Unstacking the matryoshka nesting doll: A self-study of playful language instruction for adult second language learners

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UNSTACKING THE MATRYOSHKA NESTING DOLL. A SELF-STUDY OF
PLAYFUL LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION FOR ADULT SECOND
LANGUAGE LEARNERS

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

Dr. Sohyun Meacham, Chair

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May, 2022
ABSTRACT

In the recent three decades teaching second language (L2) vocabulary has expanded from sentence-level morphosyntactic features and pragmatics to the promotion and advancement of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Nevertheless, the L2 instructors are constantly seeking alternative strategies for vocabulary teaching and assessment due to a superficial level of vocabulary memorization and lack of student engagement. As an instructor-practitioner, I undertook a self-study of the process of implementing Playful Language Instruction (PLI) of L2 vocabulary in an Intensive English Program. In this self-study I combined conceptual lenses of theories of play, CLT, and the Adult Learning Theory to examine how playful robotics contribute to vocabulary retention and effective language learning in the adult English language classroom. The data of analysis was a descriptive self-narrative text based on my reflections from the videotapes of my playful language instruction, my personal notes, responses from student interviews, responses from the Anxometer data, artifacts of the actual playful activities with Bee-bot, students’ self-confidence checklists, and the discussions of my project with my critical friend. NVivo software was used for the qualitative data analysis. Through the cyclical reflection process of the Constant Comparative Method and Conversation Analysis it was revealed that the deliberate self-positioning of an instructor-facilitator and acts of translanguaging in a non-threatening environment contribute to emotional condition of joy, scaffolding, and cooperative learning for L2 learning students. The implications of this study are offering new insight of facilitation of L2 vocabulary teaching through balanced translanguaging and providing
support for instructors in regards to lesson planning by defying the regular and providing more communicative learning experiences.
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Dr. Mason Kuhn, Committee Member

Marine Pepanyan
University of Northern Iowa
May, 2022
DEDICATION

To my mother Hermine who passed the torch of education to me and has been a great role model of a foreign language teacher.

To my husband Vahe who believed in my talent and considered my inquisitive nature as a virtue.

To my friend Margie who always prayed for my sound mind and wisdom.

To all lifelong learners.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation project would be impossible without my mentor and dissertation chair, Dr. Sohyun Meacham. You opened the door to the self-study research to me. As a critical friend you walked me through the possibilities and depth of this research. Through our comparative perspectives and the reflective self-narrative I was able to vocalize problems of practice and seek answer to these issues.

I also want to acknowledge the outstanding support of my committee members throughout my candidacy. Dr. Mason Kuhn, your ability to notice details is fascinating. Dr. Joyce Milambiling, your insight into the start and completion of this project is inestimable. Dr. Shuaib Meacham, your constant encouragement and appreciation of my project is significant.

Finally, I want to recognize the most cognizant self-study gurus, Dr. Linda Fitzgerald and Dr. Deborah Tidwell who encouraged me to learn about self-study research method and reflect on my teaching practices.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

“Play is the beginning of knowledge.” - George Dorsey, American ethnographer, 1868–1931

From my own teaching observation, vocabulary quiz announcements in the adult second language (L2) learning classroom typically are comprised of such tasks as matching the words in the text with their definition, replacing words with target words from text, and unscrambling words to form a sentence. When assigning vocabulary practice exercises, English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors accentuate selective attention, word recognition, word manipulation, interpretation, and production activities (Paribakht & Wesche, 1997). These directions are aimed at ensuring that students recognize the target words and their meanings, they are able to ‘play’ with given elements to make words, can see the meaning of the words in context, and that they have the ability to produce the target words in corresponding context.

Back in the days when I was an instructor at a private university in Armenia, a good descriptor of a language instructor was described as a professional who follows the steps embedded in the curriculum, and who is meeting the requirements in the protocols of the program by making sure that all student learning outcomes and standards are met during the course. I didn’t go very far from the image of ‘that professional’: I dutifully taught my students to test, accordingly, for their upcoming quizzes, tests, midterm and final exams. All that mattered was that my students nodded to me during my teaching, and completed the assignment and passed the unit tests. My students were adults who
were purposefully taking language courses in order to pursue a degree at the university. In my firm belief, which was also backed up with the research, adults would come into educational activity mostly because they experience “some inadequacy in coping with current life problems” (Knowles, 1973, p. 48). So, whatever was learned during that activity was aimed at the perspective of application in the future. Therefore, the adult language learners’ problem-solving orientation would be something natural.

With the latter in mind, when teaching English language vocabulary in the reading skills class, it was not truly relevant to me whether my students would be using those words in the future. I, as their language instructor, had accurately documented with their current grades the actual ‘improvement, progress, and learning’. I was sure that my students could proceed to the next level in the language learning program. I was sure that for the sake of their grade my students, enjoying or not, would do the practice, diligently memorize or use some strategies in order to earn their grade on the test. No wonder that I myself was not to blame for any students’ learning failure as I justified myself by ‘I taught and tested them [my students]’ excuse. In fact, the answer to my professional behavior was well described by Austin and Senese (2004). As a justification of my teaching style they wrote that it “is a product of how that teacher learned it (first as a student and then as a teacher), the kinds of experiences that teacher has had with the content, and even how that teacher got to that point in life” (Austin & Senese, 2004, p. 1245). My interpretation of testing and assessment of the taught knowledge didn’t go very far either from the manner the content was taught.
I was not a good test taker at school. Nor I was at the university. It was extremely hard for me to memorize any word or term without fully understanding the context of its use, and applicability. I never questioned the authority structure I experienced as a student where the teacher knows all and the student is only there to gain knowledge from them. That was a part of my culture where anyone older than you needs to be respected, conformed, and abided. And, perhaps those circumstances contributed to my and my classmates’ skills to seek various paths and strategies to ‘study’ and ‘be prepared’ for the quiz. We mostly aced those tests as they became very mechanical and common study practices.

The foreign language test preparation strategies by the students were various. Some would learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in isolation and through memorization. Others would use encoding strategies (using word lists, words-structure, oral or visual repetitions, etc. for memorization). Form-meaning associations were the absolute hit which was very far from recognizing the words in natural contexts (Gu & Johnson, 1996). Learning an additional language was a must and a part of the national curriculum back then. Trilingual children were very common in my country. Everybody was literate and spoke at least one foreign language. However, the question is why just one language if we were taught two additional languages? Simply because there was a huge exposure to one of them and none to the other. English was that ‘secondary’ foreign language. Everybody could read and write it; a few could communicate. Little did we know that many of the vocabulary words that we learned in our English language class would tend to stay at the word recognition level only.
Avenue to Language Teaching

What is language teaching and what are the purposes? Breen and Candlin (1980) consider communication in the first place as the general purpose. The demands of students, teachers’ contributions, the process of learning and teaching, and the roles of teacher and the student factor into the purpose of language teaching. Communication is primarily interpersonal action; thus, it is realized through such conventions as behavior and language forms. In exchanging knowledge, learners will modify their knowledge, and at the same time they will bring their background information (Breen & Candlin, 1980). The additional characteristics of this communicative process would be socio-cultural attitudes, emotions, and values that both teachers and learners bring into this process. With this definition of language teaching as a cornerstone of communication, the teacher will see “the overall purpose of language teaching as the development of the learner’s communicative knowledge in the context of personal and social development” (p. 91). Schmitt (2000) emphasizes that “lexical knowledge is central to communicative competence and to the acquisition of a second language” (p. 55). Among other elements of language learning, vocabulary is the most important constituent of language teaching. It is the core of all four skills of language learning. According to Coady and Huckin (1997), vocabulary is an invaluable tool for foreign and/or second language learning. The primary concern of researchers has always been to come up with the best way for students to acquire the L2 vocabulary as it is a critical aspect of any language, and an important factor of learner’s academic success (Coady & Huckin, 1997; Barcroft, 2004; Nation, 2001).
Background of the Problem

The language teaching expanded from sentence-level morphosyntactic features and embraced pragmatics, cultural, social, gender and other variables (Savignon, 1990). Celce-Murcia et al. (1997) described how research in communicative skills have resulted in the promotion of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), “During the past 10 years an increasing number of publications have reported on various direct approaches to teaching communicative skills [...] that resulted in the introduction and spread of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)” (p. 142). CLT has become a robust concept for teachers, yet has continually attracted language researchers and curriculum developers. Developed were roleplays, games, and similar communicative activities for inclusion in the classrooms with the purpose of involving students in the experience of communication. The games, pair activities, and role plays were accepted and widely recommended in the U.S. classrooms. Nevertheless, the implementation of the approach in language teaching classrooms had its opponents and proponents, its ups and downs. One obvious flaw observed by Savignon (1990) was that the assessment and testing methods were unable to provide adequate accuracy in measuring the learning outcomes. The necessity of changes in evaluation of CLT was a featured problem; otherwise the program’s effectiveness would be questioned.

There are some requisites for verbal communication to take place. Primarily, communication is impossible without basic vocabulary knowledge (Alqahtani, 2015; Wall, 1969). People start to communicate as babies, and enrich their vocabulary as they grow. L2 students and teachers insistently ask questions about vocabulary and language
study methods. How many working words need to be provided? What are the best foreign language words to learn? What are the best means of retaining the words? Do the words need to be learned in single lists, pairs or in context? These are just some questions to recite (Carter & McCarthy, 2014). By 1953, major studies about vocabulary selection for teaching purposes were extensively developed to list the words with the adopted criteria of their universality and utility. However, the problem was not quite solved with the emergence of those lists as they didn’t answer the question of how to teach them. Some literature suggest that L2 teachers’ beliefs about their pedagogical practices underline the significance of seeking some alternative strategies for vocabulary teaching. Laufer (2017) vocalizes that most vocabulary studies commonly have probed the treatment of target words being learned in a short period of time. Often instruction is too reliant on the teacher in the classrooms, and what is happening is the lack of engagement by learners leading to a superficial level of memorization (Newton, 2001; Sullivan, 2000). By highlighting the overall vocabulary research approach, Laufer (2017) advocates for more attention to input, instruction, and involvement in vocabulary learning. Niu and Andrews’ (2012) study with Chinese L2 teachers showed both commonalities and differences in their beliefs about vocabulary instruction. Astonishingly, these beliefs were not coinciding with their teaching practices. For instance, teachers who learned English and Chinese shared institutional culture emphasized the importance of incorporating explicit vocabulary teaching. However, the difference in their beliefs stemmed from the awareness that the learners’ language proficiency factor may predict different forms of word instruction. Blachowicz et al. (2006) characterize strong vocabulary instruction in
terms of the following formulations: “it takes place in a language- and word-rich environment; it includes intentional teaching of selected words providing multiple opportunities for repeated exposure, use, and practice; and it includes teaching generative elements of words and word-learning strategies” (p. 527).

In other empirical research, some teachers stated their concern about the ways of encouraging vocabulary development in L2 students, and the transfer and retention of those words. The research suggested that learning a word requires at least five to sixteen exposures to it (Nation, 2001). However, the question is - where is the guarantee that during a short language learning programs L2 students will be exposed to those lists of universal and useful words so many times? As a guidance of how to teach L2 vocabulary Lems et al. (2017) endorse oral activities as a pre-teaching of a new text, giving the priority to teaching the high-frequency words. They suggest introducing those words with pictures, flashcards, word walls, labeling, and many more by providing students opportunities for enough repetitions.

What seems likely to be important in answering the how to implement question might be the incorporating several teaching strategies while teaching a L2. It is in the teacher’s authority and capacity to introduce non-traditional and alternative strategies in their L2 classrooms. As Johnson (2008) states, L2 teachers are advised to “create as many interactive activities as possible with learners of different backgrounds or with the L2 learners who are at the same of different levels of language proficiency” (p. 181), and not be afraid to experiment with teaching vocabulary. These alternative teaching strategies and activities are intended to result in greater learner autonomy along with improved self-
confidence and, ultimately, higher academic performance and achievement (Benson, 2013).

**Significance of the Study**

As a cornerstone of my teaching philosophy, L2 teaching programs which adopt a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a basic teaching method should introduce alternative teaching methods and elements for successful language teaching to the college level audience along with the mandatory class material. In this study I intend to explore such element to enhance communicative skills and assistance to enrich students’ lexicon might be Playful Language Instruction (PLI). I cannot add more to what Cook (2000) wrote in his book *Language Play, Language Learning*: “Play, broadly defined, should exert an influence upon learning and not replace it. I talk about the play element in learning, and not about play as learning” (p. 182). There have been arguments about the definition of play and its use in the teaching and learning process. Play researchers have always distinguished between children and adult play. Each scholar has brought their own definition and interpretation of play and playfulness as its constituent part. Play has been analyzed through the lens of philosophy, psychology, arts, education, and more. Much of the literature addressing play and playfulness focuses on developmental contribution for children and benefits of organizational involvement for adults. However, the benefits of Playful Language Instruction in adult L2 classroom have rarely been explored. This self-study addressed the gap in both research topic and method seeking to explore and reflect on the role of PLI as it is related to learning and teaching in context of the adult L2 classroom.
Another important step of this study is to set the tone for additional self-studies among Teaching English to Speakers of Other Language (TESOL) practitioners. The current study is important on a personal level as I have witnessed significant learning of English language in my experience as a language instructor in the Intensive English Programs. This study provides empirical research about the role and contributions of PLI in adult L2 learning classroom. Theories and historical background in the following sections will provide some insight about play, its definitions, counterparts, and relation to education, and will additionally reflect on the theories of adult learning.

An Historical Look at Play Theories

How is play defined in the literature? Why do people play? When did scholars show interest in play research? To start answering these questions it is crucial to mention that there are various definitions of play in the existing literature. In his work *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Dutch historian Huizinga (1955) defined play as,

> A voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is “different” from “ordinary life”. Thus defined, the concept seemed capable of embracing everything we call “play” in animals, children and grown-ups: games of strength and skill, inventing games, guessing games, games of chance, exhibitions and performances of all kinds. We ventured to call the category “play” one of the most fundamental in life (p. 23).
The attempt to define play and explain the motives of play is also seen in the works of Caillois (2001), Cook (2000), Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Dewey (1938/1997, 1944/2009), Lieberman (1977), Norrick (1993), Sutton-Smith (1997), and other psychologists, historians and play researchers. It’s worth mentioning that initially play was considered to be uniquely a child’s activity informing their cognitive and behavioral development (Ellis, 1973; Lieberman, 1977; Vygotsky, 1967). Play has been studied in both primates and humans. Playful behavior is associated with the utmost evolutionary development of the brain and is evidence for higher intellect (Fagen, 1995). Play has biological functions and direct social significance for mammals. Influenced by the Darwinian school, one explanation to this early form of play was the Surplus of Energy theory, or use of an organism’s resources of its time and energy (Dockett & Fleer, 1999; Ellis, 1973; Huizinga, 1955). The Instinct theory of social theorist McDougall, states that people engage in human play as it is installed in human’s genetic code and that it is the body’s natural response (Ellis, 1973). The proponents of Renewal of Energy theory (Patrick, 1916) and Relaxation Play theory (as cited in Dockett & Fleer, 1999) suggest that play is used to restore energy. From the developmental view point, the overarching role of play is highlighted and highly signified. Namely, it is claimed that children engaging in play develop communication and metacommunication skills, they acquire the sense of self-reflection, manage their emotions, and explore rules of functioning in the society (Vygotsky, 1967). Vygotsky writes,

In play a child is always above his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying
glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form; in play it is as though the child were trying to jump above the level of his normal behavior (p. 552).

In addition to Vygotsky’s observations, psychologist Piaget’s (1962) theory of Cognitive Development and his systematic studies conclude that play is fundamental to cognitive development, and as the child matures, they need experiences and appropriate play environment stimuli (assimilation and adaptation) for learning. Moreover, Piaget (1962) recommended a relaxed atmosphere for learning. The psychoanalytic theories of play (Freud, 1955) focused on the emotional domain of development. Play gives children a sense of control, and at the same time reduces anxiety. The children have opportunities to be in a position of a power and control, to let go negative emotions and feelings.

To answer the second and third questions posed earlier, why people play and when the play research started, there have been proposed theories for both children and adult play in the literature. Ellis (1973) categorizes play into classical, modern, and recent ranks. He referred to five classical theories popular during the 19th century which were influenced by the Darwinian school of thought. The early stages of play were explained through the Surplus Energy theory, the Recreation and Relaxation theory, and many more. Those were philosophical reflections of ethology and were far from experimental research. Play, alongside with work, was considered to be an innate tendency to explore, and it is the initial stage of knowing and experience (Dewey, 1944/2009). Cultural historian Huizinga (1955), who was mostly interested in art, religion, morals, sentiments, imagination and inventions, acknowledged the functions of play as an integral element of
the most serious of human activities. Being an ambiguous concept, play could be seen in many aspects of human activity, such as anthropology, philosophy, law, warfare, religion, psychology, art, and education. Along with the free, conscious, and serious characteristics of play, it results in enjoyment as well (Cook, 2000).

While exploring play and playfulness among both young and adult learners, it is crucial to identify how the early theories approach and explain those phenomena.

**Play Theories**

The early theories of play mainly developed within the then popular children psychology field. It is commonly recognized that when children engage in play there occur the most significant and influential developmental and psychological achievements of the early childhood age. As a reference of play in early childhood, the Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1967) discussed various levels of the social category of play as well. In the Sociocultural theory, he claims that during play children achieve a mental representation of social roles and self-regulation. Similarly, Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget (1962) agreed that play contributes to child’s cognitive development through construction of knowledge, assimilation, and accommodation processes. The stages of child’s play are closely connected to the stages of cognitive development and biological maturation. According to Piaget’s (1962) Cognitive theory, play contributes to new learning by consolidating it with the knowledge that has already been acquired.

Children’s social engagement through play has also been researched by the American philosopher George Herbert Mead (1934). In his theory of self, in order to function in adult society while being in relation with other members of that society, role
play was considered determinative. Later, in his book *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1944/2009) also highlighted the importance of playful activities in the classroom in order to secure effective learning. He wrote,

> [...] when children have a chance at physical activities which bring their natural impulses into play, going to school is a joy, management is less of a burden, and learning is easier. Sometimes, perhaps, plays, games, and constructive occupations are resorted to only for these reasons, with emphasis upon relief from the tedium and strain of “regular” school work. [...] the whole pupil is engaged, the artificial gap between life in school and out is reduced, motives are afforded for attention to a large variety of materials and processes distinctly educative in effect, and cooperative associations which give information in a social setting are provided (p. 138).

Dewey (1944/2009) saw the problem in an educator who was far from engaging their students in playful activities for efficient learning. Hands-on activities with trials and incidental mistakes were highly welcome; ready-model activities were, on the contrary, scolded. Play was viewed as an opportunity for self-initiative learning episodes, creativity, and a tool of reduction of judgment, also as an alternative to dictated and prescribed actions. The problems that accompany the introduction of play as an important aspect of learning were encountered by several researchers and studied mostly in the children’s level as a target population. One factor that must not be overlooked is the existing extensive literature contributing to the notion of play for young learners. However, the theories barely provide a whole picture of play among adult learners.
Significant Contributors to Play and Playfulness

Play is associated with childhood and development in majority of societies. Play increases literacy, creativeness, emotional expressiveness, cooperation, language skills, and plays a significant role in lives of children (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Tracing back to Plato’s epoch, children’s play was of great importance, and the Greek word ‘paideia’ meant play, culture, and education. The concept of paideia was aimed at training and educating children to become disciplined citizens and to their formation into adults (D’Angour, 2013). However, the playing of games, music, and warfare as part of quasi-realistic play, and sports also served as religious ceremony and social events element. The ambiguity in the concept of play was obvious and it was hard to define who the proprietor of play is.

Play has a subtle nature and it is difficult to conceptualize as different academic disciplines approach play differently (Sutton-Smith, 1997). Everybody plays and knows about play but it is hard to conclude what that word means. Classical theories of play deal with the definition and motives of play. Several play theories attribute the motivation of play to emotional development. For instance, Sigmund Freud (1955) suggested that in the children’s play “the child repeats even the unpleasant experiences because through his own activity he gains a far more thorough mastery of the strong impression than was possible by mere passive experience” (p. 20). For many researchers, however, play denotes trivial, apparently non-productive, and fruitless behavior (Ellis, 1973).

However, the ‘undefinable’ term play sought definitions and scholars devoted chapters trying to explain the meaning of the word “play”, and most importantly to define
Huizinga (1955), in his book *Homo Ludens* analyses and compares the human play in the Japanese, German, Greek, Norse, Aramaic, Sanskrit, and Semitic language expressions for the play-function. He reveals that these functions are dramatically diverse, starting from the play of animals, children, and extending to rapid movement, dance, laughing, and mocking. For Huizinga (1955), play denotes a multitude of behaviors denying the previous views that play serves a biological purpose only. When looking at the definition in different languages, he encountered that play is perceived differently from culture to culture. He goes one step further and postulates play as a key denominator of human civilization. These characteristics of complex behaviors constitute an integral and legitimate part of adult life, and apparently of adult education. Huizinga (1955) referenced that the tendency of viewing the elements of adult versions of play as a competitive, based on chance and skill, work and leisure could also be rooted into the system of adult education.

Huizinga’s contribution to recognizing play element as an important counterpart of culture and adult learning (play and its prominent role in adult life as well as play and knowing) is significant. Building on his definition of play, French philosopher, Roger Caillois (2001) critiques and disagrees on some points in the definition and proposes play to be an activity which is essentially free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules, and make believe. He goes further and classifies play into four categories of agon (competition), alea (chance), mimicry (pretense), and ilux (vertigo). Caillois described play and playfulness as an attitude, mindset, and approach to life, which is typically observed in adult learning. In order to design a quality playful learning environment there
is a minimal, if any threat for a group of adults participating in it (Caillois, 2001). Play is thought to be a non-obligatory activity that can be brought into learning environment.

Similarly, like Huizinga (1955) play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith (1997) also questioned the proprietorship of play among children and adults. In his famous book *Ambiguity of Play* Brian Sutton-Smith acknowledged that play is paradoxical and hard to define. He described various forms of play (such as sports, gambling, imagination, and festivals) and seven constituent parts of the rhetoric of play. “The rhetorics of play express the way play is placed in context within broader value systems, which are assumed by the theorists of play rather than studied by them” (p. 8) wrote Sutton-Smith. By the broader value system was meant politics, religion, social, and educational symbolic system. These broader symbolic systems, in their turn, constructed the meaning of culture. Sutton-Smith (1997) was arguing against the mere fact that play is a process that is usually and mistakenly applied to children. It would clearly apply to children’s socialization, moral, social and cognitive growth. Nevertheless, he suggested the adaptation as play’s main function, which can be attributed to adults. “Still, there is potential here for thinking of the rhetorics that direct adult attempts to view child play as progressive as being themselves the very phenomena that cause such transfers of skill from play to everyday reality” (p. 41). In Sutton-Smith’s (1997) opinion adults are expected to be productive both at work and at home. According to the rhetorics of play it should be seen in the society in the form of a progress (development), faith (games of chance and gambling), power (sports and contests), identity (constructing social identities through community celebrations), imaginary (creativity and innovation), self (hobbies
and relaxation), and frivolity (playful protest against social life). The components of play rhetorics suggested by this scholar confirm that play goes beyond development and is comprised of enjoyment, improvisation, innovation, solitary activities, competition, and creativity.

The psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1990) who is not a play researcher, highlighted the notion of ‘flow’ which shared many characteristics of play. Contrariwise with Huizinga (1955) and Sutton-Smith (1997), Csikszentmihalyi (1990) specifies the importance of self in the organization of a human play. The true self of a person is being revealed during the play. For instance, people involved in activities enter into the state of flow or a playful state of mind with the final goal of reaching satisfaction and happiness. Play is a combination of social constraints and spontaneous behavior (Csikszentmihalyi & Bennett, 1971). “The play experience is constructed by means of negotiation involving awareness of the dualistic social skills of language, categorization, and roles” (p. 56).

During the flow (play in this context) the experience of the activity is useful by itself and is authentic experience. While studying playfulness in children and adults, psychologist Nina Lieberman (1977) also indicates spontaneity as an important characteristic of play, appending joy, fun, humor, curiosity, inventiveness, imagination, and thinking outside the box as additional markers of play behavior. In her book Playfulness: Its Relationship to Imagination and Creativity Lieberman (1977) considers playfulness (derived from the notion of play) as an attribute or personality trait of adults, and regretfully acknowledges and questions why adults are not encouraged to play in the society.
As it could be seen from above presented play theories and definitions of play and playfulness, there is multitude of definitions. Play “doesn't teach facts but rather develops attitudes” (p. 167) wrote Caillois (2001). Brian Sutton-Smith (1997) was cautious at defining play both in children and adults’ life calling it an ambiguous phenomenon. The psychologist Csikszentmihalyi (1997) characterized play as creative, flexible, stimulating involvement full of exploration, experimentation and quality in learning. “It is attitude which makes something play rather than anything intrinsic to the behavior per se. People are playing when they say and believe they are playing”, proposed Cook (2000, p. 101). Dutch historian Huizinga (1955) saw play as a voluntary activity with rules which are different from culture to culture. He would call play a conscious activity accompanied by a feeling of tension. Some other characteristic and descriptors of play are fun, joy, pleasure, humor, spontaneity, and voluntary (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Huizinga, 1955; Lieberman, 1977). However, what is specifically striking is that those definitions reflect perception of play as primarily a childhood phenomenon with some indecisive try to attribute it to adult experience. Furthermore, there is a marginalization of play activities among adult learners (Cook, 2000). Irrespective of drawbacks and complexity of a unanimous definition of play, Cook (2000) was convinced that there is ease of re-classification of a playful activity in various disciplines. With all the mentioned characteristics of how play is defined in the literature, my definition of play is as follows: play is a self-directed activity cultivating problem-centered orientation, facilitating enjoyable learning, initiating social engagement, guiding to self-reflection, and expanding one’s experiences.
Elements of Play in Language Teaching

The playful, or ludic function of language hasn’t always been appreciated in traditional language teaching (Crystal, 1998). Moreover, it has traditionally been neglected from teaching perspective. “Enjoyment and fun are not words which usually come to mind when we start to think about what language is and why it is used. We tend to adopt more sober perspective” (p. 1), wrote David Crystal (1998) in his book Language Play. “We define teaching as the professional practice of engaging learners in the construction of knowledge directly related to a particular area of study” (p. 53) wrote Clarke and Erickson (2004). However, there has always been belief and attempts to include play element in adult education. Alongside with many human activities like warfare, religion, philosophy, arts, and many more, Huizinga (1955) mentioned that play element is an integral part of education as well. Scholars like Cook (2000) were seeking to develop the notion of play element in language learning. He was firmly convinced that play may influence ideas about every aspect of teaching and learning. He justified his belief by saying that “classroom is an educational setting well suited for detached critical discussion of human behavior - intimacy and conflict - making use of it, without encouraging it” (p. 160).

Play in language teaching has mostly been represented in the form of language play. Cook (2000) in his book Language Play, Language Learning describes in details the history of language play and its significance for the society. He depicts the functions of language play through the primitive forms of rhymes, and evolving to verbal dueling as its development during the time. By highlighting the social effects of language play,
Cook (2000) wrote, “Language play in the public arena often simultaneously establishes the solidarity of some participants by demonstrating their rejection of others” (p. 63). Via social use of language shared beliefs and identities are being expressed. Apart from language play being used for fun, its serious social function is to create group identity. Playful people develop creative responses and have a greater understanding of the environment they are in. Cook (2000) believed that “one function of play is to promote an increase in general flexibility and adaptability, including especially the generation of new ideas” (p. 107). Cook was considering mastery of the language system and acculturation for adult L2 learning as the key role of the language play. Cook (2000) wrote,

> Yet, for both the first and the second language learner, language play is much more than merely a potential means. As a widespread, highly valued use of language, of social and cognitive importance, it is also an end. Knowing a language, and being able to function in communities which use that language, entails being able to understand and produce play with it, making this ability a necessary part of advanced proficiency (p. 150).

Cook (2000) was seeking to develop a play element in language learning. He was convinced that through the language play the alternate realities are allowed to be emerged from the classroom activities. He was giving great importance to deployment of communicative competence in the classroom.

**The Role of Communication in the Second Language Learning Classroom**

In 1998, when Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researcher Peter Skehan was exploring task-based activities in the language learning classroom, he wrote, “Skilled
teachers can bring meaning to the most unpromising material, just as the reverse can happen when a task with great potential is rendered mechanical through unimaginative implementation” (p. 96). Activities in the adult language learning classroom may be designed in various manners. The aspects of language knowledge include knowing how to use the language for different purposes, knowing how to produce and understand various types of texts, and, despite of limitations in the language knowledge, how to maintain communication (Richards, 2005). As opposed to traditional approaches to language teaching, which were giving priority to grammar competence, language learning has been considered from a different perspective after 1990. Collaborative and purposeful interaction, meaningful interaction through language, and negotiation of meaning with the interlocutor resulted from the new learning processes. New types of classroom activities implied advanced roles for both teachers and learners (Richards, 2005). The task of the teacher was to facilitate a cooperative approach to learning. With a greater degree of responsibility for their own learning, “students had to become comfortable with listening to their peers in group work or pair work tasks, rather than relying on the teacher for a model” (Richards, 2005, p. 5). As one option of effective communicative language teaching linguist David Crystal in his book Language Play (1998), showed that the play element has a crucial function in the language for communication. Even though he was writing that children often feel attraction with manipulating with words, he also considers play as central to adult lives. Words as the tools of thought were viewed a serious business for learning, imagination, creativity, fun and acquiring knowledge. Playfulness with words seemed to go beyond mere fun as it establishes new connections
between words and thoughts (D’Angour, 2013). “Language and play are so closely intertwined. It constitutes a large proportion of personally and socially significant language use” (Cook, 2000, p. 204). The absolute hit for the CLT activity types are puzzles, map-reading games (task-completion activities), conducting interviews, surveys (information-gathering activities), sharing beliefs, opinions, values (opinion-sharing activities), inferencing, and practical reasoning activities (reasoning-gap activities) (Richards, 2005). All the mentioned activities are designed for pair or group-work which have the benefits of hearing and producing the second language, increment of students’ motivation, and a higher chance to develop fluency.

The shift about teaching and learning an L2 leads to several assumptions that underlie current CLT (Richards, 2005). Present practices of CLT assume that L2 is facilitated when there is an engagement in meaningful communication. Importance is given to activities that involve discovery learning of basic rules of language use. And because communication is a holistic process, the meaningful interpersonal exchange “provides opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used. [...] Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting, and engaging” (Richards, 2005, p. 22).

**Adult Learning Theory**

In his book *Democracy and Education* John Dewey (1944/2009), proposed that all persons are born with an unlimited potential for growth and development. He defined education as the agency that facilitates this growth and cautioned that the teacher should
guide but not interfere with or control the process of learning. “Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language, and trial and error” (p. 22), reaffirmed Richards (2005). Adult education researcher Cyril Houle in his book *The Design of Education* (1972) shed some light on why adults continue their education, and how they learn. He defined adult education as “a process by which men and women (alone, in groups, or in institutional settings) seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skill, knowledge, or sensitiveness” (p. 32). In his book Houle (1972) emphasized that in the 1920’s USA there was a drastic cleavage between the education of children and adults. The education of children and youth was considered institution centered, while that of adults was seen as process centered. There were clear cut terms for the study of children education (pedagogy) and adult education study (andragogy). The latter “derives from the Greek word stem “aner”, meaning man (as distinguished from the boy), and “agogus” meaning leader of” (Knowles, 1973, p. 42). Adult education has become a special field of study and application, ensuring consistency to many activities which previously were not considered as related to each other (Houle, 1972). The task for the adult educator was to find out what to teach and how to teach a grown-up learner, and then to provide them with that knowledge. Houle (1972) admitted that adapting and modification of teaching methods of schooling to adult learners was not an easy task, and was, at times, contradicting. Deweyan approach of the expression of learning through experience and acquisition of skills and techniques for direct utilization in the future was then accepted by the developers of adult education in the United States. According to another eminent adult education researcher Malcolm Knowles (1973), the adult learners
step into education with a problem-centered orientation and the immediacy of application of the acquired knowledge. He states that “the adult comes into an educational activity largely because he is experiencing some inadequacy in coping with current life problems” (p. 48), and that what is learned today will be applied by the adult learner the next day. The term activity, in its turn, is defined by Houle (1972) as “a specific educational action or succession of actions occurring in a situation” (p. 229).

In the study with continuing learners conducted by Houle in the 1950’s through in-depth interviews of a small sample of adults and later the analyses of adult education problems and issues, Houle identified three types of purposes and values for continuing education: “goal-oriented” learning with clear cut objectives, “activity-oriented” learning who are mostly course-takers and group-joiners, and finally “learning-oriented” learning where knowledge is learned for its’ own sake (Knowles, 1973, p. 36). Based on the objectives of these subgroups, Houle (1972) proposed seven fundamental assumptions about how learning occurs in an adult educational system. The analyses of adult education problems and issues unfolded the importance of learning episodes as a contributor to successful learning. The planning of educational activity is a complex of interacting elements and needs to be based on “realities of human experiences. [...] a cooperative work in a facilitative way by guiding and directing a natural entity or process” (Houle, 1972, p. 38).

Houle's milestone work symbolized a critical shift in adult education. In contribution to adult learning theories no less important is Knowles (1973) book *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, where he formulates the theory of adult learning and
uses the term Andragogy. Andragogic theory is based on four assumptions which addressed the establishment of formal learning environments for adults. The first assumption is called changes in self-concept. According to Knowles’ (1973) observation, this assumption can be derived from the fact that adult learners “have made a big step toward seeing themselves as essentially self-directing. They have largely resolved their identity-formation issues; they are identified with an adult role” (p. 45). The second assumption is related to the background knowledge that can be related to the newly acquired, this way expanding the experience. This assumption is called the role of experience and is related to new learnings, “discussions, simulations, field experiences, team projects, and other action-learning techniques” (p. 46). The third assumption of andragogy theory assumes that with the biological maturation learners shift their learning content to their new roles in the society (e.g. spouses, workers, leisure time users, etc.). Also known as the ‘readiness to learn’ assumption, it is by no means presumed that one has to sit passively by and wait for readiness to develop naturally. Knowles (1973) acknowledges that “there are ways to stimulate it through exposure to better models of performance, higher levels of aspiration, and self-diagnostic procedures” (p. 47). The final assumption is titled orientation to learning which describes that unlike children, who have subject-centered learning orientation, adults most learning is problem-centered. Thus, it is determinative to understand the kind of motivational orientation. Research on formal adult education shows social reasons as pivotal (Houle, 1972).
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to concentrate upon a PLI phenomenon in an adult L2 learning classroom through the self-study research method. The primary aim of this dissertation study is to describe in depth my students’ perceptions of playfulness in language learning as well as my reflections of my own teaching L2 vocabulary via playful activities for the improvement of my future teaching practices. The unit of analysis will be a self-reflective narrative of my own instructional approach to adult L2 low-intermediate language proficiency learners enrolled in an eight-week Intensive English Program (IEP). The self-study method is qualitative in nature (LaBoskey, 2004; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Tidwell et al., 2009), and its justification of being used in the framework of the self-study serves for incrementing and improvement of educators’ reflective practice. The qualitative research paradigm considers that “meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with the world” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 3). Educational researchers are constantly looking for new ways to balance their teaching, as the knowledge is constructed within minds of students. Each student comes into the classroom with a distinct cultural and social background. People make meanings in different ways. Concerned with these differences in realities, the self-study proponents constantly ask themselves ‘How can I improve my practice?’ (Whitehead, 1993).

Research Questions

For defining the problem and identifying the research concern McNiff and Whitehead (2002) distinguish the importance of a set of critical questions to help the researcher identify the issues within the self-study. Gathering data in order to manifest
how my actions in the classroom inform my teaching is directed at impacting my teaching improvement and my students’ effective language learning in the future. Therefore, the formulation of critical research questions is crucial (Wilcox et al., 2004).

I firmly believe that the self-study research method is standing in the intersection of theory and practice. As a language researcher, I am in constant search of effective ways of second language vocabulary development and instruction. There is a great emphasis on word recognition rather than word comprehension and use in the context. Even though the research on L2 vocabulary instruction was not very straightforward (it declined in 1950’s with the resurgence in 1970’s), many articles on vocabulary have been published in instructional journals, and more than 400 dissertations with relation to vocabulary have been abstracted in dissertation abstracts (Blachowicz et al., 2006, p. 525). The frequently pointed questions covered the issues of the ways of good vocabulary instruction, how and how many words should be taught to English Language Learners (ELL), who should choose the words to be taught, what the specific strategies to help ELLs were, and many more. From the pool of questions addressed by Blachowicz et al. (2006), I, as a researcher, am concerned specifically with two within my own context of research. The questions are “What specific strategies, approaches or teaching methods can contribute to the improvement of adult L2 vocabulary teaching? And, how can playful robotics as a counterpart of progressive technology be used to enhance L2 learning classroom?”

In their review article Blachowicz et al. (2006) refer to scholars who tried to answer these questions regarding effective L2 vocabulary teaching. One suggestion of the
vocabulary learning strategy was recognizing cognates (words that are similar in native languages to English forms of words). Another option to enrich vocabulary instruction would be introduction of oral language, use of the native language, and “the use of written semantic analyses and cloze techniques” (p. 532). With regard to technology inculcation in language learning process and for developing meaningful vocabularies, electronic texts, videodisc technologies, storybooks made available through computers are exemplified as efficient tool as well.

Becoming the subject of my own inquiry, I put “I” into my research questions (Davey & Ham, 2010). To determine whether the mediating introduction of PLI via robotics in the adult L2 classroom contributes to vocabulary retention, communication advancement, and effective language learning in the adult English language classroom, I center the following two-part research questions about reciprocal process of teaching and learning as a purpose of my inquiry:

1. How does embedded playful instruction enhance vocabulary learning practice in the context of an adult L2 learning classroom?
2. To what extent does the navigation of playful robotics contribute to improvement and change in my teaching practice?

**Overview of Design and Methodology**

The literature has constantly shown the empirical research of L2 vocabulary teaching options for successful language learning to both young and adult learners (Barcroft, 2007; Berne & Blachowicz, 2008; Cepeda et al, 2009; De la Fuente, 2006; Kang, 2010; Karpicke and Roediger, 2008; Newton, 2001; Oberg, 2011; Song & Oh,
This self-study examines the effectiveness of teaching vocabulary to adult L2 learners, with a focus on the dynamics and practices of Playful Language Instruction (PLI) evolving from adult L2 teaching. As a part of the study, activities with programmable toy robots are introduced with the purpose of exploring PLI in action. Particularly, the objective of this study is to examine my perceptions about adult L2 learners’ progress through non-traditional playful activities. The study uses self-study qualitative research design to document my reflective thoughts about implementation of playful robotics in CLT classroom. Several characteristics that encompass qualitative research determine and justify the research design. Namely, the researchers endeavor “to understand the meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p. 5), as well as being a primary instrument for data collection deliver its accurate interpretation and summarization. In addition, qualitative research is a ‘richly descriptive’ form of inquiry where the data is formed through participant interviews, electronic communication, field notes, direct quotes from the documents, video tapes, and more (Merriam & Simpson, 2000).

In the current study the founded self-study approach allows an opportunity to describe and analyze the phenomenon of PLI in an adult L2 classroom. Multiple data sources used in this self-study provide an opportunity to study the phenomenon of PLI from a self-study perspective. As McNiff and Whitehead (2002) reason, “The focus of your work is you, and you are your main source of data. Your research participants are sources of data that show how you are trying to exercise your educational influence in your own and their thinking” (p. 101). “The aim of self-study is to provoke, challenge,

Self-study aids a researcher to generate a set of personal and professional lore. The intended outcome of a self-study is its contribution to personal and professional knowledge, to what is known to about in particular disciplines, and its potential to ameliorate the understanding of our practices (Wilcox et al., 2004). Reflecting through self-study also helps “to uncover patterns of personal beliefs and values, leading to greater self-awareness” (Wilcox et al., 2004, p. 276).
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Intensive English Program (IEP) courses are vital in developing and contributing to international students’ Academic Language Proficiency (Cummins, 1979). These programs are receiving increasing attention, and consequently researchers are exploring factors of success of adult language learners in IEPs. Numerous studies were conducted to determine how adult individuals’ language learning strategies correlate with language proficiency, cognitive, social, and affective traits (Ehrman & Oxford, 1989, 1990; Ely, 1986; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995). Gradman and Hanania (1991) identified aptitude, learning styles, motivation, age and gender, anxiety, self-esteem, and cultural background as learner-related factors that mostly contribute to success in language learning. But, perhaps, the disturbing factor is that textbooks and syllabi typically “present an analysis of language rather than of communicative skill” (Allwright, 1976, p. 3), and not even touch upon aforementioned factors of success. However, Allwright (1976) claims that communication is the aim of linguistic competence by positing a question whether we teach language for communication, or we teach communication via language.

There are few researches in the existing literature which focus specifically on the alternative agencies to enhance communicative language learning of adult L2 learners in the context of Intensive English Programs at the university level (Hong-Nam & Leavell, 2006). As mentioned earlier in Chapter I, during the shift from the traditional grammar competence to communicative competence some alternative activities were brought in to
the language learning classroom in the form of language play, role-play, and games (Crystal, 1998; Richards, 2005; Savignon, 1990). The introduction of oral activities was one recommendation in the language learning classrooms (Lems et al., 2017). However, specifically Playful Language Instruction (PLI) in Communicative Language Teaching classroom with adult L2 learners is still underconsidered, and even neglected in the literature. The research on play and playfulness is extensive for younger populations. Nevertheless, very little of that literature addresses the implementation of playful element in the adult’s life, and more specifically in the adult language learning environment.

The questions that still remain unanswered are how eventually play is defined in the literature, and what is meant by playfulness. According to Eberle (2014),

play plainly offers a mix of physical, social, emotional, and intellectual rewards at all stages of life. [...] To try to define play by naming its functions or listing its beneficial effects would be like trying to define art by where we hang it or by counting the brush strokes on a canvas (p. 217).

Current cognitive psychology and neuroscience endorse six basic elements that emerge to cover the field of play. These elements in their turn have subdivisions for the sake of explanatory power. These elements are anticipation (interest, openness, readiness, expectation, curiosity, desire, exuberance, wonderment), surprise (appreciation, wakening, stimulation, excitement, arousal, discovery, thrill, astonishment), pleasure (satisfaction, buoyancy, gratification, joy happiness, delight, glee, fun), understanding (tolerance, empathy, knowledge, insight, mutuality, sensitivity, mastery), strength
(stamina, vitality, devotion, ingenuity, wit, drive, passion, creativity), and poise (dignity, grace, composure, ease, contentment, fulfilment, spontaneity, balance) (Eberle, 2014).

The goal of this chapter is to explore literature that is relevant to familiarize the reader with the existing empirical literature on children and adult play, and to understand at what extent play is utilized in adult language learning. The purpose of the literature review is to identify gaps, to understand the subject of the research, “how each work relates to the other under consideration”, to identify new ways to interpret previous research, to prevent duplicating other researchers’ efforts, and “to locate the researcher’s original work within the literature” (Booth et al., 2016, p. 14). In the previous century and today there have amply been written about play and playfulness of children. There is some literature about play in adults’ life as well. The familiarity of the reader with the theories and empirical research of play and playfulness among children and adults establishes the overall spirit of the study, addressing the perceptions of play and playfulness in the literature. Along with classical play theories, the literature review discusses influential studies conducted on the topic. In addition to play theories, several adult learning theories relate to the understanding of the language learning processes of adult L2 learners within CLT.

Studies of Play

“Play is part and parcel human experience, its absence signals a lesser quality of life” (Kielhofner & Miyake, 1981, p. 375). Despite the modern tendency among the researchers of the topic of play and playfulness in the field of education, it was widely studied almost exclusively as an experience of children contributing to their cognitive and
social development (Caplan & Caplan, 1973; Cook, 2000; Sutton-Smith, 1997). A boundless empirical literature regarding play and playfulness in children’s classroom were deliberately designed for problem-solving activities. These activities mostly addressed children’s cognitive aptitudes, reasoning, creativity, physical, and cognitive development (Alfieri et al., 2011; Caplan & Caplan, 1973; Chen et al., 2010; Garvey & Kramer, 1989; Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2009; Lester & Russell, 2010; Lillard et al., 2013; Lillard & Else-Quest, 2006; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Rubin, 1982; Singer & Singer, 1992; Sylva et al., 1976; Trawick-Smith, 1994). Play can be either spontaneous or structured activity. It is an essential need of childhood, it is necessary for survival in adulthood, and it allows children to practice and perfect skills (Rubin, 1982). Play reveals what children know and what they are curious about (Trawick-Smith, 1994). As earlier stated, play is everywhere in children's lives and that is the reason it has always been in the scope of interest for researchers worldwide.

Play in Children’s Life

“Can we imagine a satisfying definition, one true of play wherever and whenever there are players and however they play? Can we specify ideal, unvarying, dependable attributes of play?” asked Eberle (2014, p. 215). There are various contradictory explanations of the nature and value of children’s play (Lester & Russell, 2010). It can be seen as a “self-protecting process that offers the possibility to enhance adaptive capabilities and resilience” (p. ix). Along with being fun, enjoyable, pleasurable, voluntary (no one is forcing you to play), and non-serious (Caillois, 2001;
Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Huizinga, 1955) play has also been perceived as useless activity, and on an occasion, it is a waste of time, energy, and skill (Caillois, 2001).

Apparently, not all researchers saw play as unambiguously beneficial human activity. The role of play in children’s development was viewed differently by modern psychological theorists at times (Burriss & Tsao, 2002). For instance, the purpose of Meacham, Vukelich et al.’s (2013) study was to explain how preschool teachers’ language use might promote their young students’ oral language development when participating in a dramatic play. Qualitative and quantitative analysis of the collected data from 11 Head Start program teachers revealed that among four types of teacher play instruction talk (play-embedded instructional talk, explicit instructional talk, play language coaching, and play administrational talk) “play-embedded instructional talk which requires playful pretend talk” (p. 264) was the type that provided children with more opportunities to talk during teacher-participated dramatic play (Meacham et al., 2013). Meacham et al. (2016) went one step farther, and based on the previous research of teachers’ language use in preschool classroom they conducted another study guided by a question about teachers’ responsiveness related to children’s verbal response in pretend play, in non–pretend play, nonverbal response in pretend play, nonverbal response in non–pretend play and no response in sociodramatic play. 74.2% of participating children (45 boys and 52 girls, with the average age of 4.4 years) were identified as dual language learners. Through the sequential analysis of teachers’ and children’s utterances teachers’ responsiveness styles associated with the children’s immediately following response mode. The long linear data analysis revealed that the children responded to “the teachers’
pretend play mode utterances in the pretend play mode (verbal in pretend play, nonverbal in pretend play, nonverbal not in pretend play) when the teachers extended the children’s utterances using the topic initiated by the children” (Meacham et al., 2016, p. 328). The researchers addressed the importance of conversational interaction on the preschool classroom for optimal language development. They also concluded that sociodramatic play and pretend talk are important ways to support children’s language development.

In their review of evidence about the impact of pretend play on children’s development (their language, narrative, emotions, social skills, reasoning, etc.), Lillard et al. (2013) revealed that most studies conclude in correlation of pretend play and language development among young children. They suggest that pretend play affects children’s early language. By considering the symbolic aspect of the language and the repeated practice of using symbols in pretend play many studies predict the concurrent association of language development as a byproduct of the pretend play.

With the strong belief that young children’s playful learning promotes their language, cognitive, and social skills and future academic success, Toub et al. (2018) conducted two quantitative studies with intervention procedures of book-readings and play sessions. More specifically, the group of researchers attempted to probe the value of play combined with book-reading methods. They were focusing on introducing vocabulary through book sessions predicting that playful activities would augment vocabulary knowledge of low-income preschool students. The studies attempted to answer the following four questions – whether the book-reading activity (intervention) followed by either free play, guided play, or direct play improve the students’ knowledge
of the target vocabulary over time; which play approach would be the most effective for vocabulary development; whether children show improvement in vocabulary learning if book-reading and adult-supported play are delivered by classroom teachers; and finally, whether the combination of book-reading and adult-supported playful learning sessions or book-reading and a more direct teaching approach give more exposure to the target words. The findings of this study indicate that the offered vocabulary instructions were effective for children’s word recognition and explanation of their meaning. Also, the results showed that preschoolers in the guided play and direct play conditions outperformed their peers in the free play condition. Children learned new words with success – whether the vocabulary was taught through play and book-reading or picture card and book-reading activity. Moreover, the reviewing of words by children in the context of play activity was more effective that in the context of direct teaching picture card activity. The statistically significant growth of word knowledge was “on both receptive and expressive measures, which capture different types of knowledge (Breceptive = −0.16, SE = 0.03, p < .01, d = 1.18; Bexpressive = −0.50, SE = 0.04, p < .01, d = 1.55).” (Toub et al., 2018, p. 13). The researchers concluded that the findings of that playful context would be beneficial for supporting academic-oriented programs and dispel the misguided attitude towards playful activities in education.

According to Van Gils (2007) play is a right of children to be children. Moreover, it is not an additional right, but the basic. In his book, Social Play among Preschool Children, Parten (1933) described how children played in nursery school. According to his observations children mostly play in groups of two, with the same sex playmates.
They preferred sandplay, playing ‘house’, constructive work with clay, paper and paints. He notes that younger children play in a different manner than older children, giving a new social value to the toy at a certain age. The reasons behind the children playful behavior is that play has the potential of fostering cognitive and social development, imagination, adaptation of multiple social roles (Bodrova & Leong, 2005). Play is productive and beneficial in children’s life. It contributes to growth of memory, oral language, self-regulation, and many more developmental and social skills. “At the school level, early childhood teachers can make a valuable contribution to this effort by clearly documenting the learning opportunities that occur during the classroom play” (Golinkoff et al., 2006, p. 68). There is a robust body of theoretical research supporting connection between play and literacy. Play provides a foundation for framing language skills (Burriss & Tsao, 2002). The effective play-based teaching strategies are highlighted as well (Golinkoff et al., 2006). Correlations of effective cognitive, emotional and social development of children through pretend play (Bergen, 2002; Eberle, 2014; Fein, 1981; Lillard, 1993; Linsey & Colwell, 2003; McCune-Nicolich & Bruskin, 1982; Nicolich, 1977), dramatic play (Burns & Brainerd, 1979; Christie, 1990; Gupta, 2009; Griffing, 1983), linguistic play (Cook, 2000; Crystal, 1998; Goodson & Greenfield, 1975), and play for health (Frohlich et al. 2013; Jachyra, & Fusco, 2016; Zarrett et al. 2009) have been well-documented in empirical studies. The aim of play in education is considering the school to be “a microcosm of the society that children will join as adults. The play behaviors of children as they interact with peers at school are regarded as necessary preparation for the future” (Burriss & Tsao, 2002).
Children and Play in the Classroom. The role of play is well documented in childhood pedagogy. There is evidence that introducing more ‘playful’ approaches to classrooms at any age can contribute to the development of creativity (Cohen, 1993; Cremin et al., 2006; Cumming, 2007; Gardner, 1993; Lester & Russell, 2010; Rubin, 1982). Perhaps one obvious reason why play is highly promoted and accepted in the children education is the fact that play is overlapping with Piaget’s (1962) stages of cognitive development and Vygotsky’s (1967) abstract and imaginative thinking development stages. Play promotes assimilation of the new information and accommodation to the reality of the world. The benefits of play can be immediate, long-term, or both (Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). However, taking into consideration the fact that play does not have a single definition and the definitions are multidimensional, the exact role of children’s play in education is debated.

The proponents of locomotor play, which involves body activity and physical training of muscles, evidence the benefits of physical coordination and healthy growth of the child (Blasi et al., 2002; Ginsburg, 2007; Humphreys & Smith, 1984; McGrew, 1972; Smith & Connolly, 1980). According to Blasi et al. (2002) “children need multiple opportunities for meaningful play in a variety of settings and environments. Through many experiences, children begin to construct their knowledge and understanding of multiple skills” (p. 101). Play forces children to constantly reexamine, challenge, test, and construct new understandings. Social and physical skills, creativity, and cognitive competencies are revealed during the process of play. The locomotor play in the
classrooms in primarily observed during their infant, toddler, and preschool years at nursery schools. However, a decline in physically active play is observed in primary school (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998).

In reality, play does not completely disappear but shifts from the classroom to playgrounds. With maturity, play takes various forms such as parallel play, social play, pretend play, dramatic play, object play, etc. Some play is solitary, some requires participants, some incorporate objects, some include fighting and chasing (Smith & Pellegrini, 2008). In their longitudinal study with middle-class family descending preschoolers, coming from various ethnic and racial backgrounds, Johnson and Ershler (1981) were interested in transformational probabilities of classroom play behavior. The researchers were looking into the cognitive play categories included functional, constructive, and dramatic categories. After the analysis of their observation of children free play in their classrooms the researchers documented almost all previously mentioned categories of play. They even went farther and analyzed sex differences in classroom play engagement. Their conclusion was that 60% of solitary play in the classroom was dramatic (or constructive) and 40% was functional.

Children’s tendency towards play and playfulness has been associated with creative thinking skills (Caplan & Caplan, 1973; Gadomska, 2015; Lieberman, 1977). For instance, during the free play in Dansky and Silverman’s (1973) study with preschool children, the researchers noticed that behaviors of children differed depending on the form of their play. The group who had been allowed to do free play transferred their playful disposition towards the new objects. The groups who imitated an adult’s actions,
scored significantly lower. The significant impact of play within educational settings is the effortful and intentional learning which concludes in the development of problem-solving and creativity skills (Gude, 2010; Howard-Jones et al., 2002; Rubin, 1982; Sullivan, & Bers, 2016; Szekely, 1996; Trawick-Smith, 1994; Whitebread et al., 2009). “Engagement in play involves the mind in an active process as a child investigates, explores, and inquires during play” (Blasi et al., 2002, p. 101). Play is the natural way to learn by observing others and investigating their world through real experiences. “The child, particularly in collective situations, progresses in their mastery of a game, and therefore, by playing, learns to play better and better” (Brougère, 1999, p. 137).

Children’s play is constitutive to the academic environment. It undertakes that the educational setting addresses social, emotional and cognitive development of children (Ginsburg, 2007). The existing literature examines spontaneous language plays limited to case studies with small samples, as well as children’s classroom language play and its relationship to measures of literacy and metalinguistic development (Broner & Tarone, 2001; Cekaite & Aronsson, 2005; Cook, 2000; Crystal, 1998; Ely & McCabe, 1994; Mondada & Doehler, 2005; Peck, 1980). The valid features of language play allow the learner to acquire linguistic form of words (with the emphasis of exact wording and repetition), pragmatics (with the focus on performance of the language, intimate interaction, enjoyment and value), and their semantics (inversion of language and relation to reality; Cook, 2000). Studies about language play demonstrate that there are other equally compelling reasons to appreciate children’s language play. Both spontaneous language play and expertise with riddles were shown to be positively associated with
measures of literacy and metalinguistic development. In their study with 20 kindergarten children with the average age of 5.10-year-old. Ely and McCabe (1994) hypothesized higher frequency of language play of children interacting naturally with their peers rather than in laboratory-based environments. Data was collected through observations, one-hour audio recordings, and individual interviews. Various tasks were administered for measuring children’s performance in three areas: construction of meaning, knowledge and function of the alphabet, and conventions of written language. The analysis and findings from the collected data revealed that one of every four utterances contained some form of language play, which confirmed the previous hypothesis. Language play appeared in a variety of forms serving such range of functions as expressive, phatic poetic, and metalinguistic (Ely & McCabe, 1994).

Given that language use is multifunctional, Broner and Tarone (2001) analyzed language play from Cook’s (2000) definition where the latter emphasizes the essentially ludic, or self-amusing, characteristic of language play. Through the analysis of instances of language play engaged in by three L2 children (with American English L1 immersed in an L2 Spanish classroom), and transcription of audiotaped data, the researchers examined two notions of ludic language play: fun and rehearsal. Among the benefits of language play and its contribution to L2 acquisition is “the emotional excitement that comes with language play may simply make the L2 discourse more noticeable, and thus more memorable” (Broner & Tarone, 2001, p. 375). Second, the learner is enabled to internalize more than one register via language play and facilitate L2 acquisition. Deliberately varying from accepted language norms produced “destabilizing force that
provides a productive and dynamic balance to the stable force of adherence to standardized language norms and even to fossilization” (p. 375), thus making possible growth and change in the system.

Children’s language play has been of interest among many researchers (Cook, 2000; Ely & McCabe, 1994; Lantolf, 1997; Vygotsky, 1967; Weir, 1962). They explored children’s language development from the crib through adolescence. Together with communication, investigation, exploration, self-perception of a child through ludic language encountered were humorous episodes during the classroom communication of language learners. Humor as a broader category of play in children’s learning is considered a form of intellectual play (McGhee, 2018). Varga’s (2000) study with preschool children examined the processes by which children initiate, organize, and maintain language play interactions. The qualitative data for her study were obtained during play, as part of investigating the form and content of children’s communicative interactions. Specifically, the researcher was interested in hyperbolic utterances of young children (i.e. utterances of exaggerated incompatibility, designed to achieve a special effect during the communication). “Language play was contextualized within broader context of children’s social play interactions” (Varga, 2000, p. 142). The findings of the study supported the argument that four- and five-year old children possess higher cognitive skills, and that children’s concrete operational abilities may emerge at that age during the playful interactions.

Fostering the importance of enjoyable, joking and playful language learning was also endorsed by Cekaite and Aronsson (2005). They claimed that the ludic model of
language learning is related to metalanguage, and that it is “a pedagogic tool that is intrinsically motivates and facilitates L2 learning” (p. 170). They acknowledged that the children’s play was explored primarily in relation to their first language. Children’s social play (Garvey, 1977; Iwamura, 1980), their crib monologues (solitary ‘language rehearsals’) (Nelson, 1989; Weir, 1962), sociodramatic play (Heath, 1983; Sawyer, 1997), and their lexical, phonological, and grammatical practice (Cazden, 1976; Chukovsky, 2021; Garvey, 1977; Iwamura, 1980; Kirchenblatt-Gimblett, 1976; Weir, 1962) has always been in the scope of interest of early childhood researchers. In their qualitative study, Cekaite and Aronsson (2005) studied refugee and immigrant children in a Swedish immersion school. All nine children aged seven to ten years were various first language speakers. For the analysis the children’s classroom interactions and their play activities were video recorded (the children had spent between four months and one year in Swedish schools). Their study showed that the language play as a collaborative affair involved distinct focus on language learning. Namely, during the play episodes initiated by the children, puns, jokes, cross-utterance poetics, varied intonational patterns, error correction, collaborative repetitions and variations (promoting the learner’s awareness of the phonology and morphology of correct and incorrect language choices) emerged. When the children jokingly played with their L2, “they were thus involved in a twofold process, that of practicing language and of qualifying as participants in the classroom community, thereby securing occasions for practicing L2” (Cekaite & Aronsson, 2005, p. 188).
The description of disparate empirical studies about play in children’s cognitive and physical development, its contribution to their creativity, and knowledge acquisition provides insight about multifunctionality of play phenomenon. Precisely building on this ambiguous, multi-faceted and ubiquitous functions of play, scholars also explored the relationship between play and playfulness in adults’ life and its possible benefits in the lives of adults.

**Play in Adults’ Life**

Theories of play consistently reference that play is the work of children. However, Bonnie Neugebauer (1993) wondered “What would happen if we approached everything in our lives with a more playful spirit? And what then, is the play of adults? How would this playful spirit change our workday, our parenting, our lovemaking?” (p. 26). Some adults are naturally playful; for some play requires energy and commitment. Taking risks is a part of play, and as a reward play brings enjoyment, too. “Play, a central human characteristic, is responsible for both individual learning and the very fabric of social and cultural life” (Kielhofner & Miyake, 1981). Play is important for the higher species to survive, to adapt to external conditions, and to increase the general stock of knowledge to draw upon in emerging circumstances. Play enables the player to learn by doing. Playing adults generate their own rules, and give special meanings to social events.

Play is a ubiquitous phenomenon. “It is an easy mistake to believe that the major purpose of play development is to contribute to another kinds of age-related development - social, emotional, and cognitive” (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 42). In the literature, the vast majority of books and empirical research place adult play in the categories of psychology
(feelings and emotions of the adult), leisure (individual and group play, joint leisure activity), workplace (effective workflow management and content workers), and education (self-directedness and motivation in continuing learning). To define playfulness for adults, Guitard et al. (2005) identified five components: creativity, curiosity, sense of humor, pleasure, and spontaneity. Similar components can be clearly observed in previous sections describing children’s play. Children play and create their world and learn about the role in the society. Problem-solving was one factor highlighted in early childhood play. Humor and laughter go hand-in-hand with children’s play. Play brings enjoyment and pleasure. And finally, children play is spontaneous (unless structured for the formal classroom learning purposes). Play has specific space and time; it is taking place in a daily life; players negotiate the rules of the game and accept conventions between players; play constructs internal decision making (Brougère, 1999). Play prepares a child for a number of learning situations characterized by these explicit dimensions. Why, then, these definitions cannot be implemented in adult learning process? Below literature review will highlight three reasons why people play: “social, economic, and personal” (Brown, 2009, p. 197).

The Experience of Adult Play: Psychological, Social, and Personal. Through pretend play and dramatic play children develop creativity, cognitive and social behavior (Dansky & Silverman, 1973; Fein, 1981). Adults, too, possess creative capacity for playing. This is typically demonstrated by different and complex playful transformations of the players where they “convert their own playful characteristics into play scenarios for others” (Sutton-Smith, 1997, p. 46). In order to create favorable social climate,
“diversionary play can facilitate creativity by influencing people’s psychological processes and also by creating a social relational and cultural context that is conducive to creativity” (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, p. 103). Empirical psychological studies fostering play suggest that the creativity of children and adults are alike (Dansky, 1999). Studies on exceptional professional creativity highlight the commonality in characteristics of their participants in maintaining a playful attitude toward their work throughout their careers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Gardner, 1993).

The social psychological aspect of play is well observed in adults’ desire to compete and take risks. According to Caillois (2001), four categories of adult play (agon, alea, mimicry, and ilux) are competition, chance, pretense, and vertigo. Similarly, the children’s play is also comprised of the mentioned categories. So, the question remains, why adults cannot play if children’s play characteristics is so well aligned with adult play component? Van Leeuwen and Westwood (2008) write,

Play has been opposed to work or any activity which is purposeful for the well-being of a community. The connection of play to morally rejected idleness has given it, in the context of adulthood, a rather dubious reputation which sports and recreation sciences and industries try to reverse by pointing out the health and wellbeing benefits. Understanding the individual reasons for ludic engagement in general and for adults in particular would advance the understanding of play as a means to actively improve one’s own well-being and experienced quality of life (p. 6).
Enjoyment of adult play is oftentimes associated with playing games - be it a sport game, video game, leisure activities, or hobbies. Interest and satisfaction are responses of playful behavior among adults because emotions and perceived complexity affect subsequent play performance (Holbrook et al., 1984). According to social scientists, most leisure activities are pursued in the family setting, friends’ company, or the presence of others.

In their studies exploring adult experiences of play the researchers conclude that play and playfulness are beneficial for adults (Bozionelos & Bozionelos, 1999; Brown, 2009; Lieberman, 1977). “Play sets the stage for cooperative socialization. It nourishes the roots of trust, empathy, caring, and sharing” (Brown, 2009, p. 197). In order to understand why adults play, researchers need to look into the players’ individual differences, too (Van Leeuwen & Westwood, 2008).

To address the gap in the literature on functions and implication of play in adult’s life, Van Vleet and Feeney (2015) had an advanced perspective. In their review, researchers endorsed that immediate or long-term rational outcomes of play should contribute to positive psychological and physical health of an adult, thus, they called for future research on the issue. They suggested that from the psychological point of view, play needs to be considered an important phenomenon in adults’ life. Similarly, like adult learning theorists, Van Vleet and Feeney (2015) prioritize the adults’ nature of problem-centered learners. They wrote,

Play in adulthood is likely to foster thriving by helping individuals develop and sustain healthy relationships, by providing mental and physical stimulation across
the aging process, by equipping individuals with flexible thinking patterns and improved problem-solving abilities, and by providing a means of reducing the impact of life stressors (p. 643).

Among many functions of play in adults’ life, it is also well-known as therapy for developmental and psychological disabilities. The play therapy is viewed as a vehicle for communication between the patient and the therapist. Adapted from Child-Centered Therapies, Person-Centered Therapies are used to help overcome behavioral and emotional challenges of adults (Desnoyers-Hurley & Hurley, 1987; Morrison & Newcomer, 1975). In their two case studies with one 24-year-old male and one 22-year-old female, Demanchick et al. (2003) implemented adapted Person-Centered Therapies model in order to obtain relatedness and communication with their therapists. The principle of a person-centered approach included non-judgmental, emotionally supportive atmosphere, where the clients were free to play, self-express, and learn emotional self-regulation without being directed, interfered, or judged by the therapist. The clients were observed during 23 sessions with the aim of documenting the qualities of participant changes. According to interview data and rating scales of behavior, the two participants flourished when they had the opportunity to feel safe, trusted, and accepted. Moreover, the participants were able to adjust to changes and transitions without major stress. The playful treatment empowered and increased confidence in adult participants (Demanchick et al., 2003).

Play in adults’ life is drawn to forms of recreation, playing of games (both online and real-time), and other relaxation methods. One example of advance play is the
illustration of the study of a health-oriented game. Within the medical domain, greater attention has been given to designing of electronic games promoting healthy living. For instance, Grimes et al. (2010) conducted a real-world deployment of a mobile game called OrderUP! with twelve African Americans in the Atlanta, Georgia metropolitan area with the objective of assessing how healthy eating can be encouraged through a casual mobile game during three weeks. Data was collected from participants through surveys, diaries and interviews. The participants “described not simply what they learned, but how what they learned applied to their lives” (p. 245). Their self-evaluation helped the participants to spread the word about the information that they learned. Participants were willing to learn more about healthy habits, and improve their well-being. Moreover, the health-related engaging dialogues facilitated atmosphere of support, encouragement, and understanding in the network of participants (Grimes et al., 2010). Similarly, Knowles’ (1973) first assumption in Andragogy addresses and advocates for changes in self-conception.

Some examples of a play element in the form of games for educational purposes (both physical and intellectual) were found in the studies of De Grove et al. (2013); Dye et al. (2009); Green and Bavelier (2006); Li (2010); Hutton and Sundar (2010); Okagaki and Frensch (1994); Studenski et al. (2010). The contribution of playing digital games is enhancement of metacognition, speed of processing, and spatial reasoning among college-age adolescents and adults. Some studies viewed educational games and their benefits from different angles, too. With educational purpose in mind, De Grove et al. (2013) questioned to what extent the game experiences in terms of enjoyment differ
between commercial and special-purpose educational games when both are used in a language learning context. After distributing game experience questionnaire to 62 adults learning German, a repeated measure mixed method model results unfolded that learners negatively reacted to the idea of language learning through digital games. The researchers stated that “it would be more correct to state that digital games might be intrinsically motivating on the condition that they are used by people accepting them as tools for learning” (p. 31).

**Adult Play as a Component of Leisure.** In modern play literature there is an argument for the importance of play and leisure in the theorizing of adult learning and adult education. Any adult education discourse which excludes consumer culture and leisure fails to engage with the very 'experiences' of the everyday existence of adults which is so often claimed to be at the heart of adult educators' concerns (Edwards & Usher, 1997). Leisure literature promotes the importance of play in adults’ lives. However, it primarily focuses on play is that it is one of the many activities that adults engage in when they have free time and are not working (Guitard et al., 2005).

Play is embedded in organizational life (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). Its role is to facilitate and encourage people to maintain more flexibility by occasionally experimenting behaviors, or possible new identities. Mainemelis and Ronson (2006) wrote,

Play facilitates the full range of factors that enable individual creativity and that by nurturing play organizations can improve their creative output. When play is marginalized by being viewed as detrimental to work its benefits to creativity are
also likely to be marginalized. [...] Full benefits of play to creativity are more likely to be realized when play is accepted and encouraged as an integral part of organizational life (p. 85).

Research demonstrates that encouraging children to learn through play facilitates healthy development in all areas, including cognition, language, social/emotional behavior, and problem-solving skills. So, why not allow adults have play in their lives? Mainemelis and Ronson (2006) suggest that during the play of an individual “problem framing, divergent thinking, mental transformations, practice with alternative solutions, and evaluative ability are all facilitated” (p. 95). By inclusion in normal social play the nature of relationships is altered in organizational settings. Informal play enables people to relate personally to one another. “Play helps organizational members to feel comfortable with and trust one another; it lets group members know that they are part of the group, preventing them in that way from feeling alienated” (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, p. 105). The previously discussed benefit for creativity is increased during the play activities at workplace, too. The factor of psychological safety (i.e. being free from evaluation and being unconditionally accepted) for experimenting with diverse ideas and processes removes anxiety from the player (Rogers, 1954). Varied perspectives to the dynamics of the workplace can be observed in diverse empirical organization research. Such areas of research explore collective identity, psychological adjustments to the office environment, and organizational culture (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006). Play has been shown to be beneficial for adults in the organizational settings for several reasons. It relieves boredom and reduces stress, decreases aggression and anxiety, has an element of
fun and enjoyment, increases group cohesion, improves work quality and work efficiency (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009; Guitard et al., 2005). In this respect of identity formation, parallels can be seen with the Andragogy theory assumptions.

In order to investigate how play is used in organizations and whether it facilitates the workplace creativity, West et al. (2013) recorded and transcribed in average 50-minute semi-structured interviews with ten creativity consultants and seven play advocate consultants of different nationalities, within the age range of 28 to 69. The participants were requested to define and exemplify playfulness in workplace, as well is its relation to creativity. The qualitative data analysis allowed researcher to seek patterns and themes, and code those themes under categories. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the participants found it hard to define play. However, they mentioned board-games, word games, role-plays, social team building exercises, physical, silly and pointless games as what they used with their clients. Also, it emerged from the interviews that “play promotes organizational creativity by increasing openness, intrinsic motivation, and by building collaborative relationship needed to co-create and innovate” (West et al., 2013, p. 11). When encouraged to play, a worker exercises non-judgement; they are fostered to explore and make mistakes. Play behavior stimulates mental flexibility and energizes the player. It engages the player into the work organization community, brings psychological safety, and breaks hierarchical barriers. That is why the business world values the benefits of play among adults in the workplace (Guitard et al., 2005). “High job complexity environments increase the likelihood of play as engagement, which increases, in turn, the likelihood of people’s creativity on their work
tasks through the cognitive, affective, motivational, and skill conditions” (Mainemelis & Ronson, 2006, p. 109). Among many benefits of play, it is also worth adding that play in adults’ life is “a state of mind, an internal predisposition that is composed of creativity, curiosity, sense of humor, pleasure, and spontaneity” (Guitard et al., 2005, p. 19). These would perfectly align with Houle’s (1972) definition of adult education - people alone or in institutional settings endeavor to improve themselves or the general public by expansion their skill, knowledge, or responsiveness.

The Role of Play in Adult Education. The reference to the role of play in children education is well-described in previous sections of this manuscript. The benefits of play in early education included but was not limited to cognitive development (Piaget, 1962), development of abstract and imaginative thinking (Vygotsky, 1967), physical development (Linsey & Colwell, 2003), socialization (Brown, 2009), problem-solving skills and creativity (Rubin, 1982), assimilation of the new information and accommodation to the reality of the world (Smith & Pellegrini, 2008), and language learning (Crystal, 1998). Some elements of play, in their various forms of a human activity as such similarly were found in adults’ learning. Howsoever play might be, simple or complex, challenging or gentle, physical or intellectual, orderly or disorderly, competitive or cooperative, planned or spontaneous, solitary or social, it is a balance of anticipation, surprise, pleasure, understanding, strength, and poise (Eberle, 2014). Adult play has been presented in different forms in education - through simulation games (Brougère, 1999; Corbeil, 1999; Kovalik & Kovalik, 2002), robotics (Hood & Hood, 2005; Klassner, 2002; Ringwood et al., 2005; Liu et al., 2010), and many more.
Researchers studying playful instruction looked at play from different angles and perspectives.

**Adults’ Classroom and Play.** Irrespective of the age deviance, play is directly associated with oral language use and communication through the target language (Dunn & Herwig, 1992; McCune-Nicolich & Bruskin, 1982). Play is not only significant for children, but it is also critical for adult development. An aspect of the adult identity is built upon the heritage of a playful childhood and this playfulness must be renewed on each level of adult development (Erikson, 1972, p. 158). Erikson is one of the few developmental theorists who advocates for play as an important aspect of the emotional life of an adult. Guitard et al. (2005) proposed that the imagination of children later develops into creativity in adulthood.

It has been shown that a playful learning environment is conducive to larger amounts of participation. An emotional investment in what has normally been thought of as only a cognitive exercise, in the formal classroom may help in the learning process. Dewey proposed the idea that humans remember best what they experience emotionally (Dewey, 1944/2009). The incorporation of some form of play can assist an adult apprentice to achieve integrated learning experience where the experiences and talents of all are utilized. Playful adults are more likely to demonstrate curiosity and seek a diverse knowledge (Proyer, 2011). Examples of activities of playing video games, role-plays, creative drama, and imaging oneself to be a child indicate the increment of scores on tests as well as manifest the importance of the experienced emotions (Hutton & Sundar, 2010; Karakelle, 2009; Karwowski & Soszynski, 2008; Zabelina & Robinson, 2010). In the
twofold aim of Proyer’s (2011) study the researcher was trying to compare and see a
relationship between psychometric intelligence and self-estimates of intelligence with
playfulness with 254 adult psychology class students. Also, the study tested whether
playfulness relates to successful test taking during an exam. Data for further analysis was
collected through quantitative research tools (The Intelligence Structure Test, Adult
Playfulness Scale, and Measure for Self-estimated Intelligence). Descriptive statistics and
reliability analyses were computed for the Adult Playfulness Scale for psychometric
intelligence and self-estimated intelligence. Differences between the two groups were
examined by means of t-tests for independent samples (Proyer, 2011). The author stated,
that even though playful people didn’t consider themselves to be the most intelligent
people (hypothesizing, perhaps, that a playful adult might have an image of a non-
serious, and non-conscientious person), their results indicated the opposite. The playful
students performed well in tests and academic performance was excelled.

The implication of play in the adult classroom has been documented as beneficial
in several higher education settings - in university courses, language learning programs,
foreign language classrooms, and second language environment. In his case study with 70
university students, Rice (2009) was inquiring about the role of playful learning
approaches for students in an architecture school. The analysis of semi-structured
questionnaire and focus-group interviews about the inclusion of play revealed that play
contributed to generation of enjoyment, motivation, engagement, alternative point of
view as part of the process of learning. Ringwood et al. (2005) advocate for use of
technology in undergraduate engineering degree programs, such as the use of generic
engineering technology like Lego Mindstorms in order to engender creativity, enjoyable practical experience, meaningful group exercise, and so forth. The mentioned characteristics of human feelings and behavior are similarly derived from the Andragogy assumption of changes in self-concept.

Scholars studying play in adults’ education also examined the advantages of collaborative game-play in language learning classrooms (Bell, 2005, 2012; Bell et al., 2014; Belz, 2002; Bushnell, 2008; Chen et al., 2010; De Grove et al., 2013; Heidari-Shahreza, 2018; Kovalik & Kovalik, 2002; Pomerantz & Bell, 2007; Piirainen–Marsh & Tainio, 2009; Sevy-Biloon, 2017; Warner, 2004). For instance, Chen et al. (2010) reported about the benefits of play in their study with ten freshmen English class students in the University of Taiwan. They examined the effectiveness of incorporating playful game-based English learning system (GPS_E) into low-achievement English learning classes. The data collected through a survey about students’ E-learning and computer usage experiences, along with questionnaire, was analyzed quantitatively. Within subject T-test was conducted for investing the effectiveness of applying this system. The results of the study concluded that because play and learning are fully integrated the students are intrinsically motivated to learn. Some interesting qualities of play implementation in the adult classroom research can also be read in Harris and Daley’s (2008) action research and a self-study. The scholars explored relational, experiential, metaphoric, integrative, and empowering qualities of play and their contribution to social capital. The participating university early childhood preservice teachers and groups of trade and general students talked about the qualities of play that “fostered learning by enriching
adult learners’ engagement, cooperation and sense of connectedness with one another, with people, resources and information beyond their group” (p. 68). The assumption of self-diagnostic feature of adult learning theory begs to be equalized in this context.

Parallel to benefits of play implementation in the face-to-face adult classroom, language learning through play has also been researched in online and virtual networking settings. In his study Warner (2004) posed questions about what types of play students use in the network-based medium, when and how those types of play appear, and if there is a contribution of ludic language to the study of foreign language acquisition and pedagogy. The descriptive analysis of students’ transcripts from two university level online German courses (a second-semester beginning-level course and a conversation course attended by advanced students) revealed for Warner (2004) the importance of considering definitions of play as analytical guidelines rather than absolutes when experimenting with play in online platform. He found that a large portion of the language used online cannot be described using standard referential definitions of communication, but still that language was playful in nature. Once again, the study confirmed the ambiguity of play and especially its definition in different contexts.

Playful Language Instruction

In the adult classroom the manifestation of play and playful instruction mostly appear in the form of games. In a handful of studies L2 researchers also saw the benefits of play in the adult classroom, but those play elements were limited to language play only. A study with 82 MBA students performed gamelike task cues (puzzle solutions) exhibited that individuals who framed their task as play were mostly concerned about the
quality of their task behaviors, while work framed participants were more attentive to the quantity of their performance output (Glynn, 1994). Games also increased 30 fourth-semester beginner EFL university students’ abilities to speak in simple guided conversations (Sevy-Biloone, 2017). In order to find out how to motivate students who would otherwise choose not to study non-mandatory English as a university course, the researcher questioned participants about their learning styles. Analyzing participants’ opinion, Sevy-Biloone (2017) concluded that students gained more intrinsic motivation to learn English after the teacher’s implementation of play in the language learning classroom, which in its turn, brought enjoyment to learners. In like manner, Bushnell (2008) made an inquiry with two second-semester students of Japanese as L2 learners about functions of the language play as a resource for engaging in social interaction. Through conversation analysis of the data he recognized that the task that was designed as play forced the students to “re-conceptualize language play as a possible motivator and facilitator rather than as disruptive, ‘off-task’ behavior” (p. 64). At the mentioning of the social aspect of the language play on the language learning classroom, Belz’s (2002) study with 31 advanced English-speaking students of German language studying at a US higher institution suggested that in the process of language learning, L2 play might offer insight into changes in learner’s self-conceptualizations. Experimental assignments, oral interviews, videotaped classroom discourses, surveys, and written journal entries uncovered the benefits of the playful environment which not only contributed to language acquisition, but to the multicompetence of the language learner. In regards to well-informed adult learners, Knowles (1973) also acknowledged the importance of exposing
adult learner to larger models of performance in the third assumption of adult learning theory.

One attribute of language play in the classroom is the display of humor, laughter, and enjoyment. In their study of adult language play in a foreign language classroom Pomerantz and Bell (2011) highlight the importance of humor and humorous interactive exchange. They claim that foreign language classroom humor “allows us [educators] to see the extent to which learners actually break free of the restrictive patterns of interaction” (p. 157), how the learners position themselves, and manage their social relationship. The benefits of humorous language play and its reflection of the level of the language learner’s proficiency are highlighted in Heidari-Shahreza’s (2018) study with 86 Iranian 13-18 years old mid-novice mid-intermediate, and mid-advanced EFL learners. To document episodes of language play, data was collected and analyzed within the mixed methods research design and Conversation Analysis framework. The audio and video recordings of 90-minute sessions of four classes analyzed through NVivo qualitative software manifested that the learners’ gained control over their second language as the learners' humorous language play seemed to become increasingly more relevant to their learning materials. Similarly, Bell (2005) demonstrated that humor in a native speaker and a non-native speaker’s interaction is the predictor of an involvement of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and cultural elements that are too subtle or complex for L2 speakers to interpret out of the classroom. Bell (2012) also examined Language Related Episodes (LRE) in her study with 16 adult ESL learners enrolled in a US Intensive English Program. Going through the observations, audio recordings of whole class and
pair and group interactions, and personal notes (doing both qualitative and quantitative analysis), Bell (2012) inferred that language play facilitates acquisition of L2 form and meanings, and suggested a future research on focus on playful language forms.

In the modern technological society, the implementation of play in adult language learning has also been performed through robotics and artificial intelligence (Chang et al., 2010; Moundridou & Kalinoglou, 2008; Mubin et al., 2013; Whittier & Robinson, 2007). In the line of empirical research and literature review reports, scholars attempted to gather evidence about students’ attitudes and feelings towards the use of robotics and technology in the language learning classroom. Specifically, they focused on documenting student satisfaction and self-efficacy, low anxiety level, and evidence of engagement in enjoyable playful learning setting (Liu et al., 2010). The vast majority of studies of adult language learning through robotics has concluded in using robots who would successfully replace classroom teachers. Lego robotics has been viewed as authentic problem-solving tool mainly for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) classroom for both children and adults. In a foreign or second language classrooms there were developed interactive robot as social partners and teaching assistants in an English language class. Also, storytelling robots have been designed to improve vocabulary teaching and acquisition (Weininger & Shield, 2003; Weinberg & Yu, 2003; Wu et al., 2008; You et al., 2006).

The importance of play in the life of humanity irrespective of the physical age of a human is beautifully described by Mainemelis and Ronson (2006). They wrote,
In the adult life play continues to be woven into the fabric of our culture. In large part, play is our culture, in the form of music, drama, novel, celebrations, dances, and festivals. Play shows us our common humanity. It shows us how we can be free within the societal structures that allow us to live with others. It is the genesis of innovation, and allows us to deal with an ever-changing world (p. 199).

Play is equally important in the higher education setting. However, research that centers on the presence and use of a play element for purposes of teaching and learning languages within formal adult learning contexts has not yet been created. The current study addresses the lack of empirical research on playful language instruction in adult language learning classroom. Research studies on adult playfulness have so far been focused on quantitative research methods that capture functions and perceptions of play without room for real examples. There are several empirical studies about playfulness in education, but never in a second language classroom. Moreover, Playful Language Instruction has never been considered as a refinement of communicative language skills among adult language learners. The purpose of this self-study is manifold. With the final goal of improvement of my own playful language instruction in an L2 higher education setting, the current study is examining and describing the implementation of PLI within Adult Learning Theory frames. The emphasis of self-study as a research method is important for understanding the phenomenon of PLI for adult language learners for the profession of language instruction and teaching studies.

Increasing the understanding of adult PLI can potentially assist those who work with adults through language education and those who advocate communicative language
teaching to lobby for more opportunities for interaction and communication through play. Studying the play in the classroom imply that play is valuable for children, and that value can be applied for adults as well (Baptiste, 1995). This review of the literature presented concepts identified in the studies that contribute to the understanding of play in higher education language learning setting. The different viewpoints of play were described through the attributes of play and play theories.

In this literature review, play in the lives of adults has been examined in conjunction with the theories of play and adult learning theory. As indicated above, existing research has determined that there is a need for alternative teaching methods to improve communicative skills of adult L2 learners. The benefits of playful language learning with adult students have been identified as a key to successful interaction. The increment of the ability to speak and demonstration performance output were shown in the studies of Bushnell (2008), Glynn (1994), and Sevy-Biloon (2017). Belz (2002) found changes in L2 learners’ self-conceptualization as a gain for adult language learners. The manifestation of humor and humorous interactive exchange as contributors of lowering the affective filters during L2 learning were imaged by Bell (2005) and Heidari-Shahreza (2018). And finally, the facilitation of acquisition of L2 form and meaning through playful activities was a major finding for adult L2 learning (Bell, 2012).

Through this research project I add to existing research by describing how I engage in playful language instruction with four L2 learners within the context of Adult Learning Theory and PLI framework. The existing research mostly has indicated the impact play element has on children’s learning. In this study I also contribute to existing
research by describing the lived experiences of change in self-concept, relating background knowledge to the newly acquired, stimulating better models of performance, and finally, putting problem-centeredness by adult language learners carried out within PLI framework. The current study contributes to the small number of previous research studies on the play element in the L2 setting as well as allows me to self-reflect on my role as an L2 instructor. As an L2 educator, I aimed to enhance my knowledge and improve on my vocabulary teaching in order to better support the learners in my program and in the future teaching endeavors. I also targeted to support all of my colleagues by leading them to deeper understanding of play elements while increasing their confidence and fostering implementation of alternative teaching approaches.

Influence “on the move toward self-study has been the growing involvement of international researchers in teacher education who bring with them diverse intellectual traditions, mostly tapping the humanities rather than the social sciences” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 14). I believe my ethnic and cultural background of an international scholar will bring into play my unique and distinctive professional experiences. I aspire to support language instructors through this collaborative apprenticeship approach by adopting a co-learner position with instructors providing an environment that encourages deliberation and reasoning. Through the use of a self-study, I examined my PLI of a in an adult L2 vocabulary teaching context.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODS AND RESEARCH APPROACH

Research Questions

To ascertain whether the mediating introduction of Playful Language Instruction (PLI) via robotics in the adult L2 classroom contributes to vocabulary retention and effective language learning in the adult English language classroom, in the first chapter of this manuscript I centered two research questions. My first research question was “How does embedded playful instruction enhance vocabulary learning practice in the context of an adult L2 learning classroom?” More precisely, I was interested to explore to what extent robotics contributed to vocabulary learning efficacy and communication enhancement in low-intermediate adult L2 classroom. To learn about how vocabulary teaching through the PLI led to possible improvements and modifications of my teaching became possible through the second research question - “To what extent does the navigation of playful robotics contribute to improvement and change in my teaching practice?”

By combining three conceptual lenses of the theories of play, Communicative Language Teaching, and the Adult Learning Theory and synthesizing their shared commonalities, I found common patterns that these theories share. Theorizing relationships of knowledge and practice of teaching adult L2 learners let me reinvent CLT practice. These frameworks helped me to determine whether my vocabulary teaching practice is consistent with theoretical perspectives. The interconnection between these theories resulting in conceptual framework “led to particular ways of teaching, of
coming to understand that teaching through research, and of representing that understanding to others” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 821). The three-cycle Venn diagram is showing the synthesis of shared commonalities between the theories of play, Communicative Language Teaching, and the Adult Learning Theory (see Figure 1). The overlapping circles are the elements of three sets of theories and approaches showing the possible relation and shared commonalities between those sets. All these sets share one commonality - augmenting lateral thinking and adapting acquired knowledge for social assimilation are pivotal for all frameworks.

Figure 1 Venn Diagram of ALT, CLT, and Theories of Play. Shared patterns of theories.
The conceptual framework was operationalized through the self-study activities. With an intention to answer the research questions, I generated my reflective narrative as the primary data. I reflected upon my instruction data that I collected in Summer of 2017. Used were the following instruments, materials, and data collection methods: a) Anxometer - which documents adult language learners’ level of comfort or anxiety during the implementation of the interactive activity (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), b) Bee-bot – a playful robot that had been operated during the vocabulary learning activities. Use to collect instructional data; the audiovisual data of the students’ playful activity, c) a checklist as an instrument to measure adult L2 learners’ self-confidence evolution (Sevilla Morales & Méndez Pérez, 2015) before the first and after the final activities with playful robotics, and d) a semi-structured interview with four questions during which the participants were asked to provide commentary on their emotional and perceptual experience on the PLI with playful robotics. The choice of instruments and methods of data collection that were previously generated by other scholars concur with my philosophical insights. These materials, instruments and methods were aimed at conducting data collection for further analysis, as well as facilitation of my reflections during the self-study process.

Research that primarily focuses on the presence and use of playful language instruction for children has been well documented. However, the use of a playful element in teaching adult L2 learners has not yet been created. For this dissertation project, a literature review was conducted to explore how the terms play and playfulness were used within some literature. More precisely, an inquiry was made to explore the
implementation of playful instruction in both K-12 and college level teaching. Through the findings from the literature review it was identified that defining the terms play and playfulness is complex. The review suggested that play had been seen as beneficial for children’s cognitive development. This inference led to the assumption that the implementation of playful instruction in adult classrooms might as well be valuable. In spite of the advantages of playful language instruction, it was detected that there was a lack of such instruction in college level settings. The instructors’ pedagogical decision of implementation of a type of play generally concluded in the form of digital games or language play. Play and playfulness were not the most popular terms in regards of teaching and learning in college level classes. However, the benefits of playful instruction are undeniable, and experiences with play element teaching and learning may benefit students’ individual and group level learning, specifically, L2 learning in the CLT setting.

What is play and how is it implemented in a college setting? What is its potential relationship with the study of adult L2 learning? How does it relate to adult learning theories and effective practices of teaching and learning in higher education? What are some factors of play element implementation that predict success for a language teacher and a learner? This practice is an area that has yet to be studied more deeply. Without constant inquiry, one’s teaching turns to a trivial and superficial practice (Clarke & Erickson, 2004). The practice stops to be professional and is distinguished as a technical work. “When inquiry is reframed in terms of ‘how students learn,’ then it becomes embedded in practice and teacher learning is a natural (even unavoidable) outcome” (p. 58). The teacher’s professional growth or stagnation can become evident when teacher’s
teaching styles and beliefs are observed. “What you do in your teaching reflects more strongly in what students take away from a course than what you say,” suggests Berry and Loughran (2004, p. 26). Based on their personal practices and observations, Tidwell and Fitzgerald (2004) infer that some scholars recognize the anterior issues that they had in their teaching performance, namely their aspiration of being an expert in the classroom. Through the self-study research method of personal pedagogy Deborah Tidwell acknowledges the imperfection of the ‘teacher-expert model’ seeking new ways of optimal teaching practices (Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2004).

The teacher-researcher approach to my own practice of an L2 instructor in an adult classroom is closely related to my own beliefs (Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2004). The self-study approach “incorporates a broader, more global labeling of a pedagogical phenomenon with a clear connection to beliefs and values” (p. 93). The intention of this study through the self-study research method was to comprehend thoroughly my role as a L2 instructor, as well as to critically analyze and critically overview my own teaching practices. Moreover, by engaging myself in a deliberate examination of my teaching practices I was seeking to explore whether my teaching aligned with my beliefs and my teaching practices. Learning through ‘self’ allowed me to recognize my concerns, issues, tensions and dilemmas in my L2 vocabulary instruction.

Without recognizing, exploring, and knowing one’s own practice “teaching becomes repetitive, not reflective – merely the duplication of models and strategies learned elsewhere and brought to bear unproblematically in one’s own classroom” (Clarke & Erickson, 2004, p. 59). When discussing the form of inquiry, Clarke and
Erickson (2004) acknowledge that in some fields inquiry methods are highly delineated and specific. In others, “the methods employed are more flexible and responsive to the context of the investigation” (p. 54). One way or the other, no matter how the form is, inquiry is coupled in professional practice.

In self-study the question of generalizability may take the form of direct reference to theory, “or it may take the form of the conscious setting of the case within a particular context or problem of potential general interest” (Ham & Kane, 2004, p. 115). It is worth mentioning, that by circumstances both my mother and I graduated from the same state linguistic university. We both majored in Applied Linguistics. Being raised in a family where females attend the same college and chose the profession of a language teacher, it is hard to be indifferent towards the problems that are being discussed in your familial setting. Undoubtedly, the female part of my extended family was an initial influence on my perception of the world and my own positioning and beliefs about that world. The benevolent mission of assisting learners in learning languages was gradually becoming a hereditary process to which one is bound forever. Eventually, one day, when I ended up being a teacher myself, I dealt with language instruction problems first-hand. On the top of being a classroom teacher I realized that my additional language knowledge was in high demand among adult learners, too. Tutoring English, Russian, and Spanish languages after regular work hours became a natural outwork. Evening time adult language learners took up learning because of specific needs and dissatisfaction of their current quality of life. And so, typically this kind of anecdotes provoke attended teachers to start to form their perceptions and beliefs about adult language teaching. More
specifically, teachers start rethinking their actions and begin looking for alternative teaching strategies. As LaBoskey (1997) writes, “my passionate creed is that educators need to be thoughtful about their work, which means they must question assumptions, consider multiple perspectives, avoid judgements, recognize complexity, and be primarily concerned with the needs of their students” (p. 161). Ergo, self-study takes the form of inquiry where educators are examining their beliefs and actions through the context of their work as educators in order to raise pedagogical questions (Whitehead, 1993).

Sometimes, teachers’ questions emerge “from a frustration, a practice puzzle or a contradiction in a setting. [...] Formalizing the puzzle of practice into research is a way of working better rather than doing more of the same only harder” (Anderson et al., 2007, p. 125). In order to better familiarize myself with the challenges and frustrations of L2 learners, I endeavored to write my MA paper on problems that I encountered most when I was teaching in Armenia. More specifically, I ambitiously looked at specific grammar categories in the English and Spanish languages that caused most issues during the process of these languages. While I was systematically researching the issues with grammar, “I began to see the use of others’ voices to examine their understanding as a way of actually distancing myself from my own practice through examining others’ perceptions of that practice” (Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 77). The findings and the literature review in my thesis were a contribution to my own knowledge of the issues and challenges of L2 learners. Extensive readings and conclusions were pointing at how others interpret their findings and deal with issues. These findings by all means contributed to my overall competence on the topic that I thought to be problematic.
However, I was looking for solutions for my specific classroom population and my own teaching methods. The question was still ‘how can I improve my teaching practice’? (Whitehead, 1993)

It is important to emphasize that self-study is a field of inquiry in its own right which values the relationship between teaching and learning, and that the understanding of this relationship is essential (Clarke & Erickson, 2004). My choice of self-study as a research method was aligned with my identity of an international researcher. For my dissertation the self-study research method was not arbitrary and it was well-considered and deliberately selected. “The influence on the move toward self-study has been the growing involvement of international researchers in teacher education who bring with them diverse intellectual traditions, mostly tapping the humanities rather than the social sciences” write Bullough and Pinnegar (2001, p. 14). Another major justification of self-study research method choice was that among other learning theories, Adult Learning Theory had been of broader interest to the self-study community as a worthwhile form of professional development in college level education. Wilcox et al. (2004) acknowledged that “adult learning theory offers a sound rationale and foundation for using self-study as an approach to educational development and that it is particularly well-suited to efforts at furthering the scholarship of teaching” (p. 289). They believed that there are important links between self-study and self-driven, transformative avenues to adult learning.

In addition to the recognition of the primacy of my own self in the reflective inquiry, I also acknowledged that as an educator I was both “theory generator and theory user” (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 10), and that the intent of my reflection needed to be
based on closing the theory-based gaps specific to my practice. The reason behind the educator’s reflective inquiry is the enhancement of their understanding the very teaching practice, as well as extension of the underconsidered theories within their practice. In their book, Cole and Knowles (2000) describe several forms of teacher development initiatives (individual or group work, writing, reading, work with colleagues, community volunteerism, etc.). However, in order to take charge of their professional development and basically to contribute to the answering of institutional problems, Cole and Knowles (2000) set forth teacher-researcher model, where the educator studies one’s professional practice and associate those practices with ongoing improvement of teaching and learning. By advocating teacher-researcher operation, Cole and Knowles (2000) conclude that “through systematic reflection and analysis of practice, teachers can take charge of their professional development. They have the potential to substantially contribute to the resolution of institutional problems and issues” (p. 13).

The purpose of this study was to explore my vocabulary teaching practices to adult second language (L2) learners using the Playful Language Instruction (PLI) approach. Namely, to address the benefits of implementation of playful language instruction in adult L2 classroom. The opportunity to approach my teaching and the classroom as a site of inquiry became especially powerful incident. I critically reflected on my personal experiences (Samaras & Freese, 2006).

**Self-Study**

Scholars who advocate for self-study research method are in continuum attempts of finding best ways to address their inquiries (Samaras, 2010). The designs are multiple
in nature and they have been elaborated by teacher educators. Self-study as a methodology is overall qualitative in nature (LaBoskey, 2004; Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009; Tidwell et al., 2009). “Qualitative studies tend to employ flexible designs and subjective methods - often with small samples of research participants - in seeking to generate tentative new insights, deep understandings, and theoretically rich observations” (Rubin & Bellamy, 2012, p. 53). The main reason of the qualitative research method choice is related to the concerns of the qualitative research, namely being less preoccupied with “generating conclusive findings and more concerned with generating tentative new insights and helping you consider possibilities you may not have considered” (Rubin & Bellamy, 2012, p. 244). The findings are not generalizable to populations, thereby the term transferability is preferred over the term generalizability among qualitative methodologists. For this reason, the study should provide enough information to assist the user to judge to what extent the qualitative findings are transferable to exploiter’s specific concerns (Rubin & Bellamy, 2012).

Clarke and Erickson (2004) remarked that the definition of self-study will be difficult to frame in a formal statement, as “self-study takes on many forms of inquiry and includes practitioners at all levels of the educational enterprise. Underlying all forms, is the analysis of one’s own practice with all the attendant challenges and celebrations associated with such scrutiny” (p. 55). “There is no one way, or correct way, of doing self-study. Rather, how a self-study might be ‘done’ depends on what is sought to be better understood” (Loughran, 2004b, p. 15). The particularity of a self-study is its tendency to be methodologically framed through the issues and concerns under
consideration. The use of the most appropriate method for uncovering evidence emerges in accord with the purpose of the study (Loughran, 2004b). It’s been decades since self-study made its way to a legitimate form of research (Samaras et al., 2004; Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2004). Self-study practitioners expect their research to help future educators in establishing their own practice and voice as teachers, and their own moral attitude towards their students. There is no one and the only one true way to do self-study (Loughran, 2004b). Self-study is a self-directed and rewarding experience for a professional, and how a self-study needs to be done is entirely depends on what tends to be understood. “The use of the term self-study is used in relation to teaching and researching practice in order to better understand: oneself; teaching; learning; and, the development of knowledge about these” (Loughran, 2004b, p. 9). The work of teachers and teacher educators themselves called forth emergence of documentation of teaching and teacher education practices.

Teachers’ attempts to better understand the issues and challenges of teaching and learning have led to an increasing focus on researching their practice that will better inform them about their own teaching. The self-study community is composed of educators who wish to enhance their students’ learning, who are exploring their professional proficiency, and who investigate questions of practice (Pinnegar & Russell, 1995; Wilcox et al., 2004). Self-study is a genuine process that relies on recognition of encouragement of aspects of the self (social, emotional and intellectual) (Griffiths et al., 2004).
However, can practitioners research themselves? Justification of the choice of a self-study research method and its validity has been a topic of concern among self-study scholars (Feldman et al., 2004; Ham & Kane, 2004). When the practitioner and the researcher are the same person, to past the test of honesty and prejudgment in assessing self-study as a valid and convincing research method is hard.

The validity and power of self-study as research therefore lies in large part not merely in the intimacy that the practitioner has with his/her own practice, but in the special combination of perspectives that practitioner-researchers are able to bring to bear on the phenomenon of teaching: the intimate knowledge of the participant, and the self-critical data collection (Ham & Kane, 2004, p. 128).

Trustworthiness of the evidence made several scholars provide potential interrogatory approaches and suggestions of categorical questions about research evidence (LaBoskey, 2004). The strength of self-study research method resides in its nature of active engagement and transformative power. The self-study method is acknowledging the humanity of teaching and learning at the personal level, as well as is contributing to educators’ responsibilities for their actions. “Thus, we might do well to identify each self-study as an exemplar of practice that provides a beginning rather than an ending to the validation process” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 1178).

Positioning of Instructor’s Self within Self-Study Research

Exploring my teaching identity involves examining my teaching beliefs and the alignment of my practices with those beliefs (Samaras & Freese, 2006). Potentially there might be issues with “critical rigor in the conduct of research done on one’s own
practices” (Ham & Kane, 2004, p. 143). Moreover, the practice of teaching and being a self-investigator should cope with the criticism due to the degree of stake of the researcher. However, in support of validity of the self-study research method Ham and Kane (2004) clarify that the self and positioning of the researcher should not be seen in a negative light, but should be perceived as the commitment and rigor that are articulated from another conceptual direction.

In their writing, Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) mention the existing and inevitable tension between “self and the arena of practice” (p. 15), at the same time recommending to keep the balance, and avoid producing a confessional or a traditional type of research, because by tipping towards one or the other extreme of the analyzed data the question of the research significance might be lost. Samaras and Freese (2006) suggest the complexity found within self-study research, which “involves study of the self and study by the self” (p. 10). They refute the creation of a simple, all-encompassing definition for self-study methodology. Self-study researchers acknowledge that within the reflective practice frame, some papers are very explicit in declaring the purpose and rationale for using this frame - that is “to better understand their own positioning and their subsequent learning about their practice from their use of these methods” (Clarke & Erickson, 2004, p. 52). Self-study researchers honestly review their own practice rather than merely systematize existing behaviors (Loughran, 2004a).

The importance of positioning a self-study researcher in the local context and developing insights that have relevance in that situation was also acknowledged by Kelchtermans and Hamilton (2004). The value of the meaningful and in-depth analysis of
the context and the researcher’s position in that context go hand in hand. In their interpretation of self-study that is “a mixture of systematic reflection or a form of inquiry that tries to answer relevant questions through a systematic collection of data and their analysis. To our analysis we bring an interpretative, interactionist and contextualized view” (Kelchtermans & Hamilton, 2004, p. 786). And so, when the focus of the inquiry is on one’s self, that’s the distinguishing characteristic of self-study as a variety of practitioner research (Feldman et al., 2004).

**Setting.** The reflective narrative for this dissertation study is based on my reflections during my eight-week teaching in a Culture and Intensive English Program (CIEP) in the Midwestern University in the United States. The Program offers five full sessions per year: two in the Fall semester, two in the Spring semester, and one in the Summer. Each session lasts eight weeks and includes 20 hours of class work per week. There are seven levels of instruction: Bridge - Beginner, Level 2 - High Beginner, Level 3 - Low Intermediate, Level 4 - Intermediate, Level 5 - High Intermediate, Level 6 - Advanced, and Level 7 - Academic. The CIEP curriculum is designed to meet the needs of international students and language learners, yet is flexible enough to allow teachers to make use of their individual strengths in teaching. The classes are student-centered and use the latest methods in the field of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL).

The overall mission of the CIEP is to provide international students with quality intensive academic English language instruction and a cultural orientation to the United States in preparation for study at the current university or other institution of higher learning. Through its many programs, events, and connections on and off-campus, the
CIEP seeks to accomplish teaching English for academic purposes to students already enrolled in academic programs of study or planning to enroll in academic programs at current university or another college or university; providing students with the cultural knowledge and awareness which they will need to function well both academically and socially; informing students about options and opportunities for academic study at university and encourage them to apply for admission; recruiting international students to the UNI campus for participating in the regular and special programs in order to develop cross-cultural and educational opportunities for both Americans and international students; and serving as a resource for faculty, staff, and students at university who are interested in international education or the teaching of English as a second language. The primary goal of the CIEP is to improve their students’ ability to communicate in English. They do this through speaking and listening practice in all classes, not just listening/speaking classes. Instructors of the program work with students to improve specific skills in grammar, writing, listening, speaking, and reading. With this said, increased trade and immigration that led to steady growth of adult language courses with immediate and practical use, and to a general consensus that such courses should be driven by student needs (Howatt, 1984).

The course goal of the Reading 3 class is to assist students to develop their competence by reading modified texts in relation to academic topics. The course objective is for students to practice critical thinking of basic concepts, note important concepts, and increase vocabulary. The level-appropriate expectations of the Student Learning Outcomes is that adult L2 learners are developing critical thinking skills
Data Collection. “Self-study is not a collection of particular methods but instead a methodology for studying professional practice settings” (Pinnegar, 1998, p. 33). Researchers closely monitor their settings, systematically collect data to present and capture the observations they make, study the research using other methodologies to understand their current practice, abstrusely consider their own experience and contribution to this setting, and reflect on any link of these possibilities in their efforts to understand. They use their study to show others what they have understood in their own practice, and eventually to improve and perfect the quality of their own practice direction (Pinnegar, 1998). Hoban (2004) writes,

To change teaching a researcher needs to stay ‘‘vulnerable’’ so that the data being collected cause some confusion, dilemmas, or uncertainty to initiate and sustain reflection. Otherwise, there is a tendency to collect data about trivial aspects of teaching that simply confirm existing interpretations of practice (p. 1065).
With the aim of collecting data about my teaching practices, to analyze the data, to act on discoveries resulting from it, and to communicate my practices with other professionals, my Academic Advisor distributed to potential participants the Consent Forms and Demographic Surveys. In the beginning of the third week and in the end of the seventh week of classes L2 learners were given a self-confidence checklist, with the objective of collecting information about the students' self-confidence levels while participating in oral communication tasks (pre- and post-). During the weeks of four, five, and six, before and after each activity, the students rated their anxiety by a ten-point Anxometer scale (six times in total). Alongside with the videotaped data, artifacts (actual performance of students’ activity and their notes) were analyzed to answer the research questions.

**The Teaching Context.** In their chapter overview Clarke and Erickson (2004) wished to shed light on the issues of the nature of learning as well as the learner who is positioned in the learning. Primarily, they wanted to define who the learner was.

The very act of posing this question suggests that there is some conceptual clarity to be gained by distinguishing between different types of learners, particularly because self-study projects most often entails an analysis of one’s own learning as an educator and/or the learning of our students (p. 43).

Likewise, as Knowles (1973), Clarke and Erickson (2004) addressed the importance of establishing official learning setting for adults. The formal learning environments need to consider why something is important for them to learn (letting learners know the objective), how adult learners can direct themselves through the new information (showing learners how), knowing learners’ experiences (relating the topic to learners’
background), acknowledge the readiness to learn (motivation); and finally assist adult learners to overcome suppressions, behaviors, and convictions about learning. By recognizing adult learners’ individual differences, variation of motivation, and reasons to learn, selective or ‘purposive sampling’ is yielded as the most informative to illuminate the topic under investigation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016).

The data for this self-study is collected from my instruction of four adult low-intermediate proficiency level international students. They were enrolled in an eight-week Intensive English Program at a comprehensive university in Midwest. Two students were from Colombia, one was from Japan, and one was from the Dominican Republic. Three students identified themselves as Spanish speakers; one student’s home language was Japanese. For keeping anonymity of the participants, in this self-study the participants are referred as Jp1, Sp1, Sp2, and Sp3.

For the purpose of answering my research questions, I proceeded with the Institutional Review Board process to acquire permission of collecting and using the data of my teaching from the level 3 reading class. The protocol for data collection was followed accordingly.

**Self-Narrative Derived from the Teaching Activity.** Decisions made about instruction are not spontaneous. “This belief and value structure is embedded in the decisions about instruction that are made” (Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 86). Narratives for evaluation of my teaching practice is the overview of elements of my own beliefs and values of L2 vocabulary instruction. Tidwell and Fitzgerald (2004) contend that the records by the observer give the sense of their values, as well the insights lying behind
those values. The narrative of my teaching with reflection on PLI in adult L2 classroom are the lenses through which I see into my own teaching practices (see Appendix A). My narrative captured my teaching experiences, the nuances of motivation, behavior and decisions. My reflective narrative piece was aimed at adding to the corpuses of knowledge of L2 educational practice by depicting the knowledge of my personal teaching. These reflections, in their turn, are projected to become a part of continuing education for other L2 instructors. More so, being reflective and looking inwards of others’ teaching practices leads to changes in educators themselves, thus leading to changes in their practices as well.

Questioning what happens in the classroom from the perspective of a teacher is central for a self-study research (Mitchell et al., 2013). Reflective practice through narratives of teachers’ experience is a powerful tool for examining researcher’s assumptions. In order to critically reflect on the narrative, it is important to institute some data sources. In her book *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences* Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008) describes the functions that narrative practices accomplish. She writes that narratives have different purposes, and that they can be in the form of argument, justification, memorizing, engaging, entertaining, and persuasion. Narratives are contextual and dynamic. Thus, they engage the audience in the experience of the narrator. And what is fascinating about narratives is that they can mobilize others into action for progressive change.

Riessman (2008) continues that “a good narrative analysis prompts the reader to think beyond the surface of text, and there is a move toward a broader commentary” (p.
13). The reflective narrative of the combination of interviews, the Anxometer, the verbatim transcripts of activities, the checklist, my personal notes and the collaborative analysis with my critical friend constituted data for this dissertation.

**Critical Friend.** In the majority of self-study research, we see that through working together in sharing ideas, issues and concerns, critical friends are quoted to have a crucial share. “The learning as a result of collaboration in self-study appears to be linked to the opportunity to access alternative perspectives on situations” (p. 158), writes Loughran (2004a). The role of a critical friend has been to extend the researcher’s worldview and have a meaningful outlook on some contexts. “Doing a self-study without assistance of a “critical friend” is not nearly as fruitful as with that kind of assistance” (Lighthall, 2004, p. 236) because as Loughran (2004b) positions, the critical friends bring “an avenue to alternative views. Alternative views therefore begin to challenge one’s privileged position, for, as they suggest, without such challenge, others’ agency and ability to learn are diminished” (p. 158).

With the clear aim of a validity check and an aid of alternative perceptions, my advisor, and my present dissertation Committee Chair served as a critical friend for my dissertation project. Considering the critical aspect of the self-study the exchanges and systematic re-examination of practices “are not casual conversations. Rather they are critical to the intentional interrogation which is at the heart of the process” (Lyons & Freidus, 2004, p. 1093). As a person who studies play through self-study, with the help of a critical friend “I would ‘check’ on the problematic perspectives and deal with the limitations of my own approach to the situation” (Wilcox et al., 2004, p. 287).
In order to avoid the blurring of the two roles of me as an instructor and a primary investigator of the study, it is crucial to have a critical friend during the process of the self-study. The moral and ethical nature of the practice needs to be considered. The role of a critical friend is to validate my research practice. Samaras and Freese (2006) encourage having a critical friend who will be helpful in “asking probing questions and critically analyzing the issues” (p. 59). They advocate the integration of a critical friend because “self-study necessitates a disposition of openness to outside views, questions, and critique” (p. 58). Tidwell and Fitzgerald (2004) add,

It is through this process of self-examination, of collaboration with a critical/collegial friend (or two), that self-study emerges as an experience with the potential to create an informed, entuned, opened self, interacting with others in ways that encourage and sustain learning for self and others. The results of such an experience in self-study about one’s beliefs and practices can be long ranging and widespread, affecting more than just the researcher, but also the environment in which the researcher teaches (p. 71).

Critical friends provide comparative perspectives from their former and current teaching experiences and institutions. As an avenue to alternative views, they “help practitioners to see beyond their own ‘world views’ and to broaden their perspective on situations in meaningful ways” (Loughran, 2004b, p. 158). As a part of this project and validation of interpretation of the collected data, I also had a critical friend for recognition of what I was really doing in my teaching in contrast to what I thought I was doing (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004). By revisiting the collected data and asking questions both to the
research participants and my critical friend I gained new insight and reshaped my practice.

To articulate my educational practice and what informs my thinking and motivates my actions I followed the guidelines determined by Bullough and Pinnegar (2001). According to their guidelines, the elements of trustworthy self-study should conclude in throwing “light on one's self and one’s connections to others” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 16). My self-study narrative was written in an authentic voice and revealed truths of human behavior.

**Teaching Activity as a Source for Generation of Reflective Narrative**

People express meanings in different modes. This multimodality can be through gestures, oral, visual, and writing media (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011). Lived experiences of people can be captured in a form of practices and texts. Pahl and Rowsell (2011) advocate for artifacts (similarly like texts) to be meaning makers as well. “Artifactual literacy allows meaning makers to bring in objects to educational contexts, and makes more explicit the role of material objects in literacy and their thing-like status,” wrote Pahl and Rowsell (2011, p. 133). This approach combines objects and stories attached to these objects. The introduction of the Bee-bot, its implication in the classroom, and overall student perception were imaged in my artifactual critical narrative. As it can be traced from ideology of text-based approaches to critical literacy,

Texts themselves are material, multimodal, and often linked to everyday objects. Their positioning within other cultural worlds construct and shape identities in practice and can alter or shift the positionings or cultural platforms from which
texts are made. By paying attention to these shifts and positionings, a more critical approach to text-making, rooted in the everyday world of cultural artifacts, comes into play (p. 134).

The critical analysis of my reflective narrative stemmed from analyzing textual artifacts in an interrogative way. These artifacts became helpful to develop critical analysis through discussion of emerging themes (Pahl & Rowsell, 2011). As I consider earlier, the previously mentioned theories informed the understanding of texts in context and the constant comparative method extended the reach of a critical literacy approach.

One way to critically read through my reflective narrative was interrogating my outlined meanings, values, and identities that I developed. For data analysis, the unit of my self-study was my personal teaching practice. My personal narrative was a primary data (or an artifact) for analysis. The artifactual critical analysis, comprised of my personal writing and my dialogue with the critical friend, was about rethinking the teaching context and situating meaning making.

In 1980, in their paper about theoretical bases of communicative approaches to L2 teaching and testing Canale and Swain questioned whether the language needs simply the vocabulary and conventional grammatical choices are specialized aspects of some particular subject-matter, or they are associated with more general communicative abilities such as the sociocultural, discourse, and strategic components. They were claiming that the design of teaching methods and assessment instruments need to “address not only communicative competence but also communicative performance”
They also pointed that competence cannot be directly measured, while performance is observable.

The philosophy behind the creation of my interactive activity with the play element in the adult L2 classroom streams from the students’ needs analysis where, besides learning from their textbook, “the ability to engage successfully in actual, everyday social interaction is largely developed through interaction with fictional characters in games and stories” (Cook, 2000, p. 153). The refinement of vocabulary knowledge for the purpose of communication practices can “reside within a skills repertoire or a cycle of skill-use during an activity. For example, there could be a progression from reading to note-taking to speaking for the achievement of a particular activity” (Breen & Candlin, 1980, p. 104). This continuity as clusters of potential continuities can be inherent in a single activity. These advantages of this type of continuity can serve the full process competences of learners—knowledge systems and abilities—and they can allow for differentiation. Learners need to be enabled to seek and achieve their own continuity and, therefore, the criteria for their own progress. In the process of accomplishing some immediate activity, learners will impose their own personal and interpersonal order and continuity upon that activity, the communication which the activity generates, the interpersonal, ideational and textual data which they act upon, and on the skills they need to use in the activity's achievement. [...] Once the teacher can accept that each of these areas provides potential continuity for different learners, it ceases to be a problem
if different learners pursue several routes or progress at different rates (Breen & Candlin, 1980, p. 104).

With these ‘progression from reading to note-taking to speaking’ assertion, the three interactive activities with robotics were aimed at documenting students’ communicative abilities, their interaction in L2 and the usage of previously learned and tested vocabulary (two-weeks spacing after formal vocabulary testing). The low-intermediate adult ESL students were taught the vocabulary of three textbook units during 8-week Reading level 3 class in the Intensive English Program. The participants were formally taught the vocabulary of each unit during the first, fourth, and seventh weeks of the class. During the second, fifth, and eight weeks the playful vocabulary retrieval activities were presented accordingly. Among other student learning outcomes of the Reading level 3 class of the program there was selection and application appropriately spelled vocabulary words from the text and application of vocabulary in sentences from leveled vocabulary list (Culture and Intensive English Program, n. d.).

**The Bee-Bot.** During the eight weeks, the students covered three units from the program assigned textbook and were taught 111 academic, multiword, and topic vocabulary words in the context. For the non-graded activities with the use of playful robotics (Bee-bot), the students were grouped by two people in each group (dyads). Flashcards with similar pictures of the topics featured in their textbook were placed on a desk. During each activity, one student from each group operated the Bee-bot towards the direction of the choices which seemed favorable for that group of students to discuss about. Bee-bot is an exciting colorful, easy-to-operate little robot designed for use by
young children. It is a great tool for teaching problem-solving and just having fun while operating its forward, back, left, and right directional keys. By agreeing in pairs which topic the students were going to discuss, their task was to operate the robot towards the preferred flashcard, and by pressing the green go button start the Bee-bot. The operation of the robot accelerated enthusiasm for experimentation and learning for people of all ages. The instructor handed out the list with directions and questions to be discussed in pairs. Students took notes during their discussion and prepared to communicate their opinions with the students from the other group. The instructor videotaped the discussion for further observation, transcription, coding, and analysis. As a source of information that was relatively unfiltered by the eyes of researchers and was not limited to preliminary hypotheses, the video had a number of clear advantages over other types of data. Video data was more “raw” than other forms of data, such as observations, and it was easier to return them to laboratory conditions for analysis (Jacobs et al., 1999). Video and audio recordings are “helpful in accessing information, as digital data can be easily stored and retrieved quickly to help recall events at a later time and as many times as required” (Hoban, 2004, p. 1046). Also, languages Other Than English teachers commonly video all students during activities where the students are speaking in the (foreign) language and use the video to formally grade their students on this skill. The video allows the teacher to re-listen and hence mark more accurately in the way that an essay being marked can be reread” (Mitchell, 2004, p. 1426).
Another advantage of using video data was its versatility, as it captured the process of the content and the classroom events. It recorded visual and verbal content. Unlike other forms of data,

Videos can be viewed by researchers from diverse backgrounds and disciplines, who might bring fresh perspectives to the data analyses. Based on their particular interests, observers from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds can examine many facets of the data, including topics ranging from gestures to behavioral or speech patterns. Specialists with domain-specific expertise can also join in on various analyses of the content (Jacobs et al., 1999, p. 721).

There was a minimal participation and feedback from the instructor during students’ oral discussion. Students had 10-15 minutes for preparation and five minutes for the final discussion. For more detailed analysis of the used vocabulary frequency, the researcher collected students’ notes (as an artifact) that they took. The activities were non-graded and took place during the last 15 minutes of the Reading level 3 class. It is important to note that the activities took place one week after the formal vocabulary testing with the aim of observing and documenting the effects of spacing and vocabulary retention and retrieval rate. Also, each student had a different peer during the three activities and had an opportunity to work in pairs with a different person (see Appendix B).

Anxometer. In communication, interlocutors are always engaged in sharing meaning (Breen & Candlin, 1980). The ideas which are exchanged during the communication contain various meanings. The interpersonal nature of communication is saturated “by personal and socio-cultural attitudes, values and emotions” (Breen &
Candlin, 1980, p. 91). These feeling and affects are the driving force behind the communication. “Language anxiety arises from personal and interpersonal anxieties; learner beliefs about language learning; instructor beliefs about language teaching; instructor-learner interactions; classroom procedures; and language test” (Young, 1991, p. 428). The anxiety thermometer or Anxometer (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) used as a data collection tool included six emotional states, and it was administered at the beginning and at the end of all three activities. This scale gathered information about students’ feelings regarding their non-graded pair-work activity participation. The Anxometer included such ascending rate of feelings as furious, very upset, moderately upset, concerned, calm, and happy. Before and after each activity students were asked to rate their feelings by checking what applied to their emotional state. Anxometers were on separate pieces of paper. Each student would put their name on the top of that paper, and after collecting that response the respondents didn’t have further access to their prior responses. Anxometers were referred to as affective filter measurements (Dulay & Burt, 1978) which were aimed at documenting emotional aspects that influence vocabulary learning. I comply with Krashen’s (1987) statement that “the lower the level of anxiety, the better the language acquisition” (p. 39).

Interviews. Kosnick et al. (2009) describe interviewing as “one of the ways we can hear others’ stories” (p. 53). The purpose of the conducted structured individual interviews with four questions was to collect more data about emotional and perceptual feedback from the students about playful activity during the paired communicative sessions. The students were asked about their feelings before, during and after each
activity, as well as were inquired how pair-work was useful for their vocabulary learning process. Participants’ answers were audiotaped and later transcribed for further analysis. Seidman (2006) proposed that “interviewing provides access to the context of people’s behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior” (p. 10). Interviewing is a powerful way to comprehend education through insight to the experience of learners. In his recent book titled *Qualitative Research*, David Silverman (2016) lists key points for ideal interview. For him, the interview process is “neutral conduit for excavating and conveying undistorted knowledge; meaning-making conversation - a site of narrative practice for researchers; and unavoidably interactional and constructive” (p. 70).

**Self-Confidence Checklist.** Cooperative negotiation and joint interpretation characterize the communicative classroom (Breen & Candlin, 1980). Activation of these abilities can serve for the refinement of the learners' new and developing knowledge. By involving the L2 students in a process of communication through activities, the harnessing of language use and learning the language is very probable. The achievement of oral presentation is believed to be related to the students’ self-confidence. The aim of using the self-confidence checklist was to reveal students’ strengths and limitations regarding oral communication and presentation skills. The self-confidence checklist used during my teaching process was aimed at capturing adult L2 learners’ self-confidence evolution (Sevilla Morales & Méndez Pérez, 2015). The examples of items included in the checklist were: When speaking in class I … believe that my classmates have better English skills than I do; … feel anxious about interacting with my classmates in group
discussions; … prefer not to express an opinion because I feel I do not have enough
vocabulary to do it; find it difficult to apply the vocabulary that I read in short stories, and
more. The checklist enclosed such inquiry points as vocabulary knowledge, language
competence, group work, and emotional state of an L2 student.

It is believed that oral presentations are closely related to people's confidence
(Brown, 2000). Lack of vocabulary, shyness, and fear of being humiliated are some
facets that affect oral participation of language learners (Urrutia Leó & Vega Cely, 2010).
In their study Urrutia Leó and Vega Cely (2010) were questioning how games encourage
teenagers to improve their speaking skills. They encountered that the students of English
in a Colombian high school had the ability to communicate their ideas in writing, they
were able to comprehend instructions through listening tasks, they could read and
understand texts, however they had difficulty with their speaking production because of
low self-confidence in their oral skills. The methodology of teaching English in that
classroom was based on games, workshops, songs, role plays, etc. In their action research
the scholars implemented activities focused on oral games in order to contribute to
students’ speaking skills’ development. The findings allowed them to conclude that
games in a language learning classroom motivate and excite experiences for learners to
develop their speaking skills in a fun and comfortable way, at the same time games
enable learners’ confidence. Working in the atmosphere where teams were helping and
collaborating with each other also contributed to lowering their anxiety and increasing
self-confidence during students’ oral interaction (Urrutia Leó & Vega Cely, 2010).
In order to motivate students to improve their oral abilities the class environment needs to be cooperative. Lack of self-confidence is a negative variable that prevents learners from L2 learning as it is highly correlated with anxiety, judgement and evaluations about one’s value. As Brown (2000) describes in his book *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*,

the affective domain includes many factors: empathy, self-esteem, extroversion, inhibition, imitation, anxiety, attitudes—the list could go on. Some of these may seem at first rather far removed from language learning, but when we consider the pervasive nature of language, any affective factor can conceivably be relevant to second language learning (p. 68).

Self-confidence is playing an important role in determining one’s willingness to communicate. To achieve this, the teacher needs to create a climate of acceptance that will stimulate self-confidence (Brown, 2000). As a secondary data for this dissertation, I distributed self-confidence checklist to my students. The objective of the tool was to collect information about the students’ self-confidence level while conducting oral communication activities. The students checked the boxes with statements that were true for them before the first activity and after the last, third activity.

**Analysis of Data**

The choice of research method and the further analysis of the collected data mostly depends on what I, as a researcher, am trying to understand, and how the chosen method will help me to achieve that understanding (Samaras, 2010). As previously mentioned in this chapter, there is not a right method to do a self-study (Loughran,
However, according to LaBoskey (2004) there are several characteristics that define self-study. Namely, self-study researchers are self-initiated and focused. Self-study is improvement aimed which is “based upon a careful and thorough understanding of our settings, which in turn results in an enhanced understanding of that practice” (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 845). This study method is interactive as the scholars “collaborate directly with colleagues in an effort to better understand and improve their own practice and institutional context” (p. 848). Interaction in self-study allows the researcher farther multiple perspectives on the professional practice, as well as challenge assumptions, inconsistencies, and biases. Also, the interactive characteristic of self-study facilitates expansion of the potential knowledge and triangulation of findings (LaBoskey, 2004). In the diversity of research methods, self-study scholars employ narrative research, action research, dialogue - storytelling research, and many more, thus highlighting the multiple qualitative methods’ characteristics of self-study. “This mix of mainly qualitative methods can enhance our understanding of our professional practice settings and help us to reframe our thinking and our teaching in appropriate and defensible ways”, writes LaBoskey (2004, p. 851). And finally, exemplar-based validation is the process where the self-study scholar provides and demonstrates details of complexity and context of the situation, as well as makes direct links to applicable educational literature.

The Constant Comparative Method

The constant comparative method of data analysis which is the “process of taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories” was used to analyze the data in order to learn “whether the categories of information become
saturated and whether the theory is elaborated in all of its complexity” (Creswell, 2007, p. 64). Based on the reflective narrative, the data was segmented into categories of information (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The preliminary interpretations were defined as a recursive data what were reexamined, revisited, and reassessed (Samaras, 2010). Those engaged in the practice of teaching are qualified to investigate and document that practice (LaBoskey, 2004). After re-attending the data for several times, I paid attention to repeated statements, behaviors, and actions across the data set (Samaras, 2010). As an inductive process, I grouped the most striking codes under categories (i.e. terms and phrases) to help me sort the descriptive data by topic. The separated codes and the relationships among and between them represented my themes. Themes enabled my interpretation, meaning making, and thematic analysis of my categories (Creswell, 2007; Samaras, 2010). Using the constant comparative approach, I attempted “to ‘saturate’ the categories - to look for instances that represent the category and to continue looking (and interviewing) until the new information obtained does not further provide insight into the category” (Creswell, 2007, p. 161).

The choice of methods “best allow the researcher either to gain the trust of the people in the situation or, if necessary, to accomplish clandestine research” (Glaser, 1965, p. 436). The use of constant comparative method in qualitative data is an analytic procedure of regular comparison. According to Glaser (1965) this method is designed to aid analysts with these abilities in generating a theory which is integrated, consistent, plausible, close to the data, and in a form which is clear
enough to be readily, if only partially, operationalized for testing in qualitative research” (p. 438).

In addition, the threat of internal validity preexists in all types of research methodology, especially because it is researchers’ workplace. However, as Mitchell (2004) stated that this is no different to any other form of bias and is a methodological issue – all research reporting needs to give evidence of what was done to minimize bias. We also reiterate that teachers do not engage in research if they believe their practice is perfect (p. 1431).

With the ethical considerations and consents for collecting and using data for the current study the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol procedures were performed accordingly.

**Conversation Analysis**

Earlier in my chapters I highlighted that lack of student engagement during the teacher-led explanations in the language learning classrooms lead to superficial level of vocabulary retention (Newton, 2001; Sullivan, 2000). I also exemplified the studies of Rice (2009) and Harris and Daley’s (2008) that were advocating the benefits of engaged and cooperative L2 learning. Both researchers explored the role of playful learning approaches as well as metaphoric, integrative, and empowering qualities of play in the process of learning. They found that playful learning contributed to generation of enjoyment, motivation, engagement, alternative point of view, cooperation, sense of connectedness, and reference for linguistic resources.
To explore and have a deeper insight into my earlier assumption that playful practices of CLT facilitate L2 vocabulary learning when there is engagement in meaningful communication I did a Conversation Analysis (CA) of conversations of two groups of students (verbatim transcripts of within group) and analyzed the turn-taking acts of their interaction. The Conversation Analysis is characterized by naturally occurring interactional events, and is “predominantly focused on linguistic forms and repertoire of practices for designing, organizing, projecting and making sense of the trajectories and import of turns-at-talk” (Martika & Sidnell, 2020, p. 242). According to Hutchby and Wooffitt (2008), Conversation Analysis is a paired action sequences where the communication participants “display to one another their understandings of what each utterance is aiming to accomplish” (p. 41). Sacks et al. (1978) saw the importance of organizing of turn-taking for conversation into a system. They stated that turns during conversational exchange should be viewed as distributed resources among speakers.

For the analysis of my data and to explore the ratio of the areas of academically and socially engaged talk during each turn I borrowed the MacDonald Tutoring Interaction Codes (MTIC) model. The five-part framework defines the coding system as follows (MacDonald, 1991):

An initiation is an utterance which intends to elicit a verbal or nonverbal response from another interactant. A reply is an utterance which is directly occasioned by a previously occurring initiation. An evaluation is an utterance which by inflection, tone, or word rates as positive or negative the accuracy or utility of a previous reply. An additional move is an utterance, which has not been initiated, which
clarifies, illustrates, extends, or elaborates the current topic. A marker is a one or two-word utterance (“um hum,” “OK,” “right”) which indicates one’s on-going attention to utterances of the other or indicates a boundary between topics. (p. 4)

I used the MTIC model to analyze each interactional move in order to encounter characteristics and proportions of the communication exchange for each group member as well as the Instructor. I did Conversation Analysis of turn-taking as well as translanguaging acts for these two within-group discussions around the third playful activity with Bee-Bot robots (Garfinkel, 1967; Martika & Sidnell, 2020; Sacks, 1983). The decision to explore the acts of translanguaging was based on the incidents of students’ use of their home language during all pair-works with playful robots. The analysis of the ratio of translanguaging acts during turn-takings was also done during the Conversation Analysis of the transcribed verbatim data.

To maintain the confidentiality agreement with participants, here and in the future the participants have been assigned as Spanish speaker 1 (Sp1), Spanish speaker 2 (Sp2), Spanish speaker 3 (Sp3), and Japanese speaker (Jp1).

Credibility of Results

With some forms of practitioner inquiry and the self-study inquiry in particular, Lincoln and Guba (1990) forwarded the notion of trustworthiness to evaluate the results of qualitative research. The validity of the chosen method and interpretation is a concern that is critically shared among researchers. The inquiry can be affected by the investigator’s bias, situational uniqueness, factor patterning, and other factors (Guba, 1981). In order to ensure that the gathered data are not mere fictions, Guba (1981)
proposed four criteria for the qualitative study to be trustworthy. The qualitative researcher should employ credibility (truth value), transferability (applicability), dependability (consistency), and confirmability (neutrality) to meet good interpretative research. For the credibility provisions, peer scrutiny of this dissertation (a colleague as a critical friend) was practiced. For the trustworthiness of my data interpretation, the offered feedback from my critical friend was made over the duration of the project. As Shenton (2004) describes, the fresh perspective brought by the critical friend allowed me to challenge assumptions made by the investigator, whose closeness to the project frequently inhibits his or her ability to view it with real detachment. Questions and observations may well enable the researcher to refine his or her methods, develop a greater explanation of the research design and strengthen his or her arguments in the light of the comments made (p. 65).

Also, as the project was developing I was seeking to evaluate it through the systematic reflective commentary. These commentaries were initially used to record my impressions of data collections sessions and emerging patterns (Shenton, 2004). Moreover, the detailed description of students’ actions through my reflective narrative produced findings that were plausible. I did not perform a member check as I did not initially know who the participants were. They became known only after the grades were posted. However, it was intricate to contact international students after their course session due to their travels or discontinuing enrollment in the Intensive English Programs.
CHAPTER FOUR
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description of each of the categories found in the collected data. First, I discuss my actual vocabulary teaching and the implementation of the playful robot for teaching L2 vocabulary. Next, I connect the findings with my research questions. Finally, the analysis of my self-narrative and the language that I have used provide descriptions and glimpses into my L2 vocabulary teaching practices as well as my underlying beliefs found within my teaching background of a L2 educator.

In this self-study I focused on embedding playful robots in a routine low-intermediate level L2 vocabulary teaching. These transformations in my teaching style had the final goal of observing changes in students’ vocabulary learning habits. I used NVivo software for this qualitative data analysis. Through the process of my data analysis (the self-narrative text), a total of 86 codes (called nodes in NVivo) emerged. After re-attending and comparing these codes several times, the number of codes was reduced to 65 (due to repetitive nature of several codes). Glaser and Strauss (1967) describe this process and state that the researcher is “comparing incidents applicable to each category” (p. 105) as many times as possible, as the categories emerge and fit an existing category. While coding an incident for a category, I compared it with the previous incident in the same and/or different groups coded in the same category. As it is referenced in Glaser and Strauss (1967), this coding was done by memory, and I did not
always need to go back to my actual notes. After identifying these codes that described the characteristics of playful language instruction, I compared the codes to each other. The flowing codes that had recurring characteristics were merged with each other. After thorough examination of the data, the codes that had similarities were grouped under five categories, which in turn evolved into three large themes: instruction, planning, and transformation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The process of coding and categorization was going through the steps as it is noted in Dye et al.’s (2000) article. They wrote:

the research must continually attempt to define and redefine categories by specifying and changing the criteria used for assigning them to the data. In so doing, one must recognize that any definitions developed in the beginning will probably be quite general and contingent in character. (Dye et al., 2000, p. 4)

**Description of Themes and Categories**

Throughout the entire data analysis, I used the constant comparative method and the metaphor of a nested *Matryoshka doll* to guide me through the process of analysis. The metaphor of the Russian Matryoshka doll concept helped me envision the interconnected and deeper layers of my data. During the data analysis, to relate my findings with my research questions I looked at my records through the lenses of three critical elements of self-study methodology, learning enhancement, and contribution to the knowledge base about teaching (Capitelli, 2015). As categories and their properties were emerging and unfolding to me, I discovered that some categories were interpretative (emerged from the language in the self-narrative), and some abstracted from the research situations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). As described in Bogdan and Biklen (2013), in
Qualitative research the codes that were developed into categories were interpreted by me according to the setting (context codes), definition of situation, perspectives, way of thinking about people and objects, process, activity, events, strategy, method, narrative, and relationship codes. This data analysis process once again confirmed the fact that as educators we are interested in people and their lived experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In an analysis of data through the constant comparative method it was revealed how playful vocabulary learning and teaching take place in the adult L2 learning context. As a result of the constant comparison and grouping the codes under categories, the following main themes emerged: 1) planning, 2) transformation, and 3) instruction. Each of these themes and their subcategories demonstrate important and unique characteristics of the playful vocabulary instruction to adult language learners and are described in the next sections.

**Planning**

The theme *planning* that emerged from the data analysis revealed to me as a pivotal characteristic of my L2 vocabulary teaching. The self-study researchers Brandenburg et al. (2008) similarly highlight the importance of educational activity planning. They wrote that “planning and being responsive between planning for learning and responding to learning opportunities as they arise in practice” (p. 28) is one feature of thoughtful organization of one’s instruction. In my NVivo data analysis the definition of the code planning is “self-reflective planning of communicative activities as an important
The following excerpt is one example from my self-narrative about the planning of playful activities:

The beauty of this project was the pre-planning period: constant adding of what I believed was good for my students, and deleting what was of little value for my project [...] I was reading about different theories and learning about research frameworks [...] behind these preparations were hours of thinking, planning, note-taking, organizing and reorganizing of ideas and teaching materials. It was a process for constant thinking and rethinking about the appropriateness of my tools and instruments for both teaching and researching.

The descriptors of the definition clearly underlie the importance of my own reflection about the teaching material which stems from the students’ needs, my teaching expertise, educational background, and learning theories. The instructor-facilitator mode was one concept that I kept repeating in my self-narrative. I was envisioning the planning of activities and used the metaphor of the Russian nesting doll Matryoshka to describe my thought process. The descriptors that I was using about playful activity planning were ‘activities contributing to vocabulary learning skills in a non-threatening environment’, ‘adult learning theory’, ‘educational activities on realities of human experiences’, ‘it can be carried out through complex interactional elements’, and many more. I clearly mentioned communication and interactive activities as key characteristics of content planning. The connotation of the word planning is an assembly of every reference to the playful activity. In its turn, the context of the playful activity is unfolded under the subtheme delineated as the practice field (Figure 2).
Figure 2 Planning Flowchart
Practice in the Field

According to Austin and Senese (2004), self-study research “urges teachers to find their own voices, to improve their practices, to extend their relationships, and to discover and document their potential as leaders of change” (p. 1231). Being in the field and teaching both ESL and EFL, allowed me to be the practitioner who focused on what matters most to me and my students. Through the analysis of the self-narrative I began to examine my own teaching practice through reflectional research. By being personally in the field, I established an important line of thought for my L2 vocabulary teaching: my ability to defy the regular within the direct teaching experience. In one of the lines of my self-narrative I wrote:

I was creating a database for what worked and what did not work during my teaching for future instruction and adjustments. [...] I believe it is the instructor’s responsibility to devise interactive, purposeful, and engaging activities within the context of the unit. [...] One corridor for such facilitative teaching is the instructor’s willingness to incorporate creative and enjoyable activities without disdaining the textbook content.

My examples became a means to help me understand that vocabulary learning activities are not abstract and inauthentic teaching materials, but are at work in the context of students’ learning needs, and most importantly relevant to their lives.

Defying the Regular. In the hierarchy of the flowchart of themes and categories addressing my planning habits, the term justification stands on the top. The word justification itself either occurred directly in the language or was interpreted by me on 28
occasions in the self-narrative data. “By recognizing the personal and the experiential self as a focus for inquiry, the experiential and personal foundations of inquiry become a justification for knowing rather than a hindrance to it,” acknowledge Kuzmic and Bloom (2008, p. 208). Throughout the planning of the playful activities with robotics to enhance vocabulary learning I was going back and forth trying to justify the effectiveness of my planning. In the definition of nodes in the NVivo qualitative research software I define the node justification as a vision of my playful language instruction. In the narrative I describe that this type of language instruction stems from my teaching philosophy, my beliefs, and my teaching expertise. Moreover, I add my theoretical competence background to the definition to support how ponderable my argument in favor of playful instruction is. I state that my teaching is based on consideration of the elements of Adult Learning Theory. My teaching underlies the important component of inquiry, namely, it focuses on facilitation vs. teaching, and is based on my formal education as a professional. This playful teaching and planning include the characteristics of authenticity - the importance of having a teaching setup for a language output. Some examples from my self-narrative that make a connection between playful learning instruction and the audience for such instruction are as follows:

I analyzed each and every activity in the textbook unit. I was constantly thinking and mentally recalling my teaching philosophy and actions about my vocabulary teaching and retention methods. [...] By unpacking each new doll I hoped to understand whether my beliefs and perceptions about vocabulary teaching and
learning through playful language instruction resonate with beliefs and perceptions of my L2 students.

The process of justification of implementing playful activities in vocabulary teaching goes throughout the entire data analysis as my research question concerns the benefits and effectiveness of embedding a playful activity in adult L2 vocabulary learning. The planning of the activities would be impossible without the deliberate choice of the activities, or otherwise said, the teaching material. The term material is defined in my data analysis as careful pre-planning of activities aimed at facilitative L2 vocabulary teaching. Further, the Communicative Language Teaching theory is specified as a vehicle to deliver this authentic material instruction. Below is an example that particularly foregrounds my intentional vocabulary teaching material choice:

I was trying to make sure that I deliver a more polished and less erroneous language instruction. I was adjusting existing quizzes and modifying tests based on my observations and teaching practices. I was ensuring that my teaching objectives were rejected in my students’ learning outcomes. [...] I accurately created an outline and prepared a playful element in my activities - I introduced Bee-Bot robot to my students in later activities.

The playful activities were chosen as auxiliary, or challenging planning material to defy the usual and suggest new ways of learning L2 vocabulary. In her self-study research Smith (1996) introduces the idea of “development of teachers’ thought as major component of that practice” (p. 238) which totally resonates with my line of thinking about L2 vocabulary teaching material choices. The setup of these playful activities took
a long time of pondering. Involved in this process of thinking and rethinking was my critical friend and myself. At one point in my self-narrative I wrote:

We had interesting conversations and discussions about our teaching beliefs, our student’s expectations, and current language learning practices. These conversations with a knowledgeable person were constructive, inspirational, and deliberative. [...] My thoughts were not limited to quality L2 instruction but rather simultaneously studying my actions while I teach.

In my NVivo nodes I defined the process of activity setup as devising non-graded facilitative activities and creating a non-threatening environment for adult L2 learners. Further I explain that setting up the facilitative activities were aimed at examining student’ interaction and vocabulary retention in a playful manner. Through the adjustments of vocabulary teaching material, I was aiming at shuffling the existing ones and serving them differently. I further state:

These playful activities were aimed at filling in the neglected part of my students’ vocabulary retention and reproduction. I believed that playful non-graded activities that I prepared for the ‘dessert’ will be the missing communicative part and the peak of my L2 vocabulary teaching.

The category of setting up the teaching material in the planning is associated with adjustment and assessment. The educational task that was set in front of me was to adjust, or modify the existing teaching material and tailor it to my teaching beliefs, philosophy, and background. In my definition of the term adjustment I state that it should answer the question of how to teach vocabulary to adult L2 learners in an effective manner. I was
also thinking about the assessment part of the activity. My notes in the narrative data analysis mention that I clearly needed to deviate from the standardized assessment. The activities should have been different from the students’ negative experience about formal grading, and should have solved the problem of the ‘teaching disconnect’ - the educators’ eternal dilemma of how to assess knowledge objectively. The statement that underlines my noncompliance with ‘regular’ knowledge assessment and justifies the choice of the playful activity can be read in the following line from my self-narrative:

The vocabulary tests and quizzes were standardized multiple choice types. I would test my students’ vocabulary knowledge retention through the unit test which consisted of reading similar texts as in the unit readings, circling main ideas, circling right answers to the questions, writing true or false for the statements, and finding differences as a comprehension check. I had a feeling that the practices and exercises from the textbook were only teaching my students to test.

The dissent with the discussed way of teaching and learning L2 vocabulary led me to actions. Those actions were built upon my former L2 teaching experiences and my current vision of playful activities that would move my teaching practices towards the change. In my self-narrative the term change is defined as shift and adjustment of teaching material.

Direct Experience. When describing the categories where self-study falls, Berry (2007) speaks about the importance of enabling the educators to learn from their teaching experiences and to improve the existing instruction. In my self-narrative I define the node
*new learning experiences* as non-standard language learning referring to the new language learning habits. Interestingly, the planned playful activities not only let me as an educator see what I did to improve my students’ L2 vocabulary learning but also allowed me to see my students’ learning events and growth. The notion of *experience* surfaced when I was constantly comparing emerging codes from my self-narrative. These experiences were typically depicting the reciprocal processes of students’ new learning opportunities and adaptations to the new playful learning environment. These playful learning experiences are labeled *direct* as they were reshaping their mental model of L2 vocabulary learning through active engagement in a new learning environment. Below are some examples describing the process of direct learning experiences:

Evidently, this was a new experience for my students. They were adapting to the new facilitative and relaxed environment of language production. Using playful robots was not a common practice in their [students’] countries and educational institutions. This was a different and unusual activity. I was clearly observing and simultaneously documenting a change of mindset and attitude towards language learning.

Aside from the self-narrative excerpts, I remember that when I was re-attending the transcripts of interviews with the students I was clearly picturing and recalling in my mind how the students felt about the activities. Below is an example from my self-narrative about the introduction of playful activity for the first time to my students:

Getting back to notes, I observed that this contextual cooperative learning consisted of writing and erasing, giggles, and converging attempts to remember
the necessary vocabulary word. [...] They [students] were attentively listening to my instructions and together were trying to figure out how to operate the playful robot.

The above statements exemplify the terms that constitute the category of direct experience under the planning theme. More precisely, the element of communication falls under this umbrella of students’ learning experiences. It is a crucial code in this self-study research. In my self-narrative the node communication is defined as meaningful verbal exchange in the L2. Throughout my story the term language output is reoccurring. Below is a paragraph from my self-narrative focusing on communication and communicative activities:

My descriptive narrative explained how I set up my playful activities for vocabulary retrieval in a communicative manner. [...] they would actively use gestures in an attempt to exchange their knowledge and meaningful communication. The interactive activity and topics allowed my students to cooperatively transmit information. [...] The students were so engaged in the communication that they totally forgot about the tension of being in a formal classroom environment.

Once I mention above the term environment as the part of direct learning experience, it's important to acknowledge its role in effective L2 learning. In the descriptive narrative I clearly differentiate between EFL and ESL students' learning environments and needs. Whilst an EFL learner’s needs might not go beyond the ability to hold a conversation in English, the ELS learner needs to apply what they have learned
to real life situations. Moreover, the environment of both learners differs in the amount of exposure: the opportunities to communicate for an EFL learner is happening in the classroom while the ESL learner has greater level of exposure to the language and more opportunities to communicate in larger range of situations. I have a lengthy depiction of practical needs and my feelings towards teaching English as a foreign language and as a second language. I clearly acknowledge that apart from the difference in audience, the learning environment plays a significant role in language teaching. For instance, I write:

ESL students in IEPs require more authentic language learning applicable to their everyday life and academic environment. [...] I outlined possible activities contributing to vocabulary learning skills in a non-threatening environment. [...] I could take the nonjudgmental stand of the language instructor. In this way I would confirm Stephen Krashen’s (1987) words about the fact that there is a better language acquisition when the level of anxiety and affective filter of students is low.

In the process of communication there should be more than one participant who is obviously creating a cooperative learning environment. Moreover, the language that is produced in the process of communication is authentic, too. In the descriptive narrative the code cooperative learning is defined as promotive interdependent interaction. Below is an excerpt where I describe the activity with the robotics and prioritize the value of authentic language exchange:

It is my creed that cooperative work is a natural way of contributing to the process of adult’s learning through interaction. [...] During the cooperative discussion my
students were so much involved in the activity that they were negotiating meaning, integrating verbal and non-verbal language skills, and showing self-initiative in their responses and discussions. They would correct each other’s mispronounced words in a friendly and humorous manner. They activated their background knowledge to reflect on what they know and to sustain a conversation initiated by the classmate. [...] The process was already interactive and authentic, as the young language learners started the engaging experience.

In addition to these descriptors of a cooperative vocabulary learning process, I add the authenticity as an underlying component of communicative competence.

It [language learning] requires contextual and process relevant learning where authenticity is the core counterpart. [...] In my opinion, based on my expertise, adult language learners need exposure to the target language through interactive, engaging, and authentic communication.

So, what is exactly happening during these types of intellectual and cultural verbal exchanges? In my self-narrative text, I introduce the node out-of-the-box thinking which is defined as thinking from a new perspective. The units of analysis that represent this code exhibit examples from the playful activity where the students have the choice and freedom to come up with their own versions of responses. Unlike close-ended questions which restrict the respondents and limit their answer options, open-ended questions are not pre-populated and provide students a wider span to construct their response. The multiple choice or circle the right answer are not an option for these activities anymore. For instance, I describe critical thinking as an important piece
of alternative way of thinking around a problem. I wrote about active listening, answering topic related open-ended questions, discussions, contrasting ideas, interactivity and communication as a way to better solve a problem with the partner:

    Discussions, team projects, and action learning techniques are counterparts of expansion of out-of-the-box thinking. [...] They had a freedom of choice; their thoughts were out-of-the-box, they experienced scaffolding by me and their partners; and they had a chance to use their knowledge in an authentic environment.

    The recent referenced code choice was defined as uncommon (alternative) learning practice in my text analysis. By choice the students were offered a different type of vocabulary learning style. The differentiated instruction was aimed at motivating student engagement in independent language production, as well as to increase the motivation of self-expression and content-specific language generation. That was a big change - a term that had also emerged during the constant comparison of the units of analysis. The node alternative teaching method was defined as facilitative L2 vocabulary teaching method. These facilitative methods were mostly characterized by such descriptors as playful activities and facilitative tasks aimed at students’ vocabulary learning. The portrayed processes of playful language instruction were unique opportunities for adult L2 learners to interactively learn new vocabulary. The following statements describe this term of alternative teaching method as a change in vocabulary learning:
I was thrilled to learn that the playful element was appropriately embedded in my L2 vocabulary teaching. I was clearly seeing stuff that I didn’t use in my regular vocabulary teaching. By playful language learning activity, I was really aiming at revisiting the taught vocabulary and reinforcing the word knowledge.

During the data analysis I documented the term *vocabulary* on 38 occasions. About vocabulary teaching practices Allen (2007) writes,

> When I was in my own classroom, I used to say that I wasn’t sure how to define effective vocabulary instruction but I sure knew what it looked like when it was happening. One day it was a success, the other day every aspect of vocabulary instruction was a challenge (p. 6).

During the coding process of my self-narrative data, the definition for the term *vocabulary* was as simple as new words in target language. In the coding process the node vocabulary appears either directly or indirectly. It focuses both on the alternative playful instruction, and the intervention that was aimed at supporting L2 learning. It covers both my beliefs and my expertise about shifting from ‘dry’ word memorization to meaningful language production; a transition from superficial word recognition to deeper level of the word knowledge, retention, and later retrieval of the word. I describe in detail the setting up of the playful teaching material and conclude by the enjoyment that the alternative learning brings to the adult L2 classroom. The excerpts below refer to an enjoyable vocabulary learning process.

One corridor to such facilitative teaching is the teachers’ willingness to incorporate creative and enjoyable activities without disdaining the textbook. […]
The process was already interactive and authentic, as the young language learners started to enjoy the engaging experience. I could clearly see the initial tension on their faces changing into the ones of connoisseur. [...] Getting back to my notes, I observed that this contextual cooperative learning consisted of writing and erasing, giggles and converging attempts to remember the necessary vocabulary word. [...] The playfulness could be observed during the dynamic exchange of emotional, creative, thoughtful, enjoyable, intellectual, cooperative, humorous, and most importantly, authentic elements of second language acquisition. [...] The majority of students were underlining the fun and enjoyable part of the activity. In their interviews, students mentioned enjoyable vocabulary practice and recalling new words most of the time. [...] Some students blended into the playful language learning activity momentarily and enjoyed the opportunity far and wide.

The data analysis allowed me to reflect on the planning of my playful language instruction. The direct experiences and the setup of these activities formed the big umbrella of the ESL vocabulary teaching as a practice field of adult L2 instruction. The process of analysis of the playful language instruction and the actual planning of the teaching material in the practice field was the unstacking process of the biggest Matryoshka doll with the promise to reveal to me more interesting findings hidden in the next size doll.

Transformation

In the self-study research frequent interrogation of phenomena is a must (Zeichner, 1999). Zeichner (1999) states that the self-study researchers often
“courageously expose and confront the shortcomings in their work and the gaps between their rhetoric and the reality of their practice” (p. 12). Anderson et al. (2014) note that the conscious interrogation and change of the teaching structures, the curricular and pedagogical work helps educators to transform the classroom and the world of the student. Interestingly, the authors highlight the importance of the intellectual and emotionally supportive venue which I call learning outcome and reduced language learning anxiety in my NVivo nodes. These improvement-oriented transformations originate from the acknowledgements of my teaching practices and eventually lead to the reframing of those practices. These interrogations of my own vocabulary teaching practices are aimed at improvement of my teaching. The progression of self-questioning is described through the depiction of teachable moments and the self-reflection of the process of setting up of playful activities as a tool for that improvement.
Outcomes

Prompt-based discussions are aimed at interrogating the existing phenomena, thus initiating conversations. Interrogation promotes a deeper level of personal and intellectual inquiry (Anderson et al., 2014). The term outcomes (or Student Learning Outcomes) was defined during the coding process as teaching objectives to develop content area skills. In my narrative I state that I had learning expectations that I aligned with the teaching objectives and student learning outcomes. The importance of teaching a unit playfully was supported by the fact that the students should revisit the taught vocabulary and reinforce the word knowledge. The specificity of playful language instruction was aimed
at the retrieval of the vocabulary in the non-intimidating and relaxed environment. I wrote:

According to the Venn diagram presented in the earlier chapter, my prediction was to collect evidence confirming that playful language instruction in an adult L2 learning classroom contributes to students' augmented lateral thinking and adapted acquired knowledge for social assimilation. [...] It became clear that I wanted my language learner students to feel safe and relaxed during the vocabulary learning process. [...] I accurately had an outline of the possible activities contributing to vocabulary learning skills in an unthreatening environment. I could clearly see the initial tension on their faces changing into the ones of connoisseur. [...] The reduced anxiety was very helpful in social roles - the more knowledgeable student was indirectly assisting his partner’s understanding and language acquisition. [...] I realized that the setup of topics by their level of popularity was a great trick that enabled language learners to feel less anxious and more comfortable after each activity. [...] The students were so much engaged in the communication that they totally forgot about the tension of being in a formal classroom environment. [...] All four post self-confidence checklists were turned in blank. [...] They [students] asserted that during the last activity they were already familiar with the playful learning format and felt at ease when sharing about their personal experiences in a group.

The language in this excerpt from the self-narrative is bringing forward such codes as language learning, output (language production), and outcomes. At the same time the
clear scope in this passage are the audience, the environment, and the L2 learning context. All these codes together are grouped under the category of second language learning outcomes.

**Enhanced L2 Learning.** The node *language learning* was found on 38 incidents while I was constantly comparing and coding the data. The code is defined as acquisition and production of a target language. In the self-narrative text, I describe in detail what language learning means in general. I talk about the process of simultaneous acquisition of pragmatics, phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of a given language. I emphasize that language learning is a process of transitions from isolated forms to forms that serve one or more functions. I see the transition as a part of learning transformation from regular to progressive. I see the enhancement of language learning by denying the standard grammar-translation method and mechanical memorization, and conversely embracing personal language learning experiences by building on the foundation of the background knowledge. I foreground the idea of moving forward and setting expectations for the language output. For instance, I write:

> Complex syntax, word building, successful entering to peer conversations, register variations - all these linguistic cues were expected to be observed during the students’ linguistic knowledge increment.

Those ambitious expectations of language growth can be read between the lines throughout the entire narrative. Along with setting a high bar of learning expectations, I acknowledge the importance of instructor’s facilitation of language learning.
Facilitative teaching is a big step towards formal learning for adult learners. [...] Specifically this is true for adult language learners, who need more assistance for their second or additional language learning. [...] I believe that purposeful learning-oriented experiences with the new language acquisition process should be stimulated with ESL learners.

For successful results in teaching and seeing the result (or the outcome) educators constantly question the teaching content, mostly asking themselves - how much do I teach? (Williams, 2008). The decision-making stems from the component of cognition. During that process the educator develops in their mind the “knowledge, beliefs, thoughts, and understandings in relation to language learning processes” (Williams, 2008, p. 321). Then the educator provides the action component, which is “the process of carrying out a task in order to make language learning happen or ease the process” (p. 321). Thus, the language learning, output, and content together form the outcome.

The term content, which is defined as a body of knowledge or the teaching material, stood out to me in a profound way as I was doing the analysis of the data. The concept was mentioned in various instances and it carried the meaning of materials that would facilitate L2 vocabulary learning. It covered the process of my thoughts about shifting the content from inauthentic texts to real life situations (Brown, 2003). The content was addressing my thoughts about planning and ideas of implementation mentioned earlier in this chapter. For instance, I wrote:

Distancing myself from my own learning experiences, during my teaching in Intensive English programs (IEP) I mostly envisioned my role of an educator-
facilitator. I had the feel of what works and what doesn’t in the language learning classroom. [...] It requires contextual and process relevant learning where authenticity is the core counterpart.

Abstracting from the content and the outcomes (the subject matter), I continued my thought line towards the audience and context (circumstances and events). In several instances I stated, that it was crucial to define the target audience of this research project:

The target audience should be clarified here. [...] I defined my audience and their learning needs by formulating a descriptive adult L2 learners’ qualification.

Considering the audience (i.e. the adult language learners) my big question was how to teach vocabulary effectively. Teaching carries the whole galaxy of the educator’s beliefs. In the beginning of this project I created a Venn diagram in which I separately analyzed the characteristics of Adult Learning Theory, play theories, and Communicative Language Teaching theory. Then I put together the characteristics of these theories to see whether there are patterns that overlap, and that would give me a road map for setting up playful vocabulary activities for my self-study. Further, in the self-narrative text I declare in several instances that the adult learners' education is goal-oriented and has a problem-centered orientation. Based on the adult teaching doctrines, I believe that adult language learning should be facilitated. These learners need frequent exposure and authentic language learning material (Brown, 2003). Their background knowledge should serve as a basis for their learning. It was notable to see all these pieces come together in teaching an L2 vocabulary through playful instruction. When the actual teaching was done, I wrote:
I could see the benefits of playful elements in language learning in an adult classroom.

The above-mentioned codes and categories were addressing the process and viewpoint of a playful language instruction (context) from my perspective. The array of various codes was guiding my data analysis during the coding process. The sub-category of students’ perceptions about the playful instruction and the transformation of their point of view about vocabulary learning emerged independently.

**Students’ Perceptions.** In my descriptive narrative I wrote that international students and language learners in general come with their expectations and beliefs about language learning. In many language teaching environments, the majority of language learners have a background of learning a language through memorization. I relate that common expectation to my own language learning assumption. As a second language learner myself, I depict in my narrative how inauthentic my own additional language learning experiences were. In the below excerpt I compare incidents of my own foreign language learning experiences with those of my international students:

Shared grammar-translation language learning method was very effective for mechanical memorization and application of grammar rules. […] The sentences of my students were grammatically correct and sounded very ‘bookish’, ‘rehearsed’, and ‘cliché’. Exercises requiring fill in the blanks and multiple-choice practices were aced and had almost 100% results.

The following observations in particular forced me to look for alternative ways of teaching L2 vocabulary and initiate change in the learning habits of my students:
One observation during my teaching from the textbook was that the assignments were heavily comprehensive. The choice of the right answer, however, did not require any critical thinking, problem solving, language production, or communication.

However, apart from my desire to know about my students’ language learning perceptions in general, I constantly kept questioning myself about my students’ perception about playful language learning. In the descriptive narrative I wrote:

I don’t stop wondering if alternative, or better put, non-traditional teaching methods and activities resonate with my students' perception of how the additional language needs to be taught.

As it was described earlier in the chapters the self-narrative was the global analysis of my teaching, the overview of actual vocabulary teaching activities, and the process of creating a playful learning environment. One way to know how my students felt about communicative pair work activity was to ask them directly. The administration of the self-confidence checklist used by Morales and Perez (2015) helped me to know about the level of credence in their performance of oral communicative tasks. Another data collection tool was an anxiety thermometer used by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) in their research. The transcripts of the students’ interviews with my critical friend provided auxiliary background information about my students’ feelings and L2 vocabulary learning preferences. Here is an example of how I synthesized that information in my descriptive narrative:
The objective of using these tools was to rate students’ feelings about their participation in a non-graded playful activity. [...] The expected students’ reaction of spontaneity of seeing playful Bee-bots was still vivid in my memory (I also accurately depicted that moment in the notes that I was taking). [...] The guided playful learning started with a ridiculous awkwardness.

Undoubtedly, as a self-study researcher I cannot agree more with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) idea about the importance of the voice where they state that “the ways that participants talk with us tell us something about how we are storied” (p. 178). The description below of the interview analysis and my reflection on the student’s perceptions about playful language learning provides insight into students’ new language learning experiences and the change in their learning habits:

Evidently this was a new experience for my students. Four adult male students were walking around the playful robot and were looking very puzzled. They were obviously waiting for my directions. I had a feeling that my students felt somehow relieved when I, one more time, reminded them that it was going to be a non-graded and cooperative activity.

This excerpt is presenting an event of seconds that reveal a world of students’ perceptions. The perceived stereotypes of ordinary and routine learning fade away, and disclose the alternative way of L2 learning. The actual and real reactions of international students to something new and sporadic is described in the next excerpt:

There was some tension in the air until I instructed my students how to operate the Bee-Bot. They were attentively listening to my instructions and together were
trying to figure out how to operate the playful robot. The process was already interactive and authentic, as the young language learners started to enjoy the engaging experience. I could clearly see the initial tension on their faces changing into the ones of a connoisseur. They were adapting to the new facilitative and relaxed environment of language production.

As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) bring out in their research, “we need not see our participants as univocal, not tied to one theoretical structure or mode of behavior that would leave them with the appearance of being unidimensional” (p. 178). The palette of research on language learning, reduced or increased anxiety, new learning experiences that lead to changes in learning habits, and feelings about alternative ways of language learning have already been described somewhere in the previous chapters. These components that form L2 learning have been well documented by outstanding researchers (Bolton & Houlihan, 2009; Guitard et al., 2005; Krashen, 1987; Richards, 2005). The “co-construction of the voice of individual group members within the small group discourse” has also been acknowledged (Smith, 1996, p. 263). Language learning is a process that is happening within the community of practice. It was a very important finding for me to learn that not all learners share the same feelings towards innovative playful language learning. In language teaching it is important to acknowledge that people have different social and cultural identities, and, primarily, that not all students are passionate about culturally inclusive practices and not all students experience playful instruction in similar fashion (Anderson et al., 2014). Below is an excerpt from the descriptive narrative about the positive feedback and attitudes toward playful activity:
My beliefs and predictions about the benefits of playful language teaching in adult ESL classroom were confirmed once again. I was thrilled to learn that the playful element was appropriately embedded in my English language teaching. Students attested that they were eager to start the playful activity with the robot. Using playful robots was not a common practice in their countries and educational institutions. The majority of students were underlining the fun and enjoyable part of the activity. The pair-work was also an influential part of their learning during this activity. Through these communicative activities, the students spoke about the importance of sharing their knowledge about their own culture. They would contribute to conversations by their academic and cultural knowledge. This was a different and unusual activity. Pair work was beneficial for the ones who were not very knowledgeable and proficient in English. As I predicted, practicing the language communicatively with a different partner was very helpful. They learned new things from a new partner. My students also confirmed my belief about the setup of the activities. They asserted that during the last activity they were already familiar with the playful learning format and felt at ease when sharing about their personal experiences in a group.

In their interviews, students mentioned enjoyable vocabulary practice and recalling new words most of the time. It was also pointed out that by revisiting the topic and through playful group discussions, the students learned more about the context than they previously knew. Moreover, one of my students said that by discussing ideas and communicating with a partner he was able to contrast ideas and give a better solution to
the problem. This statement once again confirmed my belief that adult learners have problem-centered orientation to learning. They had the freedom of choice, their thoughts were out-of-the-box, they experienced scaffolding by me and their partners, and finally they had a chance to use their knowledge in an authentic communicative environment.

During the playful activity, the vocabulary learning was going in full swing. It was a very interactive process. One interesting statement that was made by students about playful language learning was the importance of making a choice, recollecting the content, thinking about the grammatical structure of their utterances, as well as polishing the skills of note-taking.

My students highlighted the fact that through this playful activity they had a choice of topic, they had a chance to remember what was previously taught, they recalled the topic (context), revisited grammar forms while communicating, and finally did some writing activity (note-taking).

The description above was on the positive side. However, the beauty of the self-study research are the findings that would lead to professional improvement based on observation of one's own teaching practices. The feedback of one student was the biggest revelation for me, and suggested room for improvement of playful activity planning.

It was very illuminating to know that in some cultures it is unacceptable to show one’s ignorance in public. Even when the lack of knowledge is demonstrated in a playful manner and among classmates. Some cultures simply do not practice playful learning, which is a drawback and can be a source of anxiety. This specific activity had a dual effect on my students - some students blended into
playful language learning activity momentarily and enjoyed the opportunity far and wide. Some students felt frustration about ineptitude and inability to remember the vocabulary in order to express their opinion. This finding was very valuable for me as I needed to consider cultural habits and practices of my students when creating similar teachable moments in the future. The student used the word ‘regrettable’ when describing his feelings about this group activity. This activity evoked disappointment in this student. He mentioned several times that he cannot speak English. However, he never mentioned his frustration in the post self-confidence scoring sheet. Was that another sign that in some cultures people do not openly express their emotions and feelings to their educators?

The analysis of my reflective descriptive narrative called forth and excited deeper thinking about future planning of playful activities and reconsidering cultural aspects of this type of L2 vocabulary instruction. Most importantly, the manifestation of students’ perceptions of what is culturally acceptable or unacceptable was extremely important in considering my future facilitative lesson planning. One substantive part of my teaching transformation was consequently the acknowledgement of the reality and my attempts to reframe my practice.

Acknowledgement

Once I started putting the codes under the category of transformation it became apparent to me that the recognition of enhanced student’s vocabulary learning and their perceptions about playful instruction form the category of acknowledgement of the reframed vocabulary teaching practice. This operation of changing my teaching approach
was based on several components that are mutually inclusive events and they overlap
with each other. That was when I perceived the intended meaning of my actions, and I
gradually started interpreting the layers of my teaching. My teaching consisted of
reviewing and understanding of teaching events, incidents, proceedings, and episodes in a
particular way. During that process a series of actions were taken to achieve a particular
goal: the self-improvement of L2 vocabulary teaching.

Reframing the Practice

In his research Smith (1996) foregrounds the acknowledgement of the process
view of language learning. In my NVivo data coding activity I define the term *process* as
steps taken for goal achievement. During the constant comparison of the analysis units I
mention the code *process* thirty-five times. The code occurs in the description of the
planning of teaching L2 vocabulary, and marks the acknowledgement of actions and
thinking processes that reframe my teaching practice.

I was perceiving this constant back and forth pondering process as if I was
unstacking a Russian nesting doll Matryoshka. [...] Language learning is a process
of transitions - from forms to function. [...] It was a process of constant thinking
and rethinking about the appropriateness of my tools and instruments for both
teaching and researching.

There is a rich description in my self-narrative of the process that draws to the surface the
unseen emotions and the actual process of the playful language instruction.

They [students] activated their background knowledge to reflect on what they
know and to sustain a conversation initiated by the classmate. [...] They would
actively use gestures in an attempt of exchanging their knowledge and meaningful communication. The interactive activity and topics allowed my students to cooperatively transmit information.

The reframing of the teaching practice encompassed the process, my insight, the actual facilitation and scaffolding of learning, the critical friend’s insight, and most importantly, the acknowledgement of self-improvement.

Awareness, a deep understanding of process is the descriptor of the code *insight*. This code occurred two dozen times mostly in the context of my ‘realizing’ something that I didn’t notice before. For instance, I acknowledged entities that were not obvious before the self-reflection of my vocabulary teaching.

I was clearly seeing stuff that I didn’t use in my regular vocabulary teaching. [...] I was clearly observing and simultaneously documenting a change of mindset and attitude towards language learning. [...] I realized that the setup of topics by their level of popularity was a great trick that enabled language learners to feel less anxious and more comfortable after each activity. [...] I was flattered and amazed to see the improvement in their communication-in-public habits.

The deep insight into the cultural aspect of my teaching was also very enlightening. Owing to these moments of the teaching discernments, I was fully exposed to understanding my L2 vocabulary teaching style and approach. In the reflective narrative I wrote:

This specific activity had a dual effect on my students - some students blended into playful language learning activity momentarily and enjoyed the opportunity
far and wide. Some students felt frustration about ineptitude and inability to remember the vocabulary to express their opinion. This finding was very valuable for me as I needed to consider cultural habits and practices of my students when creating similar teachable moments in the future.

Under the big umbrella of my acknowledgements, specifically during these back and forth constant comparison and analysis of my data, my attention caught two important things about my L2 vocabulary teaching - language learning facilitation and student scaffolding. I defined the node *facilitation* as planning of teaching components for explicit L2 teaching. After revisiting this definition, it became clear that I was not defining my actual teaching but the setup of the teaching content. For instance, I did not describe the process of direct playful teaching as the whole idea of my playful instruction underlie in the facilitation and not straight teaching of L2 vocabulary. The playful instruction became possible by creating the playful activities with robots and the assignments with open-ended questions. I did not teach directly during the activities: instead, the playful activities enabled my students to generate authentic communication and use the necessary vocabulary to respond to the unit questions and maintain conversation. In fact, the students were teaching each other during these activities by scaffolding, non-verbal communication (gestures), and translanguaging. That was a big a-ha moment and an insight of discovery. That was a very weighty finding for me about my L2 vocabulary teaching. In the self-narrative I
highlighted the importance of how I saw myself as a professional and what my role was:

Distancing from my own learning experiences, during my teaching in IEPs I mostly envisioned my role of an educator-facilitator. One corridor to such facilitative teaching is the teachers’ willingness to incorporate creative and enjoyable activities without disdaining the textbook. Nobody limits the instructor to initiate meaningful communication with the aim of facilitating and integration of language skills.

Behind these thoughts about facilitation I clearly saw my professional background and beliefs about how to teach L2 vocabulary. I also acknowledged that in my narrative I reflected on why I am reframing my regular vocabulary teaching practices. By planning playful activities, I was distancing myself from the teaching to the test habit and I explained in detail what the goal was for the facilitative activities.

The facilitative activities were aimed at examining student interaction and vocabulary retention in a playful manner; measuring students’ level of self-confidence while conducting oral communication tasks; checking and documenting students’ level of comfort of anxiety before and after the playful activity, as well as holding semi-structured interviews for recording students’ emotional and perceptual experiences about these activities.

In the three events of the playful activity with the robot I was mostly encouraging my students to recall the vocabulary word. Whereas I was assisting them only when necessary, they were scaffolding each other most of the time.
During the cooperative discussion my students were so much involved in the activity that they were negotiating meaning, integrating verbal and non-verbal language skills, and showing self-initiative in their responses and discussions. They would correct each other’s mispronounced words in a friendly and humorous manner. They activated their background knowledge to reflect on what they know and to sustain a conversation initiated by the classmate. [...] It was great to observe that my students were using such features of authentic communication as scaffolding, comprehension check, word recalling, elicitation, reference for explanation, and many more. [...] The reduced anxiety was very helpful in social roles - the more knowledgeable student was indirectly assisting his partner’s understanding and language acquisition. Getting back to my notes, I observed that this contextual cooperative learning consisted of writing and erasing, giggles and converging attempts to remember the necessary vocabulary word. There was some problem-solving taking place when, for instance, one student was trying to remember and remind his partner the context of the unit. They would first suggest, then doubt or disagree, then give a consent to the proposed answer to the prompt questions.

The outcome of the setup of facilitative vocabulary instruction activities was aligned with my desire to know about the effects of alternative vocabulary teaching methods. My target was to know how my students felt about the activities and how much the playful approach was going to be acceptable for intermediate level adult language learners. I wanted to hear my students' voices and learn about their perceptions of
facilitative playful vocabulary learning. The above excerpt is the direct evidence of that facilitative vocabulary learning process.

In the self-study practice aimed at reframing teaching practices, one crucial constituent element is the presence and the input of a critical friend (LaBoskey, 2004; Loughran, 2004b). A critical friend is a trusted and informed person and a collegial voice who provides feedback, support and expertise during the self-study process (LaBoskey, 2004; Tidwell & Fitzgerald, 2004). During the coding and categorizing process of my data I defined *critical friend* as a peer offering ways of better understanding alternative perspectives. In the undertaking of reframing my L2 vocabulary teaching practices, I dedicate a paragraph describing my cooperation with the critical friend.

My mentor and adviser knew about my interests and practices. Interestingly enough, she was sharing my interest in the facilitation of additional language teaching. We had interesting conversations and discussions about our teaching beliefs, our students’ expectations, and current classroom language learning practices. These conversations with a knowledgeable person were constructive, inspirational, and deliberative. I was developing a researcher’s mindset while I was taking doctoral level courses and thinking more about additional language teaching facilitation. My thoughts were not limited to quality language instruction, but rather to simultaneously studying my actions while I teach. During these discussions with my professor I wanted to see whether the theories that I believe are really reflected in my teaching, or if it is just an illusion of a thirsty person who approaches an oasis. Moreover, I needed to know whether my
teaching objectives were reflected in my students’ learning outcomes. These conversations were the exact description of a researcher and a critical friend relationship. The perspectives brought by the critical friend started and continued throughout the whole self-study project. My assumptions and beliefs were constantly challenged. Based on my mentor’s commentaries my research method was refined. The systematic reflective commentary helped me to develop my research design and strengthen my arguments.

All these thoughts and contemplations had the final goal of my professional self-improvement. In the NVivo coding process I explicate the node self-improvement as improvement of my teaching by my own efforts. This definition is mostly stipulated due to the active verbs that I am using in my narrative to describe what is meant by the term improvement. For instance, I utilize such language as ‘I started testing the waters’, ‘I try to deliver more polished and less erroneous language instruction’, ‘I study my actions while I teach’, ‘I was wondering how’, ‘I analyzed my teaching’, ‘I had the opportunity’, ‘I will teach this class again’, ‘I was reading about different theories and learning about research frameworks’, and many more. My wandering mind was constantly overseeing and bridging the potential capacity of my mind and knowledge. That knowledge was going to be translated into my instructional practices, that was nested inside the next size Matryoshka doll.
Instruction

Professional Positioning

Frames that Impact my L2 Teaching

Expertise
Education
Teaching background
Teaching L2 Role

Visions of my Professional Practice

Beliefs about L2 teaching and learning
L2 teaching assumptions
Teaching expectations
Inquiry
Perspective
Responsibility
Passion

Instructional Decisions

Pedagogical Problem

Teaching decisions
Teachable moment
Researcher's mindset
Language learning challenges
Inauthentic teaching material
Tensions in teaching

Student Needs

Effective L2 acquisition
Language-learning skills
CLT
PLI
ALT
Interaction Exposure

Figure 4 Instruction Flowchart

Professional Positioning

Throughout the whole self-narrative about playful language instruction I discursively positioned myself and my students within the planned activities. Through close attention to the written text and my instructional plans I saw how I constructed my instructional identity at the intersection of my professional self, students’ perceptions, and L2 vocabulary teaching practices. This theme of instruction is wide-reaching and
contains the largest number of categories and nodes. As it is going to be expanded further, my instructional practices consisted of two categories: *professional positioning* and *instructional decisions*. In my approach to L2 vocabulary teaching, I placed myself within four frames of reference: the frames that impacted my L2 teaching; visions of my professional practice; the acknowledgement of pedagogical problems; and recognition of my students’ needs.

In response to social stimuli, people act differently. Harré et al. (2009) define positioning as “cognitive processes that are instrumental in supporting the actions people undertake particularly by fixing for this moment and this situation what these actions mean. These processes explain the actions to which we are attending” (p. 6). They mention that ongoing activities and actions unfold within interactive episodes. In the context of my research, these episodes represented changing relationships between my L2 vocabulary instruction and my instructional decisions.

**Frames Impacting my L2 Teaching.** The frames that impacted my L2 instruction were my professional expertise, my formal education, my national and international teaching background, the role of how I position myself professionally, and the context of teaching L2. The aggregate of these criteria is my description of the *instruction* theme. It is my belief that successful teaching instruction or teaching should involve both subject knowledge and teaching practices. Educators can make learning more meaningful by looking beyond traditional textbook materials. This might be done to incorporate lived experiences and practices that are relevant to language learning. *En masse,* the whole palette of this frame of reference is concluded in one statement by
Smith (1996). The scholar writes that “a successful lesson moves through the stages of presentation, practice and production, and has a sense of direction, movement, and dynamics” (p. 249). I strongly believe that to accomplish successful teaching, an educator must have appropriate formal education and professional expertise.

I define node expertise as knowledge in a particular field. The examples of language teaching competency in the narrative span the command and knowledge of teaching Language Arts, English as a Foreign Language, and English as a Second Language. This professional aptitude is bridged with my formal education which enables me to be proficient in language teaching. In several excerpts I mention that I greatly value and see the worth of my formal education as the recipe for success. Furthermore, I state that a valid share of my education was accumulated through my graduate research work that should not be underestimated. I audibly acknowledged that I was making my professional way through trial and error. For instance, I wrote:

My knowledge was building gradually, but firmly. [...] I started ‘testing the waters’ of extracurricular activities in my teaching when I started my Ed.D. program at the University [...] I was developing a researcher’s mindset while I was taking doctoral level courses and thinking more about additional language teaching facilitation. [...] I learned by then that I need to have a theoretical background to support my research. [...] After doing extensive research on the Adult Learning Theory and learning about the beneficial characteristics of this theory for adult learners, my next step was to saturate learning about characteristics of the CLT method.
Along with referencing to the ongoing process of my academic growth, I was also conscious about my long-standing teaching expertise:

    During my six plus years of teaching in IEPs I taught different levels and various courses. [...] I had the feel of what works and what doesn’t in the language learning classroom. [...] in my opinion, based on my expertise, adult language learners need exposure to the target language through interactive engaging, and authentic communication.

My national and international teaching background emerges in several episodes as well. The narrative around this code is describing my passion in wanting to learn and explore ways of teaching English language to international students.

    Thus, my role or how I position myself professionally is rooted in my teaching background, my formal education, and the content of second language teaching. In my reflections I duly acknowledge that I need to set up my student for success. At the same time, I clearly distinguish and recognize that teaching English as a Second Language is not the same as teaching English as a Foreign Language:

    As their language instructor, I carry the role of teaching my students necessary skills for their further academic success. I always feel responsible when I teach English to international students. I constantly question myself about my teaching philosophy and methods. I don’t stop wondering if alternative, or better put, non-traditional teaching methods and activities resonate with my students’ perception of how the additional language needs to be taught. The reason for this constant comparison and questioning is the teaching context and target audience. […]
Teaching in an EFL context differs from teaching in an ESL environment. What seemed obvious in teaching a foreign language to students who shared the same linguistic and cultural background drastically differs from teaching a second language learner. I must admit that it is a radical shift for a linguist and a pedagogue.

These subcategories of the frames that impact my L2 instruction reveal a deeper level of my professional positioning, i.e. my vision that underlies my professional practice.

**Visions of my Professional Practice.** In his review about teacher cognition in language teaching Borg (2003) talks about research on teacher’s cognition and practices in different contexts. Especially, he calls attention to the decision making, instructional methodology choice, education, background, and how the teacher learned the language. These cognitive influences foreground visions of my own professional practice. I define *beliefs about language learning and teaching* as propositions about the latter. In the self-narrative I describe in an arduous manner how much I disagree with the textbook teaching to the test practice and underline the importance of communicative language teaching. I oversee successful vocabulary teaching by addressing the realities of human experiences. My disagreement with the existing L2 teaching practices can be read in the following excerpts:

Teaching decisions are not arbitrary but, instead, are deeply rooted in the instructor's personal convictions and teaching philosophy. [...] It is my creed that cooperative work is a natural way of contributing to the process of adults’ learning through interaction. [...] ESL students in IEPs require more authentic
language learning applicable to their everyday life and academic environment.

[...] From the standpoint of an L2 instructor I must admit that the activities in the textbook were barely facilitating CLT. [...] My own expectations about vocabulary learning contradicted the ‘dry’ teaching-to-test. I was impatiently waiting for the day(s) of playful vocabulary learning activities.

In extension of my teaching beliefs, the node L2 teaching assumptions emerged during the coding process. Under this big umbrella of visions and views of my professional practice I also put in line such codes as teaching expectations, perspective, responsibility, inquiry, and passion. In their research Brandenburg et al. (2008) recognize the importance of assumptions and beliefs in teaching practices, as they reshape, remodel, and refine practices, and “stimulate the production of (new) knowledge” (p. 28). In my narrative I coded L2 teaching assumptions twenty-three times. I used such verbs as ‘it seemed’, ‘it is assumed’, ‘one assumption’, ‘this might mean’, ‘it was supposed to’, ‘as I predicted’, etc. One strong climax statement is:

My assumptions and beliefs were constantly challenged.

I reflect now why I brought this statement out. The whole vision of L2 playful activities was very demanding. It needed thinking and rethinking, justification and realignment, confirmation and validation. It was a true process of self-study research and reflection of my L2 vocabulary teaching practices. My teaching expectations were the bar that I set high. It was the ultimate perspective of my teaching improvement. I acknowledged the responsibility behind my teaching, and the inquiry that drove my passion.
To exemplify the visions of my professional practice, below is an excerpt that refers to my teaching expectations:

My expectations from my students were to see them building new knowledge on their previously acquired information. [...] Complex syntax, word building, successful entering to peer conversations, register variations - all these linguistic cues were expected to be observed during the student’s linguistic knowledge increment. [...] At that point, as a communicative teaching element I would love to see more impromptu conversations.

While describing the node *perspectives* which was defined as both point of view and envisioning I talk about positioning myself in the role of a facilitator in the power hierarchy:

I have the power of lowering the level of language learning anxiety. I envisioned my role as a teacher-facilitator by devising non-graded activities and creating a non-threatening environment for my own students. I was able to control the tension of my students by turning their individual response to a pair or group activity participation.

As a derivation of the analysis of the professional positioning within the large subcategory of instruction theme, it is crucial to illustrate the following line from the self-narrative:

There was this ongoing dialogue between my beliefs and my research inquiry. These beliefs were emerging in the way I set up my vocabulary teaching, the way I interacted with my students, and the way my past teaching experiences were
influencing my teaching. The analogies and metaphors were developing from the synthesis of my actions and my personal professional positioning.

The term perspective is defined in the literature as critical and insightful points of view. It also “involves the discipline of asking” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 54).

**Instructional Decisions**

The implementation of instructional decisions of language instructors is well documented in several studies (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Mendieta Aguilar, 2011). Educators place special emphasis on describing how they make these choices. For the most part instructors manipulate curriculum material and adjust instruction based on their students’ performance (Blankenship, 1985). The documented ESL teachers' perceptions about what influenced their instructional activities were the overwhelming concern with students’ understanding, motivation and involvement, and the appropriateness of their (teachers’) teaching strategies (Johnson, 1992). The retrospective reflection of teaching decisions provides the teachers opportunities to understand the dynamics of how they learn and act in the classroom.

The acknowledgement that people’s experiences are connected to their life cycle and are socially constructed evidence that each educator brings into practice their identity, intellectual, moral, and cultural knowledge. One way to reveal the philosophy and beliefs about instructional decisions is to analyze the narrative stories created by these educators (Mendieta Aguilar, 2011). Going through these personal narratives, some researchers conclude that each individual educator, based on their pedagogical beliefs, tensions and challenges, creates their own version of curriculum (Drake & Sherin, 2006).
Moreover, they confirm that understanding the educators’ specific instructional decisions are not isolated statements but deeply rooted in their stories of themselves as language learners and teachers. In my self-narrative I wrote:

Teaching decisions are not arbitrary but, instead, are deeply rooted in the instructor's personal convictions and teaching philosophy. [...] In my personal experience, my teaching decisions about teaching adults primarily stemmed from The Adult Learning Theory initiated by prominent scholar Cyril Houle, and later expanded by the American educator Malcolm Knowles who used the term Andragogy when speaking about teaching adults.

When I describe on several occasions and excerpts how I think, prepare, and set up playful learning activities, I relate my thought process with the findings of Mendieta Aguilar (2011). Her analysis of three narrative stories of foreign language teachers reveal that an experiential and interaction driven language teacher adopts a student-centered approach to language teaching; the strategic and goal-oriented educator chooses a goal-oriented approach, and the third, fun-driven and language centered teacher created a language-oriented curriculum. Similarly, though my own self-narrative of playfully teaching L2 vocabulary I had some personal revelation for myself. Namely, my teaching decisions and inquiry methods were heavily influenced by two factors - the pedagogical problems that I wanted to solve, and the students’ needs that I wanted to address while teaching adult L2 learners.

Pedagogical Problem. I have been in the profession of additional language teaching for more than a decade now and I developed the perspective of being a creative
and practical reformer. My main goal of effective language teaching has stemmed from the awareness of apparent gaps between what I believe should be effective language learning and the actual teaching content. As Loughran (2004a) notes, self-study emerged in academia to address the attempts of educators “to better understand the problematic world of teaching and learning” (p. 9). The discerning of problems and seeking solutions about what might be done is aimed at bringing change and improvement in personal teaching practice. Teaching decisions are reframing teaching practices. Under the subcategory of pedagogical problem, I nested the following nodes: researcher’s mindset, teachable moment, language learning challenges, inauthentic teaching materials, and tensions in teaching. These codes established the logic of attempts to solve the pedagogical problem. The reference to the pedagogical problem was addressing the “safety and challenge between a constructive learning experience and an uncomfortable learning experience” (Brandenburg et al., 2008, p. 26).

When describing my teaching decisions in the self-narrative, I constantly used verbs such as ‘prepare’, ‘intentionally start’, ‘grouped’, ‘pre-taught’, ‘explained’, ‘previously did not show initiative’, etc. It is my belief that through this language I was trying to align playful activities with the pre-existing curriculum, at the same time I was experimenting in part with my beliefs, experience, and opinion, with my own model of curriculum and vocabulary teaching practices. The self-study research was a helpful paradigm in understanding certain issues in L2 vocabulary teaching, and the process of students’ retention of that knowledge. To see what actually happens in an adult L2 learning classroom was possible through my researcher’s mindset. This was the new way
of looking at ordinary and routine L2 vocabulary instruction. The research was developing through the scientific lens of inquiry. For instance, in one of the excerpts of my narrative I wrote:

Another important thing about my investigation was my researcher’s mindset. I was constantly thinking about my research questions, my personal beliefs, and possible theories that can support those beliefs. [...] I was hoping to see the synthesis of distinct characteristics of Adult Learning Theory, Communicative Language Teaching, and theories of play in my instruction.

As a goal-driven person my interest in exposing my students to challenging and meaningful vocabulary learning practices drove my lessons towards achievement of pre-established student learning outcomes. I was going back and forth between the content and the teachable moment that originates from my playful teaching. By acknowledging the inauthenticity of my previous vocabulary teaching and further depriving myself from those non-genuine teaching materials, I was looking for evidence of my students’ overcoming language learning challenges.

During consecutive implications of elements of novelties, adjustments, and embedment in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) brings into play a whole pleiad of teachable moments. These moments carry the whole galaxy of the instructor’s beliefs about how to teach adult language learners in my particular case.

Along with success and triumph, it was an extremely valuable finding for me to learn that not all activities were culturally acceptable for everybody. For instance, I wrote,
This specific activity had a dual effect on my students - some students blended into playful language learning activity momentarily and enjoyed the opportunity far and wide. Some students felt frustration about ineptitude and inability to remember the vocabulary in order to express their opinion. This finding was very valuable for me as I needed to consider cultural habits and practices of my students when creating similar teachable moments in the future.

From these excerpts of my data analysis I encountered the teaching tensions that were experienced by several self-study researchers. These tensions are in part bound to my beliefs, experiences, and issues that relate to my teaching practices. To exemplify these tensions in teaching, there were several statements that described how I felt during the activity set up and after teaching it:

However, what was expected was not always detected. [...] My assumptions and beliefs were constantly challenged.

It was becoming obvious that I was re-creating my professional self and that my teaching activity was going beyond the mere transmission of language teaching content. It was also becoming apparent that I was bringing to my teaching not only my content knowledge but my assumptions, theoretical knowledge, and pedagogical problem-solving skills. By bringing these characteristics of my professional self into my teaching practices, I was investigating my students’ strengths and weaknesses, attitudes and perceptions, beliefs and challenges about language learning. These reciprocal actions demonstrated the two-way traffic of knowledge exchange. My students learned from me, and I similarly learned from them. One important evidence for my instructional decisions
was the mere fact that the teaching decisions for pedagogical problem solving could be attributed to my researcher’s mindset that was envisioning language learning challenges, and that I was attempting to avoid inauthentic teaching material in L2 vocabulary teaching. The tensions in teaching led to revision of teaching strategies and materials aiming at creating more teachable moments and memorable practices for vocabulary acquisition.

It is crucial in this dissertation project to acknowledge that the transformation of my instruction and teaching decisions would be impossible without considering the language learning students’ needs and their goals. Further, I am unfolding and highlighting the importance of co-construction of students’ language learning skills. I am also demonstrating the magnitude of the impact of existing learning theories on the outcomes of my self-study.

**Students’ Needs.** As previously mentioned in one of the chapters, the second language acquisition process is integration of four skills (i.e. listening, reading, writing, and speaking). The integration and balance between the instruction of these four skills develop language learning students’ communicative competence. It is my belief that the application of on-going performance assessments reveals students’ knowledge, their skills, and dispositions in action. Brandenburg et al. (2008) highlight the importance of knowing about the individual needs and concerns of students. They also add that the educator should have the sense of one’s own goals for the student’s learning so that to consider the possible and acceptable risks for the students’ development. They highlight the educator’s commitment of
caring (being attentive and receptive to others’ needs and concerns), paying attention to the individual needs of others (as opposed to thinking about the needs of the group), genuineness and honesty, taking risks and exposing one’s vulnerability, and trusting in oneself and one’s students (p. 28).

Interestingly, Shawer (2013) indicates that when working with language learners the educator might face contradicting statements about communicative teaching as students might have different perceptions about language learning. To reveal these dispositions, the author suggests building a bridge to overcome the gap between teaching practice and students’ perceptions about language learning. Namely, he sees the necessity of checking and addressing student needs and reflecting on and improving on their work.

In my self-narrative the node student needs is defined as a deficit in L2 learning skills. During the entire process of setting up the playful vocabulary learning activities my goal was to effectively teach new words and enhance language learning skills through communication and pair-work. In their research about teaching language skills Mendieta Aguilar (2011) and Shawer (2013) in the same way provide evidence that in the process of decision making the educator considers the compound internal and external factors of each student, thus inevitably building the teaching content on student needs. Under the umbrella of student needs I highlight the significance of effective language acquisition and language learning skills, the theories behind these effectiveness (CLT, PLI, and ALT), as well as the significance of interaction and exposure to the target language.

When addressing these factors and components of students’ needs in L2 vocabulary acquisition, I witnessed how all the knowledge or attributes that I mentioned
directly affected the type of decisions I made in my teaching. The students’ needs were prioritized during the planning of alternative vocabulary teaching activities. The parallels were also drawn when I was interpreting the existing curriculum for the low intermediate level. My vocabulary teaching practice was shaped by a compound of several factors, which included but was not limited to the objective of L2 students’ effective L2 vocabulary learning achievement.

I defined the node *effective L2 acquisition* as follows: successful in producing an intended result. As a verification of this definition I have several excerpts from the self-narrative that prioritize the audience, their goals, and the content for effective teaching.

In my opinion, based on my expertise, adult language learners need exposure to the target language through interactive, engaging, and authentic communication. [...] ESL students in IEPs require more authentic language learning applicable to their everyday life and academic environment. [...] Irrespective of the fact that my students are ESL learners and not EFL, I believe that adult learning should primarily be built on students’ needs. Adult learners start anew their education and are very goal-oriented. One assumption of adult learning theory is about the planning of educational activities on realities of human experiences. This might be carried out through a complex of interactional elements. It is my creed that cooperative work is a natural way of contributing to the process of adults’ learning through interaction.
In these specific examples, I demonstrated that my vocabulary instruction heavily depended on how I saw myself as an educator (my role and positioning) and how I wanted to address my students' needs (instructional decisions for pedagogical problems).

Connely and Clandinin (1986) account that teachers personalize theoretical ideas and make them practical for the classroom situation. Markedly, the implication of the Communicative Language Teaching, theories of play, and Adult Learning Theory conjointly added magnitude to my personalized theoretical background choice. In my narrative I defined the node *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) as the interaction that is both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a second language. The node *Playful Language Instruction* (PLI) was explicated as playful activities to stimulate students and promote learning. The node *Adult Learning Theory* was expanded as educational activities on realities of human experiences. During the examination of my data the layers of analysis, coding, and categorizing led me to discover that the language used in the narrative was built around these theories and spotlighted students’ needs, the quality of their interaction, and the actual exposure to the target language. For example, below are several excerpts where I talk about CLT, PLI, and ALT and connect these theories with my vision of L2 vocabulary teaching:

CLT underlines interactive learning which is very important for language acquisition and expressive vocabulary in particular. [...] CLT was composed of a complex of facilitative, meaningful, and cooperative elements of teaching. [...] I believed that the playful non-graded activities that I prepared for the ‘dessert’ will be the missing communicative part and the peak of my vocabulary
teaching. These playful activities were aimed at filling in the neglected part of my students’ vocabulary retention and reproduction. At the same time, I did not forget to consider my students’ perceptions and feelings about these playful activities. [...] The playful activity was supposed to apply level-appropriate vocabulary in the given playful communicative context. [...] The playful activity already evoked curiosity and a humorous attitude. It was interactive and was leading to out-of-the-box thinking. [...] In my personal experience, my teaching decisions about teaching adults primarily stemmed from The Adult Learning Theory initiated by prominent scholar Cyril Houle, and later expanded by the American educator Malcolm Knowles who used the term Andragogy when speaking about teaching adults. Irrespective of the fact that my students are ESL learners and not EFL, I believe that adult learning should primarily be built on students’ needs. Adult learners start anew their education and are very goal-oriented.

The entire data analysis of this project is presented by using excerpts from my self-narrative and by linking these statements to theoretical underpinnings and personal reflections. When I began this self-study journey, my second language instruction was based upon my professional experience of teaching English as a foreign and second language as well as my beliefs on how language learning should happen. I developed descriptive metaphors and stated examples that were refined from the self-narrative. By incorporating playful elements in my L2 vocabulary instruction I saw the value of interaction (communication) and vocabulary retention (output). I made an effort to understand my own L2 teaching experiences as well as I got to know my students’
perceptions about language learning. Most importantly, I endeavored to answer two questions:

1. How does embedded playful instruction enhance vocabulary learning practices of adult L2 learners? And,

2. To what extent does the playful L2 vocabulary instruction contribute to improvement and change in my L2 vocabulary teaching practices?

These questions guided the analysis of my collected data which is reflected in my self-narrative. They determined my underlying beliefs and expertise found in my adult language teaching classroom. These questions also helped to further develop the metaphor of the Matryoshka doll. The tedious process of revisiting the data through constant comparison of my statements allowed me to reconstruct my data numerous times, thus letting me see what is hidden in the deeper layers of the records. The last small doll hidden in the Matryoshka doll was the actual answer to the research questions of this project. The self-study enabled me to find the answer to these questions a) through examining my own L2 vocabulary teaching practice (the way I set up my teaching) and b) through attending interviews where my adult low-intermediate proficiency students shared their perceptions about playful vocabulary learning experiences.

**Research Questions and Discussions**

In this self-study, I created a descriptive self-narrative text that was based on my reflections from the videotapes of my playful language instruction, my personal notes, responses from student interviews, responses from the Anxometer data, artifacts of the actual playful activities with Bee-bot, students’ self-confidence checklists, and the
discussions of my project with my critical friend. These observations that concluded as a narrative text and served as data for analysis provided means of examining my instructional practice and understanding my L2 vocabulary teaching process.

Research Question 1. How Does Embedded Playful Instruction Enhance Vocabulary Learning Practices of Adult L2 Learners?

My observations about enhanced vocabulary learning were derived from the categories developed from my reflective self-narrative data and my students’ referred feedback about their playful vocabulary learning practices. In answering my first research question on enhanced L2 vocabulary learning, two sub-themes emerged: meeting L2 learning students’ needs and providing them with direct vocabulary learning experiences (see Figure 5). From the reflection of my data analysis and the language that I used in my narrative, following layers of findings were emerged:

- New ways of L2 vocabulary learning that included change in learning habits
- Direct experiences of critical thinking and authentic language production
- Reduced second language learning anxiety ensured by a non-threatening environment

These developed sub-themes from the analysis of my reflective self-narrative data determined how I embedded playful language learning in my L2 vocabulary teaching and how that application enhanced adult L2 learners’ vocabulary learning. The first sub-theme ‘meeting L2 learning students’ needs to enhance their vocabulary learning practices’ was nested under the large theme of Instruction. It was my belief that the
existing lesson plans and assessment of the vocabulary knowledge required adjustments. Through my vision of the change in habitual and inauthentic teaching material, I made extensive use of playful robotics. The goal of these playful activities was to make adjustments to the current student learning outcomes and to introduce new and authentic language learning skills. The component of interaction and direct exposure was endorsing the critical thinking of adult language learners. One benefit of being exposed to authentic material was the evidence of the reduced language learning anxiety. The students were so busy with generating their responses that they did not pay attention that the activity was actually assessing their vocabulary skills. This adjusted facilitative vocabulary teaching was corresponding to their learning outcomes, at the same time it was not adding pressure of being tested in their knowledge. The exposure to the second language was happening in a real-time environment through cooperative pair-work and play. There were no pre-fabricated answers to the questions: rather, spontaneous language and generation of responses were being produced throughout these three playful activities. The vocabulary retrieval process came naturally through the peer and instructor scaffolding, through writing and erasing, giggling and frowning. The vivid process of language production maintained elements of individual and cultural traits. The enhancement of vocabulary learning practices was content-related and genuine. Responses contained errors that enabled me to address later in my further teaching. The students were scaffolding each other during the note taking, brainstorming, preparation for answering the questions, and later group discussion of the topic. The critical thinking component that was lacking during my regular vocabulary teaching was also present during these playful activities.
As previously mentioned, the teaching to the test scenario commonly frames the IEP instructors’ teaching style. By defying the regular, it was interesting to see the natural vocabulary retrieval process during the peer interaction. It was beneficial for both the students who were learning vocabulary through communication and me to know where I needed to improve my teaching. The execution of the activities was set up for shorter time periods (the last fifteen minutes of the fifty-minute class time). However, with the progression of time and familiarity with the playful activity format the time of the second activity increased in comparison with the first activity. Ultimately, the anticipated time for the third activity (15 minutes) was doubled as the students were involved in the conversation and did not notice that the time was up.

This progression of time of the communicative activity was the testimony of students’ will to be engaged in longer conversations and more opportunities for self-expression. With each new activity the conversations were more genuine and original. The students were not only retrieving the vocabulary of the book unit but also were contributing to the discussion by using other words related to the context of the topic. The process of teaching through the adjusted material revealed such nodes as critical thinking, interaction, exposure, authenticity, learning outcome, and reduced anxiety that together nominated the enhancement of vocabulary learning practices.

The second sub-theme addressing vocabulary enhancement was nested under the large theme of Planning. Setting up cooperative learning materials aimed at communication improvement, facilitation of playful vocabulary acquisition, scaffolding peer learning, and securing the playful environment was one step towards providing
students with direct vocabulary learning experiences. Throughout my analysis and re-examination of my coding of the data, I scrutinized over how the language instruction was described in receiving vocabulary instruction within the playful framework. The sub-themes emerged as I was coding and examining how my students reflected on playful activities. For instance, I noticed in my coding that I reflected on students’ experience of being given a choice to respond to the comprehensive questions of the book unit. During the interview and conversations with my critical friend, my students were reflecting on their feelings about the new activity. The change of learning habits was another prominent discovery. The majority of students were in awe and thrill about the change. I discovered that the language that my students used throughout the activities and interviews to describe their feelings and perceptions about playful vocabulary learning led them to new perspectives of vocabulary learning, learning next steps, and increased confidence. The codes showed how they started reflecting on the learning setup. In the further examination, I discovered that the setup of the new activities and the environment together uncovered my aim of language learning facilitation rather than direct vocabulary teaching. I developed a sense of agency by challenging my students to try these new learning practices. I documented the shift from the curriculum driven teaching to that of students’ communication needs. The learning was taking place in a less controlling environment. What my students used to consider vocabulary learning was a curriculum that was being covered by their instructor. In this new playful environment, where I stepped back as the class leader, my students started making both individual and group efforts towards group problem-solving. By changing the regular way of approaching L2
vocabulary learning, both instructional and peer scaffolding promoted recognition of students’ capacity of language production rather than their passive consumption. Scaffolding became a means of exposing my students to this new world of vocabulary learning. When used effectively, the language facilitation and scaffolding became a positive learning experience and promoted new learning habits. I took the role of a facilitator rather than an immediate informant. This facilitative approach encouraged my students to use their linguistic knowledge to develop answers to the posed questions. Scaffolding in communicative language teaching was inevitably happening through cooperative learning, which in turn, appeared to be a powerful tool to help language learners succeed in vocabulary learning.

Language learners take an active role in their education and as an educator my task is to investigate questions regarding how the shared language learning perspectives between my students and myself influence their willingness to engage in the learning process and succeed in the class. My self-study is constitutive to my understanding of my beliefs about vocabulary teaching and how these beliefs inform my actions in the classroom. I was focusing on the what and how of my classroom vocabulary teaching practice to determine the effectiveness and success of the approach of playful vocabulary instruction. I was particularly analyzing my students’ directives of what was going well and which action was causing frustration. By providing me with the necessary information about their playful language learning perceptions, I was explicitly told that the novelty of the learning style was well accepted but not unanimously. I discovered that by concentrating my efforts towards setting up an ‘ideal’ teaching material I did not
consider the cultural aspect of playful instruction. The role of values, especially cultural
values, in the life of both an individual and society, is extremely important. In accordance
with these values social relations are established during the communication and
information selection. During these social interactions the conversers reveal emotions,
feelings, and interaction skills. Values are of great importance in any culture, since they
determine a person's relationship to nature, society, the immediate environment, and
oneself. To a certain extent, intercultural communication can be viewed as a relationship
between opposing identities, in which the interlocutors' identities are included in each
other (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961). Thus, the unknown and unfamiliar in the identity
of the interlocutor become familiar and understandable, which allow us to expect from
them the corresponding types of behavior and actions.

The interaction of identities facilitates the coordination of relations in
communication, and determines its type and mechanism. The variations in value
orientation, described by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) address the relational
operations of interlocutors which serve as the foundation of communication and influence
its content. Through this self-study project I realized that playful language learning can
be challenging and frustrating for some of my international students. It was very
unexpected to learn from the interview that one student was feeling anxious all the way
through the entire activities. The student’s first language was Japanese. This student was
trying to save his face when he did not know how to respond to the question. Moreover,
that student confessed during the interview with my critical friend that he was not fluent
during the playful activity and that he could not come up with the right word when
needed. He underlined that his Spanish speaking peers were using their native language when they were unable to find the English equivalent. This discontent vocalized by my student clearly evoke in my memory these acts of translanguaging during the playful activity. Obviously, the Spanish speakers’ conditions of communication among each other were more favorable. The benefits of sharing a home language (or first language) and the opportunities of translanguaging was one substantial finding of my research. I found out that the emotional condition of joy during the playful learning activity was determined with the reciprocal native language vocabulary exchange. Most importantly, this genuine verbal exchange was tremendously helpful when the students were seeking a concept or term word. The interchange of words was happening not only through English language vocabulary scaffolding but also via native language dialogue. The affective bar of the Spanish-speaking students was being lowered through the confidence of being understood, while the meaning making suffered during the communication between students who were not sharing the same native language.

Irrespective of the bitterness in his statements regarding the use of the first language as a privilege among Spanish speaking peers, later in his dialogue with my critical friend and interviewer, the Japanese student recognized the value of his classmates’ willingness to scaffold. He admitted that it was unbearably hard for him to act appropriately during these pair-work activities. He also confessed that play was not something they do in their classrooms in Japan. He acknowledged that he did not share the first language with his peers (unlike the other three students), thus that made his communication during the playful activity more strenuous. To culminate the analysis of
this students’ reflection on playful vocabulary instruction, it was good to know that the experience eventually seemed less dramatized due to the cheerful atmosphere during the actual playful activity.

My first research question enabled me to conclude with the biggest finding of my students’ playful L2 vocabulary learning practices. I do not have the node translanguaging either in my NVivo coding or in the language of my self-narrative. It emerged through the deep analysis of the feedback to the cooperative playful learning. The translanguaging that was embedded in the theory of dynamic bilingualism focuses on fluidity of language use, and it is opposed to the idealized and prescribed practices (García, 2009). I directly observed my students’ communication in action and how the playful activity was extending the repertoire of their linguistic features. My students’ voices that I encountered through the interview and checklists allowed me to see how the embedded playful instruction is beneficial for a group of students, and not so helpful for one student. It was through the class observation of the language that was being socially constructed and the interview responses that I was able to recognize the deliberate switching from use of one language to another, empowered by the translanguaging. These on site observations maximized my opportunities to recognize and develop my students’ linguistic and knowledge resources. The cooperative, inclusive, and bridging practices activated interesting dialogues and tended to create a non-threatening learning environment. At the same time, the lack of translanguaging opportunities, due to not having a Japanese speaking peer, was limiting language learning and restricting opportunities for the one student to combine languages during the dialogue.
Observing translanguaging in action was very valuable for this self-study. Even though I did not anticipate acts of translanguaging during the communicative practice, this has been a very purposeful language learning experience. Moreover, this experience affected both social and academic domains. These playful activities unfolded the layers of interpretation of play in various cultures, the significance of the language play, and it brought an element of creativity in language generation practices. This essential finding allowed me to go one step further in acknowledging the benefits of playful activities in adult classroom, and to plan my L2 vocabulary teaching accordingly.

To answer my first research question about the effectiveness of embedding playful activities in L2 vocabulary instruction, I used descriptions and analysis of data that came from the language in my narrative, and the lived playful learning experiences of my international students. I discovered that to teach L2 vocabulary effectively I focused primarily on the actual planning of these activities, and the facilitative instruction of the material. I was able to connect pieces between what students need to know and how that knowledge should be transmitted. By enhanced playful instruction I adjusted existing teaching materials and created activities that would increase critical thinking, interaction, authenticity, and exposure to the target language. Simultaneous with the learning outcomes, I created a playful environment to reduce L2 learning anxiety. Within the same perspective of L2 vocabulary learning improvement, I accentuated the change of learning practices and initiated facilitation of communicative and cooperative vocabulary learning. However, my playful instruction became more successful owing to some of my adult language learners’ ability to collaborate with each other and to use
translanguaging as a communicative strategy. It was interesting to realize that I was scaffolding my students’ translanguaging by letting them engage me in that activity. As a person who is fluent in Spanish I modelled the dynamic language use by responding to my students both in English (paraphrasing the term) and/or Spanish (translating the term).

![Figure 5 Enhanced Vocabulary Learning Practices](image)

**Research Question 2.** To what extent does the navigation of playful robotics contribute to improvement and change in my teaching practice?

In answering my second research question about improvement and change in my L2 vocabulary teaching practices, two sub-themes emerged: *positioning* and *conscious self-interrogation* (see Figure 3). From the reflection of my analysis of the construction
of my professional identity and the language that I used in my narrative, following layers of findings were developed:

- Construction of professional identity through conscious interrogation
- Facilitation of vocabulary learning through playful activities
- Transformation of L2 vocabulary teaching through defying the regular habits.

The sub-theme *Positioning* that was nested under the large theme of *Instruction* addresses my acknowledgement of the process of construction of my professional identity. The concept of positioning is situated within the social constructivist perspective. It incorporates the idea of discursively constructed and continually reconstructed identities within the social context where shared norms and practices exist (Harré & van Langenhove, 1999). Unlike the concept of role, positioning emphasizes the fluid nature of social interactions. Moreover, it holds that positioning has a shifting nature due to the dynamics related to discursive episodes. That is the reason that positioning through the dialogic exchanges contribute to the continuous work of identity building.

My teaching identity is composed of my experiences with teaching second language and is directly related to my long professional exposure in the field. It includes my interest in listening to the voices of international students and addressing their educational needs. This role is constituted from my pedagogical beliefs and professional background. The construction of my professional identity and the desire to facilitate L2 vocabulary learning emerges from the tensions in L2 teaching. The teaching decisions of how to
facilitate vocabulary teaching stem from tensions, my actions in the classroom, and from interactions with my students.

Through the self-study research that I carried out I was able to see my vocabulary teaching practice within an educational setting. I began to understand my identity by looking closely at how I taught vocabulary and how I reflected in my narrative about that teaching process. My reflective narrative was my identity building resource. I believe the building of my identity and teaching positioning has been in process for over 15 years of my teaching career. My analysis is merely a snapshot within the broader context of an ongoing teacher identification process across my professional life. The recreation and formation of my teaching identity is a dynamic work and is contingent upon positioning moves by different circumstances.

The complexity of attempting to understand my practice and the new image of my L2 vocabulary teaching became possible through examining my reflective work as a teacher facilitator navigating between my beliefs about L2 vocabulary teaching and my students’ learning needs. My organizational skills revealed my goal of creating a communicative classroom and being a facilitator, rather than a direct instructor. My identity incorporates my positioning and the desire to transform my teaching habits. It is in the intersection of overcoming teaching tensions built on previous teaching disagreements, and having a clear vision of need for change by reframing my perspective (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). By moving from an unexamined way of thinking towards the way of thinking in a critically reflective way, the improvement of my practice started from my positioning, or otherwise said, construction of my professional identity. The
self-reflective assessment of my ideas and beliefs about L2 vocabulary teaching led to significant professional transformations. The collaborative problem posing and solving it ushered the professional perception of my own self to that of a facilitator and a strategic planner. The self-study research helped me to become critically reflective on my beliefs and assumptions, thus contributing to making the best judgement to guide my L2 vocabulary teaching actions.

One major feature in the construction of my professional identity and positioning within the L2 vocabulary teaching is the apprehension that the language learning should be meaningful and that the process of communication should involve personal rather than prescribed thoughts. I highlight authenticity in the teaching material because by reframing my teaching I want to evade traditional memorization. I acknowledge that the learner needs assistance during L2 acquisition, at the same time I allow my students to take the initiative and challenge their knowledge. I am aiming at seeing more autonomous thinkers who bring into the learning their values, culture, feelings, and skills. By critically examining my teaching practices, I aspire to see a more self-regulated learning where I can be a mentor, rather than a direct instructor.

During the next step of critically analyzing my positioning on the way to L2 vocabulary teaching practices and its transformation, I concurrently developed the knowledge of conscious interrogation of my teaching. The second sub-theme that was nested under the large theme of Transformation was the constant conscious interrogation of my L2 vocabulary teaching practices. I was undergoing self-questioning and self-analysis with the goal of revealing my teaching development. The examination of the
needs of language learners was framed into the phrase *defying the regular* where I heavily relied on the value of the inquiry and background knowledge. It is my belief that for our students to reach high levels of vocabulary learning and language learning achievement in particular, we need to have high levels of competence. To attain that competence, my students needed to defy the regular along with me. To immerse into that knowledge about how my teaching is developing, I created my self-reflective narrative which was a reflective dialogue with myself, a collaborative inquiry with my students, as well as a rich conversation with my researcher critical friend.

The extensive constituent of the process of resisting the traditional curriculum driven teaching is the conscious interrogation and reflection of the existing L2 vocabulary teaching material. Through the self-study research I brought to light that the well-documented benefits of communicative language teaching were not materialized in the language learning classrooms. Intensive English Programs include the Communicative Language Teaching method in their mission statements and curriculum. However, it is my perspective that the actual lesson planning stands far from that announcement. My researchers’ mindset allowed me to examine my beliefs and actions through the context of my teaching as an ESL educator. The inquiry and search for perspectives helped me raise pedagogical questions about L2 vocabulary facilitation and my L2 teaching improvement. The conscious interrogation through the self-narrative assisted me in speculating and thinking back on what was done, reasoning about it in a written form, and then extending the meaning of my teaching as answers to my posed research questions.
Taken together, during the responding to my second research question, another substantive finding that emerged from the data was my deliberate self-positioning. Throughout the whole discourse in my self-narrative I was positioning myself as an inquisitive educator. I was referring to the fact that the whole teaching setup, planning, and the actual delivery of playful activities was primarily based on the teaching tensions, disconnects in the practice, and my ardent decision to make a change and improve my teaching. When I was addressing the injustice of language learners’ deprivation from authentic and communicative language learning, I was vocalizing the importance of knowing and addressing our students’ learning needs. My concomitant story line was nothing but my perceived dissent with the existing vocabulary teaching practices. It conveyed records of my noncompliance with the instructional techniques and deliberate inclination toward ‘defying the regular’.

The code deliberate self-positioning did not come naturally during my NVivo coding. The analysis of the construction of my professional identity, where I was foremost positioning myself as a facilitator, the specific discourse episodes emphasized the planning component of my teaching. The process of planning can be directly applied to better understanding of how I intentionally set up the activities with the perspective of a researcher’s mindset. Stressing my agency was extremely important for my vocabulary teaching decisions. My professional background knowledge, my L2 teaching experiences, and the acknowledgement of tensions in teaching constituted and emphasized my deliberate self-positioning in teaching L2 vocabulary. There were triggering forces and circumstances that furthered the creation of my teaching identity. Those changes in
teaching behavior were directed towards improvement of my L2 vocabulary teaching. The emphasized blend of my biography, my beliefs, my teaching practices, and my agency stress my unique point of view about how I should teach L2 vocabulary to adults of low-intermediate level language proficiency. The deliberate expression of my agency was the acknowledged or conscious choice of who I want to be in the classroom in order to facilitate students’ vocabulary learning process. I could reach this notion of how my teaching might improve using instructional scaffolding and deliberate positioning myself as a conscious interrogator.

Figure 6 Improvement in My L2 Vocabulary Teaching Practices

When I first started teaching English as a Second language, I believed that teaching L2 language needs to totally differ from how I learned English language myself.
I was certain that pure memorization and teaching to the test was not going to contribute to the vocabulary learning of L2 adults of low-intermediate level language proficiency. Instead, through the analysis of my descriptive self-narrative I have found that once I began reflecting on my formal education describing its challenges and relation to my actual L2 teaching, I created an alternative vocabulary instruction mode – a new way to help students of diverse cultures. In doing so, I enabled myself and my students to establish the connection between our identities and the facilitative playful language learning practices.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This qualitative self-study served to investigate adult language learners’ playful vocabulary learning practices, and examined how these experiences influenced and shaped my professional identity. Wilcox et al. (2004) write that “we learn from experience. The ‘experience’ is professional practice and ‘we’ is practitioners” (p. 275). This study contributes to the body of knowledge of those L2 educators who seek new insights to consider as they prepare to facilitate their adult students’ L2 learning experiences. This self-study may be implemented in these educators’ professional learning and teaching practices, as well as deepen the impact of deliberate self-positioning. Before this study, I theorized about how I could help adult language learners acquire L2 vocabulary communicatively in a classroom setting. Through this self-study I have been able to understand the importance of my deliberate self-positioning in creating the learning environment within the diverse L2 classroom. I have also realized the potential and benefits of translanguaging in facilitative and cooperative playful language learning environment. I did not use the nodes translanguaging and deliberate self-positioning in my NVivo analysis. These findings became possible through the cyclical reflection process defined by Tidwell and Fitzgerald (2004). This ongoing reflection with actions changing was explained by them as “engaged by action, informed through reflection, and expanded by change” (p. 70). The codes, sub-themes, and themes emerged though the direct implication or indirect language used in my self-narrative data. The
answers to my questions were formed during the process of dismantling the metaphoric Matryoshka doll.

The first research question of this self-study examined planning and instruction of playful activities by asking how does the embedded playful instruction enhance vocabulary learning practices of adult L2 learners? The metaphor of the Matryoshka doll helped me in the unstacking process of my data analysis. The layer beneath the biggest doll was uncovering the big umbrella of planning playful activities. By constant comparison of units of analysis in my self-narrative manuscript, I deepened my understanding of the constituent elements of playful activities and the teaching philosophy behind this planning. The setup of new playful teaching activities was based on the acknowledgement of complexities and inappropriateness of the existing L2 vocabulary teaching material. The adjustments of teaching material were an anticipated change that led to cooperative and authentic communicative vocabulary learning. As it stated in Deweyan’s *Experience and Education* (1944/2009) the instruction needs to be made considering the experience and capacities that learners already have, and we must provide the starting point for the further learning. It is also essential that the new learning experience can be relatable intellectually to those students’ earlier experiences, thus stimulating them new ways of observation. This will also expand the areas of their further learning experiences (Dewey, 1938/1997).

Earlier in my chapters I drew a Venn Diagram that was visually demonstrating the constituent parts of Adult Learning Theory, Communicative Language Teaching, and theories of play. The logical relation between sets showed that in the intersection of these
theories the lateral thinking of the learner is going to be augmented and that the acquired knowledge is going to be adapted for social assimilation. Thus, the salient findings of this research revealed the benefits of balanced use of translinguaging for social assimilation. The socially co-constructed responses during the playful activity provided the adult L2 learners a safe space where they could reflect on their learning. And finally, the incidents of rich and meaningful dialogues were the acknowledgement of the actual process of authentic L2 vocabulary learning.

In sum, establishing a non-threatening learning environment and building relationships with one another was a strong characteristic of cooperative communicative language learning. Providing adult L2 learners with direct experiences of authentic language learning was a big step towards meaningful dialogues. Alternative playful teaching method revealed the potential of the change and the power of the choice in teaching material. Through the ongoing communication during playful activities the out-of-the-box thinking and cultural values were linked together. This self-study revealed the significance of acknowledging the role of translinguaging within the process of L2 vocabulary learning and how enabling adult language learners use of their home language can serve the function of moving along the joint understanding by the students (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). Swain and Lapkin (2000) advocate for allowing the development and maintenance of the home language while learning the L2, this way enabling our students to learn the L2 language successfully. The socio-cultural theory of mind acknowledges that the home language serves as a tool to help language learners to understand and make sense of the requirements of the task. It is also empowering learners to focus attention on
the form, the use of the vocabulary, and overall the ability to comprehend the nature of collaboration. The adult L2 students learn the cognitively challenging academic vocabulary by appropriating language practices. The students are ‘languing’ or ‘making meaning and shaping knowledge’ through plural linguistic practices (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007).

Thus, in this project by translanguaging, students who share the same home language were enabled to truly show what they knew. Furthermore, the more students knew about a context during this linguistic practice, the more they were able to “‘language’ and make meaning” (García & Wei, 2014, p. 80). The value of my adult L2 students’ translanguaging was revealed through the playful activity, which was not a typical and routine vocabulary learning practice. Unfortunately, I must admit that the educational spaces of negotiation and leveraging of linguistic semiotic resources in meaning-making is not a common practice in an Intensive English Program due to the tightness of instruction time and proximity of tests and examinations. This study addresses this gap and suggests options of facilitative communicative activities.

The two upcoming examples from the verbatim transcript of the third playful activity are a vivid illustration of how rich the dialogue can be when the students in a group are translanguaging and share the same home language. The analysis enabled me to understand the linguistic structures and pattern factors behind turn-taking and translanguaging acts during the communication of the group of students who share the same first language and those who do not. Below is the full verbatim transcription of the third Bee-bot activity where two Spanish speakers were grouped together. After the
activation of the playful Bee-bot the process of preparation for the discussion of the
assigned topic between two Spanish speakers was videotaped. The students were
supposed to answer three questions about the country that they chose. The questions were
asking the students to discuss the safety and the crime rates in big cities, the design of the
country (e.g. economic opportunities and transportation system), as well as about the
diversity of the community (e.g. mixed-type neighborhood). As it was earlier mentioned
in chapter three, participants have been assigned as Spanish speaker 1 (Sp1), Spanish
speaker 2 (Sp2), Spanish speaker 3 (Sp3), and Japanese speaker (Jp1). The text in square
brackets is my observations.

Moves  [Total duration of the discussion is 16:38 min]

Sp1: Teacher, what is that? [Reading directions. Sp1 takes the leadership and
both students discuss facts about Dominican Republic. Sp1 looks satisfied and is
smiling because he is the expert].

Instructor: Given country. Like your chosen country. So you speak about … ?

Sp1: Dominican Republic.

Instructor: [gives the students the printed picture of the country]. Ok, you can
have this in front of your eyes, it’s gonna be helpful. [students start working]

Sp1: Ok, ok. Write there. Dominican Republic, DR, like D.R. [shows how to
spell], like PR, like Puerto Rico, [dictating].

Sp2: [writes down], yeah Dominican Republic.
Sp1: Is like. No, [spells the word like] other countries, have a city... have city with problems.

Sp2: Ah... [writes down]. Has. [clarifies] Have or has?

Sp1: Some. Some cities are not very safe. How do you say...? One with more safety is tourist parts.

Sp2: The most tourist place. [writes] the most safe place are the turistical...

Sp1: Yeah...

Sp2: Because... [thinking]

Sp1: Yes, because [pause] there...

Sp2: There [writes] is many police?

Sp1: Yes [nodes] many security.

Sp2: Security... 

Sp1: And police walking to protect to take off. To take off...

Sp2: [unsure] to protect the guests.

Sp1: [repeats] the guest.

Sp2: Guests [confirmed].

Sp1: Turistas [Spanish].


Sp1: [nodes] The people that go to beaches...
Sp2: Tourists [repeats] Teacher, how do you say… [didn’t continue]. Because there is many, many securities like police, working for protect, protect of…

Protect … to protect… [writing down]

Sp1: Teacher [referring to the Instructor then changes his mind] …Turista?

[Spanish]

26 Sp2: No gentes [Spanish]. [Looks guilty for using Spanish]

27 Sp1: The people that go to beaches.

Sp2: [reading directions]. Teacher, what is this [showing on the assignment paper]. What is la taza [Spanish] [shows with gestures]. Es [Spanish] like level…

28 Instructor: Es crimen [Spanish]. Mmm… Mayores ciudades [Spanish].

Sp1: Ah, crime is in big cities, like in the capital, no se … higher [Spanish]. The second one. Are in the big city. [writes down] in the big city. In the big city. For example, in cap… cap… [covers his mouth and speaks quietly] cuarenta million.

[Spanish] [mumbles in Spanish] More than? Is that more than 30%? [doubts]

30 60% [Sp2 smiles].

31 Sp2: No, no, the percent.

32 Sp1: 35%. Like 60%? No, may be 60%.

Sp2: Oh [laughing] 60%. Wow [amused] It’s very, very… no livable [mispronounces lay-vble]. [All laugh]. 35% [all laugh] [both start reading the next question].
Sp1: Designed. Disenada [Spanish]?

Sp2: [keeps loudly reading the question] How are the big cities in that country designed?

Sp1: [rereads the question loudly] How are the big cities in that country designed?

Sp2: What is the… the … [trying to find the word] job that Dominican Republic people…

Sp1: A lot of people … economic opportunities.

Sp2: The tourist is the most important…?

Sp1: Yeah. Lo mas importa es economica [Spanish].

Sp2: So they ….. they … gave money [pronounces mo-ni]?

Sp1: The economy depend… eee...

Sp2: What percent the people in specifically tourist [Spanish] People in DR depend specified in tourism?

Sp1: The tourist like 88%. 90%.

Sp2: 88%?

Sp1: We have a lot people working in tourist area… You don’t have to put the percent. You can put ‘la mayoría de personas’ [Spanish] … people

Sp2: Of tourist … tourist… activity [taking notes and showing the notes to the partner]. [both reread and think]. Is this highest? [showing the notes to Sp1]
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Sp1: It’s too high.

Sp2: Too high. May be …?

Sp1: 65. No, 75.

Sp2: Ok, So, is this percent ….?

Sp1: [interrupts] There are jobs. Free jobs. And the other percent work, you know, we have in ‘zona franca’ [Spanish]. Business...

Sp2: Zona franca? [clarifying]

Sp1: Yeah, but zona franca is not like [took the mobile phone to find information to interpret for his partner].

Sp2: So, you say 65%?

Sp1: Yeah, it’s so high. [shows his phone for the definition of zona franca].

Business …

Sp2: So, 25% of people work in zona franca... In free zones?

Sp1: It’s different. Like where they work, doing clothes [shows his t-shirt]

Sp2: So, you say… eee … How do you say when they ship…?

Instructor: Ok, you have five more minutes to discuss and finish up.

Sp1: 25% have business. yeah. Depend [unclear].

Sp2: Doing business?

Sp1: Own [pronouns a-un]. They own business [shows on himself] - propio negocio [Spanish].
Sp2: Own business [mispronounces a-un]. ... [pause] People use public transportation all the time?

Sp1: Yes, De publica [Spanish]. Public transportation ...

Sp2: [writes down] public transportation. How many percent?

Sp1: I don’t know. Too many people.

Sp2: [reads] What would you do to improve that?

Sp1: [laughs] I don’t know. Me?

Sp2: [Taking notes] What is the? [clarifying with the partner]

Sp1: Yeah. Que podria hacer tu...[Spanish]. [Reads question #3 and telling the history of his country]. Black people, Indian people, white people. We have white people.

Sp2: Indian people?

Sp1: Yeah, White people. We have Indian people [explaining to the partner the history of races that ended up in DR]. We have...

Sp2: Indian people name?

Sp1: We don’t have Indian people but we have before they ... America... You remember American.

Sp2: Yeah [nodes]...

Sp1: American people, Hainos, Indian people.

Sp2: There is in the Dominican Republic or ... disappear ... disappear?
Sp1: Disappear. White people, black people. Como mezcla en Espanol [Spanish] showing with his hands.

[writes down] there is black people.

Sp1: Yeah. You don’t have to write [unclear].

Sp2: …? [unclear how to proceed] [writes down] In the community diverse [mispronounces dee-vers]. Varios de ...

Sp1: No… [erases the written] Mixed races. You don’t have to write that, you can write, mescla, diferente [Spanish] [shows with hands]. Como mezcla. Like people are white [trying to explain with gestures] How to say? People like my grandma was white from Spain with green eyes - es como una mezcla [Spanish].

Como yo te digo? [Spanish] [both smile]

Sp2: Si, si [Spanish]. En my country similar [Spanish].

Sp1: People de mezcla, persona de diferente origen [Spanish].

Sp2: Yeah, I understand. [unclear] discente [Spanish] [smiles].

Instructor: One more minute.

Sp2: [writes down] White people, American people.?

Sp1: American? No, we are not American. No… no [shakes his head in disagreement] these people… You can’t say American, we are no American.

Sp2: Ok. other mixed white.
Sp1: As a … [checking on the phone internet], es como una mezcla [Spanish].
[referring to the instructor] Teacher, how do you say rasa mixta? [uses gestures]
Instructor: [paused, waiting for more clarification on the context].
Sp1: Es como rasa mixta. [using gestures] [Spanish]
Instructor: Ooo, you mean when people from different races get married? Mixed races.
Sp1: Yeah. [unclear].
Sp2: No?
Sp1: Yeah [looks at the instructor and uses hand gestures]. Yeah, mixed like, mingled.
Sp2: Es [Spanish] common.
Instructor: Ok. Ready to discuss?

In this verbal interaction between two Spanish speaker students I counted 100 conversation moves. Through the Conversation Analysis method of coding the data, I encountered acts of translanguaging similar to the ones described by García and Wei (2014). The students were enabled to truly show what they know, and at the same time they were taking control of their own learning. In this transcript of communication between two Spanish speaking students the number of moves and turn taking is almost equal. Sp1 student’s communicated utterance number is 47 (47%) and Sp2 student made
45 moves (45%) of the conversation. The Instructor was presented opportunities to participate in the communication eight-times (8%). The acts of translinguaging where both students used words and phrases in Spanish occurred in 23 conversation moves (turns) when communicating with each other (see Table 1). Only one time the instructor translated one word for the group and that was an act of a reply to the initiated question by the student.
Table 1

Conversation Analysis. Distribution of Moves (Turn-Taking) and Translanguaging by Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Group 1 Sp1-Sp2</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Sp1</td>
<td>Sp2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moves</td>
<td>n = 8</td>
<td>n = 47</td>
<td>n = 45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translanguaging</td>
<td>= 1</td>
<td>n = 15</td>
<td>n = 8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Group 2 Sp3-Jp1</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Sp3</td>
<td>Jp1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moves</td>
<td>n = 19</td>
<td>n = 39</td>
<td>n = 28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translanguaging</td>
<td>= 0</td>
<td>n = 1</td>
<td>n = 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the time, the Sp1 student used translanguaging to add, clarify, illustrate or extend information (45%). The act of translanguaging was also serving as a reply (36%), and equally initiation and evaluation of the information (9% for each). It is remarkable that the Sp2 student was also using translanguaging but mostly for evaluation of the information (40%), addition (30%), initiation of new ideas (20%), and as a reply (10%). Two-word utterances in Spanish (markers) were not observed during the discussion (see Table 2). It was distinctive that the most prevalent use of translanguaging by this group of students was aimed at co-construction of meaning both for others and themselves (García & Wei, 2014).
It was interesting to observe that Sp1 student used their mobile phone (technology) twice aiming at clarification or confirmation of their response. In their communication process the students were not being evaluated by me for speaking their home or the other language, but the actual exchange of responses and the use of the strategic language repertoire of both. As it is described in García and Wei, (2014) for the successful communication the students were including multimodal semiotics as well. Their communication was in a relaxed atmosphere surrounded by laughter, gestures, noises, and physical imitation. Moreover, it is determinative to document that “it is the combination of both languages that keeps the task moving forward” (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p. 108). The dialogue was built on the students’ linguistic strengths. The Sp1 student’s demonstration of ardent conversations about his native country and the leadership role that he took was an example of reduced risk of alienation, where the student was incorporating and sustaining ‘ languaging and cultural references’ that were familiar to him.
Table 2
Conversation Analysis. Distribution of Translanguaging Acts by Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Group 1 Sp1-Sp2</th>
<th>Group 2 Sp3-Jp1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Sp1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>n</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>2 9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reply</td>
<td>1 100</td>
<td>8 36.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>8 9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>10 45.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marker</td>
<td>0 0</td>
<td>0 0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast to the Sp1 and Sp2 Group 2 interaction, I documented fewer communication moves (turn-taking) and acts of translanguaging between the members of Group 2 (the Japanese and Spanish speakers, here and after referred as Sp3 and Jp1) (see Table 1). The figures of the CA of this group demonstrate that out of total 89 moves initiated by both students and the instructor 39 moves were made by Sp3 student (45%), 28 moves by Jp1 student (32%), and 19 moves made by the Instructor (22%). Below is the full verbatim transcription of the third Bee-bot activity where one Spanish speaker
and one Japanese speaker student were grouped together. The length of this communication is 17:35 minutes and is longer than the one of Sp1 and Sp2 Group 1.

Instructor: [gives the students the printed picture of the country]. Ok, you can have this in front of your eyes, it’s gonna be helpful. [students start working].

Sp3: [Reads directions, takes leadership and takes notes]. Cities, is dangerous [mispronounces dan-ge-ros].

Jp1: [Nods his head] Dangerous.

Sp3: In some [mispronounces s-oum] places. [Uses hand gestures].

Jp1: um… um…

Sp3: In some neighborhood, because it's common people… mmm… steal other people, like tourist. [Uses hand gestures] You have to be in a safe place, for example in best neighborhood. I can say… [refers to Jp1] a little safe?

Jp1: [laughs] Hm…

Sp3: Teacher, can I say ‘is a little safe’? [laughs].

Instructor: Not very safe.

Jp1: [repeats] Not very safe.

Sp3: [writes down] [Jp1 looks] Because … [writes] not safe… for tourists [writes].

So… [rubs his face]. Eee…

Jp1: So, eee … big city …are they [unclear].
Sp3: For example, in Pereira [points to himself and keeps writing]. … There was a vocabulary. We had the vocabulary. Do you remember?

Jp1: No, I don’t remember [shakes head].

Sp3: [rubs his forehead, trying to remember] You can be more security … Do you remember …? [waits] You can…. [writes] you can be more security.

Jp1: Oh… [nodes his head].

Sp3: Because is not a big city [writes] and the police…

Jp1: A lot of police?

Sp3: Teacher, how do you can say pendiente [Spanish]? For example, the police can be more security because is no a big city. Can be more security because it is a big city. Because the city is big.

Instructor: Patrolling?

Jp1: Ah, yes, patrol.

Sp3: Patrol is in the city?

Instructor: Yes, patrol is walking around the city. [Sp3 writes down] [Jp1 is watching].

Jp1: [nodding his head] It is good.

Sp3: Old town.

Jp1: Old town?
Sp3: [laughing] Yeah. For example, if you go to old town is dangerous. Because
the city is big [uses gestures]. There more people poor. There are a lot of people,
they can steal in Pereira [explaining to Jp1].

Jp1: Pereira? [surprised] Um …[laughing]

Sp3: [reads the next question] Increase…

Jp1: Increase [uses gesture to show up].

Sp3: Teacher?

Instructor: Yeah.

Sp3: How can I …. can … can explain the rate?

Instructor: How high it is?

Sp3: Yeah.

Instructor: You can bring some examples of what that means for the big city. Why
is it high or why is it low?

Sp3: But before example percent the rate crime [pronounces kri-meh] high… or…

Instructor: Because of these and these reasons …

Jp1: Aaa …

Sp3: [writes] In some cities... For example, the crime [mispronounces kri-meh] is
high … [laughs with other students as he overhears their conversation]. … For
example, in Bogota city [writes down].

Jp1: Uhum… Bogota.
Sp3: 60% about crime … [writes]. Teacher [writes and erases].

Instructor: Yeah.

Sp3: [does not ask a question, continues] Because there are many people don’t have work so, and they decide to steal. So, it is the most common in Pereira … well Bogota. Because they steal in Bogota. Bogota is [showing on the map provided by the instructor] …

Jp1: Capital city?

Sp3: Yeas, capital city. Cartagena is his city [shows to another student]. It is beach.

You have to know that place.

Jp1: [nodes] Uhum …


Jp1: Beautiful …

Sp3: The beach is beautiful. Because …

Jp1: [interrupts] Is this your home?

Sp3: Yeah. There are many…. many kinds of river. For example, blue, green…

Jp1: Different colors [nodes his head], yeah, yeah.

Sp3: Different colors. The sea is different colors, for example, green…. [silence] …

Teacher, diverse is like …. 

Instructor: That’s a vocabulary word [prompting the student that the word is from the unit vocabulary and inviting him to make an attempt and remember the word].
Sp3: So, it’s like different culture [mispronounces kul-tur] people. For example, in capital [take notes] … There are the places too far, so, in Bogota is no common that the neighborhood aren’t mixed. For me is no livable.

56 Jp1: Livable.

Sp3: Congestion [writes and mispronounces kon-ges-tee-on]. [writes] There are places too far. So, in Bogota is no common that the neighborhood aren’t mixed type.

58 Jp1: Livable [nodes his head].

Sp3: Is not livable. In Colombia … In Colombia you may not find economic opportunities. In the news you can listen Starbucks, they have to cut [mispronounces koot] the personnel, for example. Teacher, how you say, teacher, when the company had to without the personnel. For example.

60 Jp1: [interrupts] Retire? No……

61 Instructor: Fire?


63 Instructor: Hire is when you take the job, fire is when you…

64 Sp3: [interrupts] Yeah, yeah. [keeps writing] Because … um… [rubs his forehead] we have a bad government... [writes down].

65 Instructor to all: Almost done?

66 Sp3: Yeah, teacher. Almost, almost [both laugh].
Instructor. One more minute?

Sp3: One more minute.

Jp1: One more?

Sp3: Steal money [reads the next question for Jp1]. Teacher, is good? In the last times… [asks the instructor].

Instructor: During the last times;

Sp3: I need to say ‘en los ultimos tiempos’.

Instructor: During the recent time. In recent years…

Sp3: For example, I need to say En los ultimos tiempos…

Instructor: During the recent times…

Sp3: Recent?

Instructor: Uhum… recent. [Jp1 checks his phone].

Sp3: Ok, the recent time. The recent time, Colombia is received [mispronounces re-saived] a lot Venezuelan people. But is no common find people of other country. [reads the 3rd question. Asks Jp1]. Do you live in a mixed neighborhood?

[refers to Jp1].

Jp1: Yeah, I live in mixed type neighborhood.

Sp3: Can you buy …?

Jp1: A lot of shops.

Jp1: Yeah, yeah.

Sp3: In Japan [takes notes].

Instructor: Ok. Ready to discuss?

The findings through the Conversation Analysis of the moves (turn-taking) and acts of translanguaging within this second group allowed me to conclude that the Sp3 student was involved overall in 13% more utterances than his Jp1 groupmate during the communication. Moreover, the Instructor also participated in the communication and her share was 22% of the conversation turns. In contrast to Group 1 translanguaging acts during the moves, there was only a single occurrence of Spanish language usage by Sp3 where he was referring to the Instructor for elicitation of a word meaning. The Instructor’s response was in English, so there was no further translanguaging involved in the communication (see Table 1).

As previously mentioned in the methods section of this research, in order to evaluate the acts of turn-taking and translanguaging occurrences between both Group 1 (Sp1 and Sp2) students and Group 2 (Sp3 and Jp1) students, I utilized the approach of Conversational Analysis (Garfinkel, 1967; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008; Sacks et al., 1974). The talk was viewed as an activity through which speakers accomplish communicative goals. Throughout the activities and a particular context, the conversation was realized through sets of practices deployed by the speakers. The Conversation Analysis of both groups allowed me to investigate the areas of academically and socially motivated talk (see Table 3). In MacDonald’s (1991) article the coding procedure of the data, the unit of analysis is labeled as ‘moves’ and stands for “functional message unit, a
behavior taken to accomplish an action” (p. 3). By the detailed conversation analysis of the two groups I identified conversational actions and collaborative achievements. Conversational actions involved initiating and maintaining the conversation (initiation, reply, and evaluation) (MacDonald, 1991; Sacks et al., 1974; Wilder, 2015). In addition, in studying sequences of conversational turns as a method of organizing the conversation, I located the occurrences of vocalizations and non-verbal behaviors too (addition and marker) (MacDonald, 1991; Sacks et al., 1974).

After using the MTIC model to analyze each interactional move, I created a table with figures for each communicative feature described by MacDonald (1991). The figures of key characteristics and proportions of the communication exchange for each group member as well as the Instructor are demonstrated in Table 3. During this co-construction of meaningful dialogues, the leadership in discussions was taken mostly by Sp3 student (76%). The percentage of additions (78%) and replies (27%) are also high for Sp3 student compared to the same communication acts performed by Jp1 (17% of additions and 14% replies respectively). The Jp1 student was mostly silent (8% of initiation acts) or using pauses and fillers (100% markers). He was also occasionally repeating after Sp3 student some single words and utterances which is documented as 54% of evaluation acts (against 38% of evaluations performed by Sp3 student).
Table 3

Conversation Analysis. Distribution of Interaction Codes by Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Group 1 Sp1-Sp2</th>
<th>Group 2 Sp3-Jp1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instructor</td>
<td>Sp1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reply</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addition</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike the first example of co-contracted communication that described the dynamics of translanguaging and its benefits, the example of the second group communication lacks the component of translanguaging and additional language use, disabling any analysis of engagement in complex discursive practices. As it is illustrated in García and Wei’s (2014) book, the students were deprived from the opportunities to combine different modes and media of communication, thus the social and cultural identity of one student was largely shaded. Jp1 student’s linguistic and semiotic
repertoire were not given a chance to be explored and expanded. Instead, it was diminished in the light of a more dominant student’s leadership for communication initiatives.

The evidence of benefits of translanguaging between Spanish speaker students in Group 1 is a larger number of conversational moves by students. Additionally, the acts of usage of Spanish language during the communication greatly contributed to the reply and addition ratio during the dialoguing. While the sole example of translanguaging during the communication of Spanish and Japanese speaker group did not convey the richness and diversification of communication acts compared to that of Group 1. By adopting translanguaging the L1 Spanish speaker students were thriving and taking communicative opportunities to the full. And vice versa, the Group 2 Jp1 student who did not give himself the chance and agency to act linguistically accommodative, concluded the playful learning experience with larger percent of markers and less opportunities for replies and initiation (see Table 3).

The Conversation Analysis of communication through MTIC model during the playful activities within two L2 student groups allowed me to see that adopting playful vocabulary instruction was a great possibility to reflect on my teaching material choices and my own teaching practices. However, the research project called forth new questions. For instance, I wonder whether the lack of commonality in terms of cultural and linguistic background between the peers and the educator cause difficulties in the L2 classroom? What new question does this playful vocabulary teaching bring to the table?
And finally, to what extent does the playful L2 vocabulary instruction contribute to improvement and change in my L2 vocabulary teaching practices?

The findings in this study and answer to my first research question immediately bridge the results with my second posed question. Once I revealed that enhanced playful vocabulary teaching practices led to the emergence of translanguaging, I was able to position myself as a mediator, or a facilitator of this type of L2 learning. It can be seen from the verbatim transcript of both discussions that my role was minimal. Most of the time the students were referring to me automatically without expecting a response. They previously developed the habit of heavily depending on the teachers’ support. This recurrent habit of soliciting help instead of retrieving the covered material was one thing that I drew my attention to during my vocabulary teaching. The implication of playful activities made me aware of the reduced amount of my directly supplying the vocabulary word and my infrequent immediate participation in the communication. One aspect of my teaching transformation was the ability to be a passive listener and have a non-intrusive presence during my students’ communicative meaning making. I examined how the well-planned and developed classroom activities enabled facilitation of L2 communication. The students shifted from being passive learners to meaningful co-constructors of knowledge, while I stepped back from my role of explicit instructor and consciously took a facilitator’s position.

**Implications for L2 Vocabulary Teaching**

This study offers new insight into the importance of L2 vocabulary facilitation in adult classroom. Perhaps deliberate self-positioning and adding facilitation as a key
component of L2 vocabulary learning would provide communicative language learning designers with a purposeful way of preparing communicative teaching. By focusing on facilitation of L2 vocabulary teaching through balanced translinguaging and providing support for instructors in regards to lesson planning by defying the regular and providing more direct learning experiences, we may be filling the gap of preparing and implementing materials for a qualitative communicative language learning. The optimized opportunities for translinguaging can become possible through “project-based instruction and collaborative groupings” (García & Wei, 2014, p. 93). To maximize translinguaging opportunities and to be involved in translinguaging pedagogies, the instructor does not need to be a multilingual professional. The goal of translinguaging in teaching is to provide rigorous instruction and possibilities for students to activate their meaning-making repertoire through the emergent home language interchange. It is crucial to understand that the learner takes control of their language practices in order to access the knowledge. The teacher “gives up her authority role in the classroom” (p. 93) and becomes a facilitator who sets up the learning projects.

It was interesting to observe that Spanish speakers grouped in the same pair-group had higher ratio of turn-taking during their communicative practices. Their translinguaging during the dialogues is an example of negotiation of meaning and problem-solving process. Moreover, through the playful non-graded activity, these students were able to take initiative in leading conversations and elaborate ideas. Whereas the communication between the Japanese and Spanish speakers was not exactly productive and meaningful partially due to the lack of translinguaging practices, too. In
this group, the Japanese student was not able to significantly contribute to the problem-solving process and mostly felt uncertain or dissatisfied with himself. Neither was the Spanish speaker. During the interview with my critical friend, the Japanese speaker stated that being paired with a Spanish-speaking student he perceived that as a disadvantage as his partners “changed speaking my [his] opinion” (a direct quote from the interview). It was interesting to observe that even when the Spanish speakers were grouped together and could perform a home language interchange, one of these students used technology when he needed assistance. His mobile phone was used twice during the activity. This example shows that the student apart from translanguaging, was also problem-solving through the available technology. Meanwhile the Japanese student did not make any attempt to ease his inability to communicate. He rather chose to stay calm and frustrated. This described comparison of learning behaviors explains that L2 teaching encompasses a variety of perceptions about language learning modes. One of these modes is obviously the cultural perception of how language should be taught and learned.

**Recommendations**

The use of translanguaging in pedagogy has been both rewarding and challenging. Its implication in the L2 classroom has been carried out to enhance co-learning and to promote sociocritical literacy (García & Wei, 2014). In García and Wei (2014) the pedagogy of translanguaging can be used in different settings and various kinds of subjects taught at school. When describing the implications of translanguaging during the English Language Arts class, the authors depict a situation where two young students of Hispanic background go back and forth in their home language and English to support
their position from a read aloud passage from the article in English. García and Wei (2014) observe the dynamic communication in both languages and witness the claiming and appropriation of the content through translanguaging. They evidence the metalinguistic awareness of young learners when the girls start thinking loudly and sharing their pondering through the attempts to clarify the question. They are problem solving and simultaneously starting to comprehend more deeply that the assignment is requiring analytical thinking and reasoned opinion rather than a mere short answer to the question.

Similar to the above situation that images how translanguaging works in the language learning classroom, the findings of this study affirm that the benefits of translanguaging is the enhanced co-learning. During my data coding, the emerged nodes of *scaffolding* and *cooperative learning* were vivid examples of reinforced language learning which became possible because of a relaxed environment and playful in-class activity. The opportunity of development of meta-language and making cross-language connections is one implication that is recommended in this self-study. A student can connect what is learned in one language and apply it to new situations in the other language. By doing this, a student is demonstrating more initiative and is opening for new possibilities of learning. As it was titled in one of the categories in the data analysis, the student is ‘defying the regular’ and embracing alternative language learning opportunities.

In addition to the above-mentioned benefits of the multilingual resources of language learning, there have been findings about recurring acts of playfulness while
students translanguage. Tai and Wei’s (2021) study focused on the role of translanguage in constructing playful talk in an English-Medium-Instruction (EMI) environment. Their findings suggest that playful translanguage motivates and facilitates L2 learning in the classroom. Moreover, the playful environment allows teachers to understand the value of multiple and diverse meaning-making acts during playful translanguage, as well as to acknowledge translanguage as a resource promoting L2 student participation and facilitative content learning. The researchers conclude that playful translanguage has a potential of leading to a deeper processing (memorization) of lexical items and that “playful talk can be an indication of language proficiency as more advanced speakers employ L2 linguistic resources in more creative ways” (Tai & Wei, 2021, p. 4).

To capture students’ spontaneous translanguage for an enjoyable environment and developing their understanding of the learning content in EMI classrooms, Pun and Tai (2021) conducted qualitative discourse analysis of peer interactions performing group tasks in science laboratory sessions. In their excerpts from student interactions they demonstrate that playful talk turns the classroom atmosphere into an informal learning environment. They also mention that through translanguage (both switching from verbal to non-verbal talk) both teachers and students create interactional space and “engage in constructing knowledge via explanatory talk” (Pun & Tai, 2021, p. 23). Thus, the researchers’ evidence that playful environments and opportunities of various linguistic and multimodal means of communication are contributing to the development
of content knowledge, as well as enabling students to co-construct an enjoyable learning environment.

**Balanced Translanguaging for Development of Pragmatics**

Because in linguistics language is primarily viewed as functional rather than as needing to adhere to certain stipulated rules, speakers of the additional languages position themselves as purposeful learners (Sembiante, 2016). During the translanguaging process the artificial distinctions between languages are being dissolved. During this exchange of plural strategies there starts the motion of facilitation of acknowledgment of students’ complex and multidiscursive practices. Sembiante (2016) suggests that reframing students in this light helps not only to forefront how students engage in their diverse heteroglossic practices, but calls for teachers and schools to serve them in ways that support and leverage these practices as part of the curriculum (p. 55).

Lin and He (2017) in their turn advocate for smooth scaffolding of the multimodal flow of communication. As students co-construct meanings through their shared communicative repertoires, the researchers claim that the ongoing dynamic unfolding of the speech is taking place. During this type of peer learning scenario, as I observed and exemplified in the above verbatim transcribed excerpt, translanguaging not only enabled the students to share their knowledge and expertise in the topic, but most importantly, the learners structured the language according to their purpose. The dialoguing also provided a source of empowerment and affirmation of their identity through mutual sharing.
Among its many applications, translanguaging brings genuine dialogic experience into the language learning classroom (Motlhaka & Makalela, 2016). This type of linguistic interchange encourages students to be critical in their rhetoric as well as develop analytical skills on their intended meaning making process. The enhanced metalinguistic awareness is the learners’ investment in the dialogic facilitative language learning environment. The co-constructed language is becoming a result of negotiated uptake. Motlhaka and Makalela (2016) encounter that through this process of dialoguing students activate their rhetorical conventions of their home language and their schematic knowledge contributes to their language production. The most important finding in this study is the fact that translanguaging techniques contribute not only to sense-making but also to the acculturation of students. The use of dialogic pedagogy and the use of translanguaging techniques “empower instructors with the explicit awareness of cross-linguistic and cultural differences” (p. 256).

For the Intensive English Program classroom where the students have diverse linguistic backgrounds and are not always paired or grouped by their home language (similar with the Group 2 Japanese and Spanish speakers), García and Wei (2014) propose that during their class observation, the teacher used pictures, drawing, and acting to contextualize the task. The use of translanguaging emerged during the process of dialoguing over the playful learning activity. The frustration of the Japanese student that was manifested during the data analysis was an excellent record of language learning and pedagogy in practice. The teacher practices supporting these students are various. For instance, one strategy to address the needs of a student who shares a different home
language than his classmates are by introducing cognates that some languages share which will result in enriched meaning making (García & Wei, 2014). Another strategy to develop metalanguage and make cross-language connections is to include multilingual books and texts in the teaching curriculum (Daniel & Pacheco, 2016; García & Wei, 2014). For the balanced use of translanguage it is essential to implement activities that will encourage cross-linguistic comparisons. By including multilingual texts in the classroom, the educator can design multimodal projects that are related to the unit themes. These multilingual projects will enable language learners to share their stories, languages, and goals. Occasional development of activities with guided translation and cognate instruction will contribute to learners’ metalinguistic awareness and critical meaning-making. For these activities, researchers recommend dictionaries and various types of technological devices to be available in the classroom for translation purposes (Daniel & Pacheco, 2016; García & Wei, 2014). Canagarajah (2011) endorse the need of guidance for educators who plan to utilize translanguage elements in their dialogic classroom. The scholar suggests that the educators who appreciate the use of multilingual strategies in the L2 classroom need to do some guidance for their students. That is, during the implementation of translanguage pedagogy “teachers have some work to do in giving students constructive feedback, channeling their linguistic resources in appropriate directions, or affirming their choices” (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 21).

The expansion of multilingual ideologies has become a goal in the recent language teaching system. There have been challenges with promotion and acceptance of pedagogical translanguage “because it implies the involvement of the whole school and
effective collaboration between teachers of different languages and between language and content teachers” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020, p. 309). However, this barrier can be overcome by balanced pedagogical translanguaging. The implementation of balanced dialogic translanguaging can become possible by designing multimodal projects and activities in language learning classrooms.

“Pedagogical translanguaging implies softening language boundaries so as to use resources from different languages in language and in content classes” continue Cenoz and Gorter, 2020 (p. 303). In terms of social justice and equitable education, the implication of translanguaging in dialogic pedagogy is one step towards destruction of stereotypical target language learning in isolation. On the contrary, in order to hear the voices and understand complex nuances of diverse backgrounds of language learners, it is important to implement various strategies of language learning. By adopting balanced use of translanguaging in dialogic pedagogy L2 learners will have opportunities to use their own linguistic competence by having access to that ‘resource’ through their home language. Through enabling the ingress to their linguistic repertoire, L2 learners become more effective learners and users of the target language. It is important to remember that during the communicative interaction students compare elements from their native language. They naturally link their prior knowledge with the new knowledge. The students also use their pragmatic and discourse strategies in different contexts demonstrating their metalinguistic competence (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020).
Recommendations for the Future Research

Self-Study Research

This self-study provided answers to the two research questions. It examined my philosophy of teaching and adults’ L2 vocabulary learning within an Intensive English classroom. In this section I will describe ways in which a reflective narrative could be utilized for a deeper understanding of one’s teaching practices.

Through the surfaced metaphor of an unstacked Matryoshka doll it became possible to observe profound layers of my vocabulary teaching practices and the choices behind the playful activities. The constant comparison and juxtaposition of my professional background, my teaching expertise, and my role in teaching vocabulary allowed me to examine my vision of effective L2 teaching. My professional positioning and instructional decisions bridged the relationship between my beliefs about L2 vocabulary teaching and learning and the actions that were taken to accomplish these expectations. My instructional decisions were heavily dependent on the pedagogical problem that I was trying to solve. Additionally, the acknowledgement of students’ needs played a big role in the attempt of solving this problem.

For further exploration of playful vocabulary instruction, it could also be used as an examination of cultural perceptions of playful instruction throughout classroom observations and more in-depth interviews with international students. It would be interesting to investigate how the play culture is constructed in different cultures. What are the limits of play in adult education? What are perceptions of explicit teaching vs playful facilitation of vocabulary knowledge in different cultural settings? Would the
conversation and language of students be different if they were not videotaped during the playful activity? Would it be helpful to have students write a reflective journal after each playful activity?

This self-study was conducted during the summer semester. Would the students’ responses be more intense if there was a more diverse student population? At the time of this study, there were only four students placed in the low-intermediate reading class. I wonder what it would look like if the playful robots were introduced more than three times and be part of the curriculum in the upcoming higher proficiency levels? Given the low proficiency level, will the student feedback be different from what I encountered in this self-study?

Other Types of Research

Since the goal of this study was to understand how my planning of playful activities help L2 students learn vocabulary, I am curious about how balanced translanguaging can be implemented in the curriculum of Intensive English Programs as programs offer short (eight-week) term courses and are very vigorous. Also, can other instructors in the program be successful in applying translanguaging while being monolingual educators? I am curious about how the opportunity of practicing balanced translanguaging is going to be realized in other language skills’ classroom (writing, listening and speaking)? And by balanced translanguaging conveyed is the teacher’s prioritization of pedagogical outcome by switching to translanguaging while explaining grammar and vocabulary described by Zhou and Mann (2021), or the educator’s integration of academic discourse with everyday discourse by facilitating interpersonal
communication through linking verbal and semiotic resources characterized by Yuan and Yang (2020). Another question might be whether the practice of translanguaging has been used previously in the program, and how do instructors negotiate their teaching and interactions with L2 students? An additional difficulty is the assessment of translanguaging (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017). Have there been additional attempts to develop multilingual assessment procedures? Gorter and Cenoz (2017) suggest that there are elaborated tests and methods focusing on the assessment of translanguaging. For instance, they exemplify the practice of looking at the learner as a multilingual person and assessing those students through the multilingual tasks. Another possibility that they mention about assessing multilingual students who use translanguage is the use of bilingual rubrics which have both qualitative and quantitative components and look at “bilingual strategies and distinguish patterns that go across languages and language-specific approximations” (p. 244). These actions demonstrate that researchers acknowledge the benefits of translanguaging and have begun to explore ways of assessing multilingual competence in academic settings (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017). However, they see the potential influence of multilingualism in language educational policy and state that the steps to assess the linguistic repertoire of these students holistically are still modest. Yet, Canagarajah (2011) is still uncertain about the existence of “concept of normative translanguaging against which errors can be judged” (p. 9). He writes that “we have to explore if we can move away from a norm-based or form-based notion of error and adopt a practiced based orientation to developmental stages in translanguaging” (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 9). Finally, how does my modification of
facilitative vocabulary teaching through translanguaging fit within other models of effective vocabulary teaching?

Final Thoughts

No matter to what extent self-study is a personal type of inquiry by nature, with the emphasis on self, it “also needs a process to make data and their interpretations available for public inspection” (Hoban, 2004, p. 1044). The aim of this self-study is to contribute to the construction of teacher knowledge. The dissemination of descriptive narrative might serve for engagement and representing adult L2 teaching complexity, as well as for provision with new lenses for the language instructor. Through the research process of analyzing, retrieving, and sharing data a self-study the researcher might enhance the self-study research method among educators. Finally, the educational community might benefit from the identified strengths and possible limitations of teaching methods.

The impetus behind this self-study study project was my natural curiosity and the ‘researcher’s mindset’. This self-evaluative project was aimed at professional improvement and gaining more knowledge about effective L2 vocabulary teaching. The motivating force for this research study was the acknowledgement of the underrepresentation of play as an effective communicative tool for adult L2 language instruction. In this study, the inauthentic teaching materials were challenged by the instructor in order to overcome tensions in L2 vocabulary teaching. The benefits of elements of play and the facilitative nature of its implementation in the IEP classroom showcased that my deliberate professional positioning played a great role in my
instructional decisions. Moreover, my visions of how L2 vocabulary should be taught were not exclusively based on my beliefs and expertise, but my students’ learning needs. It is through this analysis and reflection that I aspire to improve my practice as well as illuminate other ESL instructors about the possibilities of their improved practices in supporting L2 learners’ vocabulary learning process.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

SELF-NARRATIVE

Shifting the paradigms: from EFL to ESL instructor

As an additional language learner, I was well-familiar with challenges and obstacles of students who learn a new language. Language learning is a process of simultaneous acquisition of pragmatics (how language is used as a social tool), phonology (the rules of language that govern sound structure of syllables and words), morphology (the internalization of the rules of language that govern word structure), syntax (the internalization of the rules of language that govern how words are organized into sentences), and semantics (the learning and retrieving of the meaning of words) of a given language. This process of language acquisition might sound overwhelming, and is indeed immense unless one knows how to deliver this information to the language learner. Language learning is a process of transitions - from forms to function.

When I chose my major in linguistics and pedagogy I knew my personal passion in wanting to learn and explore ways of teaching English language to international students will intensify. The background of learning habits of international students was very similar to my own habits. Shared grammar-translation language learning method was very effective for mechanical memorization and application of grammatical rules. The sentences of my students were grammatically correct and sounded very ‘bookish’, ‘rehearsed’, and ‘cliche’. Exercises requiring fill in the blanks and multiple choice practices were aced and had almost a 100% results. It seemed that my students were
ready to “sail off to the boundless ocean of English language and find their pier”, be it a
career, academic, or social harbour.

However, the things in practice were not as simple as they might sound in theory.
Knowing grammar rules and excelling in assignments and tests oftentimes turned out to
be useless in everyday life. As an instructor who worked in the Intensive English
Program (IEP) I had the opportunity to teach the same students in different levels of the
program. The program was set up in a way that instructors taught reading, grammar,
listening, speaking, and writing skills in arbitrary rounds. During my six plus years of
teaching in IEPs I taught different levels and different courses. Needless to say that the
odds were that I would teach the same students at some point again. My expectations
from my students were to see them building new knowledge on their previously acquired
information. I believed that one way for my students to demonstrate their knowledge is
through their writing and oral communication. The efficiency of retrieving the
appropriate vocabulary and grammar forms was going to be a firm foundation for moving
forward in their language learning. Complex syntax, word building, successful entering to
peer conversations, register variations - all these linguistic cues were expected to be
observed during the student’s linguistic knowledge increment. However, what was
expected was not always detected.

Distancing from my own learning experiences, during my teaching in IEPs I
mostly envisioned my role of an educator-facilitator. The narrative above was justifying
my vision of language teaching. I was a little suspicious about ‘prescriptive rule based
language-translation’ teaching method. As mentioned earlier in my introductory chapters,
I had the feel of what works and what doesn’t in the language learning classroom. My teaching practice and beliefs were very much reflecting my past experiences of learning an additional language as a child and a university student. I worked and still work with international students who come to the United States and enroll in IEPs with their own perceptions and preconceptions about language learning and academic success. They come with their expectations and beliefs about learning English. One person standing behind the language learning success of international students is me. As their language instructor, I carry the role of teaching my students necessary skills for their further academic success. I always feel responsible when I teach English to international students. I constantly question myself about my teaching philosophy and methods. I don’t stop wondering if alternative, or better put, non-traditional teaching methods and activities resonate with my students’ perception of how the additional language needs to be taught. The reason of this constant comparison and questioning is the teaching context and target audience. Teaching in an EFL context differs from teaching in an ESL environment. What seemed obvious in teaching a foreign language to students who shared the same linguistic and cultural background drastically differs from teaching a second language learners. I must admit that it is a radical shift for a linguist and a pedagog. With the new population and the environment my teaching skills acquired in the university classroom and during my teaching as an instructor requires a paradigm shift. Alterations need to happen in the instructor's beliefs, approaches, and teaching methods. With this shift the confidence rate about knowing my teaching English language does not go away. Instead, it tilts towards who I teach and not what I teach. The adjustments of
teaching elements and teaching practices take place mandatorily. During consecutive implications of elements of novelties, adjustments, and embedments in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) brings into play a whole pleiade of teachable moments. These moments carry the whole galaxy of the instructor's beliefs about how to teach adult language learners in my particular case. Teaching decisions are not arbitrary but, instead, are deeply rooted in the instructor's personal convictions and teaching philosophy. These scholars defined adult education and also proposed assumptions about how learning occurs in the adult educational system. Among the assumptions of these formulated theories, there were some that are very appealing to my teaching philosophy and instructional practice. In my personal experience, my teaching decisions about teaching adults primarily stemmed from The Adult Learning Theory initiated by prominent scholar Cyril Houle, and later expanded by the American educator Malcolm Knowles who used the term Andragogy when speaking about teaching adults. Irrespective of the fact that my students are ESL learners and not EFL, I believe that adult learning should primarily be built on students’ needs. Adult learners start anew their education and are very goal-oriented. One assumption of adult learning theory is about the planning of educational activities on realities of human experiences. This might be carried out through a complex of interactional elements. It is my creed that cooperative work is a natural way of contributing to the process of adults’ learning through interaction.

Based on adult teaching doctrines, facilitative teaching is a big step towards formal learning of adult learners. Specifically, this is true for adult language learners, who need more assistance for their second or additional language learning. It is assumed
that adults have largely resolved their identity formation issues and they are comfortable with their adult roles. I would totally agree with the assertion, however, the target audience should be clarified here. An ESL learner faces challenges that an EFL learner does not due to the learning environment and need. I believe that purposeful learning-oriented experiences with the new language acquisition process should be stimulated with ESL learners. Discussions, team projects, action learning techniques are counterparts of expansion of out-of-the-box thinking. In my opinion, based on my expertise, adult language learners need exposure to the target language through interactive, engaging, and authentic communication. One corridor to such facilitative teaching is the teachers’ willingness to incorporate creative and enjoyable activities without disdaining the textbook. I strongly believe that it is a misconception that textbooks limit teacher’s authentic teaching experiences. More specifically, in teaching reading skills and vocabulary the textbook can be a great resource for providing a language learner with a context and corresponding academic vocabulary. I believe it is the instructor’s responsibility to devise interactive, purposeful, and engaging activities within the context of the given unit reading passage. Nobody limits the instructor to initiate meaningful communication with the aim of facilitating and integration of language skills. If the exercise for vocabulary teaching in the textbook unit is set up in a ‘fill-in-the-blanks’ format, that does not necessarily mean that the instructor is limited to assigning only that exercise and moving forward. On the contrary, I assume that this limitation can be overcome by implementation of additional authentic activities. Moreover, it is my belief
that these activities need to be based on already acquired or background knowledge of adult language learners.

Working in an ESL context with adult learners

I was privileged to have an excellent opportunity to teach English in IEPs for more than six years in the United States. More than a decade ago I was teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at a university level in my home country. My previous higher ed teaching and current position of second language (L2) instruction were absolutely independent experiences, even though the context was the same English language. Obviously, in teaching vocabulary in EFL context, I would use adjustments and use my first language (L1) to explain the meaning of the word or to translate the word into my student’s L1. However, as previously mentioned, the goals of an EFL learner fundamentally differ from those of an ESL learner. ESL students in IEPs require more authentic language learning applicable to their everyday life and academic environment.

Teaching English to international students became my passion gradually. During the first two years of teaching ESL I was enrolled in the TESOL/Spanish graduate program. The first semester (or two session in IEP) of those two years of teaching were trial and error period for me. I was creating a database for what worked and what did not work during my teaching for future instruction and adjustments. I was trying to make sure that I deliver a more polished and less erroneous language instruction. I was adjusting existing quizzes and modifying tests based on my observations and practices.
And the key word here will be the ‘existing’ teaching material. I did not show much initiative in creating or introducing my own material for the course. I started ‘testing the waters’ of extracurricular activities in my teaching when I started my Ed.D. program at the University of Northern Iowa. My mentor and adviser knew about my interests and practices. Interestingly enough, she was sharing my interest about facilitation of additional language teaching. We had interesting conversations and discussions about our teaching beliefs, our students’ expectations, and current classroom language learning practices. These conversations with a knowledgeable person were constructive, inspirational, and deliberative. I was developing a researcher’s mindset while I was taking doctoral level courses and thinking more about additional language teaching facilitation. My thoughts were not limited to quality language instruction, but rather to simultaneously studying my actions while I teach. During these discussions with my professor I wanted to see whether the theories that I believe are really reflected in my teaching, or if it is just an illusion of a thirsty person who approaches an oasis. Moreover, I needed to know whether my teaching objectives were reflected in my students’ learning outcomes. These conversations were the exact description of a researcher and a critical friend relationship. The perspectives brought by the critical friend started and continued throughout the whole self-study project. My assumptions and beliefs were constantly challenged. Based on my mentor’s commentaries my research method was refined. The systematic reflective commentary helped me to develop my research design and strengthen my arguments.
Self-study was an excellent way to answer my questions and to see my teaching philosophy in action. Through self-study I could see my teaching from both my and my students’ perspective. The potential teaching chance occurred at a good timing. The forthcoming opportunity was to teach a summer session of a reading class for low-intermediate proficiency level ESL students at an IEP. I thoroughly prepared for my self-study by filling in and submitting the official protocol for the research process. I took time to prepare for the reading course as well as come up with the teaching activities that I believed would help me in answering my questions about my teaching of adult language learners. Behind these preparations were hours of thinking, planning, note-taking, organizing and reorganizing of ideas and teaching materials. It was a process of constant thinking and rethinking about the appropriateness of my tools and instruments for both teaching and researching. The beauty of this project was the pre-planning period: constant adding and deleting of what I believed was good for my students and what was of little value to my project. Before I explain in more detail about the implemented activities, my teaching process, and the objectives that align with the student learning outcomes of the level, it’s worth mentioning that my researcher’s mindset didn’t cease wondering. I was reading about different theories and learning about research frameworks. I learned by then that I need to have a theoretical background to support my research. I was wondering how I could best answer my research questions, and how I can justify my choice of this or that activity for my self-study. My knowledge was building gradually, but firmly. My questions were related to effective vocabulary teaching or, simply put, the facilitation of vocabulary learning. I defined my audience and their
learning needs by formulating descriptive adult L2 learners qualifications. I believed that The Adult Learning Theory contained the elements and characteristics necessary for my research activity. My research questions were built on my teaching content (a reading class) and what I encountered a problem with teaching that class. One more time I mentally cast a retrospective look at my previous L2 instruction. I recalled teaching a paragraph, answering questions about that paragraph, finding main idea and supporting details, the formal introduction of the vocabulary list (new words) used in that paragraph, fill in the blank exercises, quizzes and tests on the vocabulary that’s been overused for years with slight changes.

The description of reading skills activities seems well planned. It is aimed at teaching L2 learners how to understand the text and provides necessary vocabulary for the reading comprehension. However, I want to pause here and state one important thing about teaching a reading course. The vast majority of IEPs proudly enclose Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in their curricula and teaching statements. This statement is indeed terrific and very up to date. This might mean that L2 teaching departed from the grammar-translation method and language teaching is not as prescriptive as it used to be. From the standpoint of an L2 instructor I must admit that the activities in the textbook were barely facilitating CLT. To be more precise in my claim, I analysed each and every activity in the textbook unit. My one goal was to see whether there were CLT elements (if any) in the activities. When I was doing this mini-investigation, I noticed patterns that occurred over and over again. I noticed that all units were designed the same way - there was the introduction of the vocabulary, some
explanation about the main idea and supporting details of the texts, the actual reading paragraphs, vocabulary exercises. Finally, the unit was concluded by three questions about the reading. Now, it is important to keep in mind that I was not evaluating the textbook itself, but I was more interested in the Communicative part that the book does or does not provide. Another important thing about my investigation was my researcher’s mindset. I was constantly thinking about my research questions, my personal beliefs, and possible theories that can support those beliefs. To keep my reader’s attention, I should remind once again that by the time I was setting up this current research project, I tuned myself in an instructor-facilitator mode. I developed the ability to read between the lines about learning outcome of each activity.

After doing extensive research on the Adult Learning Theory and learning about the beneficial characteristics of this theory for adult learners, my next step was to saturate learning about characteristics of CLT method. As previously mentioned elsewhere in the chapters, CLT was comprised of a complex of facilitative, meaningful, and cooperative elements of teaching. This method encompasses negotiation of meaning, purposeful, interesting, and engaging language learning. Moreover, it requires contextual and process relevant learning where authenticity is the core counterpart. During the social interaction this method resembles discovery learning where the students cooperatively integrate their language skills and transfer information. CLT underlines interactive learning which is very important for language acquisition and expressive vocabulary in particular. Activities built on CLT method fundamentally differ from ‘fill-in-the-blank’ practices. They promote language learners’ vocabulary use in an authentic context.
No matter how great my idea of an educator-facilitator was, there was still a missing piece of the puzzle. That missing part was why would I want to alter the mode of vocabulary teaching? I knew the answer for myself, for my own self as of an additional language learner. I clearly recall myself as a young language learner standing in front of the classroom, shifting from one foot to the other in attempt of answering the teacher’s questions, and trying to utter ‘foreing’ words in front of my classmates’ gazing thirty pairs of eyes. I was immediately feeling and was going through the language anxiety described by Young (1991). This anxiety was stemming from my perceptions about language learning, my teacher’s possible beliefs about my learning abilities, my and my teacher’s interaction, my classmates’ attitudes, and so forth. On the top of the language anxiety, described in the literature, there was my teacher’s judgmental look.

When I was setting up my teaching activities, these reflections made me think that in this particular case I am the teacher in the language classroom. I have the power of lowering the level of language learning anxiety. I envisioned my role as a teacher-facilitator by devising non-graded activities and creating a non-threatening environment for my own students. I was able to control the tension of my students by turning their individual response to a pair or group activity participation. I could take the non-judgmental stand of the language instructor. In this way I would confirm Krashen’s (1987) words about the fact that there is a better language acquisition when the level of anxiety and affective filter of students is low.

The answer to the why part was there. It became clear that I wanted my language learner students feel safe and relaxed during the vocabulary learning process. Now it was
high time to think about the how part. I accurately had an outline of the possible activities contributing to vocabulary learning skills in an unthreatening environment. A little throwback to my doctoral studies will help the reader understand how I came to the solution of the why part of my research. During my studies and work as a graduate research assistant I was immersed in the omnipotent inquiry of early elementary education. My mentors, supervisors, and professors at the university created environment contributing to my deep knowledge of young children’s language development process, their language acquisition through literacy, about the improvement of students’ scientific literacy through science writing heuristics, and so forth. One thing that was specifically striking during this immersion was the fact that the literature addressing developmental contributions for children, their involvement and socialization was focused on the phenomena of play and playful environment. I learned from my work and study experience that among play researchers there has always been this rigid distinction between children and adults play. However, after reading and learning more about playful instruction in different context these distinctions didn’t sound very convincing and grounded to me. I could see the benefits of playful element in learning in adult classroom too. For instance, play develops metacommunication skills and helps children acquire a sense of self-reflection, assists in managing their emotions, and provides rules to function in the society (Vygotsky, 1967). Playful instruction for young children gives them opportunities to let go of the negative emotions, at the same time feel safe in the atmosphere of reduced anxiety (Freud, 1968; Piaget, 1962). With this said, my question is why the described characteristics of the previously mentioned theories (Adult Learning
Theories, Theories of Play, and Communicative Language Teaching) can not be beneficial for adult learning and instruction?

There was this ongoing dialogue between my beliefs and my research inquiry. I was perceiving this constant back and forth pondering process as if I was unsticking a Russian nesting doll Matryoshka. This was an irreversible process anymore - my self-study design was built around the core doll nesting in the ensuing one size bigger than the previous one. By opening the biggest doll I was hoping to find answers to my research questions. I hoped to understand if by unpacking each new doll I will reveal whether my beliefs and perceptions about vocabulary teaching and learning through playful language instruction resonate with beliefs and perceptions of my L2 students.

My next step was designing and devising optimal methods for documenting my teaching practices based on my beliefs and grounded by theoretical frameworks. The facilitative activities were aimed at examining student interaction and vocabulary retention in a playful manner; measuring students’ level of self-confidence while conducting oral communication tasks; checking and documenting students’ level of comfort of anxiety before and after the playful activity, as well as holding semi-structured interviews for recording students’ emotional and perceptual experiences about these activities.

My study and matryoshka doll metaphor - unnesting the biggest doll

While setting up the actual self-study project I started from the big picture (the largest doll) and I was seeing the forest. The research process was getting narrowed down
the way Matryoshka doll size would gradually decrease, eventually leading to the smallest one - the core. That process from unsticking my dolls in order to get to the smallest doll, the core, is what I learned from this study and is precisely what I want to share about my research.

As it was stated earlier in the third chapter of this dissertation thesis, the elements of my study were built based on my beliefs and theories about playful language teaching and vocabulary retention. More specifically, I pre-taught a unit vocabulary from an ESL textbook focused on reading in a traditional way and added some interactive practices. However, I would not call my teaching playful during that time. I prepared the playful element and introduction of Bee Bot robot to my student for later activities. I started my teaching with an apprehensive unit about animal groups. The unit consists of two reading around the topic and several exercises. The layout of all units in the textbook is very similar. The components of the unit are the introduction of the new vocabulary, activities about finding topics, main ideas, and supporting details. The units familiarize low-intermediate language learners with such reading skills as summarizing, finding similarities, distinguishing true or false answers, expressing their opinion, finding cause and effect, checking comprehension, and making some predictions about the paragraph. The vocabulary tests and quizzes were standardized multiple choice types. I had an option to choose a quiz that would suggest the student to write the new word, then define it, then provide a picture or translation of that word, come up with a synonym, and finally write their own sentence with that word. Also, I would assign vocabulary journals where the students are supposed to use at least two vocabulary words from the unit to answer
open ended questions on the unit topic. These practices were aimed at documenting students’ language output. However, the communicatively learning part was still lacking. I would test my students on their vocabulary knowledge retention through the unit test which comprised reading a similar texts as in the unit readings, circling main ideas, circling right answers to the questions, writing true or false for the statements, and finding differences as a comprehension check. The critical thinking part was providing the vocabulary word and assigning a student to write answers to some questions. I believed that the playful non-graded activities that I prepared for the ‘dessert’ will be the missing communicative part and the peak of my vocabulary teaching. These playful activities were aimed at filling in the neglected part of my students’ vocabulary retention and reproduction. At the same time, I did not forget to take into account my students’ perceptions and feelings about these playful activities. So, I put together some materials to evaluate how my students feel about these activities and sketched a semi-structured interview to ‘hear their voices’ first hand.

I intentionally started teaching from the unit where the topic was not very familiar to the students. The first unit taught was about animal groups where students learned a large number of new words. For their level of vocabulary competence, the topic was interesting, but challenging at the same time. Then, I taught a unit about human facial expressions, their functions, and interpretations by people of different cultural backgrounds. This topic alleviated my students’ interest and they were able to state their own ideas, agree or disagree. The third unit was about livable cities where my students from different parts of the world talked about their countries. They analyzed the actual
text, shared, compared and contrasted that information with lives in their own cities.

During my teaching, my students were filling in graphic organizers, charts, and maps. By answering questions from their unit readings, I believed there was a better chance for my students to be exposed to the new vocabulary words in context.

One observation during my teaching from the textbook was that the assignments were heavily comprehensive. The students were expected to come up with ‘the best’ answer. The right answer, however, did not require any critical thinking, problem solving, reproduction, language generation, or communication. And so, to fill in the gap of language production and output I would ask the student to explain why this or that answer was chosen, or explain to the class how they would justify their choice. However, there was a dreary silence and it was unbearable for me. I had a feeling that the practices and exercises from the textbook were only teaching my students to test. I did not observe my students use any of these specific vocabulary in everyday classroom ambience. However, my own expectations about vocabulary learning contradicted to the ‘dry’ teaching-to-test. I was impatiently waiting for the day(s) of playful vocabulary learning activities.

To allow my audience have a complete picture of the activities I will describe in detail the context. As mentioned earlier in the third chapter, I formally taught the vocabulary of three units during the first, fourth, and seventh weeks of the session. During the second, fifth, and eight weeks the playful vocabulary retrieval activities were presented to the students. In order to document my student’s evaluation of their overall self-confidence level while conducting oral communication task I distributed a self-
confidence checklist used by Morales and Pérez (2015). The form was given to students during the third week of classes, before administering playful activities with robotics. The instruction of the checklist was asking students to read and tick statements about their feelings and preferences while conducting oral communication tasks. The same form was given to the students during the eight week of classes to compare their self-confidence level after all three playful activities. However, I did not stop there, and after discussion with my critical friend I added another data collection tool - the anxiety thermometer used by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) called Anxometer. This tool was distributed to my students six times, before and after each playful activity with the Bee-bot. The objective of using this tool was to rate students’ feelings about their participation in a non-graded playful activity. The tool was composed a scale of feelings rating from furious to happy.

To complete the communicative assignment, I grouped two students in each group. The same student was not placed with the same partner during these three activities, so that everybody can have a chance to work with different classmates. Flashcards with pictures of animals were placed on the classroom desk. One student from each group was supposed to operate the Bee-bot towards the direction of the chosen flashcard which seemed favorable for students to discuss about. Students were provided with a handout with discussion prompts and questions. They were encouraged to take notes during their discussion and try to remember as many vocabulary words from the given unit as possible. Also, the students were instructed to answer topic related open ended questions in complete sentences by using the unit vocabulary. After the instruction and actual Bee-bot operation the students started their discussions and note taking.
5 minutes students were told to conclude their discussion and prepare to present their answers to their classmates.

The objectives and the student learning outcomes were taken from the reading 3 class syllabus. The playful activity was supposed to apply level-appropriate vocabulary in the given playful communicative context. Students should use accurate pronunciation of the learned words while asking and answering questions. They were also supposed to demonstrate ability to intelligibly discuss essential topics while communicating with the class. The previously taught unit vocabulary comprised academic, multi-words, and topic vocabulary. The students were informed about this non-graded playful activity during the first week of the session. The playful activities were introduced to students as facilitative tasks aimed at their vocabulary learning and oral communication skill improvement.

Getting closer to the innermost doll - my perceptions about the playful activities and vocabulary learning.

And so the day of first playful activity came. The expected students’ reaction of spontaneity of seeing playful Bee-bots was still vivid in my memory, as well as accurately depicted in the notes that I took. The guided playful learning started with a ridiculous awkwardness. Evidently, this was a new experience for my students. Four adult male students were walking around the playful robot and were looking very puzzled. They were obviously waiting for my directions. I had a feeling that my students felt somehow relieved when I, one more time, reminded them that it was going to be a non-graded and cooperative activity. There was some tension in the air until I instructed my students how to operate the Bee-bot. They were attentively listening to my
instructions and together were trying to figure out how to operate the playful robot. The process was already interactive and authentic, as the young language learners started to enjoy the engaging experience. I could clearly see the initial tension on their faces changing into the ones of a connoisseur. They were adapting to the new facilitative and relaxed environment of language production.

However, the expression on my students faces kept changing over and over again. The playful activity already evoked curiosity and a humorous attitude. It was interactive and was leading to out-of-the-box thinking. For the first time, my students were responsible for distribution of their roles. One was a note taker, the other was helping with spelling and the context. This was a unique opportunity to communicate about a familiar topic without precisely following directions from the textbook. During the cooperative discussion my students were so much involved in the activity that they were negotiating meaning, integrating verbal and non-verbal language skills, and showing self-initiative in their responses and discussions. They would correct each other’s mispronounced words in a friendly and humorous manner. They activated their background knowledge to reflect on what they know and to sustain a conversation initiated by the classmate. They were given the opportunity to demonstrate their cognitive and linguistic aptitude. The communication was authentic, conscious and meaningful. There were some interesting verbal exchanges about their culture. For instance, when talking about facial expressions and livable cities, students would bring on the table their previous experiences and happily share with their partner, and then to the whole group. It was great to observe that my students were using such features of authentic
communication as scaffolding, comprehension check, word recalling, elicitation, reference for explanation, and many more. The social interaction was a great resource of knowledge acquisition without being explicitly taught. The reduced anxiety was very helpful in social roles - the more knowledgeable student was indirectly assisting his partner’s understanding and language acquisition. Getting back to my notes, I observed that this contextual cooperative learning consisted of writing and erasing, giggles and converging attempts to remember the necessary vocabulary word. There was some problem-solving taking place when, for instance, one student was trying to remember and remind his partner the context of the unit. They would first suggest, then doubt or disagree, then give a consent to the proposed answer to the prompt questions. There were emotional, sensitive, spontaneous, intellectual and inventive moments happening during these playful processes. I was clearly observing and simultaneously documenting a change of mindset and attitude towards language learning.

Rereading my notes from the playful activity over and over again I had a feeling of having a roller coaster ride during those three playful activities. I was mentally recalling my philosophy and actions about my vocabulary teaching and retention methods. I was clearly seeing stuff that I didn’t use in my regular vocabulary teaching. Even though I set my study with a critical friend, after watching the recorded videos and revisiting my notes, I had had several a-ha moments. For instance, I was still thinking that I could have reworded the discussion questions. Also, I thought that the students were reading their answers and were very much relying on the script. At that point, as a communicative teaching element I would love to see more impromptu conversations. I
realized that the setup of topics by their level of popularity was a great trick that enabled language learners to feel less anxious and more comfortable after each activity. However, I felt that Spanish speaking students took the advantage and were asking me to translate some words while my Japanese student had a feeling of seclusion.

I felt that laughter and cheerful atmosphere set the overall tone to the communicative vocabulary teaching. I would step in my students’ conversations with a hint or a prompt of a word. I would encourage my students to read the directions and try to remember what we learned. The students were so much engaged in the communication that they totally forgot about the tension of being in a formal classroom environment. They would actively use gestures in attempt of exchanging their knowledge and meaningful communication. The interactive activity and topics allowed my students cooperatively transmit information. The playfulness could be observed during the dynamic exchange of emotional, creative, thoughtful, enjoyable, intellectual, cooperative, humorous, and most importantly, authentic elements of second language acquisition. The ultimate activity lasted twice longer than I anticipated which, I assume, was much needed splash of interactive and authentic language learning.

The innermost doll - my students’ perceptions about playful activities

The aforementioned descriptive narrative explained how I set up my playful activities for vocabulary retrieval in a communicative manner. I analyzed my teaching practices and documented my perceptions about the activities. However, my students had the final say about these activities by confirming or rejecting the plausibility of my
playful vocabulary teaching beliefs. My perceptions about students’ emotions, feelings, and possible benefits from the playful activities were indirectly documented through my notes, the artifact created by the students during the cooperative activity, and by actually watching recorded videotapes. The direct documentation of data about my students' perceptions of playful vocabulary learning in a communicative manner was collected through anxometer, self-confidence checklist, and semi-structured interviews.

It is crucial to mention that as I previously predicted and as the literature suggests, ESL learners had some challenges with speaking in public and expressing their thoughts to the audience. More precisely, three out of four participants checked the following statement from the self-confidence checklist: “When speaking in class I … find it hard to express and opinion because I don’t have enough information about the topic”. One student also checked, “When speaking in class I … Feel insecure about the ideas I’m trying to express” (Morales and Pérez, 2015). These statements were suggesting that any changes observed in the post self-confidence checklist would be marked as success. It was a signal for me, as their facilitator, to teach them the context. By thoroughly and extensively teaching my students about unit topics I could contribute to their confidence in their public speech. The results of my language instruction in a playful manner weren’t long in coming. All four post self-confidence checklists were turned in blank. My students did not have access to their initial self-confidence checklist which they filled in during the third week of their classes. I was flattered and amazed to see the improvement in their communication-in-public habits.
The data collected through Anxometer (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991) turned out to be no less interesting as the self-confidence checklist data. There was a consistency and a pattern among two participants. Their pre-ratings indicated their calm and/or happy state changing into consistently happy feelings in the post-rating. One student even added ‘more’ to the ultimate ‘happy’ choice. Another student had a ‘calm’ choice during all pre- and post-rating. It was interesting for me to learn about this particular student's constant choice. During the eight weeks of teaching I was more or less familiar with my students' age, marital status, life goals, and more. I would assume that it was his usual classroom comportment. However, I did not rush into conclusions, and was very much eager to listen to his responses from the semi-structured interview. Moreover, the data from the interviews would also reveal why one of the students rated his feelings as happy and moderately upset during the pre-rating, and then concerned and calm during the post-rating. I created the facilitative relaxed environment, and I really wanted to know what element of my teaching was vectoring to the ‘concerned’ feeling.

The dialogues from interviews added the missing flavor to my descriptive self-study narrative. I was able to depict the choice of activities, my vocabulary teaching, and my beliefs about playful language instruction. However, the actual students’ reflections were the peak of my self-study findings. This way I learned that playful learning activity helped my students remember some of the vocabulary words that I taught previously. Most importantly, they vocalized my belief that the facilitative playful practice and environment contributed to the perception that they did not remember the words very well. For instance, my students highlighted the fact that through this playful activity they
had a choice of topic, they had a chance to remember what was previously taught, they recalled the topic (context), revisited grammar forms while communicating, and finally did some writing activity (note-taking).

My beliefs and predictions about the benefits of playful language teaching in adult ESL classroom were confirmed once again. I was thrilled to learn that the playful element was appropriately embedded in my English language teaching. Students attested that they were eager to start the playful activity with the robot. Using playful robots was not a common practice in their countries and educational institutions. The majority of students were underlining the fun and enjoyable part of the activity. The pair work was also an influential part of their learning during this activity. Through these communicative activities, the students spoke about the importance of sharing their knowledge about their own culture. They would contribute to conversations by their academic and cultural knowledge. This was a different and unusual activity. Pair work was beneficial for the ones who were not very knowledgeable and proficient in English. As I predicted, practicing the language communicatively with a different partner was very helpful. They learned new things from a new partner. My students also confirmed my belief about the set up of the activities. They asserted that during the last activity they were already familiar with the playful learning format and felt at ease when sharing about their personal experiences in a group.

In their interviews, students mentioned enjoyable vocabulary practice and recalling new words most of the time. It was also pointed out that by revisiting the topic and through playful group discussions, the students learned more about the context than
they previously knew. Moreover, one of my students said that by discussing ideas and communicating with a partner he was able to contrast ideas and give a better solution to the problem. This statement once again confirmed my belief that adult learners have problem-centered orientation to learning. They had a freedom of choice; their thoughts were out-of-the-box; they experienced scaffolding by me and their partners; and they had a chance to use their knowledge in an authentic environment. All of this being said, I felt satisfied to see that all the pieces come together and I gradually reach my smallest nested doll.

The information from the one student who expressed some anxiety explained in detail the reason behind his concerns. It was very clarifying to know that in some cultures it is unacceptable to show your ignorance in public. Even when the lack of knowledge is demonstrated in a playful manner and among classmates. Some cultures simply do not practice playful learning, which is a drawback and can be a source of anxiety. This specific activity had a dual effect on my students - some students blended into playful language learning activity momentarily and enjoyed the opportunity far and wide. Some students felt frustration about ineptitude and inability to remember the vocabulary in order to express their opinion. This finding was very valuable for me as I needed to consider cultural habits and practices of my students when creating similar teachable moments in the future. The student used the word ‘regrettable’ when describing his feelings about this group activity. This activity evoked disappointment in this student. He mentioned several times that he can not speak English. However, he never mentioned his
frustration in the post self-confidence scoring sheet. Was that another sign that in some cultures people do not openly express their emotions and feelings to their educators?

By playful language learning activity I was really aiming at revisiting the taught vocabulary and reinforcing the word knowledge. I learned from this study that my students came to understand that they need to study and learn the language for application and never mechanical memorization and test taking. I could read between the lines of their actions that this unusual playful activity was necessary for all of us. This activity evoked reflection on what was done and what still needed to be done for successful additional language learning. I documented my teaching practices based on my beliefs and teaching theories. I raised the bar and documented my adult students’ perceptions about my L2 vocabulary teaching. I was hoping to see the synthesis of distinct characteristics of Adult Learning Theory, Communicative Language Teaching, and Theories of play in my instruction. According to the Venn Diagram presented in the earlier chapter, my prediction was to collect evidence confirming that playful language instruction in adult classroom contributes to students’ augmented lateral thinking and adapted acquired knowledge for social assimilation. This reflective narrative and the self-study journey helped me to reach the core matryoshka doll which was my aimed research goal.
APPENDIX B

IMAGES OF PLAYFUL ACTIVITIES WITH BEE-BOTS