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“I Wish That I Could Belong”: An Intercultural Play About Adapting to Life in the US

This article provides an in-depth analysis of a play that I wrote centering on 4 international students’ experiences studying and living in the US. It consists of 5 scenes, which delve into the topics of cultural differences, first impressions of the US, university systems, friendship, time and personal space, stereotyping and discrimination, and culture shock. Central to this article was highlighting the rationale behind this play and the reflective processes that were instrumental to creating the story line, script, and characters. Moreover, the objective of this play is to promote intercultural awareness through drama in order to strengthen students’ relationships with each other and to foster dialogue. By incorporating materials that focus on cross-cultural communication into curricula designed for English immersion programs, I hope that students will develop a greater understanding of and appreciation for cultural differences. A suggested lesson plan regarding ways of teaching the play is included in this article as a means of showing the stages that lead to a final performance performed by the students.

Introduction

For international students coming to the US to live and study, adapting to this new culture can be a rewarding experience, for they can develop a greater understanding of a different lifestyle through interacting with individuals from that culture. In some cases, however, this process of adaptation is painful, inasmuch as they are sometimes confronted with situations in which their identities, beliefs, and values associated with their own culture are called into question. While feelings of isolation are not uncommon when living in another culture, learning how to cope with them can be a daunting task. Some

students may not have the opportunities or feel at ease externalizing their emotions, whereas others would prefer to conceal the fact that they are struggling. How are these issues addressed? What kinds of strategies are implemented to create a safe space where international students can freely express their concerns and discuss situations and experiences that have conjured those feelings?

Even though universities organize orientations for international students wherein they are provided with important information about various aspects of American culture, I think that not enough is being done in a tangible and concrete way to address the issues that arise when students are immersing themselves in another culture. To this end, I chose to write a play about international students and to focus specifically on their interactions with each other, their discussions about cultural differences, and their frustrations about feeling like outsiders. In so doing, my aim is to present these themes in a way that students can relate to and that will help them to come to terms with their feelings. As part of this project, international students will be expected to perform the original play, expanding on certain topics and incorporating their own experiences into it or creating short scenes in which they interact with the characters as they knew them, providing them with advice on ways of coping with their respective issues.

Central to my project was promoting intercultural awareness among students in order to strengthen their relationships with each other and to foster dialogue. By participating in activities that emphasize cross-cultural communication, students begin to discern commonalities between their respective cultures (Cunico, 2005). In so doing, they realize that while they may espouse diverging beliefs and values, what matters is finding ways of accepting each other and more important, of embracing those differences.

Unfortunately, ESL curricula do not often include modules that specifically handle intercultural awareness, let alone discuss it through the medium of drama. Why are there not more lessons dedicated to encouraging students to talk more about their culture and their impressions of living in another culture? In order for them to feel more integrated into the university community, it would perhaps be useful to introduce orientation courses that offer a platform for students to convey their feelings and impressions of being in the US and to receive support from their peers and teachers.

Moreover, one salient issue that I wanted to press forward was ESL students' exposure to stereotyping. Indeed, being viewed as foreign owing to a manner of dress, customs, and behaviors that differ from the mainstream culture can result in feelings of rejection and alienation. This is exemplified in the play when certain characters ex-

press their grievances about being reduced to nothing more than stereotypes and about not being perceived as normal human beings who share the same desires and hopes. While stereotyping and generalizations are commonplace among individuals who are unfamiliar with another culture, as teachers, we strive to minimize as much as possible this kind of behavior by emphasizing sensitivity vis-à-vis a particular culture, dispelling distorted and potentially harmful perceptions of other cultures, and by increasing opportunities for intercultural dialogue.

How was drama helpful in this instance? Using this type of medium to explore this array of multidimensional and sensitive themes can be beneficial to students' ability to engage their bodies and minds and to reflect on their own experiences of adapting to another culture (Kao & O'Neill, 1998). Throughout this process, I hope that the characters' stories will resonate with the students, for some of the characters' emotions and reactions may be analogous to those that the students are experiencing. Recognizing that others have undergone similar situations, they might be more inclined to reveal their impressions about being in the US. Moreover, because drama functions as a means of distancing the individual from his or her own cultural reality and of introducing him or her to another viewpoint, it facilitates his or her capacity to place him- or herself in the *other's* position (García & Biscu, 2008). Finally, incorporating drama activities in the classroom can shore up feelings of empathy, which by extension, enhances intercultural awareness (Stem, 1981).

The Process

The Characters

All of the characters, which are based on real people, originate from my experience of having lived in or having friends from those countries who imparted information about their culture. Because I wanted the portrayal of the characters to be as authentic and as accurate as possible, I selected countries and cultures with which I was familiar and which were of particular interest to me from both a cultural and political standpoint. There are four characters in this play: Shahnaz is Iranian, Yasmina is German-Syrian, Carlos is Argentinean, and Tuán Anh is Vietnamese.

My decision to create a bicultural character reflects my own experience as a bicultural individual who has struggled to find acceptance in both cultures. For Yasmina, the issue of identity as a Syrian and a Muslim is twofold: In her encounters with other classmates, Yasmina feels ostracized for having two identities that are cast in a negative light as a result of media influence and lack of exposure to other

cultures. Indeed, in the play, not only are perceptions of her identity as a Syrian strictly constricted to the current conflict and humanitarian crisis in Syria, but her wearing of the *hijab*—a head scarf worn by Muslim women—is perceived as a sign of oppression.

Why did I choose to name my character Yasmina instead of Jasmine, a more Anglicized version of her name? My goal was to highlight the character's dual identity and to bring forth her ties to her cultural heritage. As such, even though Yasmina lives in Germany and is integrated into the culture, having an Arabic name indicates her desire to maintain a connection with her Syrian heritage.

Furthermore, through this play, I wanted to underline the effects of foreign policy on shaping a society's views of a certain culture. In the case of Shahnaz, she is confronted with negative impressions and the demonization of her country among American classmates as a consequence of severed ties between the US and Iran and the US's unflattering depiction of Iranians in the media. She resents the fact that her classmates are unable to see beyond the stereotypes and skewed representation of her culture. By the same token, the character of Tuán Anh bears the weight of coming from a country that was devastated by war as a result of US foreign policy. Others' knowledge of his culture is thus limited to images of a war that he did not experience firsthand. Moreover, his identity as a Vietnamese is conflated into the generic term "Asian," which alludes to all populations living within the vicinity of China. He, too, expresses annoyance at his classmates' lack of cultural awareness and tendency to assume that all individuals who are from countries bordering China speak Chinese and partake in stereotypically "Asian" activities such as kung fu.

Additionally, to provide more depth to this play, I wanted to concentrate on the development of the characters' personalities, chiefly Tuán Anh's evolution from his first encounter with the other international students to the final scene. At first shy and reserved, he gradually becomes more at ease in the group and participates actively in the conversations. This is made apparent in the length of his speech: Because Tuán Anh initially feels unsure about his English, his sentences are shorter and more stilted, a feature that I have observed as an EFL teacher among certain Vietnamese English L2 learners; however, they progressively lengthen, showing that he has developed more confidence in his oral skills and is less inhibited when talking among his friends. Some of the comments that he makes regarding his feelings and concerns would not normally be verbalized if he were in his home culture. However, to assimilate the cultural behaviors and to help the reader relate more to his experience, I deemed it useful to vocalize what Tuán Anh was feeling.

As a counterexample to the other characters' challenges in adapting to American culture, I wanted to include a character who had succeeded in immersing himself into the culture. Indeed, throughout the play, Carlos, the character from Argentina, actively involves himself in social activities that enable him to find a group of American friends and even to develop a romantic relationship with an American student. It may be viewed as somewhat stereotypical to have Carlos be the most extroverted and gregarious character of the group, for individuals from Latin America are often associated with those types of qualities. Nevertheless, I am once again drawing from my observations of students from Latin American cultures who seemed more adept at seeking out friendships with American students than students from other nationalities or cultures. Moreover, Carlos is critical of the other characters for not devoting more effort to meeting Americans. He becomes frustrated when they convey their concerns about feeling isolated, reprimanding them for not being very persistent. His successes give rise to tension and envy within the group, which leads to division between him and the other characters.

Feedback

Once I had completed this play, I sent it to my international friends, particularly to those who come from the character's countries. I referred to them when I had a particular question pertaining to cultural practices such as friendship and physical contact. Some highlighted parts that I needed to improve, such as shortening the scene about university life, for it did not seem as relevant to cultural exploration or as captivating as the other themes. I also had to change certain statements about physical contact in Vietnam and Tuấn Anh's reactions so as to capture as accurately as possible common behaviors linked to that culture. Many asked some excellent questions regarding why I had made a certain character react a certain way or why I had ended the story in a negative fashion. Those kinds of questions facilitated the reflective process of identifying my reasons for including certain facets of the characters' personalities and exploring the interactions between them. The answers provided great fodder for describing the process of writing this play.

The Content

Context

This play is designed for upper-intermediate and advanced international university students who are enrolled in an English immersion program similar to the American Language Institute at San Francisco State University. The majority of them are undergraduate

students who come from countries such as Chile, Colombia, Germany, Lebanon, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, and Vietnam. The play could be incorporated into an elective course that examines intercultural dialogue through drama. The course is offered three times a week during the entire semester and at a running time of 90 minutes. For students to fully benefit from the experience, it would be preferable for the class size not to exceed 20 students.

It is worth mentioning that this play is more suitable for classes that focus specifically on optimizing communication skills and fluency than on analyzing linguistic forms. Students who decide to participate in this course should be made aware that the main objective is to discuss the content of the play. That said, certain language structures such as collocations, colloquial expressions, reported speech, and the difference between *used to*, *get used to*, and *be used to* can be pointed out in order to show their use in context.

Assessment

As a form of assessment, participation in class discussions and in each other's plays is essential to students' overall performance in the class. They would also be expected to write weekly reflection pieces in the form of a letter to a friend or relative from their home country, detailing their impressions and observations as they prepare to perform their plays. A final reflection essay at the end of the course regarding what they had gained from that experience, what they had learned, and how they had improved would be required to complete the course.

Purpose

This play consists of five scenes, which delve into core themes pertaining to friendship, first impressions of the US, time and space, university systems, and stereotyping. My intention was to exhibit the transition from the students' initial state of enthusiasm and optimism about being in a new culture to growing feelings of alienation and disappointment for being considered as outsiders, which mirrors the various phases of culture shock that international students may experience.

Additionally, I intentionally ended the play in a negative manner to prompt students to reflect on the interactions between the characters and the tension that resulted from their conversations.

- How did they feel about what had transpired?
- What would they have done differently?
- What were their thoughts about some of the characters' overt

- hostility toward one of the members in their group?
- Why were they feeling this way and how would they have felt if they had been in the situation of the person being rejected from the group?

I could have written a play that handled cultural adaptation in a more lighthearted way, avoiding sensitive topics; however, from my perspective, it would have been disregarding the types of challenges with which international students can be faced and which can significantly influence their perceptions of American culture. As such, I view the medium of drama as the ideal avenue for discussing sensitive issues with regards to acceptance, stereotyping, and culture shock. The framework of this play was conceived in such a way as to facilitate reflection of the characters' and the readers' reactions in a particular situation. To accomplish this, each scene lends itself to in-depth discussions and opinion sharing about the various interactions between the characters. Key to this activity is not to judge; rather it is to analyze and understand why a character reacted in a certain fashion, what he or she could have done to thwart conflict, and whether conflict was inevitable.

One question that I often asked myself was whether to include errors in the characters' speech, thus rendering the play more authentic. While this idea was appealing and would be useful in a lesson that focused on noticing errors, particularly common errors across cultures, I was concerned that interpolating them in the text would cause students to internalize those errors, assuming that they were correct and producing incorrect forms. Perhaps, as an option, instructors could use an excerpt from the play, insert errors into it, and then have students identify them in groups. In one scene, however, I did have one character, Shahnaz, pronounce a word incorrectly (e.g., the word *skewer* in Scene 4) to show that she and the other characters are still in the process of learning the language in different contexts.

Teaching the Play

After presenting the course objectives and the forms of assessment, the instructor introduces the course's content by providing an insight into the theatrical genre through examples of American plays and by encouraging students to share plots from a particular play they like from their respective cultures.

The first week of the course is dedicated to laying the groundwork for reading the play. To this end, the instructor leads activities on the first two days that emphasize vocal projection, pronunciation, and breathing. These are favorable to helping students develop confidence

in their ability to project their voices and to use correct intonation activities. They should be repeated throughout the course at the beginning of every class so as to establish routine. Exercises from *Stage by Stage* with regards to using tone and stress to express emotion are optimal for showing students how to convey their feelings through their voices (Burke & O'Sullivan, 2002). They then discuss cultural differences about the use of voice in their respective cultures. In addition to these activities, gestures and body language in the US are examined and their use is compared to those in their own cultures (Burke & O'Sullivan, 2002).

During the next three days, students focus on studying the format of dramatic text by identifying how to present dialogue and how to include information about feelings, gestures, and movements in a dialogue (Burke & O'Sullivan, 2002). Using the activities "Facial Expressions in a Text" and "Movements of Characters in a Text," students are subsequently given an excerpt from a play and are told to add extra information about the characters' reactions and movements (Burke & O'Sullivan, 2002, pp. 34, 44). Next, they practice reading the dialogue in pairs or groups, paying specific attention to their intonation.

After that first week, the instructor introduces the play to the class in stages and explains to the students that they will either act in the original play, but include an alternate ending and additional information based on their own experiences, or they will imagine that they knew the characters in the story and write scenarios in which they talk to them, offering advice regarding ways to tackle culture shock, discrimination, and friendships with American students. Another option would be for the students to create a script of the characters reuniting after 10 years, showing their evolution through time and drawing comparisons with their past and present lives.

These projects will then cumulate in a performance at the end of the course. Ideally, there would be two or three representations of the play. If the group of students is large, the instructor can have multiple people play the same character for different scenes. This also applies to those students who would prefer to follow the original script. Another option is to have several performances during the course of a few days so that everyone has a chance to partake in the plays.

Scene 1

As a lead-in into the first theme of the play, the instructor has the students talk in groups about their views of the US before they came to this country and whether those views have changed since their arrival.

- What did they find interesting or unusual?

- How is American culture different from their own culture?

The instructor lists the items on the board and has students discuss their opinions about the various topics.

Afterward, the instructor transitions to the reading of the first scene from the play. Students who are from the characters' countries or cities can explain how they would describe their city to a person who has never been there. Next, the instructor nominates students to read one of the parts, alternating between different readers so as to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to read. It is advisable to allot some time to reading the scene silently before having students read it aloud so that they can become acquainted with the story.

After the reading, the instructor asks if students need clarification regarding particular lexis, phrasal verbs, or expressions. He or she highlights the use of questions as a form of conversation strategy to encourage participation and turn taking and types of questions that are common for requesting more information or clarification. He or she then proceeds to a whole-class discussion by asking these questions:

- Are your impressions similar to those of the characters?
- What did you think of the first meeting between the different characters?
- Was there anything surprising or interesting about it?
- Did everyone have enough speaking time?
- Who seemed to speak the most?
- Did the students experience anything similar during their orientation and if they did not have one, is this a good activity to do for new international students?

Then, the instructor has students analyze the interactions between the characters with these next questions:

- How did they take turns talking?
- Which person wanted the other students to talk more?

Afterward, the instructor dedicates some time to focus on form by asking the students to examine the types of adjectives that the characters use to describe their cities and to say whether they thought that those adjectives effectively captured the atmosphere and appearance of those places. As a means of building their vocabularies, particularly knowledge of suffixes and prefixes, students furnish more examples of adjectives and use them when depicting their respective cities.

Another topic of discussion could consist of having students

list in groups differences and similarities between their cultures and American culture and illustrate their ideas with specific examples of situations that they have experienced.

Finally, the instructor tells students that they will need to form groups based on their decision to either write the scenarios or perform the original, expanding on certain scenes. If they want to do the former, then they will have to discuss how to incorporate the themes from the original play and collaborate on writing the dialogue. If they choose the latter, they will have to agree on which characters to include in their scenarios, which part they would like to play, and what type of advice they could give to the character. After each draft, students conduct either peer correction or request the instructor's assistance in correcting any errors.

Scene 2

As a lead-in to the second scene, which focuses on adapting to a different university system, the instructor writes the word *university* on the board and appeals to students for ideas that they associate with that word. The instructor selects one or two examples and asks what the idea evokes to them. Next, students work in groups and share information about their respective university systems with regard to class size, rapport with teachers, the grading system, types of evaluation, student life, and their opinions about the type of instruction. The students report their findings to the whole class and mention any similarities that they noticed between the various cultures. This, in turn, triggers a discussion about comparisons with the American university system and what they find interesting or different about it.

The instructor proceeds to the reading of the second scene, following the same format as in the reading of the first scene. Afterward, students discuss in groups their own as well as the characters' thoughts with regard to deadlines, smaller class sizes, closer contact with professors, active participation in class, and student clubs.

- What do they find interesting or challenging about studying in the American university system?
- Have they participated in any clubs?
- Do they think that it is an effective way of meeting people, especially Americans?
- Have they participated in social activities with mostly international students or American students?

In this particular scene, the instructor highlights the distinction between *used to*, *get used to*, and *be used to*, drawing from sentences

extracted from the text. Because it is assumed that students at that level are familiar with these forms or have had some exposure to them, this serves as a review in the form of a guided discovery: Students have to infer meaning based on three sentences from the scene: “I used to study a few hours before the exam because I always felt that I had enough time to do it” (p. 172), and “You know, for me, too, I need time to get used to giving presentations in front of the class” (p. 173), and “I’m not used to professors being so strict about this” (p. 172). The instructor assists them by asking the following questions:

- Which sentence refers to a habit in the past which is no longer carried out in the present?
- Which sentence talks about a process of becoming familiar with something and which sentence means that the individual is not familiar with this type of activity?

After pointing out how the form is constructed, the instructor leads an activity wherein students construct sentences using each form. Finally, students join their groups and either practice reading the scene or draft the script of their second scene.

Scene 3

The instructor introduces the third scene by beginning the class with an activity from *Stage by Stage* called “Personal Space,” in which students stand as close as they can to another person and observe their reactions (Burke & O’Sullivan, 2002, p. 43). They then share how they felt and what they noticed as they came closer to each other. Other questions will result from those conversations:

- At what point did they begin to feel uncomfortable?
- Did they feel that the person was invading their personal space?
- What does it mean in their culture when a person stands close to them?

The instructor has students predict the characters’ attitude toward distance and personal space.

The instructor tells students to read the first half of the third scene and has them discuss Shahnaz and Yasmina’s reaction to Carlos’s way of greeting.

- Have they experienced anything similar?
- How did they react?

- Are customs such as same-sex friends kissing on the cheek similar to customs in their culture?
- What are the rules about personal space between members of the opposite sex?
- How do they greet each other and what is it like being a couple in their culture?
- Can they show their affection in public?
- If not, are attitudes changing, such as is the case in Shahnaz and Tuấn Anh's respective cultures?
- What have they noticed about personal space in American culture and have they seen any differences or similarities between their culture and American culture?

From their responses ensue topics relating to the role of religious practices and beliefs in the culture, the effects of globalization, and a shift from a more traditional mind-set to a society that is evolving and that wants to adopt more Western behaviors.

Next, the instructor refers to the concept of time, spurring students to comment about its impact on their lives and their cultures. He or she mentions the distinction between monochromic cultures, which value orderliness and doing one thing at a time, and polychromic cultures, which prefer doing multiple things at the same time (Hall, 1990). The instructor then asks students to which type of culture they belong and whether in their culture individuals feel more controlled by time.

- Is punctuality very important in their cultures or is it acceptable to come to a meeting late?
- Are there any differences between time in their culture and in the US?
- How do they feel about the idea of "being on time"?

The students read the second half of the scene and discuss whether they identify with the characters' responses to time. They will begin to notice that most of the characters come from places where time plays a minimal role. The instructor questions how that compares with German culture, where time seemingly regulates every aspect of daily life and what it feels like, in Yasmina's case, to belong to two distinct cultures that have diverging views of time. Does culture affect how we see time? If students are unsure of how time and space are viewed in their culture, the instructor could have them conduct research on those topics and give a mini-presentation about it in small groups. Students could furnish examples in the form of a skit of cul-

tural misunderstandings relating to time and space between two different cultures and discuss the reactions.

As a focus on functional language, the instructor points out expressions for complimenting someone such as: “It smells really good here” or “Nice place!” (p. 174) or showing enthusiasm: “I’m so excited about trying Persian food” (p. 175), mentioning that is typical in US culture to comment positively on a person’s work and to exhibit enthusiastic behavior.

Finally, the instructor incorporates some grammar practice by bringing forward the use of reported speech and reported verbs in this scene. One example of this can be found when Yasmina reports her classmate’s response to her lateness. Students then suggest additional reporting verbs and review the rules with regard to reported speech forms. The instructor motivates students to integrate reported speech into their plays, for they may have to report comments from their classmates regarding certain situations in their scripts.

Scene 4

At the start of this lesson, the instructor writes *friendship is...* on the board and has students share their thoughts about its meaning and views about friendship in their culture. Afterward, he or she asks the following questions:

- How do they see friendship in the US versus in their culture?
- Have they found American friends?
- Where are their friends from?
- Do they feel that it is important to have friends from the host culture?
- What are the advantages to having friends from the host culture or international friends?
- Are they part of any clubs in which they can meet more people?
- For those who have managed to make American friends, what advice could they give to someone who wants to meet Americans?
- For those who feel more comfortable being with other international students, what are ways for them to meet them?

After reading the fourth scene, the instructor appeals to students for comments on the characters’ behaviors:

- How did they feel about Shahnaz’s response to not meeting enough Americans; to Tuán Anh’s feeling uncomfortable speaking to them?

- What are their thoughts about his personality changing once he came to the US? Has this happened to them?
- Do they act differently when they are in another culture?
- How do they feel about Carlos's impatient reaction? Do they agree?
- Why, in their opinion, is Carlos more successful in meeting Americans?
- What do they think of Yasmina and Shahnaz's stories about their American classmates' sudden disinterest in pursuing the friendship? Has this happened to them as well?
- Is it easier in their culture to make friends?
- How do they feel about Yasmina's perspective about friendship?
- How do they know when that person is a close friend?
- What do they think of the ending?
- What do they notice about the relationships between the different characters through time?

At this stage, the instructor underlines the growing distance between Carlos, who has managed to find a group of American friends and is well adjusted, and the rest of the characters, who are beginning to feel isolated and envious of him. While they say that they have made attempts at seeking friendships with Americans, they consider this process to be very challenging and appear frustrated that Carlos has not been more supportive. The instructor may want to address the topics of isolation and envy and their effects on human relationships.

Finally, the instructor centers on some functional language that conveys a critical viewpoint, such as "Maybe you need to be more open and patient" (p. 180) or "You guys aren't trying hard enough" (p. 181), and fixed phrases to defend one's position, "It's not like I haven't done anything about it" (p. 181), to indicate different ways of expressing and responding to criticism.

Scene 5

The final scene is arguably the most dramatic and the one that encapsulates a range of sensitive topics, from alienation and discrimination to lack of recognition and stereotyping. To start the lesson, the instructor writes the word *stereotype* on the board and asks for a definition. Students provide examples or alternatively, the instructor writes, "All Mexicans are..." and has the students end the sentence. Another option is to bring a picture portraying someone from a certain nationality in a stereotypical manner, for example a Mexican with a large mustache wearing a sombrero, and then have students express

their opinions and reactions. The instructor has students generate other examples and writes them on the board. Afterward, he or she asks students to reflect on the origins of those stereotypes and the effects that they have on relationships with individuals from other cultures. This conversation can be extended to the students' perceptions of their own culture and their beliefs relating to stereotypes' having some semblance of truth in their way of depicting certain cultures or nationalities. Students then share any stereotypes or preconceived notions of Americans that they had before coming to the US and whether they think that those stereotypes are accurate.

After this activity, the instructor leads into a prereading task, using these questions:

- Have they experienced any form of stereotyping since they have been in the US?
- If so, how did it happen? How did they react?
- Did they discuss the issue with friends or classmates?
- What kinds of stereotypes do they believe Americans have of individuals who are Vietnamese, Syrian, German, Muslim, or Argentinean?

This will spawn discussions regarding not only treatment of Arabs and Muslims since 9/11 in the US, but also the influence that skin tone and ethnicity have on an individual's assumptions and beliefs vis-à-vis a certain ethnic or cultural group, such as is the case for Tuán Anh and Shahnaz.

Before reading, the instructor reminds students that this is the last scene of the play and has them predict how it will end. Afterward, students discuss the ending and their thoughts about the tension between the characters. The instructor highlights certain expressions that convey anger such as "it makes my blood boil" (p. 183) or "... she dares to call all of them killers" (p. 183). The instructor then asks them if they agree with the characters' behavior toward Carlos and Carlos's reaction. Students identify the type of emotions that the characters display and they speculate about the reasons behind Shahnaz's hostile attitude.

- Have they ever seen or experienced a similar situation among their friends that they would feel comfortable sharing with the class?
- What did they think of the ending?
- Would they have included another scene? If so, what would they like to focus on?

- If there had not been conflict, what would the story have been like?

After the discussion, those who decided to write scenarios think of a final scene in which they give advice to Shahnaz, Yasmina, and Tuán Anh about how to handle their respective issues, whereas the groups who chose to act in the original play can either write an alternative ending or they can write an additional scene that will serve as a conclusion to the act.

That final discussion concludes the study of the play. The students have expressed their opinions about the content and are now concentrating on finishing the script. Once it is complete, the teacher reads the first draft and makes some suggestions about how to improve it. Students have several sessions to rehearse the play and are expected to list props that they will need. They will also have to decide on the location of the performance. The teacher would have to verify that a space for performances is available at a certain time and day. Students will then discuss how to promote the performance, perhaps through flyers or sending an email on the university Listserv. They could invite students from other ESL classes to observe one or two of their scenes and provide them feedback on the content and delivery.

What I Have Learned From Writing This Play

Because this was my first time writing a play, I thought that it was tremendously helpful to receive feedback from outside sources, for they were able to indicate elements of the play that needed some improvement. Resorting to others' opinions was truly beneficial to narrowing the focus of my play and to reflecting on the types of responses and reactions associated with a particular character.

Further, if I could change anything about this experience, I would probably reevaluate the class size versus the number of performances and the length of the play. Even though I am aware of its length, I consider these themes to be essential to understanding international students' perspectives. I would have also preferred to include more characters in the story from other countries; I feared, though, that it would increase the amount of dialogue, causing students to lose interest in the topics. I hope that next time I can incorporate more characters whose nationalities are not often discussed or presented in language textbooks and whose perspectives are thus not heard.

Moreover, during rehearsals of the play, I realized that some of the language could have been more simplified; in other words, I could have used simpler sentence structures and less academic lexis, making it more accessible and comprehensible to students. Some of my ac-

tors also requested to change certain wording in order to render their speech more natural and realistic. I was glad that they offered suggestions on how to improve the content.

Finally, I had not thought about placement of props and positioning of the actors. While we were rehearsing, it dawned on me that for each scene, it was important to consider where to place tables and chairs and where the actors had to stand to deliver their dialogues so as to ensure smooth transitions between scenes.

Conclusion

I hope that this project will pave the way to making ESL students aware that they are not alone in experiencing these emotions and that part of the process is to continue to embrace their many identities while accepting that building understanding and respect of other cultures is a lengthy process. Being from other cultures, they have the ability to initiate cross-cultural dialogue with their American classmates and to establish relationships with them by mutually imparting information about their lifestyles, customs, traditions, and beliefs.

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