthiness of the study.

To determine whether the investigation is effective, the researcher must account for or mitigate positionality, validity, and trustworthiness in action research (Herr & Anderson, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Consequently, it is important for the study to address internal validity. Trustworthiness is a contributing component of internal validity.

To promote strong internal validity, this study was written with transparency (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Also, using the strategies proposed by Efron and Ravid (2013) improved the internal validity. For example, recognizing the positionality of the researcher created an awareness to consider alternative interpretations of data.

Triangulation is a key component of the research design (Fraenkel, Wallen, and Huyn, 2012). According to Oliver-Hoyo and Allen (2006), triangulation uses different methods and attempts to capture various aspects of a construct. Furthermore, triangulation is the intentional and critical review of the data collection. For this action

research study, various methods were used, including observations, interviews, and surveys and student work artifacts.

Contextualizing the findings in a theoretical framework is a way to promote the internal validity of a study (Efron & Ravid, 2013). For this study, a survey of the literature and exploration of educational theories occurred. The frame of reference for the researcher was shaped by the PoP being derived from theoretical frameworks. It was important to consider the findings within the theoretical frameworks that were used to create the intervention (Freire, 1970a; Krashen, 1985; Long, 1985; Piaget, 1970; Pica, 1994; Swain, 1995; Vygotsky, 1962).

According to Creswell (2015), selecting the right topic is important too. The noteworthiness of the problem is critical. For this study, the PoP was relevant, intriguing, and timely. Quality topics seek to question assumptions or challenge accepted ideas. The topic was relevant to the local context and many higher education institutions across the United States as EL student enrollment continues to increase while the shortage of ESL licensed teachers continues. Also, in the local context, students reported a feeling of freedom to discuss issues in the ESL classroom as compared to other classrooms. This study sought to determine how using the problem-posing approach might impact student engagement. For this study, student engagement was defined as the oral participating of students in dialogic talk. The hope was to gain enough insight to determine how to effectively engage students in the ESL classroom and possibly have a model to transfer it to instructional design for other content areas.

Data Collection and Instruments

The action research investigation included multiple data collection measures to ensure quality criteria of action research. Field notes, interview protocols, a survey, and a collection of artifacts were measures used within the study. The length of the study was six weeks. The instructor-researcher solely conducted the data collection measures. The hope was to mitigate the PoP by creating an understanding of whether the problem-posing approach adds instructional value to the ESL classroom.

Observation field notes. The instructor-researcher kept password-protected electronic field notes throughout the six-week data collection period (see Appendix E). The purpose of writing down field notes of observations was to create a rich picture for reflection and data analysis after data collection. The field notes helped the researcher capture various informal student interactions, responses, and behaviors. Furthermore, the researcher could use the field notes to determine the next problem-posing tool to use during the implementation phase.

Student-participant survey. The Student Engagement Surveys were instructor-created using adaptations of national student engagement survey questions and relevant research on higher education student engagement (see Appendix C). Surveys were given to students both before and after the intervention. The surveys sought to examine students' perspectives of student engagement. The survey had three subsets of questions: (1) demographic information, (2) behavioral, and (3) personal development. The platform of the survey was a Google Form. The surveys were completed outside of class time. The survey was emailed to students two weeks prior to the intervention. Students had up to a

week to complete the survey. Suggested time to complete the survey was 20 minutes. A reminder email was sent to students three days before the deadline.

Structured student-participant interviews. The interview protocol was instructor-researcher created. The interview protocol's purpose was to gain student-participants' insight related to the research question. Themes highlighted include perceptions of barriers to student engagement in classrooms and ways teachers may elicit stronger participatory dialogic talk. Students participated in interviews using the same questions pre- and post-intervention of the problem-posing approach. During the two weeks before and after the intervention, the researcher conducted the interviews through Google Forms. Students were able to write their answers to mitigate participants' language proficiency that may impact results.

Informal student-participant interviews. The researcher noted informal interviews that occurred between the researcher and participants throughout the implementation phase of the intervention. When the instructor asked questions to different students, answers were noted. The intent of this data measure was to collect students' perceptions throughout the intervention. In addition, the outcomes of the informal interviews could be used to inform instruction of the problem-posing approach during the implementation phase.

Artifacts. The researcher collected artifacts of students' writing throughout the study. The artifacts are journal entries that are a preexisting component of the course. The journal prompts were not artificial as they came from the participants' perspectives. Students answered the journal prompt of "How do you solve problems?" at the beginning, middle, and end of the intervention phase (see Appendix D). Students had 10

minutes to write on the topic. The journal entries provided participants with an opportunity to explore their voice as well.

Procedure

The action research procedure reflects quality criteria of action research in many ways. However, a primary way this action research topic aligned with quality criteria is that the PoP was meaningful and relevant for the instructor-researcher. Thus, it is important to note contextual underpinnings, settings, and positionality made the topic meaningful for the instructor-researcher and local context. While generalizability was not strong due to these factors, replication of the research design might be modified or occur successfully in other contexts.

The class met twice a week on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:00-6:45 p.m., because it was a four-credit class. The participants were selected after the instructor gave a 10-minute overview of the study during a class. Students were able to let the instructor know immediately after class or email the instructor within two days of a desire to participate in the study. Follow-up emails regarding concrete details and informed consent followed. Informed consent paperwork was passed out and reviewed after the next class period. Informed consent paperwork for participating students was collected prior to beginning the study.

Logistical communication occurred through email to students. The instructor-researcher kept a communication log for organization. Before the intervention of using the problem-posing approach over a six-week period, a survey and structured interview were emailed to students. The survey and structured interview were completed outside of class time. They were both formatted using Google Forms and emailed to students two

weeks prior to the intervention. A reminder email was sent out three days before the deadline. To explore the research question, the survey was designed to capture students' attitudes of student engagement, while the interview was designed to capture students' perceptions of participation, learning, and teaching. For the interview, the questions were open-ended. Thus, students were able to write their answers. No transcription process was needed.

Throughout class, the instructor-researcher acted as a participant-observer while carefully watching and writing field notes. Student behaviors, responses, interactions, comments and other important information were notated on the days the intervention occurred. The narrative data were an important part of using the five-step problem-posing process to plan for the next class.

Informal interviews occurred throughout the intervention. When engaging with students, the instructor-researcher asked different students the same or different questions while noting their responses.

A sampling of artifacts was collected as well. At the beginning, middle, and end of the study, the instructor-researcher electronically collected journal entries of participants. Then, a sampling of the artifacts was used as data measures.

During the six-week data collection period, student-participants worked in groups of four to five students on the problem-posing activities. The groups included students who were not participating in the study. A code was embedded into the class PowerPoint which was projected for all students to see. Students did not have access to the PowerPoint before each Tuesday. On Tuesdays, students worked through the first three steps of the problem-posing approach. On Thursdays, students completed the final two

steps of the problem-posing approach. Code selection was informed by current events, informal student interviews, and instructor-researcher observations. Codes were selected based on student relevancy or globalization.

After the six-week data collection period of using the problem-posing approach, a post-intervention survey and structured interview were emailed students. The survey and structured interview were completed outside of class time. A reminder email was sent out three days before the deadline. To explore the research question, the survey was designed to capture students' attitudes of student engagement after having participated in the problem-posing approach, while the structured interview was made up of the same questions students answered before the intervention occurred.

The protection of sensitive information and procedures to protect the participants is important during all aspects of the action research study. Surveys and structured interviews were formatted and utilized through Google Forms. The Google Forms responses and document data analysis were password protected. Students names were not recorded. Field notes, informal interviews, and artifacts were stored electronically while being password-protected as well. Personal identification information was redacted from artifacts.

Data Analysis

Strauss and Corbin (1997) describe grounded theory as a research methodology aimed at generating theory of an explanation of social interactions. It is a highly popular methodology for qualitative research designs. Initially, grounded theory was popular in the field of sociology. Recently, grounded theory has expanded to other practitioner fields such as public health, business management, and education. The data analysis for the

action research study drew from the foundations of grounded theory. Consequently, emergent coding was mostly used for analysis of the qualitative data in the study.

For the research question, the instructor-researcher used multiple measures to determine the impact of the intervention of using the problem-posing approach. The instructor-researcher's field notes, artifacts, and informal interviews were analyzed using emergent coding. Using emergent coding was appropriate for the research questions because it afforded the opportunity for themes or content patterns to emerge from the data measures.

Furthermore, since the study was inquiry-based, emergent coding aligned with the goal of the study to explore the effect of the problem-posing approach on student engagement. By using emergent coding, participants were afforded the opportunity to supply their own interpretations of the problem-posing approach. This was helpful for the research because it created a reliable representation of the participants and supported a quality criteria of action research. After completing emergent coding, processing and analysis of the data was an intricate act. The instructor-researcher used content analysis and thematic analysis to identify patterns in content or themes presented by student-participants.

Another data instrument for the research question involved interviewing student-participants. The student-participant responses of the interviews were analyzed using a priori coding and emergent coding. These coding methods were appropriate for the research question because they allowed the instructor-researcher to predetermine some topics to look for that were associated with the constructs or theoretical framework, such as problem-posing and student engagement.

Plan for Reflecting with Participants on Data

Mertler (2014) shares, “By sharing and disseminating your action research, you also encourage others to engage in these types of activities in their own classrooms” (p. 249). Consequently, it was important for the instructor-researcher to share the study’s findings with participants. Upon completion of the study, the instructor-researcher shared the findings with student-participants. While the course in which the study took place finished at the end of the Spring 2019 semester, participants returned in the Fall 2019 semester. The instructor-researcher met with students as a group on campus during the first week of class for the Fall 2019 semester.

During the meeting, the instructor-researcher shared information about the data measures, data collection, and data analysis. Protecting the privacy and anonymity of participants was a focus during the data analysis and sharing of the findings. For example, names were removed from data records coupled with omitting narratives of student-participants. Next, the instructor-researcher shared the findings of the study. Both the student-participants and instructor-researcher had a mutual conversation about the study in regards to their experiences, perceptions, and understanding of the findings.

The instructor-researcher collected informal feedback from the student-participants. In regards to the data measures used throughout the study and the relevance of the study for courses within the ESL pathway and English department, the instructor-researcher wanted feedback in order to share with colleagues or make possible course design recommendations. Furthermore, the instructor-researcher made anecdotal notes during the discussion. Some of the notes might be helpful to investigate in future studies. These were explored in Chapter Five.

Sharing with colleagues is important for the instructor-researcher and to advance the field of education. At the Fall 2019 professional development for the English department, the instructor-researcher will share the findings of the study. Through a PowerPoint presentation along with handouts, the instructor-researcher explained the purpose of the study, the procedure, and the findings. Visual representations, examples of problem-posing tasks, and narratives of the findings made up the handouts for colleagues. In addition, the instructor-researcher added input from the student-participant follow-up meeting. After the presentation, there was a time for discussion with colleagues about the study and its impact on instructional practices within the curriculum.

Plan for Devising an Action Plan

Developing an action plan is a time for professional reflection (Mertler, 2014). Furthermore, the action plan details how the research will be used and what will be done in the future as a result of the research findings (Mertler, 2014). The action plan is cyclical in nature.

Using this information, the instructor-researcher developed an action plan, including the following items: (a) include a problem-posing approach in all ESL classes consistently, (b) share the findings with colleagues within the English department, (c) create a focus group to examine implementation of a problem-posing approach in various content areas at the community college, and (d) conduct additional research to examine the impact of a problem-posing approach in various adult learner settings.

The intent of the action plan is to share findings from the study, gain feedback from colleagues, and expand the use of a problem-posing approach in various content

areas. The instructor-researcher used meeting structures already built into the schedule for the Fall 2019 semester.

Summary

Chapter Three provided a detailed account of the methodology used in the action research study. The study was an investigation aimed to help the PoP by providing the instructor-researcher insight about integral aspects of instruction to enhance ESL student engagement and thus, learning. The volunteer sample included 7 student-participants in an ESL writing composition class at a community college. The instructor-researcher assumed a positionality of participant researcher using insider collaborative inquiry. Data collection measures included field notes, interviews, surveys, and collecting artifacts. The research procedure included pre- and post-intervention measures. Then, data analysis occurred before sharing the findings with participants. Quality criteria of reflexivity, trustworthiness, ethical standards, triangulation, and relevancy were continually interwoven throughout the chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: Findings from the Data Analysis

This action research study sought to explore the impact of a problem-posing approach on student engagement in an ESL classroom. The identified PoP for the study occurred when the instructor-researcher observed a low level of student engagement during instruction. This action research study was designed to examine the influence of a learner-centered focus using a problem-posing approach on student engagement within the ESL classroom. The instructor-researcher conducted the study to investigate the PoP during regular class time to observe student-participants in an authentic learning environment while having the ability to use a problem-posing approach within instruction. By using multiple sources of data, the instructor-researcher provided an in-depth description of student-participants' perceptions, thoughts, and engagement while using a problem-posing approach.

During the six-week intervention phase, or data collection period, student-participants participated in six problem-posing activities (one activity per two classes). During the participation process, the instructor-researcher acted as a participant-observer critically observing the participants. The instructor-researcher later recorded detailed observation field notes to ensure accurate reflections regarding comments and interactions among the student-participants.

Student-participants completed an artifact of a journal entry on the same prompt at the beginning, middle, and end of the six-week data collection period. The journal

prompt was to answer the following question: “How do you solve problems?” The intention of the journal entry was to capture whether student-participants would write about aspects of the problem-posing approach in their writing. In addition, throughout the data collection period, the instructor-researcher asked student-participants informal interview questions that were noted in the field notes. Lastly, student-participant interviews and the Student Engagement Survey were both administered at the beginning of the data collection period and repeated at the end of the data collection period to determine any possible changes in perceptions as reported by student-participants.

Research Question

What is the impact of a problem-posing approach on the engagement level of seven students in an ESL class at a community college?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a problem-posing approach on the student engagement of seven ESL students enrolled in a writing composition course at a community college in the mid-Atlantic region. Drawing on the work of Freire (1970b) and Shor (1993), a problem-posing approach has a learner-centered focus that promotes critical thinking and dialogue among students and teachers.

Through dialogue, the teacher and students learn from each other as solutions or alternatives are generated. The instructor-researcher aimed to provide opportunities for dialogue among participants during 12 on-campus class sessions. While using the problem-posing approach, the instructor-researcher sought to explore the research question. The underlying purpose of this research was to determine how to foster increased student engagement as demonstrated through dialogue by EL students.

Based on the work of Coates (2006), student engagement is defined as the extent to which students engage with activities that are likely to lead to productive learning. In search of improved student engagement of EL students, the researcher designed an action research study utilizing a problem-posing approach.

Findings of the Study

In reporting the findings of the study, the researcher first shares notable subthemes that emerged from the individual data collection instruments. After the individual data collection instruments are thoughtfully discussed with relevant commentary from the field notes, the instructor-researcher describes the overall themes that emerged after a careful and collective examination of the data sets.

First, the student-participants' Likert-scale results on the Student Engagement Survey are discussed. Second, key takeaways from the structured student-participant interviews are described before student artifacts are highlighted.

Overall Results of Student Engagement Survey

The objective of this study was to identify the impact of the use of the problem-posing approach on student engagement in an ESL classroom. To that end, data from the Student Engagement Survey (see Appendix C) indicated that the inclusion of the problem-posing approach during the data collection period increased students' perceptions of student engagement in a majority of student-participants.

The results of the Student Engagement Survey indicated that five out of seven student-participants perceived an increase in their level of student engagement from the beginning of the study to the end of the study. The two other student participants seemed

to indicate the same or a minimal decrease in their responses on the Student Engagement Survey.

Students demonstrated the most overall growth in regards to working with peers on other projects, speaking clearly and effectively, and gaining information about career opportunities (survey questions 9c, 10c and 10h, see Appendix C). There were areas that students' perceptions declined in overall growth. The areas of most decline were having serious conversations with others that differ from you and working on a paper that required integrating ideas and information from various resources (survey questions 9b and 9e).

Maria. Maria demonstrated the most change in her thoughts regarding learning effectively on her own (see Table 4.1). She also demonstrated increased student engagement as a result of the intervention phase regarding survey question 10b (see Appendix C) asking about how often instructional experiences have influenced her ability to write clearly and effectively. Survey question 10c (see Appendix C) asking about how often instructional experiences have influenced her ability to speak clearly and effectively shifted from “sometimes” on the pre-intervention administration to “often” on the post-intervention administration. Maria's perceptions on the survey align with her thoughts she shared during an informal-student participant interview. Maria stated, “They [problem-posing activities] are fun. I like learning new words from friends and then trying to use them when I talk or write.”

Table 4.1			
<i>Maria's Student Engagement Survey Results (see Appendix C for each of the respective questions (based on a 1 to 4 scale, 4 being the highest))</i>			
Survey Question	Pre-Intervention Score	Post-Intervention Score	Difference
9a-Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	1	2	+1
9b-Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	2	1	-1
9c-Worked with other students on projects during class	2	2	0
9d-Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class	1	2	+1
9e-Had serious conversations with students who differ from you	2	1	-1
10a-Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	2	3	+1
10b-Writing clearly and effectively	2	3	+1
10c-Speaking clearly and effectively	2	3	+1
10d-Thinking critically and analytically	3	3	0
10e-Working effectively with others	3	3	0
10f-Learning effectively on your own	1	3	+2
10g-Developing clearer career goals	3	3	0
10h-Gaining information about career opportunities	2	3	+1

Jen. Jen's results for the Student Engagement Survey (see Table 4.2) capture minimal overall student engagement improvement during the intervention phase. Jen often presented as nervous during problem-posing activities as noted in field notes. Also, she would offer contributions during problem-posing activities such as, "I don't know" or "I am confused." After the sixth session, the instructor-researcher asked Jen, "What do you think of the activities we do in class?" Jen responded, "I get nervous and don't understand some of the things people say."

However, survey question 10a (see Appendix C) regarding how often instructional experiences provided opportunities for making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods demonstrated the largest increase shifting from “never” to “very often.”

Table 4.2			
<i>Jen’s Student Engagement Survey Results (see Appendix C for each of the respective questions (based on a 1 to 4 scale, 4 being the highest))</i>			
Survey Question	Pre-Intervention Score	Post-Intervention Score	Difference
9a-Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	4	3	-1
9b-Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	4	3	-1
9c-Worked with other students on projects during class	3	2	-1
9d-Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class	2	2	0
9e-Had serious conversations with students who differ from you	1	2	+1
10a-Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	1	4	+3
10b-Writing clearly and effectively	3	3	0
10c-Speaking clearly and effectively	3	3	0
10d-Thinking critically and analytically	3	2	-1
10e-Working effectively with others	3	3	0
10f-Learning effectively on your own	4	2	-2
10g-Developing clearer career goals	4	3	-1
10h-Gaining information about career opportunities	3	4	+1

Younis. Younis recorded a majority of the same responses on the post-intervention administration of the survey as he noted on the pre-intervention administration of the survey (see Table 4.3). Younis shifted from “often” on the pre-intervention survey to “never” on the post-intervention survey for question 9e (see

Appendix C), which asked about how often the student-participant participated in serious conversations with students who differ from him. Also, Younis shifted from “often” to “sometimes” during the intervention phase for survey question 10f (see Appendix C) asking about how often instructional experiences have influencing his ability to learn effectively on his own.

These sentiments may reflect academic struggles the student-participant was experiencing in another prerequisite class for his major. He was failing the class. Interestingly, Younis mentioned in class, “[During the problem-posing activities], it was good working together as a team. It helped me in my job because I have to do that and speak well.” However, this perception was not reflected in his responses to survey question 10c (see Appendix C) inquiring about how often instructional experiences have impacted his ability to speak clearly and effectively. He noted the same response of “often” on both the pre-intervention administration and post-intervention administration of the survey.

Table 4.3			
<i>Younis’s Student Engagement Survey Results (see Appendix C for each of the respective questions (based on a 1 to 4 scale, 4 being the highest))</i>			
Survey Question	Pre-Intervention Score	Post-Intervention Score	Difference
9a-Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	3	3	0
9b-Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	3	4	+1
9c-Worked with other students on projects during class	3	3	0
9d-Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class	3	3	0

9e-Had serious conversations with students who differ from you	3	1	-2
10a-Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	2	2	0
10b-Writing clearly and effectively	2	2	0
10c-Speaking clearly and effectively	3	3	0
10d-Thinking critically and analytically	3	3	0
10e-Working effectively with others	3	3	0
10f-Learning effectively on your own	3	2	-1
10g-Developing clearer career goals	3	3	0
10h-Gaining information about career opportunities	3	3	0

Baram. Baram recorded a majority of the same responses on the post-intervention administration of the survey as he noted on the pre-intervention administration of the survey (see Table 4.4). It seems as though Baram felt strong student engagement at both the beginning and end of the intervention phase. He noted the highest score on 10 out of 13 survey questions on the pre-intervention administration of the Student Engagement Survey. When asked how the problem-posing approach activities were impacting his student engagement after the fourth session, Baram responded, “Class does not seem as boring. I like working with others to solve problems. It is hard at work, but not in class.” Baram’s comments align with his responses on the post-intervention administration of the survey.

Table 4.4			
<i>Baram’s Student Engagement Survey Results (see Appendix C for each of the respective questions (based on a 1 to 4 scale, 4 being the highest))</i>			
Survey Question	Pre- Intervention Score	Post- Intervention Score	Difference
9a-Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	3	2	-1

9b-Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	4	2	-2
9c-Worked with other students on projects during class	4	4	0
9d-Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class	4	4	0
9e-Had serious conversations with students who differ from you	4	4	0
10a-Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	4	3	-1
10b-Writing clearly and effectively	4	4	0
10c-Speaking clearly and effectively	4	4	0
10d-Thinking critically and analytically	4	4	0
10e-Working effectively with others	4	4	0
10f-Learning effectively on your own	4	4	0
10g-Developing clearer career goals	4	4	0
10h-Gaining information about career opportunities	4	4	0

Grace. Grace’s Student Engagement Survey results (see Table 4.5) showed recognition of working with other students on projects in class as demonstrated from her shifting from “sometimes” to “often” on survey question 9c (see Appendix C). Grace’s perceptions either minimally decreased or increased on the behavioral subset of survey questions (9a-9e, see Appendix C).

On the personal development subset of questions (10a-10h, see Appendix C), Grace seemed to perceive a high level of student engagement from both the pre-intervention administration and post-intervention administration of the survey. Grace shared during an informal interview, “I did not like them at first. I do not always like speaking or did not know much about the picture. But, then, I realized I know some stuff about things and should talk and share my thoughts.”

Table 4.5			
<i>Grace's Student Engagement Survey Results (see Appendix C for each of the respective questions (based on a 1 to 4 scale, 4 being the highest))</i>			
Survey Question	Pre-Intervention Score	Post-Intervention Score	Difference
9a-Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	3	2	-1
9b-Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	2	1	-1
9c-Worked with other students on projects during class	2	3	+1
9d-Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class	2	2	0
9e-Had serious conversations with students who differ from you	1	1	0
10a-Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	2	1	-1
10b-Writing clearly and effectively	4	3	-1
10c-Speaking clearly and effectively	4	4	0
10d-Thinking critically and analytically	4	4	0
10e-Working effectively with others	4	4	0
10f-Learning effectively on your own	4	4	0
10g-Developing clearer career goals	4	4	0
10h-Gaining information about career opportunities	4	4	0

Lucy. Lucy's perceptions captured on the Student Engagement Survey (see Table 4.6) demonstrated increased student engagement for a majority of the questions. She demonstrated the most growth from "never" to "very often" on survey questions 9c, 10g, and 10h (see Appendix C). On the personal development subset of survey questions, Lucy shifted from mostly "never" or "sometimes" responses on the pre-intervention administration of the survey to mostly "very often" responses on the post-intervention administration of the survey.

Table 4.6			
<i>Lucy's Student Engagement Survey Results (see Appendix C for each of the respective questions (based on a 1 to 4 scale, 4 being the highest))</i>			
Survey Question	Pre-Intervention Score	Post-Intervention Score	Difference
9a-Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	2	4	+2
9b-Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	1	1	0
9c-Worked with other students on projects during class	1	4	+3
9d-Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class	2	1	-1
9e-Had serious conversations with students who differ from you	1	1	0
10a-Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	1	3	+2
10b-Writing clearly and effectively	2	4	+2
10c-Speaking clearly and effectively	2	4	+2
10d-Thinking critically and analytically	2	3	+1
10e-Working effectively with others	2	4	+2
10f-Learning effectively on your own	2	4	+2
10g-Developing clearer career goals	1	4	+3
10h-Gaining information about career opportunities	1	4	+3

Hanna. On the Student Engagement Survey, Hanna demonstrated increased student engagement (see Table 4.7). On the behavioral subset of questions (9a-9e, see Appendix C), she noted mostly “very often” for four out of five of the survey questions. These results align with her informal student-participant interviews. After the first session of the problem-posing approach, the instructor-researcher asked Hanna, “What did you think of working together?” Hannah responded, “It was good to practice my speaking. I was more focused in class. I liked it.”

Furthermore, when asked how the problem-posing approach activities were impacting her student engagement after the fourth session, Hanna shared, “I have learned to listen to others and realize that others have stories that I can learn from. I think it has helped my writing too because I am trying to look at things from different perspectives so I have more details to share.”

Table 4.7			
<i>Hanna's Student Engagement Survey Results (see Appendix C for each of the respective questions (based on a 1 to 4 scale, 4 being the highest))</i>			
Survey Question	Pre-Intervention Score	Post-Intervention Score	Difference
9a-Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions	3	4	+1
9b-Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources	2	4	+2
9c-Worked with other students on projects during class	2	4	+2
9d-Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class	2	4	+2
9e-Had serious conversations with students who differ from you	2	1	-1
10a-Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods	3	2	-1
10b-Writing clearly and effectively	3	4	+1
10c-Speaking clearly and effectively	3	4	+1
10d-Thinking critically and analytically	3	3	0
10e-Working effectively with others	3	3	0
10f-Learning effectively on your own	3	4	+1
10g-Developing clearer career goals	3	3	0
10h-Gaining information about career opportunities	3	4	+1

Structured Student-Participant Interviews

Individual student-participant interviews occurred at the beginning of the intervention phase and were repeated at the conclusion of the phase (see Appendix B).

Student-participants provided written answers to the interview questions in an attempt to overcome the possible speaking barrier of being English learners. The interviews provided a substantial narrative of student-participants' perceptions and thoughts about learning English and engagement through the problem-posing approach.

Maria. In the course of the pre-interview, Maria noted that she likes working with other students in class so that she can have conversations in English while she least likes talking about politics when working with students. Maria said, "I do not know," when asked about what she knew about working with others to solve problems.

During the post-interview, Maria noted that she likes working with other students in class because they can have conversations about popular topics. Also, she continued to share that her least favorite part of working with others was when politics were discussed. Maria said, "We can share the problems with those people that we can trust," when asked about what she knew about working with others to solve problems.

Jen. When asked how she feels about learning when you have to talk to peers, Jen said, "I feels like I learn more if I talk to the teacher face to face." English is not easy for Jen to learn because, she said, "There are so many more things and words you have to learn." In addition, she stated her least favorite part of working with other students is when they know more English.

In her post-interview, Jen said working in groups made English easier to learn. She also noted her least favorite part of working with other students: "Your point of view is different from them and they want you to be on their side." Jen said solving problems with others is important because "they have other way[s] of solving problem[s], while

you have [the] other way around. But in the end, you work it out how to solve it.” She prefers “when we interact with other people, so that I can learned about them in life.”

Younis. During the pre-interview, Younis shared that English is easy to learn due to the methods the teacher uses. Regarding the interview question about what is problem solving, he shared, “One team one dream.” He said his least favorite part of working with others is when group members disagree.

When asked what makes English easy to learn in the post-interview, Younis replied, “It makes it easy when we practice it every day of our life, such as talking and listening to people around us... when we have to learn.” Regarding problem solving, he shared, “Working with others solving a problem can make a huge help. By working together as a team, it makes you stronger and give[s] you confidence, and you will feel good about yourself knowing that there are people there to help you.”

Baram. During the pre-interview, Baram described that he liked to consider the home country of classmates when working together. He stated that he disliked when students talk about “any subject out of the curriculum, like religions, color, [or] ethnic[ity]” when having to work with peers. When asked about what he knew about solving problems, Baram shared that it is important to solve problems because it encourages the person.

When asked again to describe what he liked about working with students in class during the post-interview, Baram shifted from considering the home country of classmates and stated, “It is very important and necessary for me and all students to share all experience[s] [to] learn, [and] help each other it [is] more helpful for the all.” He stated there was “Nothing.... I strongly agree with work[ing] with other students” when

asked what he disliked about working with other students in class. When asked about what he knew about solving problems, Baram shared, “Every class we have [to] journal, conversation[s] and share [our thoughts], talk[ing] to each other for what [the] problem mean[s].... it is affect your life? How we can solve the problem? It is very important to talk with a group and share [with] other groups in the class what we have as answers. I think we do this activity in every class.... It makes class more help[ful] and coherent. And [it] make[s] high quality relations [among] each other and our professor.”

Grace. Grace provided brief answers for the pre-interview. She stated that she liked hearing classmates’ opinions when working together in class. There were no dislikes stated about working with other students. She did not consider writing or expressing her thinking in words as a struggle.

Grace’s responses for the post-interview were brief as well. She shared that she liked learning different opinions when working with classmates. Also, she still had no dislikes when working with others. She stated, “I learn that everyone has different opinions and that we have to respect their opinions and that it is good to hear something different,” when asked about what she knew about problem solving.

Lucy. In Lucy’s pre-interview, she consistently reiterated that she enjoys gaining knowledge from peers when talking to them. Lucy shared she enjoyed interacting with the content in class.

In her detailed way, Lucy noted, “I feel more confident, enjoy learning deferent experiences, and my speaking will improve more which is really important to me,” regarding how she feels about learning when she has to talk to peers. Regarding working with students in class, Lucy shared, “I love working with my classmates because it is

really helping me with my conversation. [It] also makes me feel more confident to talk with other people in society.” Lucy felt as though interacting with peers is something she would recommend, as it helps with sharing experiences, learning, and interacting with society.

Hanna. In the course of Hanna’s pre-interview, she mentioned that it is “no big deal” to learn when you have to talk to peers. When working with students in class, she finds it “fun.” She shared that she prefers to “sit and listen” in class rather than interact because “I believe class is for formal learning education and [taking] the most of instructor knowledge.... Interacting with other students can be done outside the class or during workshop.”

In the post-interview, Hanna shared her thoughts about learning when you have to talk to peers. She described, “One, it helps to see other people[‘s] perspective[s]. Two, [it] improves argument and reasoning skills. Three, [it] enhance[s] learning ability by reinforcing the information you have learned.” About Hanna’s favorite thing in working with students in class after the intervention, she said, “Engaging with other students helps me to socialize more with them and make new friends.” She shared that she still prefers to “sit and listen” in class rather than interact because, as she said, “I like to learn from the instructor rather than talking with my peers [because] our instructor is the most qualified person, that we need to learn from.”

Artifacts

Journal entries were used to collect data on how student-participants understood and employed the problem-posing approach. To that end, the student-participants answered the journal entry prompt, “How do you solve problems?” The journal prompt

was open-ended. Consequently, student-participants could choose a problem to solve or discuss their thought process of solving problems for the journal entries. The journal entries were used for student-participants to practice their writing and provide any additional descriptive information that further informed the exploration of the topic. The instructor-researcher collected the journal entries at the beginning, middle, and end of the intervention phase.

The instructor-researcher coded the student-participants' journal entries to determine specific processes students used to solve problems, as well as any possible connections to aspects of the problem-posing approach. In addition, items that provided evidence of the problem-posing approach were coded as belonging to the aspects of the problem-posing approach or student engagement.

The results indicated that all student-participants recorded an idea of the uniqueness of problem solving. Student-participants recorded their thought processes that they worked through to solve problems while demonstrating aspects of the problem-posing approach in their journal entries. The aspects included but were not limited to ownership and empowerment, in terms of constructively dealing with problems. In addition, some of the student-participants appeared to transition to taking a participatory approach to solving problems from the first journal entry to the last journal entry. Two students consistently identified a problem and wrote about solving them, compared to sharing their thought process for solving problems.

Overall, it appeared that the student-participants successfully used aspects of the problem-posing approach in terms of identifying the problem, determining causes of the

problem, recognizing its effects on others, and brainstorming solutions while working with others.

Maria. In the beginning journal entry, Maria wrote about talking with her family to solve a problem coupled with hard work solves problems. She discussed the problem of learning a new language in ESL class. She stated, “We do not have to quit the class if we have some problem[s] with speaking or conversation[s], but we have to work hard and learn more.”

In the second journal entry, Maria highlighted steps to solving problems before applying the steps to having a problem with a person. She noted the importance of knowing the sources of problems and finding out possible solutions for problems. She shared, “Discussion can solve some misunderstanding instead of fighting without knowing the result.”

In her final journal entry, Maria elaborated on the steps to solving problems that she described in her second journal entry. She added, “I believe that problem[s] can be solved by consultation and brainstorm[ing] first about the cause of the problem.” Maria interwove the problem-posing frame of thinking in her journal entry. She mentioned the importance of asking others for help in solving problems as they may have different educational attainment or experiences to draw on to offer insight.

Jen. “There are many problem[s] in our life we have to face. Some can be solved and some are not.... But problem[s] come in our life to teach us a lesson in our life,” wrote Jen in her first journal entry. Furthermore, she shared about the problem of having math homework due tomorrow that has yet to be attempted.

Jen's second journal entry describes prioritizing problems she faces. She describes how completing her homework is more important than completing her chores at home. To solve the problem, she will talk to her mom about how her professor is looking forward to reviewing her work. Then, she'll complete the homework first before completing her chores.

In her final journal entry, Jen mentioned how some problems are hard to solve while other problems are easy to solve. She described a problem of falling behind in classwork. Jen wrote, "There is always a [plan], you can set up [an] appointment with your professor. Talk to your professor and see if there [are] any other ways you can improve in class."

Younis. Younis shared, "When we face a problem, we have to look at or find out what [is] causing it to happen." Younis wrote about a road that frequently was having car accidents. When the road was studied, it was revealed that driver error was not the main cause of the car accidents. Rather, how the road was constructed was determined to be the leading cause of the car accidents. Thus, Younis reiterated the importance of pinpointing the exact cause of problems rather than assuming the cause of problems.

In the second journal entry, Younis detailed two problem-solving steps of determining the cause of the problem and identifying how the problem relates to others. He wrote about someone who is feeling lonely and experiencing overthinking. Younis shared, "What he can do is find someone close to him in his or her life that can [he or she] can talk to and say what they feel and what's the issue they are having."

"We as people have to work together to fix that problem," wrote Younis in his final journal entry when discussing world problems. He wrote about the thought process

one goes through when solving problems. He shared the steps of thinking about how a problem occurred, creating possible solutions, and working with others.

Baram. In his first journal entry, Baram posed the problem he had of his job conflicting with the time of the ESL class. To solve the problem, he changed his position so that he had off from work on the day that class met.

According to Baram, in his second journal entry, solving problems with steps and practicing solving problems leads to better solutions. He detailed the solutions he had to his problem of writing essays in English. He wrote, “For essay problems we need to solve a perfect introduction with a good hook, then we need to [have a] clear thesis statement.”

In his final journal entry, Baram detailed the importance of identifying the problem before understanding the problem. Then, one must determine how the problem impacts others before creating possible solutions he explained. Once again, he related his problem to writing an essay.

Grace. For her first journal entry, Grace described a time she had a problem: “I remember when I was working for this non-profit organization and we used to feed children in transitional shelters and Head Start. We used to have problems every day because a parent or teacher would complain about something.” She shared various solutions her boss attempted in an effort to address the multiple complaints.

“There’s many ways to solve a problem like identifying the issue. Be clear about what the problem is. List the possible solutions. Evaluate the options,” wrote Grace in her second journal entry. Grace also wrote about the importance of asking friends or teachers for help when solving problems. Furthermore, Grace shared, “Brainstorming helps me

because I write all these ideas down and look over it and see how I can solve my problem.”

Grace had the problem of not having a babysitter for her children while she needed to be in the ESL class. She wrote about this problem in her third journal entry. Typically, her husband was working so he was not available to watch the children. She highlighted the importance of using research skills to figure out possible solutions coupled with teamwork to make solutions works.

Lucy. In her first journal entry, Lucy detailed the problem of students experiencing stress before final exams. Solutions included “practice and research and study, find more resources to learn.” Lucy ended with “never los[e] hope.”

For the second journal entry, Lucy described how problems are not the same for everyone. She described problems that people experience as struggling to pay monthly bills, “difficulty learning or memorizing their lesson,” or being affected by social media. To solve problems, Lucy shared the importance of controlling emotions and gaining knowledge by finding resources to support overcoming problems.

Lucy highlighted a problem in sports. “Many parents are trying to force their children to follow what sport they like without thinking (about) how much it can destroy their kids’ wish[es] and interest[s],” wrote Lucy in her final journal entry. She continued writing about two possible solutions for the problem. The solutions included parents determining what sports actually interested their children and parents enjoying sports competitions rather than being stressed at them.

Hanna. “Facing problems is a part of everyday life. Throughout centuries, human beings have solved so many problems (have) led to great evolution and better life,”

explained Hanna in first journal entry. Hanna believed three “strategies” are needed to solve problems: (1) “discuss the problem and fully understand it”, (2) “have an open-mind”, and (3) “ask for help and advice from people with experience.”

In the second journal entry, Hanna related problem solving to solving a math problem. She detailed the importance of “logical thinking and common sense to solve it.” Furthermore, she noted taking “advantage of available data and information” before asking for help or advice from other people.

Hanna’s final journal entry had similar themes to her previous journal entries. Once again, she wrote about centuries of problem-solving leading to evolution coupled with getting help from others to solve the problem. As compared to her other journal entries, Hanna for the first time detailed that problems impact others on an “international or global” level as well.

Perhaps the most significant pattern that emerged from the student-participants’ journal data was the use of similar thought processes for solving problems that aligned with a problem-posing frame of thinking. That is, six out of seven final student-participant journal entries contained aspects of the problem-posing approach such as defining the problem, personalizing the problem, discussing the problem, and determining alternatives to the problem. Student-participants demonstrated the ability to reflect and analyze problems in order create solutions in their journal entries. This is consistent with results from the post-interviews and the Student Engagement Survey.

Interpretation of Results of the Study

This study had multiple distinct data sets which revealed a number of interrelated results. By using the constant comparative approach of grounded theory to analyze

qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Mertler, 2014), three overarching themes emerged: (A) the value of collaboration, (B) an environment that disarmed the fear of speaking, and (C) connections to the workforce. Each of these themes offered an additional understanding or perspective to the research question about whether the inclusion of a problem-posing approach in an ESL classroom would impact student engagement.

(A) Value of Collaboration

When considering the data collection results as a whole, the first theme that emerged was that once student-participants participated in the problem-posing approach, they felt as though they valued collaborating with others. At the beginning of the data collection period, student-participants generalized that they did not as often work with other students on projects or work effectively with others as compared to post-intervention. To the following pre-interview question, “How do you feel about learning when you have to talk to peers? Why?,” Jen responded, “I feels like I learn more if I talk to the teacher face to face.” Students seemed to perceive a desire to learn English through memorization rather than dialogue as presented through the pre-interviews. In addition, students seemed to understand the rudimentary aspect of problem solving in terms of identifying the problem.

After the instructor-researcher provided opportunities for participation in problem-posing activities, student-participants demonstrated an increased awareness of the value of working with others. For example, Jen responded to the same post-interview question as above, “How do you feel about learning when you have to talk to peers? Why?” with “When I'm learning I always talk to someone to see other people[’s]

opinion[s].” Grace added, “Group activities share our knowledge with each other in class.” Also during session five, the instructor-researcher noted that groups were quick to engage and start discussing the code using the problem-posing approach. Student-participants appeared to be excited to work with each other, as evidenced by their behaviors of quickly turning to each other, student questioning, and the challenge of bringing students’ attention back to whole group once engaged in a problem-posing activity. In this way, the student-participants seemed to finally start connecting the value of collaboration with their ability to contribute and learn.

In addition, data from multiple instruments indicated student-participants developed an increased awareness of the value of collaboration. Scores from the pre-intervention to post-intervention administration of the Student Engagement Survey improved in the areas of worked with other students on class projects and working effectively with others.

Likewise, student-participants’ journal entries demonstrated the development of an increased awareness of the value of collaboration. The comparison of journal entries from the beginning, middle, and end of the intervention phase established a likelihood to involve others in problem solving in order to collaborate. This was also observed by the instructor-researcher during class. For example, in Maria’s journal entry, from the beginning of the intervention phase, highlighted working hard and talking with family in regards to problems. Maria’s final journal entry included the topics of consultation and brainstorming of the causes of the problem coupled with asking for help from others.

In addition, in Younis’s first journal entry, he solely noted figuring out the cause of the problem. In his final journal entry, Younis shared determining the cause of the

problem, thinking of solutions, working together, and relating to world problems as aspects of problem solving. The specificity of their writing confirmed an increased value of collaboration.

(B) Environment Disarming the Fear of Speaking

The findings from the data sets also suggested a classroom environment was created that disarmed the fear of speaking. As previously stated in the discussion of overall results of the Student Engagement Survey, the overall growth for the question examining students' perceptions of "How often has your experience at this college contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in speaking clearly and effectively?" increased for student-participants. They perceived an improvement in their speaking domain of SLA which is strongly indicative of the intervention of using a problem-posing approach during class instruction.

Moreover, information from the student-participant interviews indicated that learning to speak was preferred more than learning grammar. In the pre-interview, a majority of student-participants indicated that they preferred to learn English through the memorization of grammar and facts as compared to practicing speaking. The post-interview findings revealed a shift to the majority of students preferred to learn English through either solely speaking or a combination of speaking and learning grammar as compared to only memorizing grammar and facts to learn English.

Furthermore, student-participant interviews provided further insight in regards to student-participants' perceptions of feeling more confident to speak during classroom time. Lucy shared in her post-interview, "It's a little harder for foreigner(s) to learn English[.] It's because English is the 2nd language for them but for sure, it's not

impossible if they take classes and watch shows and read and continue to talk to improve their speaking.” She also added, “I love working with my classmates because it is really helping me with my conversation. Also [it] makes me feel more confident to talk with other people in the society.” Younis added in his post-interview, “It makes it hard when we don't practice it every day. Like the days I don't speak English or I'm [with] friends or family for some time, then come back to the outside and talk to my English-speaking friends, they can tell that I haven't used English for some time.”

Finally, instructor-researcher observations recorded in field notes revealed an increased practice of speaking during the intervention phase. For example, Maria and Grace rarely spoke at the beginning of the intervention phase. By the end, they were comparable contributors to their peers in discussions. At the middle of the intervention phase, the instructor-researcher asked Grace, “What do you think of the activities we do in class?” She said, “I did not like them at first. I do not always like speaking or did not know much about the picture. But, I realized I know some stuff about things and should talk and share my thoughts.” Baram said, “I never talked last semester with you, but now I do talk in class.” The instructor-researcher asked the same question to Jen who said, “I get nervous and don't understand some of the things people say.” Other field notes confirmed Jen's belief that she gets nervous. Jen noted in her post-interview, “English is really complicated for me.”

Near the end of the intervention phase, the instructor-researcher asked Maria, “What do you think of these activities? Are they helpful?” She replied, “They are fun. I like learning new words from friends and then trying to use them when I talk or write.” The instructor-researcher asked Younis the same question. He replied, “It was good

working together as a team. It helped me in my job because I have to do that and speak well.”

(C) Connections to the Workforce

Another theme that emerged through data analysis was an enhanced ability of student-participants to connect the value of the problem-posing approach to the workforce. In other words, student-participants attributed improvement of engagement in the problem-posing activities within their academic realm as helpful to their professional realm. The findings of the data set reveal an increased likelihood of student-participants to highlight the benefits of the problem-posing approach as related to the workforce from before the intervention phase to after the intervention phase.

Information from the Student Engagement Survey supported the emergence of this theme. The highest overall growth of student-participants was demonstrated on a workforce-related question: "How often has your experience at this college contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas? Gaining information about career opportunities?" Furthermore, survey results revealed students perceived developing clearer career goals after the intervention of the problem-posing approach.

Examples of this theme were recorded in the instructor-researcher's field notes. Before the 11th class of the intervention phase, the instructor-researcher asked Baram, "Have the activities helped you in any ways?" He responded, "They have helped me at work. We often have problems at the hospital. I have learned to ask others question and know there are solutions." Grace joined the conversation, "It helps me at work so much. (She closes her eyes). Work is hard, but I try to think like we do in class there to help."

Moreover, post-interviews articulated an impact of the problem-posing approach on students' ability to connect in the workforce. Maria shared,

Working with others can help us to achieve ourselves. I work at [redacted] medical center and we face so many problems every shift and I have found effective communication between team members is the principle issue in many problem[s] we have faced.

Younis shared,

It makes it easy when we practice it every day of our life, such as talking and listening to people around us. And also it [is helpful] by using only English in times we have to learn [it] can also help such as class or work place.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine how to enhance student engagement for a unique population of students. The population of students are both English language learners and adult learners. An equally important goal of the study was to design and to implement a participatory pedagogical approach to foster an environment in which students felt comfortable and safe to speak and have discussions. The aim for this study was to create more engaged learners.

The problem-posing approach was used as the intervention due to its ability to engage people who have been marginalized by eliciting their lived experiences and knowledge (Freire, 1970). The frame of thinking allowed student-participants to determine possible solutions to their problems through dialogical learning. Collectively, the problem-posing approach expands the capacity of students engaging in the dialogue.

While there may have been other factors that contributed to the increased student

engagement, it can, however, reasonably be concluded that the use of the problem-posing approach had a positive impact on student engagement. Triangulation of the data collection demonstrated students perceived an increase in their own engagement through a problem-posing instructional approach. Overall, the study revealed increased student-participants' value of collaboration, an environment that disarmed the fear of speaking, and connections to the workforce resonated as key themes. The findings from this study support the use of a problem-posing approach in an ESL classroom so that all students can engage and develop their second language acquisition.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

This action research study was conducted to examine the impact of a problem-posing approach on student engagement. The researcher-instructor observed low student engagement in an ESL classroom at a community college. In addition, students shared that they did not feel comfortable speaking or interacting in their classes at the community college. The PoP was the instructor-researcher's desire to enhance student engagement and the students' desires to enhance SLA.

Research Question

What is the impact of a problem-posing approach on the engagement level of seven students in an ESL class at a community college?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of a problem-posing approach on the student engagement of seven students enrolled in a writing composition course for ESL students at a community college in the mid-Atlantic region. Drawing on the work of Freire (1970b) and Shor (1993), a problem-posing approach has a learner-centered focus that promotes critical thinking and dialogue among students and teachers.

Through dialogue, the teacher and students learn from each other as solutions or alternatives are generated. The instructor-researcher aimed to provide opportunities for dialogue during 12 on-campus class sessions, which student-participants attended. While

using the problem-posing approach, the instructor-researcher sought to explore the research question. The underlying purpose of this research was to determine how to foster increased student engagement as demonstrated through dialogue by EL students.

Based on the work of Coates (2006), student engagement is defined as the extent to which students engage with activities that are likely to lead to productive learning. In search of improved student engagement of EL students, the researcher designed an action research study utilizing a problem-posing approach.

Summary of the Study

In Chapter Four, the instructor-researcher detailed and interpreted the data collected during the study. Data were collected through pre- and post-surveys, pre- and post-interviews, student work artifacts, informal interviews, and field observations. The findings for each data instrument were discussed. The research question was addressed and three key themes of the data analysis were explored. This final chapter discusses the major themes and implications of the study. Also, an action plan is shared along with suggested areas of future research.

This study involved seven student-participants during an ESL writing course at a community college. The intervention phase lasted six weeks, equaling 12 classes. In this action research study, a problem-posing approach was used during instruction which provided opportunities for dialogical interactions and critical thinking. Data collection included pre- and post-surveys, pre- and post-interviews, student work artifacts, and field note observations. Along with answering the research question, the instructor-researcher focused on identifying themes and implications of the study.

As underscored in Chapter Four, the findings of this study showed that using a problem-posing approach had an impact on student engagement in the ESL classroom. The results of the study revealed that the students perceived an increase in their own engagement through a problem-posing instructional approach. From the data collection, this impact can be seen through the themes of increased student-participants' value of collaboration, an environment that disarmed the fear of speaking, and connections to the workforce. The instructor-researcher found that the respective themes revealed much about student engagement and could facilitate the direction of ESL instruction for adult learners and future research in the ESL classroom. The implications of what the themes tell us are detailed below.

Implications

Peer interaction as collaboration is important to SLA in addition to negotiating one's positionality. As Young and Tedick (2016) state, "Peer interaction creates learning opportunities that qualitatively and quantitatively differ from interaction with native speakers or language teachers" (p. 93). Student-participants in the study demonstrated an increased value of working with others through collaboration. Furthermore, student-participants highlighted enjoying learning about others' home countries, points of view, gaining new understandings about topics, and working together. Often, student-participants wanted to continue using the problem-posing approach as compared to doing other aspects of the class such as vocabulary instruction.

Mayo and Pica (2000) demonstrated the value of collaboration among EL students. When second language learners work together, they are more apt to provide each other with simplified input that aligns with their developmental level, allowing for

input modification. Second language learners are better able to negotiate meaning through interaction with peers than direct interaction with their instructor. Thus, the use of a problem-posing approach supports the peer interaction through collaboration in a democratic nature. Students are able to form opinions about their reality through a dialogic space.

It is a common understanding that the environment of a classroom influences the learning within the classroom. The same understanding holds true for ESL classrooms for adult learners. According to Taylor (1983),

Research in applied linguistics claims that most adult learners acquire a second language only to the extent that they are exposed to and actively involved in real, meaningful communication in that language. An ESL class which sets out to provide opportunities for such communication, therefore, requires at least two basic components: an environment which will encourage learners to exercise their own initiative in communicating, and activities which will motivate them to do so. (p. 69)

While the problem-posing approach increased student engagement, another theme that revealed itself was an environment that was cultivated which encouraged learners to exercise their own initiative in communication. Thus, a classroom environment that disarmed the fear of speaking occurred.

It was discovered that student-participants reported feeling more confident to speak in class, improved their ability to speak clearly and effectively, and enhanced their feeling of comfort in the classroom environment. These findings align with the principle of dialogue defined by Paulo Freire. According to Darder, Baltodano, and Torres (2003),

the principle of dialogue is one of the most important aspects of critical pedagogy. Dialogue and analysis are the pivotal components for reflection and action. Dialogue is an “educational strategy that supports a problem-posing approach to education” (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2003, p. 15).

Schwarzer (2009) claims, “Developing a sense of belonging to the adult ESL class is crucial. The instructor and the learners act in both roles—as learners and as experts—in such a community” (p. 30). This notion acknowledges the challenges of a banking approach, while supporting a problem-posing approach (Freire, 1970b). The purpose of the problem-posing approach is education as the practice of freedom. The relationships between the teacher and students are equitable. Thus, both the teacher and students teach and learn from one another. A problem-posing approach facilitates an environment led by a constructivist approach.

Furthermore, research has shown that creating a safe learning environment for adult learners is important for SLA. Students create more and longer sentences when they work with others (Doughty & Pica, 1986). Also, SLA occurs best when social interaction is occurring and second language learners are using social communication (Lantolf, 2006). The findings of the study demonstrate that the problem-posing approach cultivated a classroom environment in which students felt comfortable to speak. Consequently, it seems as though SLA was positively impacted.

Connections to the workforce continually resonated as a theme among student-participants. An institutionalized role of community colleges is economic and workforce development (Levin & Kater, 2012). These findings reiterate the importance of the role community colleges have in preparing students for work. Student-participants

increasingly made connections of the value of the problem-posing approach to career development.

Several students commented that the problem-posing approach had helped them at work. By actively participating in the problem-posing approach in the classroom, students thought it helped them learn to appropriately ask others questions, realize solutions to problems exist, and recognize the importance of dialogic conversation. The results of the Student Engagement Survey showed student-participants felt as though they gained information about career opportunities. Also, the student-participants desired to develop clearer career goals after the intervention of the problem-posing approach.

Action Plan

The instructor-researcher began the research process with the intent of improving student engagement. The results of this action research study demonstrated that the implementation of a problem-posing approach in an ESL classroom at a community college had a positive impact on student engagement. As a result, it is important to develop and share an action plan.

Developing an action plan is a time for professional reflection (Mertler, 2014). Furthermore, the action plan details how the research will be used and what will be done in the future as a result of the research findings (Mertler, 2014). Using this information, the instructor-researcher developed an action plan, including the following items: (a) include a problem-posing approach in all of her ESL classes, (b) share the findings with colleagues within the English department, (c) create a focus group to examine implementation of a problem-posing approach in various content areas at the community

college, and (d) conduct additional research to examine the impact of a problem-posing approach in various adult learner settings.

The first step of the action plan is to include a problem-posing approach in all of the instructor-researcher's ESL classes offered at the community college. The intention is to have a problem-posing approach consistently implemented across course offerings. Instructors determine the instructional practices used within classes, while common objectives are maintained across classes at the community college. Currently, the instructor-researcher is the only instructor of the ESL classes. The instructor-researcher plans to implement a problem-posing approach in all ESL classes. If other instructors join the faculty, then the instructor-researcher will provide resources, training, and guidance while advocating for the inclusion of a problem-posing approach by the new colleagues.

The second aspect of the action plan includes sharing the research findings with colleagues within the English department at the community college during the Fall 2019 semester. Department faculty meet at the beginning of each semester to discuss programming, instructional goals, and student information. The instructor-researcher plans to schedule time during the department's meeting before classes begin for the semester. At the meeting, the instructor-researcher will share the intent of the study, how the study was conducted, why the study occurred, the findings, and key aspects of the follow-up meeting with student-participants, as well as ask for feedback from English department faculty members. By sharing the results with colleagues teaching English, feedback can be obtained from an insider/outsider perspective that may be beneficial in future action research projects. If English department faculty desire to learn more or to

implement a problem-posing approach within their instructional practice, then the instructor-researcher will provide resources and instructional coaching as needed.

The third component of the action plan is to create a focus group that may work to discuss how the problem-posing approach can be utilized across content areas to support EL students with the intent to discuss best practices for teaching EL students. Using faculty acknowledgement of the celebrations and barriers EL students have in their classes, a problem-posing approach will be outlined. More specifically, content instructors of EL students are likely to provide insightful and relevant information about the PoP and are capable of providing additional perspectives on the topic that the instructor-researcher may have failed to consider. The focus group members will learn from each other. Furthermore, the purpose of the meetings will be to model a problem-posing approach to increasing student engagement of EL students beyond the ESL classroom. The instructor-researcher plans to act as the organizer of the focus group with the goal of expanding the instructional capacity of colleagues in hopes of broadening EL instruction.

The final aspect of the action plan is to conduct additional research with the hope of exploring the impact of a problem-posing approach in various adult learner settings. The suggestions for additional research are detailed in the next section.

The instructor-researcher has created an action plan paralleling a cyclical process. This action plan will be continually explored, reassessed, and revamped so that the instructor-researcher consistently reflects on its effectiveness (Mertler, 2014). The purpose of the action plan is to expand the implementation of a problem-posing approach to other adult learner settings including content area classes at the community college.

Collaborative efforts and reflections with colleagues will support the purpose of the action plan.

Suggestions for Future Research

The current study was limited by a small population of student-participants, one ESL class, and a focus only on a writing course. Future research is warranted to discover ways teachers can increase student engagement using a problem-posing approach. On the following pages, the instructor-researcher makes four suggestions for future research.

Research Suggestion One: Larger Participant Size

While diverse, a major limitation of the current study was the small participant size. The participant group consisted of seven students, five females and two males. Future research may consider using a larger group of participants while maintaining a high level of diversity.

Research Suggestion Two: Various Content Areas

In the current study, the participants were all in the same class. By replicating this study with a different ESL class or other content areas, the field of education can gain a better understanding of how a problem-posing approach affects student engagement. By determining how a problem-posing approach impacts students in other content areas, educators can see the value of using it in the classroom.

Research Suggestion Three: Proficiency Levels

The proficiency levels of students were similar in this study. All students had scored within a certain range on the ACCUPLACER® test. Future research should explore the implementation of a problem-posing approach on student engagement among students of lower proficiency levels or higher proficiency levels. Furthermore, research

could examine the effects among heterogeneous and homogeneous groupings of students based on their proficiency levels.

Research Suggestion Four: Workforce Development Classes

Workforce Development classes help enhance the skills of those in the workforce or providing training of relevant skills for those looking to enter the workforce.

Workforce Development classes are offered for the following industries, among others: business, education, hospitality, information technology, healthcare, manufacturing, and transportation. Consequently, future research can move beyond the adult ESL classes pathways to examine the impact of the problem-posing approach in Workforce Development classes.

Conclusion

This study examined the impact of a problem-posing approach on student engagement in an ESL classroom at a community college. Student engagement of adult learners has continued to be a topic among education programs and professional development opportunities. However, with varying understandings of student engagement of adult learners in ESL classes, the development of increasing students' engagement continues to be an area of focus. There are noted benefits of student engagement that have been discussed throughout this study, but determining the impact of a problem-posing approach in an ESL class was the primary intent of this study. The findings of the study reveal the use of a problem-posing approach during instruction in an ESL classroom increases student engagement.

Continued development of the implementation of a problem-posing approach in ESL classes while expanding to English department and other content area classes

provides opportunities to research the impact a problem-posing approach has on student engagement in various settings. Chapter Five has shared implications of the action research study coupled with the value that future studies could contribute to instructional understanding. The use of a problem-posing approach should continue in order to examine the positive impact it has on student engagement.

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APPENDIX A

Participant Consent Form

The Impact of a Problem-Posing Approach on Student Engagement in an ESL Classroom

Introduction

Beverly Jewett invites your participation in this research initiative. The purpose of this form is to provide information to you (as a prospective research study participant) that may affect your decision to participate in this research and to record the consent of those who agree to be involved in the study.

Purpose and Description of Research Study

The purpose of this research is to gain a greater understanding of how the problem-posing approach may influence student engagement in the Community College setting. Data collected from this research may be used to advance knowledge of ESL instruction via multiple studies. These studies may include but are not limited to case studies, qualitative research, and quantitative analysis.

Risks/Benefits

There are no known risks from taking part in this study, but in any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified. Although there may be no direct benefits to you, the possible benefits of your participation in the research may include greater insight into the use of the problem-posing approach, which could affect instructional decision-making. If the researchers find new information during the study that would reasonably change your decision about participation, they will provide this information to you.

Confidentiality

Continued participation in interviews, surveys, classroom data collection, and other initiative data collection serves as consent for participation in the research initiative. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential. The results of this research study may be used in presentations and publications, but the researchers will not identify you without prior consent. In order to maintain confidentiality, digital records will be password protected. All physical records will remain in a locked receptacle when not being used. These records will be maintained for a period of up to three years following the completion of the research, after which they will be destroyed.

Withdrawal Privilege, Cost and Payment, Voluntary Consent

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Nonparticipation or withdrawal from the study will not affect your grade or status at the college. There is no payment for your participation in the study. Any question you have concerning the research study or your

participation in the study may be addressed to Anne Jewett, faculty at Piedmont Virginia Community College.

Printed Name

Signature

Class

APPENDIX B

Structured Student-Participant Interview Guide

(Google Form)

Student Number _____

Directions: Today you will be answering a few questions about how you feel about learning in the ESL classroom. Specifically, we will focus on learning when talking to classmates.

1. How do you feel about learning when you have to talk to peers? Why?
2. What makes English difficult to learn? What makes English easy to learn?
3. In general, when it comes to learning English would you rather memorize grammar and facts or learn how to speak English?
4. What do you like about working with other students in class? What do you not like about working with other students in class?
5. Do other people affect how you feel about learning English? If so, who? If so, how?
6. What do you know about working with others to solve a problem? Tell me everything you would do.
7. Do you think journal writing should be done in English class? Why or why not?
8. Is writing, expressing your thinking in words, a struggle for you? Why?
9. Do you prefer classes where you sit and listen or classes where you interact with other students? Why?

APPENDIX C

Student Engagement Survey

(Adapted from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement)

(Google Form)

Student Number _____

1. Mark your age group.

- a. Under 18
- b. 18–19
- c. 20–21
- d. 22–24
- e. 25–29
- f. 30–39
- g. 40–49
- h. 50–64
- i. 65+

2. What is your gender?

- a. Man
- b. Woman
- c. Other
- d. I prefer not to respond

3. What is your native country?

4. Who in your family has attended at least some college? (Mark all that apply)

- a. Mother
- b. Father
- c. Brother/Sister

- d. Child
 - e. Spouse/Partner
 - f. Legal Guardian
 - g. No one
5. Did you begin college here or elsewhere?
- a. Here
 - b. Elsewhere
6. What is the highest academic credential you have earned? (Mark only one.)
- a. GED
 - b. High school diploma
 - c. Vocational/technical certificate
 - d. Associate degree
 - e. Bachelor's degree
 - f. Master's/doctoral/professional degree
7. How many total academic terms have you been enrolled at this college?
- a. This is my first academic term
 - b. This is my second academic term
 - c. This is my third or fourth academic term
 - d. This is my fifth or sixth academic term
 - e. I have been enrolled more than six academic terms
8. How would you describe your enrollment this semester?
- a. Part-time
 - b. Full-time
9. In your experiences at this college during the current academic year, about how often have you done each of the following? (Please respond to each item.)
- 1-----2-----3-----4
 Never-----Sometimes-----Often-----Very Often
- a. Asked questions in class or contributed to class discussions
 - b. Worked on a paper or project that required integrating ideas or information from various sources
 - c. Worked with other students on projects during class
 - d. Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with others outside of class
 - e. Had serious conversations with students who differ from you

10. How often has your experience at this college contributed to your knowledge, skills, and personal development in the following areas? (Please respond to each item.)

1-----2-----3-----4
Never-----Sometimes-----Often -----Very Often

- a. Making judgments about the value or soundness of information, arguments, or methods
- b. Writing clearly and effectively
- c. Speaking clearly and effectively
- d. Thinking critically and analytically
- e. Working effectively with others
- f. Learning effectively on your own
- g. Developing clearer career goals
- h. Gaining information about career opportunities

11. Indicate which of the following are your reasons/goals for attending this college. (Please respond to each item.)

- a. Complete a certificate program
- b. Obtain an associate degree
- c. Transfer to a 4-year college or university
- d. Obtain or update job-related skills
- e. Change careers
- f. Self-improvement/personal enjoyment

APPENDIX D

Artifacts

(Google Form)

Journal Prompt:

How do you solve problems?

