**Research Synopsis**

**Title: Collaborative Ethnography and Intercultural Communicative Competence Development in the ESL Classroom**

**Co-Investigators:**

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**1.**  **Sources of potential participants**

 Data will be collected for this study at the Texas State Intensive English program at Texas State University in San Marcos, Texas. The participants in this study will be one class (8-15 students) of High-Intermediate level ESL students and their teacher.  Students of both genders attend classes and come from around the world, primarily from Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa.  Since most of them are preparing for entrance into a university, most of the students at this institution fall in a range of 17 to 30 years of age, with some older students. Although some undergraduate students who enroll in this program may be 17 years of age, I will not include them in the research. All participants in this study must be 18 years of age in order to participate.

**2.  Recruitment and consent procedures**

We have obtained written consent from the director of the Texas State Intensive English Program to collect data for this study. The intercultural collaborative ethnography project was designed to provide opportunities for learning about local cultural practices and English communication in context, as well as for working closely with a peer from another country. These goals are pursued together with other outcomes such as improvement in English listening and speaking proficiency and preparation for participation in American academic contexts. All students in the class will complete the project as part of their required coursework. However, because one of the Co-Investigators, Jacques Hardy, will be the instructor for the class involved in this study, we will implement several safeguards to ensure that students in the class feel free to refuse to participate without any sense of undue pressure. At the beginning of the semester, Jacques Hardy will introduce the project to the students, informing them that the project is a part of the course curriculum.  He will also inform them that the class will provide the basis for a research study conducted jointly by their teacher and his colleague Minjung Park.  Minjung Park will visit the class and be allowed to introduce the research study to the students without Jacques Hardy present in the room. She will explain the goals of the study and the methods that will be used. She will also assure students that the study is entirely voluntary, and that students can refuse to participate without losing any benefits or incurring any punishments. She will also assure the students that only she, and not their teacher, will know who is and is not participating in the study. Students will be re-assured that they are free to refuse to allow their project-relevant assignments to be analyzed for research purposes although their participation in the intercultural collaborative ethnography project assignments is to fulfill course requirements for pedagogical purposes. She will then answer any questions the students have about the study.

After Minjung Park has explained the study to the class and answered their questions, she will distribute the Consent Form to the students, who will be asked to read, sign, and return the form. Consent forms will be written in English suitable for the reading comprehension level of the OS5500 students. (These students have reached a high level of comprehension of both written and spoken text, and are preparing for entrance into mainstream classes in American universities.) The purpose of this form is to obtain students’ permission to access their online collaborative reflection journals and other work produced on their PBworks collaborative work space. Because students will be working in pairs to produce work on this space, it is possible that one member of the pair will volunteer to participate but their partner will not. Therefore, the Consent Form will give students three options for participation: (1) *Minimal participation:* If students choose this option, they consent to allow Minjung Park to access their project-related coursework. However, none of the participant’s work will be used for analysis or the final research study writeup. (The consent form will explain that any words that students who choose this option produce for online journals will be immediately deleted from written transcripts, so that their words will not be used in any analysis. This is the common practice used by researchers interested in classroom discourse (e.g, Cazden, 2001). The second option will be (2) *Full Participation:* If students choose this option, they consent to allow Minjung Park and Jacques Hardy to access and analyze for research purposes all of their work produced for the project. Students will be re-assured that they can refuse to approve any of their assignments to be analyzed for research purposes. The final choice will be: (3) *Non-participation:* Students who choose this option decline access to their work for research purposes by either researcher, although they will still turn in the work to fulfill course requirements. Students will be informed that if they do not wish to participate, they can simply choose to keep the form. All students will have the option of leaving or joining the study at any point in the term. A final question on the consent form will ask students if they consent to be invited to a post-semester interview. By checking “yes” on the form, they allow us to contact them about an interview at the end of the term, at which time they can decide whether to attend. The students will be given sufficient time to read and sign the consent forms and return them to Minjung Park after I have left the room. At the end of the course in May, 2011, Minjung Park will again contact the participating students with an invitation email recruiting volunteers for a post-project interview. They will be informed that they can respond directly to her if they choose to participate. Participants will again be told that their continued participation is entirely voluntary, and that they can refuse to participate or stop participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled.

**3.  Methodology of the project:**

In this study, we intend to investigate the experiences, relationships, and learning processes of individual students working on a class project. We approach this study with the understanding that human experience and knowledge are co-constructed by human actors and that events are subject to multiple interpretations. These principles fit within a Constructivist theoretical or interpretive paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) We will accordingly take a qualitative research approach. A qualitative approach is normally used to describe phenomena in a natural setting and to see these phenomena from the perspectives of the participants themselves (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1982; Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002). Qualitative research is often inductive and process-oriented, rather than starting from clear hypotheses (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1982; Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 2002). In terms of methodology, we will employ a multiple case study (Stake, 2005) methodology because we intend to explore the ways in which individual students experience intercultural collaborative ethnography. We do not intend to generalize these findings to describe or predict the behavior of ESL students in general, but rather to gain a deep understanding of individual learners. For these reasons, According to Merriam (1998), case studies are an appropriate methodology when “the interest is in process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (p. 19).The unit of analysis in a case study should be a *bounded system* (Merriam, 1998; Smith, 1978) and in this case will be individual ESL students and collaborating pairs of students.

Data collected for this study will include: students’ completed assignments for the intercultural collaborative ethnography project (for example, worksheets, PowerPoint presentations, and self-assessments); students’ online collaborative journals (maintained online on a password-protected PBWorks collaborative workspace); and post-project interviews. Data will be analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) After each interview has been transcribed, themes across these data sets will be identified and color-coded based on the external codes drawn from Byram’s (1997) curricular objectives for the development of intercultural competence. These include perspective shift, attitude, cultural knowledge, skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interacting and critical cultural awareness. The transcripts will be read several times looking for the evidence of intercultural competence. Then, the developed themes will be constantly compared across the other set of data to look for confirming evidence or contradictory evidence (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Merriam, 1998).  Students’ written work will be analyzed using discourse analysis. This study is based on Gee’s notion that “language has meaning only in and through social practices” (Gee, 2008, p.8). In another words, the discourse analytic method is based on the his concept of Discourse with a capital “D”, which includes “what happens when people draw on the contextual knowledge they have about language and on situated knowledge based on their memories of things they have said, heard, seen, or written before in order to do things in the worlds” (Scharllert et al, 2008, p.714).

In essence, the investigators of this study will only ask for students’ permission to use their project-related coursework and assignments to be analyzed for research purposes. The students will not be asked to engage in any work other than course assignments that are designed to maximize their learning and to meet course objectives. At the end of the semester, participants who agree will be invited for an interview. The post-project interview will be conducted in English by Minjung Park in a private location agreed upon with the participant. It will last approximately one hour and will be audio-recorded with the consent of the participant. The interview will be semi-structured, with a focus on students’ experience of participation in the intercultural collaborative ethnography project, their views on the relationships between culture and language, and their experience of intercultural collaboration.

**4.**  **Description of potential risks**

 The expected risk of participating in this study is minimal. Participants may feel some slight degree of self-consciousness about being interviewed or having their work analyzed for research purposes. However, I believe this risk is minimal. The most prominent risk involved is the potential loss of confidentiality.  We will attempt to reduce this risk through the measures described in section 5 below.

**5.  Protection of the privacy and confidentiality of participants**

Because one of the Co-Investigators for the research study is teaching the class involved in the study, it is important that he not know which students are participating in the study. In this way, students can be assured that they will not receive different treatment or teaching based on their participation status. To ensure this, all communication between students and participants will be undertaken by Minjung Park after the teacher announces on the first day of the semester that the class will be involved in a research study. For the duration of the semester, until final grades have been turned in to TSIE by Jacques Hardy in May 2011, only Minjung Park will know which students are participating in the study. Jacques Hardy will have access to all students’ work in his role as course instructor, and after grades have been turned in he will have access to all data. Minjung Park will have access to students’ work only if they consent to this in Consent Form #1.

 Paricipants’ online collaborative journals will be copied to Microsoft Word files with students’ real names stripped and replaced with pseudonyms. These files, along with all hard copies of data, including consent forms, transcripts, and reflection sheets, will be kept in a locked drawer at the homes of the primary investigators. All electronic copies of data, including MP3 audio files of interviews, will be stored on the secure, password-protected computers of the primary investigators. MP3 files will be given names with no potential identifiers of participants.  All names will be changed to pseudonyms on transcripts. Participants' names and assigned pseudonyms will be kept in a master key separate from these files. This file will be destroyed as soon as data analysis has been completed. All paper documents will likewise be stripped of identifying information, copied, the originals shredded, and the copies kept in a locked drawer.  Only the Principal Investigators will have access to any data.  Students' online and paper work will be kept for 3 years after the completion of the research study.  This will provide valuable information for further studies. This will be clearly stated in the consent form.

**6.** **Description of potential benefits**

      Anticipated benefits of the intercultural collaborative ethnography project for students include improvement in their English proficiency and cultural awareness. Students’ assignments for the project constitute 25 % of the course grade. However, there is no direct benefit to be anticipated for the students by allowing their course work to be used for research purpose. Participation in the post-course interview may help students to reflect on their learning and promote their continued development as intercultural speakers. The more general benefit is that this study can contribute to greater understanding of ESL students’ Intercultural Communicative Competence development and the influence on ICC of participation in collaborative ethnography projects. It may therefore provide valuable practical guidance to teachers for future instruction.

**7. Compensation of participants:**

   Participants will not receive compensation for participating in this study.

**8.  Risks and Benefits:**

The risks for the subjects of this study and for society in general are minimal.  I will minimize any discomfort the participants may feel at being interviewed by making them comfortable and insuring that interviews are conducted in such a way that both researcher and participants find it a cooperative and rewarding learning experience, rather than as a unidirectional flow of information from subject to researcher.  In this way, all parties involved in the study may benefit from intercultural interaction and further reflection on the interrelationships between each others’ cultural practices and values. There is no risk to society as long as the research produced provides a rich and accurate description of ESL students’ experience, rather than a unidimensional or simplistic one.  The intercultural communication competence students may develop through participation in the ICEP could benefit both the students themselves and society in general by promoting greater understanding and more fruitful communication between members of different cultures. The increased understanding of ESL students’ ICC development and processes of collaboration will benefit society by informing teachers’ practice. These are the chief benefits we hope for society to accrue from our research.

**9.  Site and Approval Status:**

We have obtained written consent from the director of the Texas State Intensive English Program to collect data for this study.

**10 & 11.  Relation to Academic Work:**

This research study is being undertaken for potential publication to contribute to knowledge in this area, not in fulfillment of academic requirements.

**12.  Other IRB status:**

This study is currently under review by the IRB of the University of Texas at Austin.

**13. Access to Data:**

           For the duration of the semester, until final grades have been turned in to TSIE by Jacques Hardy in May 2011, only Minjung Park will know which students are participating in the study. Jacques Hardy will have access to all students’ work in his role as course instructor, and after grades have been turned in he will have access to all consenting participants’ data. Minjung Park will have access to students’ work only if they consent to this in the Consent Form. Only the two Primary Investigators will have access to data collected for this study. Data may be used for future studies by the Co-Investigators, either alone or in collaboration with other researchers. This will be clearly stated in the consent forms.

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