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## Theatre Arts Integration for Deeper Learning in the English-as-a- Foreign-Language Classroom

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Theatre Arts Integration for Deeper Learning in the English-as-a-Foreign-Language  
Classroom

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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in  
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by

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## Abstract

This quasi-experimental case study examines the impact of theatre arts integration in an English-as-a foreign language (EFL) course in a competency-based international high school. Aiming to engage students in a process of deeper learning through drama, this study focuses on the domain of speaking and oral communicative competence. Although widely recognized as one of the most important college-and-career-readiness skills, oral communication is often overshadowed by high-stakes testing priorities such as reading and writing. In particular, many Chinese students of English struggle to achieve confident oral fluency despite years of study. This research was designed to investigate whether theatre arts integration pedagogy contributes to enhanced learning outcomes using a treatment group of 14 Chinese students in an extant EFL classroom in China and a comparison group of 13 Chinese students taking the same level of English at the same school site that did not utilize an arts-integrated approach. Quantitative and qualitative data sources including a standardized EFL proficiency assessment, software analytics of oral interviews, and student artifact portfolios were utilized to answer the guiding question: What is the impact of theatre arts integration on learning outcomes for Chinese students studying English as a foreign language? Analyses of the pre- and post- assessments revealed that the majority of the participants in both groups experienced significant growth in their overall as well as their spoken English performance, indicating that theatre arts integration pedagogy was as effective or more effective than other non-arts-based instructional methods in this case. For participants who did not demonstrate growth or received mixed results according to the two quantitative assessments, a qualitative analysis of their portfolio of performance assessments (artifacts) provided further insights into their progress and proficiency. This research suggests that theatre arts integration has the potential to enhance learning outcomes for spoken English proficiency and communicative competence, and the instructional design and assessment system can serve as models for educators everywhere who are considering arts-integrated or competency-based approaches. This research contributes to reducing barriers between the theory and practice of deeper learning, chief among them being the need for new pedagogical models that foster deeper learning.

*Keywords:* arts integration, theatre arts, English as a foreign language, oral English proficiency, deeper learning, competency-based education, China, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

There is a strong case to be made for the connection between arts and learning, and a body of research has demonstrated the positive effect of participation in the arts with academic achievement (Burnaford et al, 2007; Catterall, 1999, 2012; Eisner, 1998; Fogarty & Stoehr, 2008; Gross, 2013; Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2005; Pepler, 2012; Ruppert, 2006). An arts-based approach to teaching and learning engages learners, piques their natural curiosity, promotes deep and meaningful learning, and empowers students to produce original works and to articulate their aesthetic choices (Greene, 1995). Participation in arts programs as well as various integrations of the arts into academic subjects have been shown to make a positive impact on student learning and engagement (Burnaford et al, 2007; Catterall, 2005; Pepler, 2012). Acknowledging the inherent value and merits of stand-alone disciplinary arts programs in schools, arts integration researchers nevertheless point to clear contributions in and across academic curricula, driving and enhancing teaching and learning in non-arts subjects (Burnaford et al, 2007; Catterall, 2009; Eisner, 1998; Fogarty & Stoehr, 2008; Gross, 2013; Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2005; Pepler, 2012; Ruppert, 2006). In particular, music, dramatic enactment, and visual arts have been shown to directly benefit English language development and literacy skills, especially for non-native speakers (Catterall, 2009; Chi, 2017; Heath, 1993; Pepler, 2012). Therefore, an integrated theatre arts program was adopted for the academic goal of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) development and the deeper learning of communicative competencies. Based on encouraging findings in the literature on the benefits of theatre arts integration for EFL instruction, the researcher contended that theatre arts were well-positioned for integration into the EFL classroom and hypothesized that a combination of traditional tests, technology-enabled analyses, and video artifacts would indicate enhanced learning outcomes for participants in the integrated theatre arts course.

The power and potential of the arts to enhance the learning process have long been established, and recent developments in theories of cognition on teaching and learning give a renewed importance to the role of arts in education (Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2005; Ruppert, 2006; Sternberg & Zhang, 2014). [The connection between arts-based learning and cognitive development is explored in Chapter 2.] In addition to these palpable benefits in terms of academic achievement and test scores, the arts seem to cultivate equally (if not more) important positive values and dispositions for students, such as creativity, pro-social behavior, and even increased attendance (Burnaford et al, 2007; Catterall, 2005; Zwirn & Graham, 2008). Nevertheless, the pressures of standardized test performance have led schools to push the arts to the periphery in favor of test-centric reading and math instruction, despite research-based evidence that the arts contribute in meaningful ways to enhanced learning outcomes for students, both academic and otherwise (Gullatt, 2007; Heilig, 2010; Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2005; Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006). Researcher David Gullatt (2007) asks: “If the arts are responsible for helping to create strong thinkers, then why are school leaders hesitant to fund programs featuring the arts?” (p. 211). Perhaps a hyper-focus on testing and accountability concerns is contributing to the discrepancy between what years of research suggests about the value of the arts for learning and the practices regarding the arts in schools. Proponents of the arts have fought this battle for generations, continuing to stress the value and the importance of the arts for students and for our systems of education (Burnaford et al, 2007; Catterall, 2009; Eisner, 1998; Fogarty & Stoehr, 2008; Gross, 2013; Pepler, 2012; Ruppert, 2006). According to Elliot Eisner,

[artistic] development requires the ability to deal effectively with multiple demands simultaneously. And it is in learning to engage in that process that perception is refined, imagination stimulated, judgement fostered, and technical skills developed.

Given the complexities of these demands, it is ironic that the arts should be widely regarded as non-cognitive. (2002, p. 15)

In short, arts education is beneficial to learning, and it is particularly effective for students with diverse backgrounds, needs, and challenges (Burnaford et al, 2007; Catterall, 2002; Pepler, 2012; Ruppert, 2006). And yet, many schools continue to reduce support for arts programs in the wake of testing accountability measures (Gullatt, 2007; Heilig, 2010; Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006). In a 2006 study, more than a third of U.S. principals polled reported a reduction in arts programs, and a third of these reductions were classified as large reductions; only one in ten reported increases in arts programs, and only 1% reported large increases (Mishook & Kornhaber, 2006). Even where they are present, the arts are routinely relegated to the world of extracurricular endeavors rather than being seen as essential core subjects, and this may be because connections between the arts and academics, or between the arts and various careers, are not always evident or explicit.

But the arts have not suffered alone in this climate of standardized testing; broader concerns related to students' well-being and preparedness for success in the modern workforce have led many educators to re-think the very structure of the traditional/mainstream school model. In these circumstances, a movement of *competency-based education* (CBE) has been experiencing a resurgence in recent years, led by educators from all over the world who are committed to shifting the traditional education paradigm towards *deeper learning* approaches (Bitter & Loney, 2015; Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Fullan & Langworthy, 2013; Keesee, 2018; Great Schools Partnership, 2014; Levine & Patrick, 2019; NRC, 2012; Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014; Zeiser, 2019). CBE advocates claim that deeper learning pedagogies better prepare learners for success in college and career, supporting their individual needs with effective combinations of teaching methods

and more flexible, humane forms of assessment (Bitter & Loney, 2015; Fullan & Langworthy, 2013; Keesee, 2018; Great Schools Partnership, 2014; Zeiser, 2019). Even among traditional school environments, research indicates a growing awareness of the importance of 21st century skills, often heralded as the “4 C’s” of communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking (Lench, Fukuda, & Anderson, 2015). Proponents of CBE have expanded the definition of 21st century skills (the “4 C’s”) to include larger, more comprehensive lists which include, for example, “self-regulation” and “digital literacies,” although the list varies somewhat from school to school, from context to context. According to the National Research Council (2012), precise definitions are not possible at this time, in part because there is “lack of definitive research on the range of skills and behaviors that have come to fall under the headings of ‘deeper learning’ and ‘21st century skills’” (p. 2). The term *competency* has been adopted to indicate a broader combination of skills, knowledge, and dispositions (habits of mind), so in this study the author will refer to “21st century competencies” or just “competencies,” using the definitions provided by the Hewlett Foundation’s Deeper Learning Framework (2013).

This study adopts the established, research-based competency model from the Deeper Learning Framework, which is comprised of six key competencies: master core academic content, think critically and solve complex problem, work collaboratively, communicate effectively, learn how to learn, develop academic mindsets. (Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014). Of these, effective communication was selected as the emphasized competency for this investigation. Definitions and descriptions for the deeper learning competencies can be found in Appendix A. Throughout the course, students were given a number of opportunities to develop their oral communicative competence and to create a competency-based portfolio containing artifacts of their performance in the course; these artifacts were evaluated using

high quality rubrics, following guidelines from the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (see Appendix C).

Competency-based education (CBE) has a strong research basis which is discussed in Chapter 2, but it is important to note the significance of the competencies with regard to the general movement toward re-conceiving of instructional outcomes and the aims of education in the context of the modern world:

Globalization and modernization are creating an increasingly diverse and interconnected world. To make sense of and function well in this world, individuals need for example to master changing technologies and to make sense of large amounts of available information. They also face collective challenges as societies—such as balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability, and prosperity with social equity. In these contexts, the competencies that individuals need to meet their goals have become more complex, requiring more than the mastery of certain narrowly defined [standards]. (Rychen, 2016, p. 4)

These types of learning outcomes require a re-configuration of the processes of schooling, from how schools are organized to the types of teaching and learning they provide. To begin with, instructional design must become much more *interdisciplinary* in nature, transcending the traditional academic silos. In a competency-based learning environment, teachers are tasked with engaging learners in solving real-world problems and fostering the capacity of their students to “analyze, reason, and communicate effectively as they pose, solve, and interpret problems in a variety of subject matter areas” (Rychen, 2016, p. 3). Such is the case in the design of this study: a collection of trans-disciplinary learning objectives comprised of Common Core standards, deeper learning competencies, and National Core Arts standards for theatre was selected for the theatre arts integrated course design. The standards are provided in Appendix B. Through the medium of theatre arts, learners in this arts-integrated English

course pursued interdisciplinary objectives while engaging in deeper learning of English language skills and 21st century competencies.

Proponents of CBE call for a fundamental re-structuring of the learning environment, instructional approaches, methods of assessment, and learning goals. *CompetencyWorks*, an initiative tasked with providing the definition and common understandings of the international CBE movement, claims that competency-based education constitutes “a major shift in school culture, structures, and pedagogy [that is] focused on ensuring that all students succeed and addressing the fundamental shortcomings of the traditional model” (Levine & Patrick, 2019, p. 2). And, according to competency-based leaders and college admissions officers, *mastery* learning is paramount. What exactly is meant by “mastery?” Wiggins (2005) defines mastery as “effective transfer of learning in authentic and worthy performance” (p. 78). But, how are teachers going to define what constitutes an “authentic and worthy” demonstration of a student’s learning in a meaningful, accurate, and reliable way? Wiggins (2005) claims that students have mastered a subject when they are fluent, even creative, in using their knowledge, skills, and understanding in “key performance challenges” and contexts at the heart of that subject, as measured against valid and high standards (p. 78). The concept of learning for transfer (referred to among competency-based proponents as *deeper learning*) is precisely what this case study addresses: learners with limited ability to speak English underwent key performance challenges through a theatre arts program, one-on-one interviews, and a standardized spoken English assessment. [In this study, positive outcomes were achieved by learners exposed to arts integration pedagogy, suggesting a substantial transfer of learning from their experience in the arts-integrated course; comparing relative growth with a non-arts peer group allowed for measures of relative effectiveness.]

The competency-based education (CBE) movement represents a paradigm shift that re-defines educational objectives and the types of teaching and learning it will take to achieve

them. This innovative effort requires field research on deeper learning, particularly around instructional design and assessment. Wiggins (2005) reminds readers that the purpose of the shift is “not to choose this or that tactic to the exclusion of others,” but rather to “seek to expand the normal repertoire to make sure that more *appropriate diversity* and validity is found in classroom assessment, based on the diversity of goals typically found in most programs” (p. 10). Expanding educators’ conception of what constitutes meaningful assessment is a central goal of the competency-based movement (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014). Thus, competency-based education is not so much a rejection of tradition, but more of a structural overhaul requiring educators to move “toward a *system of assessments* that is based on using a range of measures and methods that yield comprehensive, valid, and vital data” for both academic *and* competency-based outcomes (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013, p. 6).

In the face of considerable obstacles and the inertia of more than a century of tradition, a growing partnership of progressive, forward-thinking schools are making the switch to competency-based education. Although it sounds good in theory, the first obstacle that competency-based schools need to overcome is how to demonstrate that students in these learning environments are in fact prepared for the rigors of college and career—that (to use an unfortunate metaphor) these bold initiatives did not manage to throw out the baby with the bathwater by eliminating traditional assessment and academic rigor altogether. Many CBE schools use a *system of assessments* comprised of combinations of traditional and competency-based measures, aiming to reliably demonstrate that these approaches are effective for deeper learning and for preparing students academically.

An international partnership of competency-based schools, the Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC), readily admits that this is a work in progress, one that will take years of collaboration between schools, teachers, students, universities, and thought leaders

worldwide (Keesee, 2017). Characterized by their long-term goal of moving away from traditional letter grades towards a completely competency-based “mastery transcript,” schools in the MTC partner network are currently developing and field testing instructional and assessment methods to achieve this goal. One MTC school network principal, in describing his school’s shift to Mastery Transcript, admits that there were considerable concerns about making the switch to a “no-grades” program:

There was definitely fear that [students] would not do the work without the grade. Yet after being very transparent with our students about this process and the change, we find that we are not, overall, seeing disengagement. Especially with our older students, we are actually seeing *more* engagement, as they recognize the effort for greater authenticity. “No grades” alone is not enough—clearly it has to go hand in hand with authentic instruction, relationships (we are using a small cohort model), some kind of portfolio, and a supportive culture. But it is a step in the right direction, in the direction of the Mastery Transcript. (Keesee, 2017, n.p.)

Important to note is that, while there is a philosophical rejection of the ‘teach to the test’ approach to schooling (MTC leaders point to the ineffectiveness and, at times, counter-productivity of giving traditional grades when it comes to authentic learner engagement), competency-based education does actually feature academic learning in STEM and the humanities, assessed according to rigorous rubrics through multiple and flexible forms of assessment. (See Appendix D for a sample MTC transcript.)

Although the methods and cultures vary greatly among different CBE programs, there is widespread agreement that students should be held to rigorous academic standards as an essential part of what it means to be college and career ready (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Fullan & Langworthy, 2013; Great Schools Partnership, 2014; Levine & Patrick, 2019;

NRC, 2012; Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014). Consider that two out of the six competencies in the Deeper Learning Framework model (the first and the last: *mastering core academic content* and *developing an academic mindset*) relate specifically to academic achievement; educational attainment (the number of years one is in school) is still strongly correlated with adult earnings and success in career, thus making it a meaningful 21st century competency in-and-of itself. Furthermore, 21st century competencies support deeper learning in a discipline or subject area, actually promoting academic learning rather than being a departure from it (NRC, 2012).

One area where competency-based education has taken a strong foothold is in graduate programs in higher education, particularly in medicine. The University of Michigan Medical School’s master’s in health program describes “an assessment process that accurately and reliably determines a learner’s competence in educational domains... [through] two principal components: an independent assessment committee and a learner repository” (Fitzgerald et al, 2015, p. i). While claiming that their approach is “demanding” and admitting that assessing standards/criteria that are “not readily quantifiable” is indeed a challenge, the authors of this case study on the assessment challenges in CBE in the health profession nevertheless argue that their method of documenting practical learning outcomes with competencies is a “more genuine form of assessment” than standardized tests (Fitzgerald et al, 2015, p. 6). The authors note that that this approach to assessment—while a departure from traditional measures—is in keeping with the program’s guiding philosophy which supposes that education is not merely a set of content knowledge, but a process of developing higher-order skills.

Functional assessment systems like the one described above (at the level of college and career—and in the STEM field, no less) are encouraging for the CBE movement. At the

same time, it must be considered that one of the more serious criticisms of CBE is that a number of “for-profit virtual schools and online degree programs have been accused of offering low-quality educational experiences to students, exploiting students or public programs, and using the popularity of concepts such as ‘competency-based education’ to promote programs of dubious educational value” (Great Schools Partnership, 2014).

Therefore, it is essential to carefully define and specify the approaches being taken with regard to adopting a competency-based educational program.

For schools willing to take on bold re-design initiatives, criteria and parameters must be set according to rigorous standards that are informed by research. Rather than conceiving of this change as being a shift away from evaluation, responsible educators in the CBE movement must instead embrace different, more responsive forms of assessment such as projects, portfolios, and performances (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013). Furthermore, educational technologies will continue to play an important role in modern systems of assessment; in this study, a software program, Crestwood, is used to generate a detailed data profile showing the English-speaking proficiency of each student. Competency-based schools utilize educational technologies as essential tools for data-driven and personalized learning, and many educators and school leaders who believe in a shift toward competency-based education and deeper learning are already paving the way towards the future of educational models—or, put another way, making the path by walking it; a study from the American Institute for Research showed that a number of competency-based schools are currently employing a variety of approaches to foster deeper learning, including blended learning with adaptive software, project-based learning, portfolios, and exhibitions (Zeiser, 2019).

The goals and learning outcomes associated with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and deeper learning are not adequately measurable using standardized testing, which has come to

dominate the landscape in terms of assessment and rankings for students. At the same time, a chorus of voices from higher education and major industries claim that such competencies are precisely what are most critical for success (Bolton, Kingsley, & Graddol, 2012; Carnavale & Strohl, 2018; Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Davis, 1999; Fullan & Langworthy, 2013; Guha et al, 2015; HRA, 2015; Levine & Patrick, 2019; Zhou, Bauer, & Erb, 2004). In particular, effective communication and collaboration skills are seen as highly desirable by employers, and this has profound implications for students learning English as a foreign language. Non-native EFL learners are routinely taught in a fashion of direct instruction and rote memorization in China and other countries, yet even those with good English scores (typically reading, vocabulary, and grammar skills assessed via multiple choice exam) often struggle with the real-world speaking part that would allow them to participate in meetings, give presentations, converse on the phone, interface with clients, and more generally to make friends and thrive in their roles (Bolton, Kingsley & Graddol, 2012; Duan & Yang, 2016; Gill, 2016; Yeung, 2017; Zhang, 2017; Zhou, Bauer, & Erb, 2004). Therefore, this research adopted a pedagogical approach designed for deeper learning and utilized a mixed-method system of assessments to analyze the impact of an integrated theatre arts program on learning outcomes for Chinese high school students studying English as a foreign language. In this case, *communicating effectively* (the emphasized deeper learning competency) requires some degree of spoken English proficiency, and the multiple methods of measurement in the system of assessments provide rich, comparative data of performance and progress over time with regard to participants' oral English communication skills.

### **Background to the Problem**

There are more than 400 million English language learners in China (more than a quarter of their population), and yet less than 1% of Chinese mainlanders are considered

fluent at the conversational level (Bolton, Kingsley, & Graddol, 2012; Duan & Yang, 2016; Gill, 2016; Yeung, 2017; Zhang, 2017). The Chinese government, as a part of the ‘opening up’ policies that began in the 1970s, has mandated English language instruction nationwide, and it is a tested requirement for students from primary school all the way through high school and university programs (Zhang, 2017). All university students in China are required to study English not only for admissions purposes but also as requirement for graduation, regardless of one’s area of study; all non-English majors must pass the College English Test (CET) (Bolton, Kingsley, & Graddol, 2012). English is seen as the global lingua franca and the language of opportunity for many Chinese people with regard to acceptance into top universities, career opportunities, and international business and travel (Bolton, Kingsley, & Graddol, 2012; Zhang, 2017). According to the South China Morning Post, “this challenge should not be left to cram schools or tutorial centres, as being exam-savvy doesn’t translate into functionality. English teaching must be reimagined to prepare [Chinese] people for global citizenship and leadership” (Yeung, 2017, n.p.). In terms of ‘college and career readiness’ for Chinese students going abroad, consider that “many students from China are not prepared well for effective communications to present themselves with or in front of American peers and professors or any native English speakers due to speaking English as a second language” (Zhou, Bauer, & Erb, 2004, p. 6). Even beyond higher education, “employers complain that few graduates are prepared even for the simple tasks of writing or responding to an English email or answering business phone calls, much less conducting trade negotiations with foreign clients” (Yeung, 2017).

In the United States, three major surveys were given to businesses to determine what skills employers considered most important for prospective workers. The results, shown in Table 1, indicate the top skills chosen by executives as essential for employees. In each of these reports, communication (more specifically, oral communication) appears as one of the

most (if not *the* most) important career-readiness skills. Specifically, the AMA (2010) made clear that many executives felt that proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics was not enough to be successful without the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as problem solving, collaboration, and effective communication. This is a specific example of an area where a shift to competency-based education—with its emphasis on 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as effective communication—could have a tangible benefit for learners compared with traditional, test-based approaches in terms of preparing them for future career opportunities and success.

Table 1. *Comparison of the Three Surveys Top Rated Skills*

<b>21st Century Survey (2008)</b>	<b>AMA (2010)</b>	<b>NACE (2013)</b>
Oral Communications	Communications	Oral Communication
Teamwork	Collaboration/Teamwork	Collaboration/Teamwork
Ethics/Social Responsibility	Critical Thinking / Problem Solving	Problem Solve
Professionalism	Creativity/Innovation	Organization
Reading Comprehension		Obtain and process information

*Note.* Adapted from Hodge and Lear (2011, p. 31).

Georgetown University’s Center on Education and the Workforce released a report in 2018 on “Job Growth and Education Requirements Through 2020,” which clearly indicated the importance of oral English communication skills. The report provides the results of a study done on employment and the skills most desirable by employers in the 2020 economy. Oral comprehension and oral expression—speaking and listening skills, in other words—rank at the very top of that list, being seen as skills used intensely in the vast majority of workplace contexts. The report shows that “the abilities that are most valued in the economy are communications and analysis. Over 60 percent of all occupations require oral comprehension and expression to be either very important or extremely important to success” (Carnavale &

Strohl, 2018, p. 9). For non-native students to thrive in western colleges and to be prepared for success across a variety of careers, learning to speak English fluently is crucial. To achieve this goal, new pedagogical approaches must be attempted for English-as-a-foreign-language instruction.

A body of research suggests that arts integration is an effective pedagogical approach for improved learning outcomes for English language learners. However, as it is not an area measured on high-stakes standardized tests such as MAP, SAT, or Gaokao (the Chinese national matriculation exam), the domain of *speaking* is largely under-represented in the scholarly discussions of the impact of arts integration pedagogy on EFL development, particularly among high school students. English-as-a-foreign-language exams such as the TOEFL and IELTS do, of course, include a speaking section, and there do exist standardized and reliable measures for measuring a student's oral English proficiency (such as the speaking section of the WIDA exam); however, the overwhelming majority of what is taught and assessed in high school English courses is geared toward reading and writing. Partly, this is because of practical considerations: it is more costly and time-consuming to assess each and every student's English-speaking abilities with trained human evaluators.

Particularly in China, many students aiming to study abroad struggle with the speaking part of the TOEFL or IELTS exams—then, subsequently, with adjusting to life in an English-speaking university or company—because so much of their learning has been based on reading and writing skills, memorization, and multiple-choice testing (Bolton, Kingsley, & Graddol, 2012; Duan & Yang, 2016; Yeung, 2017; Zhang, 2017; Zhou, Bauer, & Erb, 2004). In a study on Chinese students' ability to give presentations in an English-speaking university in the United States, the researchers found that the “students currently do not have the ability to express themselves fully and freely which causes poor performance, anxiety, and communication apprehension during presentation” (Zhou, Bauer, & Erb, 2004,

p. 5). More than 30 students (all of whom had passed the TOEFL and were currently attending a U.S. university) were interviewed and observed during the study, and they conveyed that “getting a good score on the [TOEFL] test does not mean that their English is effective enough to study in the U.S.” and that learning English as a foreign language is the hardest challenge to overcome during their time at university (Zhou, Bauer, & Erb, 2004, p. 13-14). The study determined that “speaking skills compared to the other three skills of listening, reading, and writing were the most difficult skills to improve,” while at the same time being “the most important skills that needed to be used in the classroom and daily life” (Zhou, Bauer, & Erb, 2004, p. 29).

In short, much foreign language instruction simply does not translate (no pun intended) into the ability to actually be able to *speak* that language in real-world contexts. Despite its ubiquity and high status in China, the manner of teaching English is, in many cases, “unimaginative [and] bookish, short on functional skills” (Yeung, 2017). A Florida International University study (2016) investigated the challenges facing Chinese students studying abroad in the United States, finding that:

the way students have learned English in their home country may not serve them well when they study abroad.... [Learning objectives] are generally achieved through students’ self-study and by memorization of exemplary texts and vocabulary lists.... English words are memorized without a clear understanding of their origins and semantic properties. (Duan & Yang, 2016, p. 45).

In this study, a fundamentally different approach to EFL instruction was adopted through the integrated theatre arts curriculum, and with it, an updated view of assessment that includes competency-based measures to supplement the data provided from academic assessments and interview data.

Amid discussion about shifting the educational paradigm, there are bound to be concerns about major changes to instruction and assessment. There is a natural tension between a certain desired predictability and other more emergent—as Fitzgerald (2015) puts it: “less readily quantifiable”—aspects of curricula (i.e. self-direction, effective communication, collaboration) such as those addressed in the competencies. And, particularly in the early years of the paradigm shift, results may vary; the outcomes (such as admission to universities or future career success) are not guaranteed. The reality is that learners in CBE environments will, by and large, be held to the same standards (i.e. when it comes to college admissions) as learners coming from traditional learning environments, and they will take the same standardized tests. The students in this study are Chinese high school students who will likely apply to study abroad at English-speaking colleges and universities. They will all likely have to take the TOEFL and/or the SAT in order to achieve that goal. Based on the encouraging research basis of arts-based teaching and learning, combined with the future-thinking values and attitudes espoused by competency-based education, this study investigates the impact of the chosen pedagogy—theatre arts integration—on learning outcomes using multiple forms of assessment. Proponents of competency-based education claim it has the potential to provide better learning outcomes for students; in these early stages, there are serious challenges to be overcome.

First, competency-based schools will need to establish a verification process for what constitutes competency, or mastery. The Mastery Transcript Consortium—though its core values are based on decades of research by Bloom (1956) and others—is still in an early stage of conception. The impacts of competency-based instruction, while seeming to promote real-world skills and dispositions, are not always easily quantifiable according to traditional measures (i.e. standardized assessments). There are encouraging success stories and case studies from MTC partner school networks such as Envision Schools (Maier, n.d.) and High

Tech High (Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014), which have demonstrated positive outcomes on test scores and graduation rates using a competency-based approach. However, none of the cases feature interdisciplinary theatre arts instruction for language learning for EFL students, making this an area ripe for study in the field of competency-based education.

One of the main challenges facing proponents of competency-based education (CBE) is designing assessment systems which measure that which traditional assessments cannot fully capture: the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies—transferable knowledge and skills seen as essential for success in modern society. The Deeper Learning Framework established by The Hewlett Foundation (2013) includes six main competencies seen as essential to preparing students for success in college, career, and civic life (Appendix A); however, since such competencies are not sufficiently measurable with multiple-choice tests, proponents of deeper learning are working towards establishing reliable *systems of assessments* (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Fullan & Langworthy, 2013; Rothman, 2018). [This case study employed multiple modes of assessment in a systematic way to examine the impact of theatre arts integration on learning outcomes for spoken English.]

Critics of competency-based education claim that there are problems with flexible assessment, that such learning environments allow for mediocrity in lieu of rigorous academics (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). In addition to teaching in a way that honors the values and philosophy of competency-based education, teachers must design and implement a cohesive assessment system using a combination of interviews, artifact portfolios, performance assessments, educational technologies, and other solutions that can reliably evaluate learners' performance and progress toward mastery of skills and knowledge. Without such systems in place, the effectiveness of competency-based instruction is difficult to measure. Designing competency-based instruction has the dual challenge of meeting

academic standards *and* certain emphasized competencies through carefully designed projects, courses, and learning experiences.

Research conducted on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities found that “when it comes to the types of skills and knowledge that employers feel are most important to workplace success, large majorities of employers do *not* feel that recent college graduates are well prepared... for applying knowledge and skills in real-world settings, critical thinking skills, and written and oral communication skills” (HRA, 2015, p. 11). There is a disconnect between what is taught and assessed in many schools and what colleges and companies say is most essential for success. This trend is prevalent throughout the US but also internationally; accordingly, competency-based education reform is a global movement. Consider that hundreds of millions of Chinese students who study English in strict, traditional learning environments are trained to memorize vocabulary and to pass standardized reading and grammar tests, yet they often struggle with the oral communication skills vital to success in real-world contexts (Bolton, Kingsley, & Graddol, 2012; Duan & Yang, 2016; Gill, 2016; Yeung, 2017; Zhang, 2017; Zhou, Bauer, & Erb, 2004). At the same time, real-world skills are not always measurable using multiple-choice tests; as a result, more research is needed to support the paradigm shift in education towards competency-based instruction and assessment (Bitter & Loney, 2015; Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Fullan & Langworthy, 2013; Levine & Patrick, 2019; NRC, 2012; Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014; Zeiser, 2019). Research on arts integration suggests promising results for English language learners, but much of the evidence linking arts with academic achievement is based on standardized tests such as MAP or SAT which do not measure the domain of speaking (Burnaford et al, 2007; Catterall, 2005; Pepler, 2012). In many competency-based schools, blended learning initiatives using adaptive learning software programs are widely used for gathering data on student performance in English, and these programs likewise do not

possess the capability to measure spoken English proficiency (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). Though the domain of speaking is not tested throughout their K-12 education, students aiming to study abroad at English-speaking colleges and universities have to take the TOEFL, IELTS, or other evaluative test which has spoken English as a major component. Moreover, for international high school students who want to study, live, or work abroad, spoken English is not only a tested requirement—it is an essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skill for succeeding academically, socially, and in the workplace.

Particularly for Chinese EFL learners, an arts-integrated, competency-based approach is a radical departure from traditional forms of instruction. China has a rich and impressive history of education and scholarship going back centuries—even millennia. But the modern world has brought substantial changes to society, and educational practices must be updated, must evolve to meet the changes and the challenges. One significant evolution was the Chinese government mandating English language instruction nationwide for all students; however, the lack of diversity in the manner of instruction and assessment has led to a situation where only a small percentage reach conversational fluency (Duan & Yang, 2016; Yeung, 2017; Zhang, 2017; Zhou, Bauer, & Erb, 2004). Chi's 2017 case study of Chinese students at a Canadian university investigated the impact of an arts-integrated approach, claiming that "traditional English teaching methods cannot address the needs of [international] students" and that universities (responding to this problem) are "looking for innovative ways to help international students improve their language proficiency and to better prepare them for academic success" at western universities (p. 1). That study examined the attitudes of EFL learners towards their English learning process, finding that "all participants described a similar situation of learning English in their home countries... by text memorization" and that learning through the arts was engaging and empowering for students in the 'English through the Arts' program (Chi, 2017, p. 52).

Chi (2017), in seeking a better approach to EFL development, explained his motivation for the research: “A lengthy book of vocabulary is a common tool for Chinese English education; this text is comprised of inflexible rules. Chinese students will spend a significant amount of time reciting words from these vocabulary books to prepare for English exams” (p. 5). He includes a diary entry from his time preparing for his college-level English exam:

*Everyday, I needed to get up early and go to the library to recite the words in my vocabulary book; this repetition of words made me feel like a robot. Although this learning strategy was reliable, it was also very tedious and difficult for most students to be consistent with. In the next morning, despite the reliability of my learning strategy, I was surprised that I forget half of the words I memorized. My exams were fast approaching and I felt anxious and upset. All I could do was to attempt to recite and memorize again. (Chi, 2017, p. 6).*

Even among students who manage to pass their exams and are accepted into English-speaking universities, many struggle when they arrive. In Duan and Yang’s 2016 study of Chinese university students studying abroad, “all participants had problems using academic English when speaking and wanted to learn it. All of the participants needed to do presentations in class, which was a big concern for them. They were nervous and lacked confidence in speaking in public” (Chi, 2017, p. 12). For many Chinese students studying abroad, English language proficiency has been a major challenge and obstacle, even affecting the academic performance of those students in other subjects; additionally, the language barrier hinders those students’ ability to acclimate to their learning environment and to make close friends with domestic students (Chi, 2017, p. 12). [Focusing on learning outcomes related to oral communication (abilities such as effective communication in a discussion or presenting in front of a group), my own mixed-methods case study explores the impact of

theatre arts integration on students' speaking abilities using academic, analytic, and arts-based assessments.]

### **Statement of the Problem**

A major discrepancy has developed between what universities and employers say are essential for success (21<sup>st</sup> century competencies) and what is routinely measured in school (tested knowledge). In a climate of accountability with regard to high-stakes test scores, instructional priorities are often oriented toward tested standards in reading and math. However, proponents of competency-based education claim that educators should re-frame instruction and assessment around deeper learning, going beyond multiple-choice tests and looking at multiple types of measures including projects, performances, portfolios, and presentations. The goals and learning outcomes associated with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and deeper learning are not adequately measurable using standardized testing, which has nevertheless come to dominate the landscape in terms of assessment and rankings for students. Non-native EFL learners are routinely taught in a fashion of direct instruction and rote memorization in China and other countries, yet even those students with good English scores (typically reading, vocabulary, and grammar skills assessed via multiple choice exam) often struggle with the real-world speaking part that would allow them to participate in meetings, give presentations, converse on the phone, interface with clients, and more generally to make friends and thrive in their roles. This case study investigates the impact of theatre arts integration pedagogy on learning outcomes for Chinese EFL students according to multiple measures, focusing on oral English proficiency and the deeper learning competency of effective communication.

## **Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to evaluate whether (or, to what extent) theatre arts integration pedagogy can positively impact English-as-a-foreign-language proficiency and the development of deeper learning competencies for a group of Chinese high school students. A strong research basis suggests that

drama can promote the interactions between students, change classroom climate, encourage students to discover their potential in English speaking, and strengthen student- teacher relationships. Therefore, integrating drama into English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom can stimulate learners' interests and improve their communicative skills. (Chi, 2017, p. 20)

Though a radical departure from traditional and mainstream approaches to EFL instruction in China, the theatre arts program in this study was designed specifically to give learners the opportunity to develop English language and communication skills through an integrated theatre arts curriculum. The ability to speak English fluently is a goal shared by literally hundreds of millions of people around the world, and it is a particularly desirable skill for Chinese high school students in terms of college and career readiness.

When engaged in deeper learning, students develop 21st century competencies—transferrable knowledge and skills (NRC, 2012; Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014). Educating for deeper learning ensures that students become capable of taking what was learned in one situation and applying it to new situations—transfer of learning. A report entitled “Education for Life and Work: Developing Transferrable Knowledge and Skills in the 21st Century,” lays out the need for more research to “better illuminate the relationships... between 21st century competencies and desired outcomes” in other areas (NRC, 2012, p. 180). In the context of this case study, theatre arts integration pedagogy was chosen as a suitable fit for a

competency-based approach (particularly with regard to theatre, which is an inherently collaborative and communicative endeavor). By engaging in an arts-integrated English course in a competency-based learning environment, students can learn more than just vocabulary and grammar—they can become empowered to speak the language with improved command and confidence in real-world situations. That is what is at the heart of the competency-based movement: connecting learning with the real world in the modern era and enabling students to better navigate and be successful in the future.

In this study, English language development was measured using an English-as-a-foreign-language proficiency assessment (WIDA), a new, technology-enabled assessment (Crestwood artificial intelligence software analytics for measuring spoken English), as well as a portfolio of competency-based performance assessments. Arts integration was shown to have a positive impact on learning outcomes according to both traditional and competency-based measures; therefore, this course design can serve as a pedagogical model for other schools in the Mastery Transcript Consortium, the Deeper Learning Network, and educators everywhere who are considering the switch to arts-based teaching and/or CBE.

### **Research Questions**

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data sources including testing measures, interviews, and portfolios of competency-based assessments was utilized to answer the guiding question: What is the impact of theatre arts integration on learning outcomes for Chinese students studying English as a foreign language (EFL)? Responding to a gap in the research, this study focuses on the domain of speaking, which—although universally recognized as one of the most important college-and-career-readiness skills—is seldom measured (in high school) compared with the domains of reading and writing. This study was designed to investigate whether integrating theatre arts into the EFL classroom contributes to

better learning outcomes for the students who are working to improve their spoken English proficiency. From this inquiry emerged three questions relating to assessment:

1. (RQ1) What is the impact of an integrated theatre arts curriculum on learners' oral English proficiency according to an English-as-a-foreign-language assessment for speaking (WIDA)?
2. (RQ2) What is the impact of an integrated theatre arts curriculum on learners' oral English proficiency according to artificial intelligence software analytics of recorded interviews?
3. (RQ3) What is the impact of an integrated theatre arts curriculum on English-as-a-foreign-language learners' development of the deeper learning competency of effective communication according to a portfolio of competency-based performance assessments?

These sub-questions informed the methodological design for the study, which is described in the following section.

### **Overview of Methodology**

In this quasi-experimental case study, arts integration pedagogy was implemented to promote deeper learning in a competency-based learning environment, and the impacts were evaluated using a mixed-method system of data sources including traditional and non-traditional assessments. Assessment experts recognize that “no single assessment can evaluate all of the kinds of learning we value for students,” instead encouraging educators to adopt “a coordinated system of assessment, in which different tools are used for different purposes” (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013, p. 16). In *Creating Systems of Assessment for Deeper Learning*, Conley and Darling-Hammond (2013) offer conclusions and recommendations for educators at all levels who are interested in pursuing a system of assessments designed for deeper learning:

Ensure... opportunities for teachers to design, score, and discuss rich assessments of student learning. Consider how measures could be triangulated, in other words, how

information from more than one source could be combined to reach a more accurate or complete judgment about a particular aspect of performance. (p. 38)

This research employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative data sources to analyze the impact of integrating a theatre arts curriculum into an English-as-a-foreign language classroom in a Chinese high school. Triangulation of the various data sources and thick, rich description contributed to the internal validity of the case.

Recent scholarship argues that the “separate-but-equal” traditions of qualitative and quantitative methods can and should interact, reasoning that triangulation among diverse sources “is not aimed merely at validation but at deepening and widening one’s understanding” (Olsen, 2004, p. 1). In “Triangulation in Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods Can Really Be Mixed,” Olsen (2004) argues that researchers should not impose a boundary based on some supposed “contradiction between these two modes of analysis, but rather that it should be possible to bring them together to shed light on any chosen social research topic” (p. 3). A word of caution: mixed-method triangulation “may run the risk of taking on too many unfocused questions all at once unless it has sequencing and a sense of which technique is primary” (Olsen, 2004, p. 13). However, a report from the Learning Policy Institute (2015) clearly demonstrates that “performance assessments... can be central components of a comprehensive system of assessments in which no one test or assessment alone is the primary” (Guha et al, 2015, p. 12). Guha (2015) explains: “Performance assessments in education range from essays and open-ended problems on sit-down tests to classroom-based projects that allow students to demonstrate skills such as research, collaboration, critical thinking, technology application, and written and oral communication” (p. 3). These findings are consistent among competency-based schools and networks, who use performance assessments to evaluate what students know and are able to

do. In this study, a mixed-method system of assessments was employed using a variety of measures.

Only by using multiple forms of assessment can educators and researchers get a comprehensive view of a learner’s performance or ability. The assessment system used in this study considered oral English communication skills from three different perspectives: WIDA MODEL (Measure of Developing English Language) test scores, Crestwood interview analytics, and evaluations of competency-based portfolios. Triangulating the results of the portfolio evaluation with the performance and comparative data from the other (quantitative) assessments allowed for a richer description of the impact of the integrated curriculum. Table 2 provides the alignment of the research questions with the instruments used in the study as well as the manner of data-collection and analysis.

Table 2. *Alignment of Research Questions with Instruments and Data Collection Methods*

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Instruments &amp; Data Analysis</b>
(Guiding Question) What is the impact of theatre arts integration on learning outcomes for Chinese students studying English as a foreign language (EFL)?	A <i>system of assessments</i> is used to determine participants’ English-as-a-foreign-language proficiency development. The WIDA MODEL overall (composite) scores are analyzed to show the overall comparative performance of the two groups before and after the 6-week program. Later, the results of the various assessments are triangulated to provide detailed profiles of student performance.
(RQ1) What is the impact of an integrated theatre arts curriculum on learners’ oral English proficiency according to an English-as-a-foreign-language assessment for speaking (WIDA)?	The WIDA MODEL test is a valid, reliable, on-demand online assessment of English-as-a-foreign-language proficiency. The speaking domain scale scores of the two groups are measured before and after the 6-week program, and the relative growth of each group is compared using a paired t-test.
(RQ2) What is the impact of an integrated theatre arts curriculum on learners’ oral English proficiency according to artificial intelligence software analytics of recorded interviews?	Crestwood analytics: Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews are audio recorded and then analyzed by artificial intelligence software, generating comparative quantitative data profiles for participants’ spoken English proficiency. Students’ proficiency scores from the treatment group and the comparison group are analyzed using a paired t-test. (table continued)

(RQ3) What is the impact of an integrated theatre arts curriculum on English-as-a-foreign-language learners' development of the deeper learning competency of effective communication according to a portfolio of competency-based performance assessments?

At the beginning, middle, and end of the theatre arts program, students submitted artifacts for their portfolio: a collection of theatre arts integration performance assessments captured on video. Results are analyzed using pre-established rubrics. This assessment method, based in the arts integrated approach, applies only to the treatment group.

Altogether, these various data collection methods allowed for an in-depth and comprehensive view of the students' English language proficiency and development over the course of the 6-week intervention.

### **Rationale and Significance**

Given the potential of arts-integrated instruction to enhance academic learning outcomes while at the same time developing other social, emotional, technical, and aesthetic dispositions, arts integration was employed in the instructional design of this study as a logical method for promoting deeper learning of 21st century competencies. In *Arts Integration Frameworks, Research & Practice*, Burnaford (2007) reviews the literature regarding arts integration and suggests that dissertations “become integral as initial explorations of methodologies for assessing impact... offer[ing] the opportunity to examine specific practices in schools and classrooms that are promising and possibly replicable” (p. 49). Although arts-based pedagogies have been shown to have a demonstrable positive impact on English language development, there is a noticeable gap in the research in the domain of speaking—the least assessed, the “hardest to learn,” and arguably the most important of the four language domains (the others being listening, reading, and writing) (Zhou, Bauer, & Erb, 2004, p. 29).

In response to the low return on investment on spoken English proficiency in China (considering its high status and wide appeal), the researcher contends that a study examining the impact of arts integration pedagogy on EFL instruction is well-suited to the current problems in the field. Moreover, the researcher hypothesized that integrating theatre arts into

EFL instruction would have a positive impact on learners' oral English proficiency and the deeper learning competency of communication. This hypothesis is based on significant research, which the researcher has reviewed in Chapter 2. In light of the need for more research which deals specifically with the domain of speaking, this study adds to the field whether or not significant gains in oral proficiency are demonstrated, providing insights for educators interested in arts integration, English-as-a-foreign-language instruction, or competency-based education.

The Mastery Transcript Consortium's competency-based approach to assessment is an early stage concept in the first few years of building a viable model which can replace traditional grades altogether in favor of a purely competency-based transcript (Keesee, 2017). In order to achieve their vision, they need support from the network of hundreds of partner schools worldwide in terms of instructional approaches and assessments designed for deeper learning. The school site where the study takes place is in its second year of implementation, and, following the timeline set out by MTC, has formed a task force to begin working with MTC to develop the school's mastery assessment model. Purposeful, high-quality instructional design is needed to live up to the lofty objectives of competency-based education, in order to provide academic rigor and prepare students for college admissions while at the same time cultivating the less quantifiable meta-cognitive dispositions and 21st century skills. Competency-based schools and approaches are sometimes labeled 'progressive' or 'experimental'—it must be noted that the rationale behind deeper learning initiatives aligns perfectly with the mission of Common Core: to support high-quality learning designed to help students “acquire the knowledge and skills critical to success in college, career, and life” (Conley, 2014, p. 1). In partnership with MTC, all of the students at the school site will receive a mastery transcript/diploma when they graduate (see Appendix

D); the assessment system used in this study is a proposed contribution to the school's developing competency-based assessment model and the larger MTC network.

The emergence of powerful educational technologies in recent years has enabled and ushered in an era of “personalized learning” which underpins the competency-based education movement generally. A common feature of competency-based schools is leveraging adaptive learning software programs (“ed tech”) to drive personalized learning and data-driven instruction. However, although well-established programs such as iReady, MAP, and IXL can reliably measure students’ reading levels, there are no widely-used adaptive learning programs for oral English. In this study, using advanced software to quantify the spoken English in real-world interviews represents a cutting-edge method for assessing English as a foreign language and aligns with established best practices regarding the use of personalized learning technologies. Simply put, “new technologies make possible advances in assessment that were not feasible a decade ago. With technology, new assessments can measure a much broader range of student abilities in a much more efficient manner than traditional tests can” (Rothman, 2011, p. 2). Crestwood’s state-of-the-art artificial intelligence software program was utilized in this study to obtain analytics on the spoken English proficiency of students based on semi-structured interviews.

Although often cited as among the most critical skills for success in college and career (Carnavale & Strohl, 2018; HRA, 2015; NRC, 2012), spoken English as well as interpersonal competencies generally are not assessed within traditional measures and will require a high-quality system of assessments designed to measure deeper learning (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013). Within the competency-based education movement, most of the research has focused on evaluating cognitive competencies, with much less attention paid to the interpersonal and intra-personal domains. Reflecting these trends, this research focuses on the development of the interpersonal competency of effective communication and employs a

mixed-method approach to assessment designed to measure deeper learning. Best practices among competency-based schools in terms of assessment include a combination of qualitative data from projects, performance assessments, and portfolios with quantitative data provided by standardized tests and various educational technologies. Interview data from learners in the arts-integrated course will be compared with that of their peers in a comparison group at the same school site that is also taking Introductory English but with a different teacher who did not use arts integration pedagogies. Alongside a traditional assessment (WIDA) and a competency portfolio, the quantitative analyses from the Crestwood interviews provide useful data for triangulating the findings from the other sources, offering a richer description of the impact of the integrated theatre arts program on learning outcomes for students in the study. If a more effective, more engaging, and more enjoyable way of teaching and learning can be established for English language learners, this would have an enormous impact on the international community of EFL educators and students, reducing anxiety and improving outcomes. More generally, the investigation of the arts-integrated, competency-based pedagogical approach contributes to reducing barriers between the theory of deeper learning and the practices that espouse it.

### **Role of the Researcher**

In the summer of 2019, I joined a Mastery Transcript Consortium partner high school in Beijing, China, to conduct field research in competency-based education. My research focus is on instructional design—specifically, theatre arts integration in the EFL classroom. My role at the school is to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) to our Chinese learners to prepare them to apply, be accepted into, and be successful in western, English-speaking universities such as those in the U.S., Canada, Australia, and the U.K. In a competency-based model, this is no simple task. In China, which mandates English language instruction as a

core subject within their traditional school systems, it is an unconventional and experimental endeavor to explore creative, project-based approaches to teaching EFL. I am tasked with demonstrating that learners in my course will make the same or better academic progress towards mastery (in this case, mastery can be defined as proficiency in English with regard to reading, writing, speaking, and listening) as other instructional methods. Even with our school's commitment to a holistic, competency-based educational environment, our students will be held to the same standards as others when it comes to the college admissions process—namely, the TOEFL (or IELTS) and the SAT. Typically, in order to even be considered as a foreign applicant at a top U.S. university, a student must make at least a 100 out of 120 on the TOEFL exam (or, analogously, a 5.5 out of 7 on the British IELTS), thus demonstrating their “fluency” and their ability to be successful in an English-speaking learning environment (Muniz, 2017). Research suggests a timeline of 3-6 years to reach fluency (WIDA, 2020; Witt, Hakuta, & Butler, 2000). In just 6 weeks, I will not be able to bring students to “mastery” in English. I will have to collect baseline data and measure progress over the timeline of the course using a system of assessments designed to measure both academic and competency-based outcomes.

As the creator/director/instructor of the theatre arts integrated program, I occupy the role of *teaching artist*. As the certified instructor of the EFL course, I occupy the role of *teacher*. And as the doctoral candidate engaged in conducting this study, I occupy the role of *researcher*. Inspired by the methodology of Zak (2014), who positioned herself as an *ART* (artist-researcher-teacher), I will approach this study as a *teaching artist-researcher-teacher*. In my role as teaching artist, I demonstrated specific acting techniques and rehearsal skills, and I performed and provided model artifacts (exemplars) for each of the dramatic performance assessments. By engaging in the theatre arts lessons and activities in this way, I was able to authentically bring theatre arts experiences into my existing EFL classroom.

## Researcher Assumptions

The main assumption in this study is that the researcher provided a high-quality arts experience for the learners in the course. In a study on teachers' attitudes towards arts integration, Oreck (2004) identified "three conditions essential to arts integration: adequate time to plan and teach, adequate space, and support from administrators," concluding that "surprisingly, neither prior arts instruction, current artistic practice, nor years of teaching experience were significant predictors of arts use in the classroom" (n.p.). To qualify as effective arts integration, instruction must meet both academic and artistic learning standards. Many arts integration projects involve the partnership of a classroom content area teacher and a collaborating *teaching artist* who co-plans and co-delivers instruction alongside the content area teacher to promote learning of content "in and through the arts" (Burnaford et al, 2007, p. 12). However, in my role as teaching artist-researcher-teacher, I fulfilled the roles of both teacher and teaching artist in this study. Effective arts integration is characterized by achieving both academic and artistic objectives; the curriculum and instruction for the arts-integrated intervention was designed using Common Core standards for English Language Arts (speaking and listening), National Core Arts standards (theatre), and deeper learning competencies (communicate effectively). Students' portfolios of performance assessments were evaluated using high quality rubrics from SCALE (see Appendix C). Finally, this research is grounded in the assumption that high quality arts integration can be achieved via online-only instruction. [Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all instruction at our school site was conducted fully online.]

## Definitions of Key Terminology

1. **21st century competencies:** transferable knowledge, skills, and dispositions that can be applied to a range of different tasks in various civic, workplace, or family contexts.

Common examples include the 4 C's: communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity, although myriad competencies exist and are classified under three broad domains: cognitive, interpersonal, and intra-personal. (NRC, 2012)

2. **Arts integration:** “Arts Integration is an approach to teaching in which students construct and demonstrate understanding through an art form. Students engage in a creative process, which connects an art form and another subject area and meets evolving objectives in both. A distinguishing aspect of arts integration is its interdisciplinary connections. Connections are made between a specific art form and a specific curriculum area. Students can construct and demonstrate their understanding in many ways. Traditionally, they are asked to communicate their learning through a report or on a test. However, when they are involved in arts integration, their learning is evident in the products they create, such as the dance, painting, or dramatization.” (Silverstein & Layne, 2010)
3. **Competency-based education:** a major shift in school culture, structures, and pedagogy focused on ensuring that all students succeed and addressing the fundamental shortcomings of the traditional model. Multiple measures include opportunities for authentic, performance-based assessment, allowing students to engage in project-based, community-based, and workplace-based learning that is aligned with required competencies and higher-order skills. Strong implementation also requires policies, pedagogy, structures, and culture that support every student in developing essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions. (Levine & Patrick, 2019)
4. **Deeper learning:** the process through which a person becomes capable of taking what was learned in one situation and applying it to new situations – in other words, learning for “transfer.” Through deeper learning, students develop expertise in a particular discipline or subject area. (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012)

5. **EFL:** “English as a foreign language.”
6. **ELL:** “English language-learning” or “English-language learner.”
7. **Interdisciplinary curriculum:** Jacobs (1989) defines *interdisciplinary* as "a knowledge view and curricular approach that consciously applies methodology and language from more than one discipline to examine a central theme, issue, problem, topic, or experience" (p. 8).
8. **Mastery:** “effective transfer of learning in authentic and worthy performance. Students have mastered a subject when they are fluent, even creative, in using their knowledge, skills, and understanding in key performance challenges and contexts at the heart of that subject, as measured against valid and high standards.” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)
9. **Mastery Transcript Consortium:** an international network of competency-based partner schools committed to re-designing the traditional high school transcript to reflect learners’ mastery of 21st century competencies, including but not limited to academic content mastery.
10. **Transfer of learning:** transfer of learning occurs when learning in one context assists learning in another context. Transfer refers to the ability to be able to wisely and effectively *use*—transfer—what we know, in context; to *apply* knowledge and skill effectively, in realistic tasks and settings. To have understood means that we show evidence of being able to transfer what we know. (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005)

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

This review of literature explores the interconnected fields of research which coalesce in the arts-integrated, competency-based course design examined in this case study. Arts integration pedagogy, the competency-based education movement, and competency assessment are addressed in turn. First, a conceptual framework based on constructivism, arts-based teaching and learning, and interdisciplinary instruction is established to provide a theoretical context through which each element, respectively, can be examined as part of the collective whole.

### Conceptual Framework

Arts integration, interdisciplinary instruction, and competency-based education are all based on constructivist views of learning, which claim that students actively build or “construct” meaning through experience (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Lake, 2014; Silverstein & Layne, 2010). This type of learning is reflected in the tradition of John Dewey (1938), who theorized in *Experience and Education* that learning occurs through meaningful experiences—that learners build knowledge through a continuous interactive process grounded in lived experience. Or, as Eisner (2014) put it: “Experience is central to growth, because experience is the medium of education” (p. 359). *How* one teaches something is related to and has an impact on *what* is being taught. The medium of teaching is as important as the content. An arts-integrated project, for example, provides “multiple ways for students to make sense of what they learn (construct understanding) and make their learning visible (demonstrate understanding),” asking students to do more than recall information but rather to do something with the knowledge they have acquired (Silverstein & Layne, 2010, p. 3). In modern classrooms, teachers who want their learners to achieve content knowledge mastery

*and* develop meaningful skills and dispositions for their future should look to integrated, experiential forms of teaching. With regard to learning to speak a foreign language, clearly the ability for students to practice producing speech in safe and authentic contexts—such as those provided by classroom drama activities—represents a type of learning experience that is necessary to reach high levels of confidence and fluency. As Kagan (1995) put it: “students to a large extent learn to speak by speaking” (p. 3). Language acquisition is a social and contextual endeavor, and in the more teacher-dependent (traditional) classrooms in most Chinese school programs, learners are often “deprived of much-needed speaking practice” and carry fears and anxieties around producing speech in the target language (Gill, 2016, p. 240). Gill (2016), in seeking to enhance communicative competence among EFL learners through theatre arts, claimed:

Drama lets [his] students speak communicatively, free of the dread of constant correction, in a relaxed and enjoyable learner-centered environment that appears to diminish their anxiety and inhibitions. As a result, their motivation to speak increases, leading to extended speech production. (p. 240)

According to Heath (1993), dramatic enactment / role playing “moves learners beyond their usual performance in ordinary classroom presentations” (p. 177). EFL learners can experiment with emulating native speakers—their accents, speech patterns, rhythms, and physical movements. In this way, theatre arts integration pedagogy is conceived in this research as a well-established and promising approach to second language acquisition—and especially so for Chinese students learning to speak English. As Gill (2016) concludes:

Drama is one such experiential element that has human communication at the core of its existence, largely in the form of speech output. It is a holistic process in which the mind, body and emotions collaborate in completing a task or project. (p. 241)

Such learning is seen as more enjoyable and less anxiety-producing than traditional forms that focus more on skill-*getting* than skill-*using*.

Kolb (1984), in “Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development,” synthesizes and summarizes the constructivist position: “Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience” (p. 38). Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Kolb’s view of learning transcends the label of constructivism or even behaviorism since his definition involves doing, reflecting, understanding, and applying in a cycle of learning. When *learning by doing*, learners actively construct knowledge and develop understandings that they can apply in new situations. This definition underscores the need for experiential learning to be combined with opportunities for students to reflect on their learning. Long-standing constructivist theories have received recent support from arts integrationists:

The search for meaning and patterns is a basic process in the human brain. In fact, the brain may resist learning fragmented facts that are presented in isolation. Learning is believed to occur faster and more thoroughly when it is presented in meaningful contexts, with an experiential component. (Lake, 2014, p. 6)

Experiential teaching and learning resonate with the competency-based education movement, which is rooted in authentic, applicable, real-world skills.

The notion of constructing—and reconstructing—knowledge is essential to an understanding of how the arts contribute to learning. By learning to think in new ways, students can undergo *transformative experiences*, which can be life-changing, affirming, and empowering. Goldblatt, in her 2006 article “How John Dewey’s Theories Underpin Art and Art Education,” describes how experiences in the arts can extend traditional ways of knowing for students. Art, according to Goldblatt’s interpretation of Deweyan philosophy, has the power to foster the following dispositions in students: empowerment, critical analysis,

principles of democracy, responsibility, and reduction of fear/anxiety. The value of the arts for learning across the curriculum is such that Goldblatt believes Dewey's attraction to the arts in education was largely pragmatic—as a means to an end. Arts-integrated curricula helps students to connect with the world around them, and this type of teaching and learning is well-suited to what Goldblatt (2006) suggests are students' "four proclivities: social instinct (the wish to communicate with others); constructive impulse (to make things); instinct for investigation (to find out); and the expressive impulse (to create)" (p. 25). These four areas coalesce in the social, constructivist processes of learning in and through the arts. Students become wholly engaged in a meaning-making and art-creating dynamic, and they are themselves changed and empowered in the process (Eisner, 1998).

In 1999, less than a year before the turn of the 21st century, Davis published a seminal article for the Arts Education Policy Review on the role of the arts in interdisciplinary curricula, claiming that "the notion that valuable knowledge (and the thinking skills necessary to make appropriate use of it) resides at the intersections of conventional disciplines is borne out in the growth of interdisciplinary practices in the professional world" (p. 3). Her research demonstrates that schools tend to "compartmentalize" learning into the various disciplines rather than emphasizing more holistic approaches to the kind of problem solving that is most needed in the workforce, claiming that business and industry must retrain employees for interdisciplinary thinking and problem solving; business leaders are less concerned that employees memorize facts than that they respond strategically in a real-world situation (Davis, 1999).

Today, 21st century competencies such as communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking have come to the fore, and educators have a responsibility to bring the full measure of the values and benefits of integrated forms of teaching. Critics of interdisciplinary or project-based learning cite academic rigor as a driving force for teaching

in separate disciplines. And yet, conceiving of college and career readiness in the 21st century requires educators to do more than produce junior disciplinarians; it requires them to help empower students with a combination of knowledge, skills, and dispositions—and an ability to think in integrated ways about problems—to truly prepare them for the realities and demands of modern life (Bitter & Loney, 2015; Keesee, 2018; Great Schools Partnership, 2014; Zeiser, 2019).

In order to achieve higher levels of productivity and abilities such as problem solving, critical thinking, and collaboration from employees, businesses have for some time recognized and responded to the notion that arts-based experiences have the power to develop and enhance these capacities. In schools, a narrow focus on what is to be assessed on standardized tests has led to a disconnect with career preparedness related to 21st century competencies, and businesses are finding ways to remediate some of the issues caused by the “rigid disciplinarity” and silo-ing of academic subjects in schools (Davis, 1999, p. 3). Put another way, even those students who successfully complete high school and college and are able to get hired for a professional job are typically ill-prepared by their years of schooling to handle the interdisciplinary nature of problems in the real world. They may have technical expertise but lack other kinds of competencies such as creative problem-solving, seeing issues from multiple perspectives, or navigating collaborative processes.

Beane (1997) advocated moving from a subject-centered approach to school curriculum toward a fully integrated model more than 20 years ago, and arts-integrationists have drawn upon his ideas over the past two decades. He asks educators to reflect on how our teaching in separate disciplines aligns (or, rather, *doesn't* align) with life outside of schools:

Imagine for the moment that we are confronted with some problem or puzzling situation in our lives. How do we approach the situation? Do we stop and ask ourselves which part of the situation is language arts, or music, or mathematics, or

history, or art? I don't think so. Instead, we take on the problem or situation using whatever knowledge is appropriate or pertinent without regard for subject area lines.

(Beane, 1997, p. 7)

When it comes to real-world problem solving, high-level integration and interdisciplinary teaching and learning are preferable to the all-too-familiar situation of the various disciplines operating as silos that do not communicate or coordinate with one another. In the economies of today, many jobs and careers are interdisciplinary in nature, requiring organizational, social, linguistic, mathematical, and analytical skills/competencies in various combinations. Even in the fields of science and engineering, skills related to design, aesthetics, collaboration, and creativity are essential. Davis (1999) points out that, ironically, the more serious science and engineering programs have turned to arts-based strategies such as studio classes, project-based learning, and assessment via portfolio. It seems that major institutions such as corporations and universities have been looking to the arts to enhance performance among their employees and students for at least two decades. These institutions have a practical purpose for doing so—they are motivated to these actions because they believe that they will have a real and tangible (measurable) impact. If organizations of higher education and leaders of industry have recognized the compelling need for arts-based, interdisciplinary learning, why don't more schools adopt an arts-based approach to instruction?

This discussion suggests a synthesis of strategies. Instead of thinking of instructional design as requiring arts-based learning *and* deeper learning of competencies *and* portfolio assessments *and* academic content across multiple disciplines, we can now begin to see that these are all related and coalesce in arts-integrated, interdisciplinary projects. Landmark educational text *Understanding by Design* contests that “understanding... is *not* a single goal but a family of interrelated abilities,” and that the “dual purpose—clarifying the goal called ‘student understanding’ while exploring the means called ‘good design’—raises a vital

question in the real world of teaching: What is the best way to design for both content mastery and understanding?” (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005, p. 4).

### **Arts Integration**

The Kennedy Center is a leader in the field of arts-in-education, and their research-based model for how the arts function in schools is a robust and helpful guide (Silverstein & Layne, 2010). They classify arts experiences in schools into three distinct categories: *arts-as-curriculum*, which refers to instruction in specific arts disciplines such as music, drama, or visual art; *arts-enhanced* instruction, where arts-based activities are infused into other lessons but not assessed from an arts perspective; and *arts-integrated* instruction, which is a true curricular and instructional partnership between one or more arts disciplines and one or more academic subjects which meets both artistic and academic objectives. In schools, this involves making connections between subjects and drawing from a complex set of skills and strategies to solve problems. In this type of interdisciplinary, project-based, hands-on teaching and learning, students are challenged to think and reason flexibly, solve problems creatively, navigate collaborative processes, understand connections between form and function, and see issues from multiple perspectives (Burnaford et al, 2007). Eisner (2003), in his seminal *Art and the Creation of Mind*, claims that arts-based teaching and learning represents the most effective and meaningful approach to education—a model to which we should aspire—and that the implications of this effectiveness warrant change among traditional models of education.

It is important that arts integration pedagogy be distinguished from instruction in a particular arts discipline (arts as curriculum) as well as from arts-enhanced curriculum, where an art form or art experience is incorporated as an additional layer or extension of a classroom learning objective. Schools can use one, two, or all three modes of arts instruction

(arts, arts-enhanced, arts-integrated), and each adds value to students' education. Exposure to art works and performances (arts experiences) is central to all forms of arts-based teaching (Silverstein & Layne, 2010), but where arts classes focus on arts standards, and arts-enhanced lessons focus on the particular content standards of a subject, arts integration requires that educators teach and assess content standards and art standards simultaneously. *The Chicago Guide to Teaching and Learning in the Arts* (2010) explains that "effective arts integration meets learning standards for each of the integrated disciplines." This is a helpful way for teachers who are new to arts integration to think about how it will work in their classroom: planning and aligning academic as well as artistic objectives purposefully for each unit or lesson.

In academic classrooms, arts integration pedagogy uses fine arts and performing arts experiences to drive learning in languages and reading, math, science, social studies, and the like, and it is characterized by hands-on, project-based, collaborative learning environments (Burnaford et al, 2007). Rather than thinking of art or music as being just another subject among many, one of the main philosophies of arts integration is that the arts provide pathways through which the content of core curriculum can be taught, experienced, and examined. This means that arts-based content and approaches should be purposefully woven into the fabric of a school's curriculum. This could include sixth grade scientists drawing what they see under a microscope or eighth grade author/illustrators writing historical fictions with themselves as characters, or teenage mathematicians exploring numerical patterns around a piano. In general, students should be introduced to authentic art forms regularly and prompted to engage and reflect on these experiences using concepts learned in class and to provide evidence to support their claims. In this way, learners become immersed in creating and experiencing a curriculum brought to life through the arts.

Researchers from the Kennedy Center, in a two-year study of teachers' perspectives on how integrating the arts impacted student learning, described arts integration as "providing students opportunities to use the arts to demonstrate their understanding of specific content, often with themes that span a number of academic disciplines" (Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2005, p. 3). They explained that students would draw, create multimedia artifacts, or perform skits to demonstrate understanding of academic content. Teachers consulted in that study discovered promising insights regarding the value of integrating music, drama, and art into the classroom, citing increases in literacy (Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2005). The authors admit that their findings were limited and called for further research, claiming that "data are also needed to reach conclusions about whether the arts are more or less valuable in working with certain age groups or populations" (Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2005, p. 5).

Through elegant integration, arts-based programs and initiatives can provide fun, relevant, and culturally- and historically-infused ways for engaging and educating students (Ruppert, 2006). But what does "elegant integration" look like in practice for core content teachers? How can teachers of other content areas use the arts effectively to drive student learning in an academic discipline while honoring an authentic art form and process? How can we bring the research to bear in practical ways to help teachers to have a better understanding of arts integration and empower them to overcome obstacles to using this approach successfully? When it comes to planning and delivering arts-integrated units in core subject areas, classroom teachers have to rise to what can be a difficult, even intimidating challenge. The added challenge of teaching in two or more disciplines at the same time is compounded by the need to identify meaningful connections and points of alignment between these standards. Nevertheless, arts integrationists maintain that, when done successfully, teaching through the arts can lead to deep, meaningful learning and enhanced engagement.

The Arts Education Partnership released a report entitled *Critical Evidence*, which summarizes key findings from a variety of relevant studies on how arts involvement impacts student achievement (2006). They claim “a wide spectrum of academic and social benefits... [including] habits of mind, social competencies, and personal dispositions inherent to arts learning,” adding that “research has shown that what students learn in the arts may help them to master other subjects, such as reading, math, or social studies” (Ruppert, 2006, p. 8). Moreover, a clear, positive relationship is demonstrated between arts participation and SAT scores, which is particularly notable in the context of an educational culture which largely diminishes the role of the arts in schools *because of* a focus on testing. The data from multiple independent studies suggest that “arts participation and SAT scores co-vary—that is, they tend to increase linearly: the more arts classes, the higher the scores” (Ruppert, 2006, p. 9). Relevant to my theatre-based case study are findings that dramatic enactment is a particularly useful integration for developing language skills.

Longitudinal research from Catterall (2012) explores the relationship between arts involvement and student success by tracking students’ academic and social outcomes. His findings overwhelmingly support the idea that students who are educated in arts-rich environments are more likely to go on to college and to receive advanced degrees, noting that low-SES (students from a socio-economically disadvantaged background) and ELL (English language-learning) students appeared to receive a pronounced benefit (Catterall, 2012). Moreover, his examination of positive “civic” behaviors revealed “strong advantages in volunteerism and political participation” for arts-engaged low-SES students in addition to “increased college enrollment, better college grades” (Catterall, 2012, p. 24). His work also paves the way for future research, calling for new studies to address questions related to learning through the arts.

Responding to critiques of an instrumental view of the arts in education, Catterall claims that measuring the positive impacts of participation in the arts in other areas (i.e. academic performance) does not detract from the inherent values of the arts. Eisner, among others, cautions against making arguments for the instrumental value of the arts—using arts experiences to boost, for instance, reading and math achievement. Eisner believes that this line of reasoning will eradicate any remaining sense of the value and dignity of the arts disciplines themselves, that it undermines the intrinsic worth and importance of the arts in education. And he is not alone in this view. Some arts educators take a position that the arts must maintain their integrity and not be used as an aid to other disciplines. And there have indeed been cases where efforts to integrate the arts (say, for the purposes of enhancing learning outcomes) have resulted in a watering down of the arts disciplines, instances where an art form has become “dangerously diffused” (Smith, 1995, p. 24) to the point of having lost something of its essence—perhaps the very thing that made it so valuable in the first place. This creates somewhat of a dilemma: opponents of arts integration argue that such attempts are likely to undermine the rigor of academic instruction; at the same time, many arts educators are wary of integration into non-arts classrooms when the purpose is to use the arts to boost achievement. That being said, several noteworthy research studies over the last two decades have demonstrated precisely that—the instrumental value of the arts—showing that arts experiences can indeed boost academic achievement and that the positive impact of the arts to promote literacy and language development is especially pronounced for ELL students, even more so than for students in the general population (Burnaford et al, 2007; Catterall, 2009; Fogarty & Stoehr, 2008; Gross, 2013; Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2005; Pepler, 2012; Ruppert, 2006). Critiques against a purely instrumental view of arts integration are well-founded, and this is one of the main reasons why it is so important to carefully define arts integration as meeting rigorous standards in the integrated arts discipline

as well as in the academic content area(s). And so, although I understand Eisner's and others' ideological principles, I am nevertheless a pragmatist; I can appreciate that school leaders and policy makers will want conclusive proof of the instrumental value of incorporating the arts. Part of what this study hopes to achieve is to demonstrate that—with the right approach—integrating the arts doesn't have to be a retreat from rigor, but rather will foster connections that enhance learning across the curriculum.

Among high school students, a robust research basis has been established indicating strong correlations between participation in theatre arts and language arts performance for ELL students in public school settings in the U.S. (Catterall et al, 1999, 2005, 2012). Although this research refers to long-term, sustained involvement in arts programs rather than on arts-integrated teaching and learning, the overall thrust is that consistent participation in arts programs correlates with higher test scores. He admits that “the strength of evidence for specific impacts of theatre and drama claimed by these and other scholars tends to be weak” and that “drama and theatre are complex events with many possible effects” (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999, p. 16). Additionally, while positing that “theatre is a language-rich environment and actively engages students with issues of language,” the longitudinal research of his report notes that the methodology “does not contain a measure of spoken language skills, but the data do track the development of reading proficiency” (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999, p. 17). This is an area representing a gap in the established research on the benefits of theatre arts participation among high school EFL students: spoken English. Acknowledging the limits of their inquiry, Catterall et al call for “school-level or larger scale studies of initiatives attempting to bring arts integration to the curriculum” (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999, p. 22). My case study is an attempt to bridge this gap, indicating transfer of learning from an integrated theatre program to the development of spoken English proficiency for non-native high school students.

A related study from Hsiao-Chien Lee (2014) demonstrated that arts-integrated, multimodal projects help to motivate learners, claiming that “arts-integrated pedagogy can inspire and empower at-risk EFL students and lead them to a realm that a paper-and-pencil task can never match” (p. 1). However, Lee’s study focused on junior college students and mainly on visual arts media and written English performance, whereas my study focuses on the domain of speaking. Lee’s multimodal study, although it concludes that “such an approach can benefit teachers of EFL with their curriculum design, whether their students are Chinese speakers or speakers of other languages,” admits certain limitations of her research (p. 72); namely, as is typical of many case studies in education, “no control group was provided for comparison, [so] it is difficult to tell whether an arts-integrated multimodal approach will particularly benefit Chinese-speaking students” (Lee, 2014, p. 72).

Essential to this endeavor is the problem of demonstrating *transfer of learning* from the learning experiences in the theatre project to English-as-a-foreign language proficiency in other situations. Such transfer has encouraging support in the literature: Miller (2013) examined the cognitive processes of how foreign language learners make meaning using digital video composition activities, concluding that students “trans-mediate” text into sensory modalities to represent, understand, and communicate concepts; students “translated from ‘just words’ to ‘real doing’ and therefore had a deeper understanding of the text” (p. 417). In the studies of Miller and Lee, thick descriptions of student artifacts and interviews of small participant groups were established to demonstrate the effectiveness of the intervention, and these and other research lend support to the notion that arts-based learning is indeed beneficial to EFL development, albeit without quantitative verification of results.

An empirical study from Joseph (2014) entitled “The effects of creative dramatics on vocabulary achievement of fourth grade students in a language arts classroom” claimed “statistically significant evidence that the two treatment groups outscored the control group

when exposed to a creative dramatics intervention” (p. 1). Another peer reviewed study on the “Relationship between Theater Arts and Student Literacy and Mathematics Achievement” indicated strong positive relationships between theatre arts integrations into language arts classrooms for 6th and 7th grade students in high poverty communities (Inoa, Weltsek, & Tabone, 2014). Citing “a process of trans-mediation between different modes of making meaning,” Inoa and others suggest a “positive correlation between classroom drama activities and reading comprehension, writing, and oral communication skills” (Inoa, Weltsek, & Tabone, 2014, p. 3). This study—and all of its referenced studies—deal with elementary and middle school public school students in the U.S., primarily those considered “at-risk.” It remains to be seen if these findings will hold with international Chinese high school students, although the findings from my own study suggest that they do.

Gill (2016) claims that drama can help EFL learners to overcome communication obstacles such as those related to fluency, clarity, voice-projection, and kinesics (body language). According to his research, “the oral medium associated with drama in its various forms provides learners with avenues to indulge in meaningful and generative discourse,” and that “in essence, drama is a truly comprehensive and holistic way of learning because the mind, body and emotions all work in unison” (Gill, 2016, p. 244). By reducing anxiety and barriers to output of speech, drama can serve EFL learners and provide them with valuable practice “in a low-risk, enjoyable and stimulating learning environment” (Gill, 2016, p. 244).

Gullatt (2008), in his book *Enhancing Student Learning through Arts Integration*, urged for change in school curricula, encouraging educators and school leaders to consider the research-based benefits of integrating the arts such as those described by Catterall and others. In addition to the myriad findings on how participation in the arts contributes to learning, more recently Pepler, Powell, Thompson, and Catterall found that using arts integration pedagogy yielded “consistent and significant gains in student proficiency on

standardized tests of English Language Arts when compared to matched comparison school sites with standalone arts programming” (Peppler et al, 2014, p. 365). When arts integration is done at a high level of quality, the benefits are measurably positive, seeming to have even more of an impact than traditional arts instruction. These findings suggest that arts integration has the potential to drive school improvement. This is, perhaps, unsurprising to those of us who are passionate about the arts; we believe in the inherent power and value of the arts. But arts integrationists are going a step beyond promoting student access to traditional arts instruction and looking specifically at how using an arts-based approach to teaching can enhance student learning in other areas when strong connections are made across the curriculum.

In an arts-integrated classroom, the teacher incorporates an authentic art form or arts-based activity that is connected with the content learning objectives. Despite his concerns, I believe that this approach actually honors the Eisnerian school of thought, conceiving of teaching as an art form, and learning itself as having aesthetic properties (Eisner, 2002). But there are perhaps even larger forces to consider. Burnaford recounts a speech from a New York University *Arts Connection* conference where the keynote speaker “challenged the listeners to think about what was really worth learning about in these times, citing such ‘big ideas’ as human rights, languages, globalization, monuments, [etc.],” as topics rich enough to be worth our investment as educators of young people, proposing that such topics are “so fundamentally complex and rich that it’s hard to imagine teaching them without integrating the arts—because other disciplines alone could not fully address their richness” (Burnaford, 2007, p. 77). Such is the case with the pedagogical approach examined in this study, which looks to the richness of the arts to make language learning more meaningful, accessible, and effective.

## Competency-based Education

In recent years, the growing movement of competency-based education (CBE) has begun the work of dramatically re-organizing schools around new, future-oriented learning objectives—and new combinations of pedagogical strategies to achieve them (Bitter & Loney, 2015; Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Fullan & Langworthy, 2013; Levine & Patrick, 2019; NRC, 2012; Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014; Zeiser, 2019). CBE has its roots in *outcome-based education*, an idea popularized by the widespread discussion and use of Tyler and Bloom’s “Bloom’s taxonomy” of higher order skills (Bloom et al, 1956). Nodine (2015), in a review of this history, explains that “outcomes-based models seek to design and modify instructional practices based on demonstration of student skills, abilities, and knowledge, rather than providing standardized education processes (and rote exercises) based on fixed schedules and routines” (p. 6). These ideas, which gained traction mainly in higher education during the 1960s and 1970s, are early precursors to the current CBE movement. By re-framing the big picture goals and outcomes for student learning to include competencies, outcome-based and competency-based advocates aim to effect transformational, system-wide changes with regard to instruction and assessment in schools.

The *competencies* are broadly defined as a set of knowledge, skills, and habits of mind that best prepare learners for their futures, going beyond the list of content knowledge standards which prepare students for narrow exams and attempting to encompass the multi-faceted complexities involved with thriving in society (Bitter & Loney, 2015; NRC, 2012; Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014). This study adopts the model provided by the Deeper Learning Network (Appendix A), which is supported by the American Institute for Research and the National Research Council (NRC, 2012; Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014; Zeiser, 2019). The guiding philosophy of the competency-based education movement is that teaching

and learning in school must prepare students for the realities and challenges they will encounter in the future. CBE advocates do not hesitate to state their point of view that the so-called traditional model of school is often failing in this regard—that an unacceptable proportion of high school graduates is largely un-prepared (in their view) for success in society and in the world of career (Guha et al, 2018). Why is this so? Teaching to the test—and a nearly total reliance on standardized test scores as a measure of instructional effectiveness in traditional school environments—has led to an often disengaging, sometimes antagonistic mode of schooling, with teachers tasked with delivering content for grade-level standards at a uniform pace relative to benchmark and end-of-year tests, despite the fact that their (often large) classes are filled with an ever-increasing diversity of student backgrounds, needs, interests, and abilities (Tomlinson, 2003). According to Conley & Darling-Hammond (2013),

instruction has become more focused on basic reading and math skills as they are measured by multiple-choice tests. This has been accompanied by less emphasis on skills such as written and oral communication, complex problem solving, and investigation that involves evaluation of evidence or application of knowledge. This is especially true when high-stakes decisions are attached to the tests. (p. 3)

In college-preparatory high schools, the stakes for college admissions are high for traditional measures such as Advanced Placement courses and exams, standardized tests including the SAT and, for non-native English speakers, the TOEFL or the IELTS.

Amid high-pressure learning environments with students hoping to attend top-tier, prestigious universities, the pressure on academic performance is contributing to anxiety and depression at a large and growing rate (Bitter & Loney, 2015; Humes, 2004; Deresiewicz, 2015). Conversely, for students who do not see themselves on a path to university, the culture of standardized assessment in education is perhaps even more disheartening; these tests tell

low-performing students that they are not smart, that they are “behind,” that they aren’t good enough. Although one can hardly argue for a *lowering* of academic expectations, a purely standardized, GPA-based, test-centric approach to schools and to teaching is seen by many as, at best, sub-optimal and, at worst, ineffectual, inadequate, or even harmful to the holistic well-being and development of many learners (Guha et al, 2018, p. 14-15; Mishook & Kornhaber, 2015). Particularly in public and private high school environments, there seems to be a ubiquitous hyper-focus on college admissions and, at the same time, a large and growing proportion of students who are anxious, stressed, depressed, or simply overwhelmed (Bitter & Loney, 2015; Humes, 2004; Deresiewicz, 2015). The pressure to perform in classes and on standardized tests and to be accepted into college is, in some cases, having a negative impact on students’ mental health (Bitter & Loney, 2015; Humes, 2004; Deresiewicz, 2015). Moreover, there is a disconnect between such learning and individual students’ authentic passions, and external rewards are valued over internal ones (Gill, 2016). This is not to discredit or diminish the well-intentioned, earnest work of countless teachers and administrators in traditional schools, who have been advocating for students and achieving positive learning outcomes despite challenging circumstances. Rather, CBE is a response and a proposed solution to the apparent system-wide “absurdities” in high school education which purport to help students on their path to college and career—absurdities that have led some competency-based education leaders to believe that “school has become extremely stressful for too many students, and their motivation is not enough about learning but instead on earning the highest grade possible—a grade that becomes more meaningless with grade inflation and compression” (Guha et al, 2015, p. 15).

Issues with testing and assessment aren’t the only concerns driving the shift towards competency-based education. Many schools today still suffer from industrial organization, leading to a silo-ing of the academic disciplines, which are taught in small time blocks and at

a one-size-fits-all pace according to grade-level standards. This leads to a situation where content knowledge—tested standards in core academic subjects—becomes valued heavily over other worthy educational goals, which could include 21<sup>st</sup> century (college and career readiness) skills but also many others such as civic engagement, entrepreneurship, and health and wellness, to name a few. Take, for example, the notion of Carnegie units—“seat time” credits—and the practice of time-limited testing. A 2019 study by Harvard researcher Rouhani revealed that “speed does not predict ability. Students who progressed through [a] course more quickly did not perform better, nor did the students who took longer,” concluding that “there was no meaningful relationship between time and performance” (Hough, 2019, n.p.). Furthermore, she describes the implications for educators who have, for years, bought into this assumption about speed and achievement: the system rewards—and punishes—students according to an unfair and inaccurate view of intelligence/academic performance. Students who need more time on exams, for instance, are thought to have a learning disability. In Rouhani’s study, the predictor of academic excellence wasn’t time—it was mastery. Her findings suggest that fixed-pace instructional environments are putting some learners at an unfair disadvantage. One of the defining characteristics of CBE is mastery-based learning, which individualizes the pace of learning, often with the assistance of adaptive learning software and blended learning programs (Bitter & Loney, 2015). CBE schools are mastery-based as opposed to time-based; they take the concept of differentiated instruction (a common buzzword in education these days) and take it to its logical conclusion: personalized learning. According to CBE proponents, this model of teaching creates incremental success on a path to mastery of skills, rather than merely sorting students into percentiles—winners and losers (Levine & Patrick, 2019). And while many traditional schools have adopted some of the pieces or elements of the CBE model, such as blended learning with adaptive programs such as iReady, IXL, and Khan Academy, what sets CBE

schools apart is the structural re-organization of the learning environment, the emphasis on interdisciplinary projects, and the transition away from letter grades toward more flexible forms of assessment.

Leading voices in the movement caution that commitment and buy-in are crucial for sustainable success:

A school is not competency-based simply because students are using adaptive software, have flexible pacing, or are otherwise implementing isolated aspects of competency-based education. Distortions of competency-based education develop when only one aspect of the traditional model is changed, such as pace or grades. In fact, competency-based education is a deep redesign of the culture and structure of school systems to support effective instruction and learning. (Levine & Patrick, 2019, p. 7)

Although different schools approach CBE somewhat differently, a number of common strategies characterize this model, including project-based learning, collaborative group work, and alternative assessment (including portfolio and performance assessment)—all of which are featured in the course design of this study (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Guha et al, 2015; NRC, 2012; Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014).

Today, a partnership of hundreds of public and private high schools from the U.S. and around the world are working to establish viable competency-based educational models and to shift the traditional paradigm of education and how to assess learners' progress and achievement in school—the Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC). MTC is a recent development within the larger movement of competency-based education, characterized by its long-term mission to move away from the traditional letter grades of discipline-specific academic subjects towards a “mastery transcript” of competencies. Influenced by the reverse engineering (“backward-planning”) philosophy of the “Understanding by Design” model of

Wiggins and McTighe, MTC advocates posit that the ways in which educational institutions assess learning, and what they choose to assess, directly influence the culture and pedagogical approaches of schools and classrooms. The idea is that, by establishing modern, student-centered, and future-oriented instructional outcomes and assessments that are more connected with the real world, the teaching and learning in those schools will likewise be more relevant, more effective, and more meaningful for learners.

Thought leaders in the competency movement maintain that schools need not merely to tweak but to *transform* their conception of what types of learning outcomes will truly benefit learners in the real world of college and career—not merely to cover the standards likely to be assessed on the exams. In the traditional system, the culture, atmosphere, and pedagogical approaches—which are designed around how students are assessed—no longer appear to serve the immediate best interests or, indeed, the capacity for future success of the young people in the care of the secondary education system. Even when the most effective teachers are able to continuously differentiate instruction to meet the considerable needs of the diverse learners in their care, there is a separate but related concern: not just *how* educators assess learning, but *what* we are assessing for in the first place.

Achieving these new learning outcomes will, in turn, require the re-organizing of schools and the re-defining of curricula with a focus on what would best benefit the learner in their individual future—namely, deeper learning competencies (Bitter & Loney, 2015; Keesee, 2018; Great Schools Partnership, 2014; NRC, 2012; Zeiser, 2019). Advocates of CBE claim that this approach better prepares learners for college and career, expanding and deepening what is being taught and measured in schools to include 21st century skills. Critics of CBE point to problems with flexible assessment, claiming that such an approach is difficult to validate and may ultimately diminish academic rigor with assessments so flexible that they allow for mediocrity (Great Schools Partnership, 2014). If students are learning in

complex interdisciplinary settings without traditional letter grades, how will teachers know if they have made progress toward mastery of various competencies and academic knowledge?

### **Competency-based Assessment**

At the center of the competency-based education (CBE) movement is a vision of schooling which aims to provide learners with multiple paths to mastery and a variety of opportunities to develop knowledge and skill through meaningful, competency-based instruction and assessment, including projects, performance assessments, and portfolios (Bitter & Loney, 2015; Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Keesee, 2018; Great Schools Partnership, 2014; Guha et al, 2015; NRC, 2012; Zeiser, 2019). Currently, the prevailing culture of standardized testing has led to the experience of assessment in school being, to some degree, stressful for many students and teachers. This does not necessarily mean that there is no place for standardized testing in education—far from it. Educational psychologist Coladarci (2002) claims that “a valid state-mandated test can—and should—be considered an element of a local assessment system” (p. 773). The issue at hand is myopia: test scores alone don’t offer a comprehensive view of who students are and what they can do. In particular, “current standardized tests mostly require students to recall or recognize fragmented and isolated bits of information. They rarely require students to apply their learning and almost never require students to exhibit proficiency in higher-order skills” (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013, p. 3). According to Conley & Darling-Hammond (2013), “[current high stakes tests] are not able to assess a number of important standards from among the Common Core State Standards, including oral communications, collaboration, and the capacity for extended investigations and problem solving” (p. 4). By attaching high stakes to assessment forms that measure such a narrow band of achievement, the result is that students are deprived of more meaningful and authentic ways of demonstrating their knowledge and

abilities. Competency-based assessments, on the other hand, add richness and depth to discussions of what learners know and are able to do.

Competency-based schools use *systems of assessments* designed for deeper learning that include performance assessments, projects, and portfolios (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Guha et al, 2015; Levine & Patrick, 2019). The American Institute for Research found that “the personalized, project-based approach to deeper learning has implications for the types of measures and tools that can be used to assess student learning,” claiming that top competency-based schools “[employ] a range of strategies to measure student learning, including portfolios of student learning over time” (Bitter & Loney, 2015, p. 10). Rothman (2018) calls for a “balanced” system of assessments which includes formative and summative aspects, wherein cycles of feedback allow students to incrementally build proficiency on a path to mastery. The Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC) is going one step further with a fully competency-based high school transcript/diploma. There are large and growing networks of schools committed to competency-based education and deeper learning, and each one has designed or adopted an assessment system that aligns with desired competencies and provides opportunities for students to develop and demonstrate mastery of skills. Yet, as Coladarci (2002) puts it, “a collection of assessments does not entail a system any more than a collection of bricks constitutes a house” (p. 773). A combination of portfolios, narratives, and performance assessments must be integrated into an effective system.

Important to note is that both traditional and competency-based schools are focused on and committed to preparing students for acceptance to universities and to be successful in the future; the difference lies in how they approach these goals. It would be dreadfully ironic if, in the attempt to enhance college and career readiness, competency-based programs negatively impacted students’ college admissions process; therefore, competency-based educational programs will have to demonstrate that—using different instructional and

assessment methods—their approach can have the same or better results with regard to learning outcomes. Now, more than 100 universities—including some at the highest echelons of higher education, such as Harvard, Tufts, and MIT—claim to accept competency-based high school transcripts (even those without a GPA) and not to discriminate against applicants coming from competency-based high schools, which is encouraging support for the CBE movement.

The Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC) has inspired hundreds of private and public high schools worldwide to begin a journey towards entirely re-designing their schools, classrooms, curricula and—since the idea is to replace traditional letter grades—the nature of the transcripts that will ultimately be sent to colleges and universities representing the learners’ academic achievement and mastery of a variety of competencies as demonstrated through competency-based assessment (Bitter & Loney, 2015; Guha et al, 2015; Keesee, 2018; Zeiser, 2019). A “mastery transcript” is a report card of sorts for various competencies and includes a multimedia portfolio (the report is digital and interactive). Although all MTC partner schools use this type of competency-based approach for their grading systems and high school transcripts/diplomas, different schools, networks, and districts have different protocols and priorities when it comes to instruction and assessment. MTC and the current CBE movement are still early-stage concepts, and there is a need for teachers and researchers in the field to develop and test viable pedagogical models that can prepare students for success academically while at the same time honoring their holistic development and addressing the competencies that CBE advocates, educators, researchers, and other experts posit will best serve learners in their futures. Such learning outcomes cannot be adequately captured by standardized tests alone; instead, schools and districts will have to design (or adopt) and implement a coordinated system of assessments including portfolio and performance assessments that is aligned with their goals and with deeper learning

competencies. School profiles of successful competency-based high schools in the MTC network such as High Tech High and Envision Schools were consulted in the methodological design of this study (Levine & Patrick, 2019).

## **Summary**

This case study was designed to examine the impact of theatre arts integration on learning outcomes for Chinese high school students studying English as a foreign language—particularly with regard to oral communication skills—using multiple forms of assessment. The literature review above establishes the background and context for the key pedagogical approach and educational philosophy adopted in this study, namely arts integration and competency-based learning. The researcher contends that arts integration—in particular, theatre arts integration—is an apt and rational choice for English language learners in a competency-based learning environment. Given the rather limited number of well-established exemplars of competency-based learning models in the US and abroad, this case study is well-positioned to add to this field of research and to contribute to reducing barriers between deeper learning theory and practice.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

### Research Design and Rationale

This quasi-experimental case study provides an up-close look at the impact of theatre arts integration pedagogy on learning outcomes for Chinese high school students studying English as a foreign language (EFL). Theatre arts integration was selected as a fitting approach to the course design based on encouraging findings in current research and a robust theoretical backdrop with regard to language development, engagement, and project-based, interdisciplinary teaching and learning (Burnaford et al, 2007; Catterall, 1999, 2012; Eisner, 1998; Fogarty & Stoehr, 2008; Gross, 2013; Mason, Steedly, & Thormann, 2005; Pepler, 2012; Ruppert, 2006). To determine if integrating theatre arts into the English-as-a-foreign-language classroom would lead to enhanced learning outcomes, a combination of traditional and non-traditional assessments was employed: the WIDA test, Crestwood interviews, and a competency-based portfolio containing performance assessments. Based on this assessment system, which was designed to measure deeper learning (academic knowledge plus 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies), a mixed-method triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data sources was used to examine the impact of arts integration pedagogy on English language learning—specifically, the effectiveness of theatre arts integration into English-as-a-foreign-language instruction for Chinese high school students.

Merriam (2009) defines case study as “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). The case, an English-as-a-foreign-language program at a competency-based high school, for this study is bounded (surrounded) by its specific programs and practices, thus making it unique to this particular context. In the social sciences, the issue of generalization is often seen as being *not* the main purpose of the case study approach; instead, case studies allow for useful up-close views of a particular subject or

phenomenon. Through a thorough examination of the case, researchers can “extrapolate key themes and results that help predict future trends, illuminate previously hidden issues that can be applied to practice, and/or provide a means for understanding an important research problem with greater clarity” (Swanborn, 2010). This research contributes to reducing barriers between the theory and practice of teaching for deeper learning, chief among them being the inadequacy of new pedagogical models that foster deeper learning (Fullan & Langworthy, 2013). A mixed-method approach is utilized since the purpose of this study is to determine the impact of the integrated theatre arts curriculum on EFL development according to both traditional and competency-based outcomes. The term “comparison group” is used instead of “control group” in this study to reflect the quasi-experimental design; like many case studies in the social sciences, reliably generalizing the results is neither possible nor intended. The analysis is directed at the impact of a particular instructional approach relative to other approaches.

The first assessments in the system are quantitative, utilizing the WIDA MODEL test for English as a foreign language alongside a new technology-enabled assessment tool, Crestwood interview analytics, to measure participants’ oral English proficiency before and after the intervention. Students’ performance as well as their growth over time was measured and compared with data from a peer group of students at the high school who were in another English course that was not arts integrated. These two assessments provided objective data on participants’ EFL development in the domain of speaking.

In addition to targeting English-as-a-foreign-language proficiency, the arts-integrated approach employed in this study emphasized the development of deeper learning competencies. The competency of *effective communication* was chosen as the focus for this study, emphasizing spoken English proficiency. Students in the arts integrated group

developed a portfolio of *artifacts* which provided rigorous and detailed measures of their communicative competence. The artifacts in the portfolio are video recordings of various communicative tasks (performance assessments) from the theatre arts integrated class. Table 3 provides an overview of the performance assessments with the intervention timeline as well as the alignment with the relevant standards for theatre arts.

Table 3. *Alignment of Performance Assessments with Theatre Arts Standards*

Timeline	Performance Assessment	Aligned National Core Arts Standards
Week 1	<i>Introductory Event</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Movie Dubs’ activity</li> </ul>	Anchor Standard #4: Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.
Week 2	<i>Anne Frank Video Diary</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual monologue (video)</li> </ul>	Anchor Standard #6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
Week 3	<i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asynchronous discussion video #1</li> </ul>	Anchor Standard #7: Perceive and analyze artistic work. Anchor Standard #11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.
Week 4	<i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group scene video</li> </ul>	Anchor Standard #5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation. Anchor Standard #6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
Week 5	<i>Student Choice Performance</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual monologue or scene</li> <li>• Asynchronous discussion video #2</li> </ul>	Anchor Standard #4: Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation. Anchor Standard #6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.
Week 6	<i>Final Reflection</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asynchronous discussion video #3</li> </ul>	Anchor Standard #5: Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

National Core Arts Standards © 2015 National Coalition for Core Arts Standards. Rights administered by State Education Agency Directors of Arts Education (SEADAE). All rights reserved. [www.nationalartsstandards.org](http://www.nationalartsstandards.org)

Qualitative measures from the artifact portfolios added depth and context to the test and interview data for the treatment group. The researcher selected a set of communicative tasks—arts-based performance assessments—as evidence of deeper learning for students in the theatre arts integrated intervention. These performance assessments (compiled as artifact portfolios) were derived from a carefully selected combination of Common Core Standards for Speaking & Listening and National Core Arts Standards for Theatre, and they are designed to measure students’ ability to *communicate effectively*. Note: It is of course possible that other standards and/or competencies were developed in the course (reading, writing, critical thinking, collaboration, etc.); however, the selected cluster of learning objectives (see Appendix B) represent both the design of the theatre arts integrated intervention as well as what is directly measured through the artifacts. For example, a key element of the course design for the intervention was a study of the Anne Frank story: learners in the intervention explored the subject of WWII and the holocaust as a part of their English and theatre arts integration, learning necessary background information and context that would inform their reading of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (the play) and their performances as characters from that work, which is of course inspired by true historical events. The additional element of learning in history reflects the interdisciplinarity of arts-integrated teaching; however, since specific history standards were not explicitly taught or assessed, they are not considered in this study. In truth, *The Diary of Anne Frank* was selected not as a way to learn WWII history, but because of the suitability of the play in the context of our class being forced into quarantine and basically being stuck at home with their families in confinement. As the teaching artist, I hoped that the aesthetic of this dramatic work would connect with learners—that they would relate to the feelings and emotions expressed by the characters, who are shut in and cannot leave their rooms for more than a year due to the dangerous and deadly circumstances surrounding them and yet maintain a sense of hope.

Evidence of learners' development of English communicative competence was obtained by examining their video artifacts and using rigorous rubrics adapted from Stanford SCALE and iRubric (see Appendix C). Evaluations and descriptions of students' performance assessments were compared with their performance on the quantitative assessments for further insights and correlations. Altogether, the three modes of data collection (test, interview, and portfolio) were triangulated to provide a multi-faceted evaluation of the impact of theatre arts integration on English-as-a-foreign-language development. Quantitative analyses of participants' growth in spoken English ability were considered alongside evaluations of competency-based outcomes in a mixed-methods comparative analysis. This research may offer insights to the educational community with regard to arts integration, deeper learning, and competency-based instruction and assessment.

### **Research Setting/Context**

The school site is a competency-based private high school in Beijing, China, and the school leadership is committed to contributing to the larger mission of competency-based education. A group of 14 Chinese high school students participated in an integrated theatre arts curriculum in their English-as-a-foreign-language classroom; a comparison group of 13 Chinese high school students from the same school was evaluated alongside the treatment group. The theatre arts integration intervention took place over the course of 6 weeks: four 45-minute classes per week for a total of 24 class meetings for a total of 18 hours of instruction. Though it is not possible to see the full picture of language development in such a short time period—according to experts (Witt, Hakuta, & Butler, 2000), it takes 3-7 years to go from beginner to completely fluent—the system of assessments used in this study allows for an up-close look at students' performance over time.

## **Research Sample/Data Sources/Participants**

Two English classes—a treatment group with 14 Chinese high school students and a comparison group with 13 students—were chosen to participate in this study based on their English levels compared to other students at the school site. The school offers English courses at three levels: introductory, intermediate, and advanced; students are sorted into these different levels based on WIDA test scores for reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The students chosen for this study were all at the introductory level, and they represent the widest range of ability levels compared with the intermediate and advanced classes. Since students at the school are sorted by ability level and not by age or grade level, the students in the introductory level courses either struggle with learning English or have less experience with learning English compared with their peers at the school in the higher-level English courses. Research on second language acquisition suggests that lower-level proficiency learners progress more quickly than more advanced learners, who tend to progress more slowly at higher levels (Cook, 2009; Witt, Hakuta, & Butler, 2000). Therefore, the lower-level English speakers at the school site were chosen for the study; it was presumed that this group would have more gain from this program and experience more demonstrable growth than the more advanced English speakers at the school.

A quasi-experimental approach was taken to determine the impact of the integrated curriculum on this particular group of students since randomly-selected participant groups could not be established for this case study. The 27 participating students were sorted into the Introductory English level based on their performance and ability, but they were sub-divided into class group A (treatment) and class group B (comparison) randomly—a fact which contributed to the internal validity of the study. The comparison group was selected from another classroom of students at the same school at the same English level (introductory) that

was nearly identical in terms of demographics; all participants (both groups) are Chinese students between the ages of 13-16. The arts-integrated class is referred to as ELA-1A, and the comparison group is referred to as ELA-1B. The comparison group, ELA-1B, was taught by a different teacher and did not use arts integration pedagogy, but in every other respect, the classes were taught in similar environments. Both classes are called “Introductory English” and occurred at the same time, on the same days, with roughly the same number of students, and in the same online environment, which included a combination of online platforms: ClassIn, WeChat, Canvas, Tencent Meeting, and FlipGrid. Participants’ spoken English proficiency was measured using pre- and post- assessments via the WIDA test and Crestwood interview analytics. Throughout the course, students in the integrated class (ELA-1A) also compiled a portfolio of artifacts which includes performance assessments (see Table 3). The teaching artist-researcher-teacher evaluated students’ artifacts using high quality rubrics (see Appendix C).

### **Data Collection Methods**

The WIDA and Crestwood assessments provided data on learners’ performance before and after the 6-week period and allowed for comparisons of the relative growth between learners in ELA-1A (theatre arts integrated group) and ELA-1B (comparison group) during that time. Then, an evaluation of the artifact portfolios from the integrated course allowed for a more detailed and personalized view of learners’ progress. WIDA MODEL online assessments take approximately 105 minutes per student; of that, the speaking domain test takes approximately 15 minutes per student. The Crestwood interviews take approximately 15 minutes per student. The review of artifacts in the final portfolio was more time-consuming and labor intensive, but it provided valuable additional layers of detail and insight into learners’ development of spoken English and communicative competence.

Together, these approaches form an assessment system which allowed for learning profiles for individual participants who were selected as representative of the cohort.

### ***Overview of the Assessment System***

1. WIDA MODEL test for ESOL: 90 minutes (whole group) for the reading/writing/listening domains, plus 15 minutes (per student) for the speaking domain.
  - a. Test is administered before the start of the 6-week course
  - b. Test is administered at the conclusion of the course (week 7)
  - c. Results are analyzed for performance, growth
  - d. Results from ELA-1A and ELA-1B are compared
2. Crestwood Analytics: Oral English interviews: 15 minutes per student, per interview.
  - a. Interview is conducted before the start of the 6-week course
  - b. Interview is conducted at the conclusion of the course (week 7)
  - c. Results are analyzed for performance, growth
  - d. Results from ELA-1A and ELA-1B are compared
3. Portfolio Evaluation: 75 minutes (evaluation) per student portfolio.
  - a. Evaluation occurs the conclusion of the course (week 7)
  - b. Results analyzed for performance, growth
  - c. Evaluation of communicative competence
  - d. Treatment group only

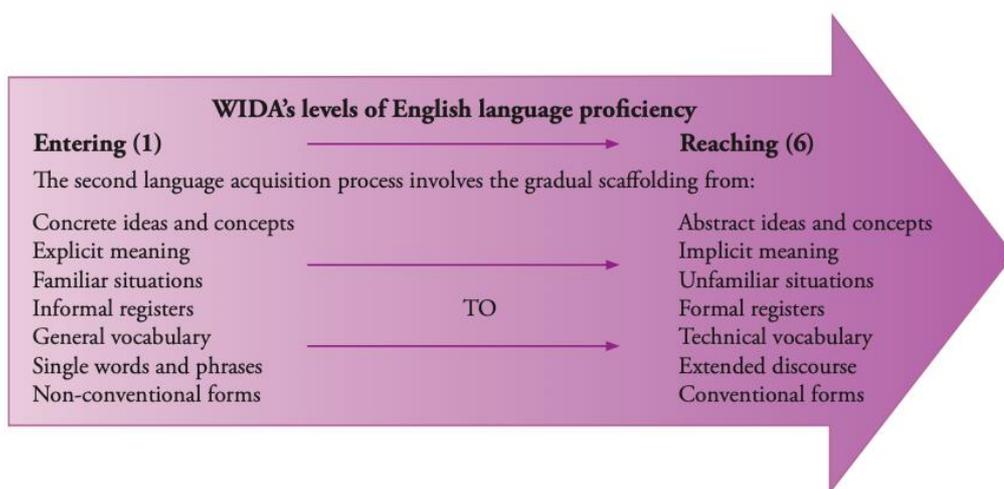
### **Data Analysis Methods**

#### ***WIDA MODEL test for ESOL (Speaking)***

WIDA (formerly World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment) is an educational consortium of 35 state departments of education that designs and implements proficiency

standards and assessment for English language learners in the U.S. and internationally. WIDA MODEL (Measure of Developing English Language) is an English language proficiency assessment for Grades K-12 covering reading, writing, speaking, and listening. WIDA has developed a six-level (1.0-6.0) language proficiency scale that describes the developmental progression of English proficiency using sophisticated interpretive rubrics (see Appendix E). Student performance is represented in this study as WIDA scale scores, which range from 100-600 and are vertically equated to account for grade level differences, since the participants include 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. Figure 1, reproduced with permission from WIDA, provides an overview of the continuum. Participants' initial proficiency levels as well as their overall progress were determined based on their performance on the WIDA MODEL online test.

Figure 1. *WIDA's Continuum of Second Language Acquisition*



WIDA's *speaking tasks* "allow students to give a performance at each proficiency level as defined in the WIDA Consortium's Speaking Rubric" (WIDA, 2014, p. 39). The speaking section of the test contains two "folders," each with five tasks, representing questions targeted at proficiency levels 1-6 (note: there is no level 0). According to the testing development report,

The test administrator asks the student questions targeting progressively higher proficiency levels until the student is no longer able to respond in a way that meets the linguistic demands of the task. When a student's response to a task does not meet expectations, the test administrator stops administering tasks from that folder and either moves on to the next Speaking folder or to the next domain test. Administration of the entire Speaking section lasts approximately fifteen minutes. (WIDA, 2014, p. 8)

Important to note is that students' responses are not judged on whether they answered the questions right or wrong *per se* but rather on "whether it met the language proficiency level expectations for each task on three criteria—Linguistic Complexity, Vocabulary Usage, and Language Control" (WIDA, 2014, p. 39). In their publication detailing the development of the WIDA MODEL speaking domain test, WIDA consortium officials explain:

For example, if a student gave a response that did not address the content of the question, but that response still met the proficiency-level expectations of the task, it was scored as "Meets." The total Speaking raw score for a student was the sum of every response that was scored as "Meets." (WIDA, 2014, p. 39)

By analyzing participants' WIDA scores before and after the intervention, this case study documented their progress over time. The researcher hypothesized that the comparative data between the treatment group and the comparison group would reveal a positive correlation between participation theatre arts- based instruction and enhanced learning outcomes and that enhanced gains by learners in the treatment group would suggest a transfer of learning from their experiences in the theatre arts program to their ability to perform on the various English speaking tasks that are a part of the WIDA MODEL English proficiency assessment.

## Crestwood Interview Analytics

This study employs a new, technology-enabled approach: software analytics that accurately measure learners’ ability to speak English in a semi-structured interview (see Appendix F). Crestwood is a start-up education technology company that brings a new concept to the field of EFL assessment. Using a dual-AI (artificial intelligence) system, students’ recorded oral speech is processed, analyzed, and scored across quantitative metrics of vocabulary, fluency, disfluency, and overall skill. Indicators such as “number of distinct words” and “stutters, filler words, and repetitions as a percentage of total words spoken” are compiled to provide a comprehensive profile of an individual’s oral English proficiency, which can then be measured against customizable comparison groups. Table 4 provides a model of how each participant’s Crestwood data is represented. Using artificial intelligence software to recognize and analyze each word spoken by the student in the interview, Crestwood provides quantitative metrics and an overall spoken English proficiency score.

Table 4. *Sample Crestwood Interviewee Report (overview)*

Core Statistics				Progress Over Time		
Triforce performance vs. Peer Group (as of 2020-07-16)				Triforce performance (historical)		
Datapoint Value	CW Score	Percentile	Classification	Datapoint	2020-05-29	2020-07-16
Interview ID	ZH-4568-0312			Interview ID	ZH-6029-8137	ZH-4568-0312
Mastery	1130	58%	Average	Mastery	1013	1130
Vocabulary (V)	481	61%	Above Average	Vocabulary (V)	401	481
Fluency (F)	548	68%	Above Average	Fluency (F)	505	548
Disfluency (D)	100	less than/equal to 40%	Developing	Disfluency (D)	106	100

On the left side, the student’s spoken English proficiency is given both objectively and relative to their peers at the school site; on the right, the student’s progress over time is tracked—in this case, indicating a growth of 117 points overall. More richly detailed statistics are available on the Crestwood user dashboard, but this shows the core, relevant metrics of the assessment.

The ability to communicate effectively in English is as an essential skill for international students aiming to succeed in English-speaking environments in college, career, and life; the quantitative data analytics from Crestwood offer a new, technology-enabled way to measure learners' spoken English performance and progress over time. The American Academy of Arts and Sciences' Commission on Language Learning predicts:

Over the coming decades, progress in language education will continue to be influenced by advances in technology and research including artificial intelligence and deep learning, through which computers process multiple layers of data, and 'big data' solutions to learning and instruction. (AAAS, 2017, p. 12)

Although never before attempted in formal research, the Crestwood interview analytics are well positioned in this study to strengthen the mixed-method triangulation by providing an additional and statistically precise layer of data to track learners' EFL development.

Consider: the WIDA test evaluates students' English-speaking proficiency on a 1.0-6.0 continuum, yet two students with identical WIDA speaking levels (e.g. "3.4") can have very different profiles with regard to their strengths and growth areas for spoken English (WIDA, 2020). For example, one student might have low fluency and hesitate to speak, but what they do say is clear and contains sophisticated vocabulary; another might speak freely and confidently but with low range and sophistication of vocabulary and/or with high error rates. Furthermore, WIDA cautions that looking to solely the composite score (the aggregate performance in reading, writing, speaking, and listening) can mask deficiencies in one or more domains.

Crestwood interview analytics, on the other hand, provide a detailed spoken English profile for each student based on their performance in the Crestwood semi-structured interview. The interview is audio recorded and processed through artificial intelligence software to provide objective data on learners' spoken English abilities. Giving this

assessment before and after the study revealed student progress over time with regard to vocabulary, fluency, disfluency, and overall performance metrics, allowing for quantitative analysis of variance between the results of the treatment group and the comparison using two-tailed, paired t-tests. Utilizing analytic software provided by Crestwood, the researcher was able to accurately quantify students' oral English proficiency levels and growth over time, in the areas of vocabulary, fluency, and disfluency. The use of a new, technology-enabled form of assessment is fitting for the course design and in keeping with best practices for CBE and deeper learning, since most competency-based schools use educational technologies for on-going assessment and data-driven teaching.

***Portfolio of Artifacts (from the integrated theatre arts program)***

To document and assess their learning in the theatre arts intervention, each student in the treatment group submitted a portfolio containing a series of performance assessments aligned with Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (speaking & listening) and National Core Arts Standards for theatre (see Appendix B). The performance assessments were submitted as student-made videos and scored using high quality rubrics designed in accordance with guidelines from Stanford SCALE (see Appendix C). The consideration of these performance assessments adds another dimension to the discussion of the impact of the pedagogical approach: the evaluation of the competency-based portfolios was considered alongside the quantitative measures to provide a richer description of participants' spoken English proficiency and communicative competence. Together, the multiple forms of assessment provide a more clear and comprehensive understanding of learners' progress in the case.

All of the artifacts are performance assessments targeting students' communicative competencies and oral English proficiency. *Asynchronous discussion contributions*

responding to questions and prompts from the class are collected as recorded videos using the free online educational platform FlipGrid. Students log in to a secure class page, where they can record and upload videos as well as view the videos of the other students. Likewise, the *individual monologues/scenes* are shared online as videos via the class FlipGrid page. The *group scenes* are recorded using the Tencent online meeting platform and then uploaded to the course Canvas page. Tencent Meeting has the feature of being able to capture the audio and video components of multiple online participants simultaneously. Students had the option to use additional video editing software (such as iMovie or FinalCut) at their discretion prior to submitting work, but it was not required. Theatre arts instruction and activities in the class supported students to prepare and present artifacts at the beginning, middle, and end of the 6-week period; the intervention provided students with a mix of individual and collaborative group endeavors.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The range of data afforded by the multiple assessments used in this study allowed for learners' performance and progress to be measured more accurately than would be determined by any one assessment method used in isolation. WIDA MODEL is an internationally recognized, reliable and valid for measuring students' English language proficiency, and so the study is grounded in verifiable results (WIDA, 2014). According to the technical report on the development and field testing of the WIDA MODEL assessment, "the reliability for the Overall Composite scores ranges from .85 to .94" using "stratified alphas based on the the Cronbach's alphas of the individual domains and the variance of students' Overall Composite scores" (WIDA, 2014, p. 82). The report also establishes validity using an argument-based approach to validation, claiming that the WIDA MODEL assessment provides consistent results for test-takers. Rasch measurement principles are used

to establish validity, and the authors conclude that for the Speaking, Listening, and Reading sections of WIDA MODEL, “all items fit the Rasch model well and are productive for measurement according to the infit statistics. These results are a strong indication that WIDA MODEL scores reflect the construct that the tests were designed to measure” (WIDA, 2014, p. 90). Crestwood interview analytics have never been used in formal research before, but the use of new and innovative educational technologies is in keeping with best practices in CBE. Quantitative performance data from Crestwood interviews were considered alongside WIDA scores to supplement descriptions of learners’ oral English proficiency provided from WIDA proficiency-level standards. The study is site-specific, and the selection differences between the treatment group and the comparison group are minimal. A team of faculty from the school site were trained to administer the WIDA speaking test and to conduct Crestwood interviews using formal training materials and protocols that included calibration. Sample WIDA questions and sample student responses were presented to the team to evaluate independently at the end of the training to ensure consistent scoring practices among all test administrators; all interviewers were coached in the Crestwood interview process (see Appendix F) by Crestwood staff.

Competency-based assessment systems incorporate projects and performance assessments as essential measures of deeper learning. Recent research outlining successful cases in the field (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013; Guha et al, 2015; Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014) shows that systems of assessments that include performance assessments can deliver meaningful and reliable data on what students know and are able to do. They cite cases where teachers were “trained to score the portfolios at the school level using analytical rubrics” (Conley & Darling-Hammond, 2013, p. 9). The teaching artist-researcher-teacher in this study used carefully chosen rubrics in accordance with guidelines from SCALE. (See Appendix C.) In this study, the data from the system of assessments was compiled to create

performance profiles for participants focusing on communicative competencies and oral English proficiency.

## Summary

Through a mixed-method analysis of the multiple measures in the system of assessments used in this study, participants' performance and progress were evaluated to examine the impact of an integrated theatre arts approach to English-as-a-foreign-language instruction in a Chinese high school. Though a randomly-selected control group could not be established for this quasi-experimental study, another English class at the same school site with learners at the same level was used as a comparison group. This group did not use arts integration pedagogy, but in every other respect, the classes were taught in the same online environment—a combination of online platforms including ClassIn, WeChat, Canvas, Tencent Meeting, and FlipGrid.

Quantitative data from the WIDA MODEL speaking assessment and Crestwood interview analytics allowed for comparisons between the two groups, indicating the relative performance over time between learners in the arts integrated group and learners who were not in that group. WIDA MODEL speaking scores could be compared using a one-tailed, paired t-test, since all of the learners were able to do *as well or better* on their post-test; Crestwood scores required a two-tailed t-test to measure variance, since several students declined in performance on the post-interview along with the majority, who improved. Combined with the rich qualitative data from the competency-based portfolios, this assessment system was used to establish performance profiles for individual learners. These analyses were conducted to answer the question: What is the impact of an integrated theatre arts program on learning outcomes for Chinese students studying English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL)?

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

This chapter contains the results of the case study, which was conducted to answer the research question: What is the impact of theatre arts integration on learning outcomes for Chinese students studying English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL)? From this inquiry emerged three questions relating to assessment:

1. (RQ1) What is the impact of an integrated theatre arts curriculum on learners' oral English proficiency according to an English-as-a-foreign-language assessment for speaking (WIDA)?
2. (RQ2) What is the impact of an integrated theatre arts curriculum on learners' oral English proficiency according to artificial intelligence software analytics of recorded interviews?
3. (RQ3) What is the impact of an integrated theatre arts curriculum on English-as-a-foreign-language learners' development of the deeper learning competency of effective communication according to a portfolio of competency-based performance assessments?

These sub-questions informed the methodological design for the study, as described in Chapter 3. The findings from each of these assessments are detailed below—in turn and then comparatively through processes of triangulation.

### Data Collection

With the full approval and support of the school site, data for this study was collected directly from 27 students in two introductory-level English language classes. Each student signed an assent form, and a parent of each of the participants confirmed their permission by signing a Parental Consent Letter (see Appendix G). The detailed plan for the research project and intervention was communicated with both classes by a team of three teachers: myself, the teaching artist-researcher-teacher in this study, along with my teaching assistant and translator in ELA-1A and the teacher of ELA-1B (the comparison group). These two

class groups contained a total of 31 students, of which 27 assented to participate in the study: 14 students in ELA-1A and 13 students in ELA-1B. Due to COVID-19, all of the instruction and assessments were conducted fully online using a variety of educational platforms and technologies including ClassIn, Canvas, WeChat, Tencent Meeting, and FlipGrid.

For the treatment group, ELA-1A, an online theatre arts integrated curriculum was developed with the goal of enhancing learning outcomes in the English-as-a-foreign-language classroom—particularly with regard to the domain of speaking and the deeper learning competency of effective communication. The comparison group, though also taught in a competency-based learning environment, did not use arts integration pedagogy. By examining the learning outcomes of both groups after the 6-week course of instruction, it was possible to see whether or to what extent theatre arts integration pedagogy had a positive impact on English language proficiency. What follows is an account of each of the three assessments used to collect data in this case study as well as a process of triangulation among these different data sources.

### **Results of the WIDA Examination**

The treatment group (ELA-1A) and the comparison group (ELA-1B) had a high degree of similarity based on overall performance in the initial round of testing with WIDA, as shown below in Table 5. After the 6-week instructional program, the students were tested again; again, the overall English language proficiency scores were nearly equivalent, with the treatment group slightly outperforming the comparison group in average overall growth and consistency of results. The results from the WIDA (overall scores) pre- and post- test show that the theatre arts group made measurable growth ( $M = 12.77$ ,  $SD = 8.76$ ) over the 6-week instructional period; the comparison group made similar gains ( $M = 11.85$ ,  $SD = 12.22$ ), indicating that both pedagogical approaches were effective in enhancing students' overall

English proficiency. For the treatment group, a paired, two-tailed t-test yielded  $p < .001$ , showing that the intervention had a statistically significant impact on student learning outcomes. Another paired, two-tailed t-test for the comparison group yielded  $p = .004$ , indicating that the comparison group also made statistically significant progress from the pre-test to the post-test, albeit slightly less than the treatment group. Two-tailed analyses were used for this comparison, because three participants actually declined slightly in their WIDA overall scores. In this study, significance is established according to the conventional alpha value for  $p$  of  $p < .05$ .

Table 5 provides an overview of the results in terms of WIDA overall scale scores—composite scores based on students’ performance in all domains (reading, writing, speaking, listening). These scores were generated using WIDA MODEL’s online test administration portal, exported to a .csv file, and then analyzed using Microsoft Excel. The same analysis was then repeated for the WIDA speaking domain scores, specifically, which is summarized in Table 6. Note: One student from the treatment group (see the learner profile for Duncan below) was removed from these comparisons, because he earned a maximum score on the WIDA speaking domain test twice; his “zero” growth actually represented a limit of the test achieved by the highest performing student in either group.

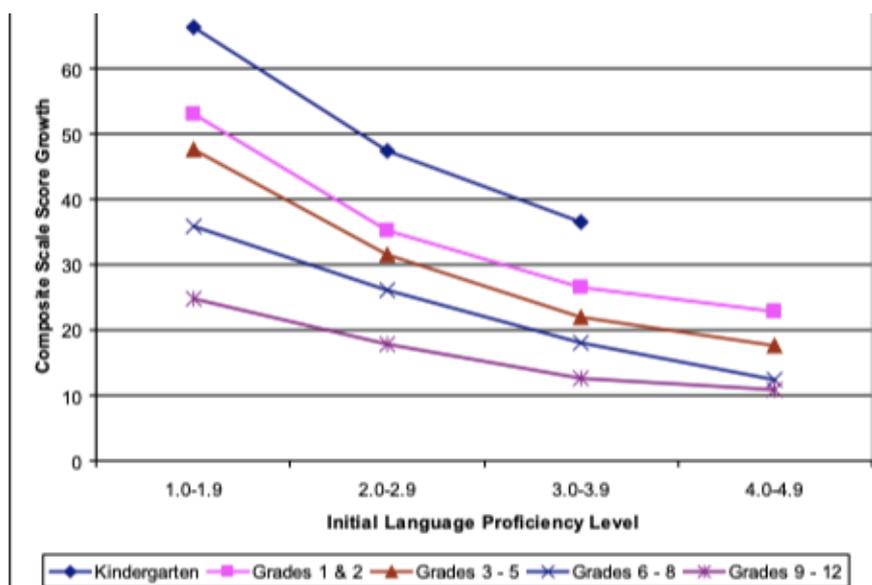
Table 5. *WIDA: Overall Performance (Scale Scores)*

<b>ELA-1A</b>	Mean	Score Range	Standard Deviation
BEFORE: 5/28/2020 WIDA Exam (Overall Scale Score)	385.38	362 - 410	13.51
AFTER: 7/16/2020 WIDA Exam (Overall Scale Score)	398.15	377 - 415	11.98
GROWTH (Overall Scale Score) (table continued)	12.77	-8 – 25	8.76

ELA-1B	Mean	Score Range	Standard Deviation
BEFORE: 5/28/2020 WIDA Exam (Overall Scale Score)	385.23	345 - 405	18.21
AFTER: 7/16/2020 WIDA Exam (Overall Scale Score)	397.08	373 - 422	17.73
GROWTH (Overall Scale Score)	11.85	-5 – 35	12.22

According to the WIDA overall scores, both groups made excellent progress—meeting or exceeding typical *year-long* growth benchmarks of 10 to 25 scale points for high school students (Cook, 2009). Figure 2, reproduced with permission from WIDA (see Appendix H), shows WIDA annual growth trends with overall (composite) scale points gained in a year on the y-axis and initial English language proficiency level on the x-axis. This trend data supports the claim that ELLs progress more quickly at lower levels, and that expected growth slows at higher levels. There is also a strong indication that students in high school who are low-level ELLs progress more slowly than younger students (Cook, 2009).

Figure 2. *WIDA typical Annual Growth Trends* (Reproduced with permission: Appendix H)



With regard to the domain of speaking specifically, 100% of the participants in both groups performed *as well or better* on their WIDA speaking post-test as/than they did on their pre-test. This fact allowed for one-tailed (paired) t-tests of each group to establish statistical significance. For both the treatment group ( $M = 24.15$ ,  $SD = 11.31$ ) and the comparison group ( $M = 62.23$ ,  $SD = 30.99$ ), the  $p$  values were far below .001, indicating a high level of significance that the teaching methods in both classes were effective in raising students' spoken English proficiency. Before and after the intervention, the comparison group had a slightly lower level of speaking proficiency according to WIDA speaking scores; nevertheless, this group outperformed the treatment group in average overall growth, albeit with a much higher variability of results (having a higher standard deviation). Table 6 provides an overview of the results of the WIDA speaking domain tests.

Table 6. *WIDA: Speaking Domain (Scale Scores)*

<b>ELA-1A</b>	Mean	Score Range	Standard Deviation
BEFORE: 5/28/2020 WIDA Exam (Speaking Scale Score)	359.23	323 - 384	24.03
AFTER: 7/16/2020 WIDA Exam (Speaking Scale Score)	383.38	340 - 412	25.45
GROWTH (Speaking Scale Score)	24.15	0 - 44	11.31
<b>ELA-1B</b>	Mean	Score Range	Standard Deviation
BEFORE: 5/28/2020 WIDA Exam (Speaking Scale Score)	308.46	182 - 370	56.81
AFTER: 7/16/2020 WIDA Exam (Speaking Scale Score)	370.69	252 - 412	43
GROWTH (Speaking Scale Score)	62.23	30 - 104	30.99

The results of the WIDA speaking domain analysis indicate that both the treatment group (ELA-1A) and the comparison group (ELA-1B) made significant and measurable progress in their spoken English proficiency from the pre-test to the post-test, meeting or exceeding typical year-long growth expectations.

### **Results of the Crestwood Interview Performance Assessment**

The Crestwood interviews and subsequent analytics were executed in a straightforward manner. Prior to the start of the 6-week instructional program, each student was interviewed online via WeChat by a trained member of the research team in alignment with Crestwood's interview standards (friendly, interactive, adaptive, professional). The full Crestwood interview guide can be found in Appendix F. Audio recordings of these interviews were then uploaded to the Crestwood system, and assigned to each interviewee's user profile. Files were then cropped to a standard 10 minutes' duration, beginning from the start of the conversation (e.g. excluding any warm-ups or introductory commentary) to ensure that each student received an equal opportunity to converse. These audio files were then processed by Crestwood's two-tier artificial intelligence (AI) system, with a human reviewer checking the outputs for accuracy in between the two systems.

Following completion of audio file processing and confirmation of audio file accuracy, performance statistics were then generated for each interviewee. Statistics used in final scoring included distinct words and advanced distinct words for vocabulary scores; words spoken per minute for fluency scores; and disfluencies (stutters, repetitions, and filler words) as a percentage of total words spoken for disfluency scores. The maximum score for any interview was 1,800 points, with 800 possible points for vocabulary, 800 possible points for fluency, and a maximum 200 points for disfluency. For each category, higher numbers indicated stronger performance. A second round of interviews was conducted after the 6-

week course completed, following the same methodology and process described above. Student performance was analyzed individually and across groups to gauge student improvement and to determine the impact of the theatre arts intervention on student performance outcomes. Table 7 summarizes the results of the Crestwood pre- and post-interviews. ELA-1B performed at a slightly higher level overall in both the pre- and post-interviews, although ELA-1A experienced higher average growth overall. These scores were generated using Crestwood’s online user dashboard portal, exported to a .csv file, and then analyzed using Microsoft Excel.

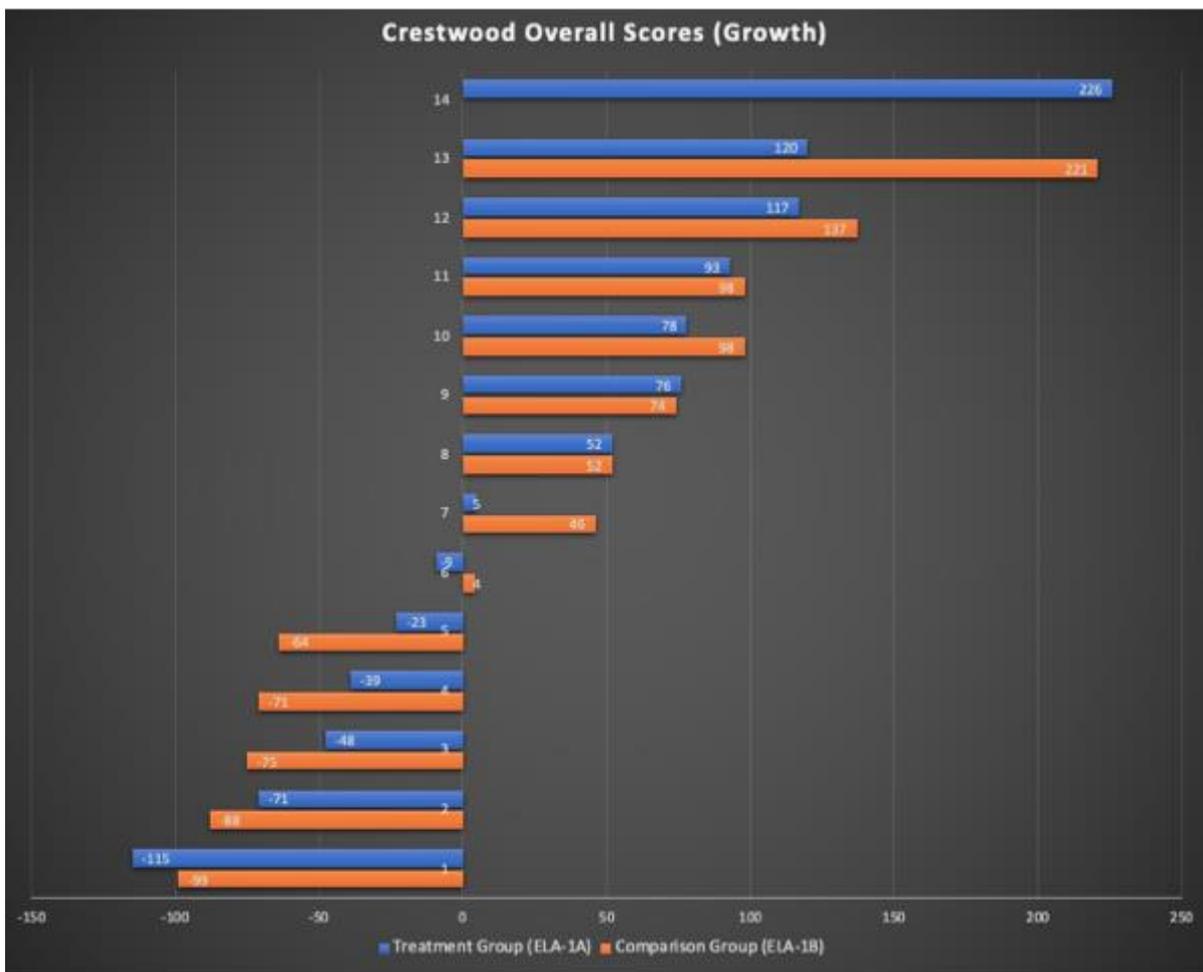
Table 7. *Crestwood Interviews: Spoken English Proficiency*

<b>ELA-1A</b>	Mean	Score Range	Standard Deviation
<b>BEFORE:</b> 5/28/2020 CW Interview (Speaking Score)	902.64	676 – 1171	146.74
<b>AFTER:</b> 7/16/2020 CW Interview (Speaking Score)	935.64	685 – 1132	159.64
<b>GROWTH</b> (Speaking Score)	33	-115 – 226	91.93
<b>ELA-1B</b>	Mean	Score Range	Standard Deviation
<b>BEFORE:</b> 5/28/2020 CW Interview (Speaking Score)	989.54	542 – 1248	220.05
<b>AFTER:</b> 7/16/2020 CW Interview (Speaking Score)	1015.15	546 – 1440	227.66
<b>GROWTH</b> (Speaking Score)	25.62	-99 – 221	100.38

Paired, two-tailed t-tests for each group indicated that neither the treatment group ( $p = .202$ ) nor the comparison group ( $p = .376$ ) made statistically significant progress according to the Crestwood interview assessment. This is likely due to the high standard deviations of the

results, which range from modest decreases to negligible changes to large increases in performance over time. However, a broader analysis of the results of the Crestwood interviews shows that, on average, both groups made growth in spoken English proficiency, despite the fact more than 30% of the students actually earned a lower score in their second interview. Figure 3 shows the change in performance from the pre-interview to the post-interview according to Crestwood’s interview analytics (overall scores).

Figure 3. Crestwood Interview Analytics: Comparison of Growth Data.



The majority of participants (8 out of 14 in the treatment group and 8 out of 13 in the comparison group) experienced measurable progress from the pre-interview to the post-

interview. The treatment group, ELA-1A, slightly outperformed the comparison group, ELA-1B, in both average growth and consistency of results (having a lower standard deviation).

### **Triangulation**

Using multiple sources of data via the two quantitative assessments (WIDA and Crestwood) allowed for a more detailed and nuanced analysis of learning outcomes for participants in this case study. A comparison of the results yielded three archetypes: cases in which a student progressed according to both assessments (Archetype #1: Growth), cases in which a student remained stagnant on WIDA speaking measures and declined according to Crestwood (Archetype #2: No growth), and cases in which a student progressed according to WIDA speaking measures but declined according to Crestwood interview measures (Archetype #3: Mixed results). These three archetypes were used to select representative learner profiles, providing a logical structure for incorporating the portfolios from the theatre arts course.

#### ***Archetype 1: Growth according to WIDA (speaking domain) / Growth according to Crestwood metrics***

More than 60% of the students in both groups experienced growth in spoken English proficiency according to both quantitative assessments: 8 out of 14 in the treatment group and 8 out of 13 in the comparison group. This level of agreement from two different and independent assessments strengthens the claim that both groups, overall, made measurable growth in spoken English proficiency. This indicates that the theatre arts- integrated approach was *as effective as or more effective than* other competency-based approaches in enhancing student outcomes in this context. Three participants from the treatment group (Ariel, Benvolio, and Cordelia) were selected as representative of this archetype, and profiles of their learning based on their artifact portfolios are included below.

***Archetype 2: No growth according to WIDA (speaking domain) / Decline according to Crestwood metrics***

100% of the participants in both groups were able to score *as well or better* on the WIDA speaking domain post-test than they did on the pre-test, indicating growth in spoken English proficiency. Of the 27 students in the study, 25 experienced growth on the WIDA speaking domain test, while the other two remained consistent (they got the exact same score on the pre- and post- test for the WIDA speaking domain) with a growth value of zero. The two students who experienced zero growth on the WIDA speaking domain both experienced a decline in their Crestwood scores. As mentioned above, one of these learners, Duncan, was removed from the group comparisons for WIDA, because he got a maximum score on the WIDA speaking test both before and after the intervention; his zero growth actually represents the highest proficiency in the cohort. Initially, this learner also had the highest Crestwood score in his group; however, his Crestwood score declined, and he slipped from being the top performer in his class according to that assessment. A more detailed and nuanced view of this learner's communicative competence and spoken English proficiency was achieved through an examination of his portfolio of performance assessments. (See the performance profile for Duncan below.)

***Archetype 3: Growth according to WIDA / Decline according to Crestwood metrics***

More than 30% of participants experienced mixed results according to a comparison of WIDA and Crestwood measures, 4 out of 14 in the treatment group and 6 out of 13 in the comparison group. A learner profile for Escalus is given below, based on a closer examination of his artifact portfolio and triangulation of his performance assessments with the test and interview data. By including this third, qualitative form of analysis, a clearer and

more comprehensive picture can be determined of this learner’s performance and progress, clarifying apparent discrepancies between the other two (quantitative) measures.

### **Analysis of the Competency-based Performance Assessments**

Since arts integration is characterized by meeting both artistic and academic objectives, students in the theatre arts group were evaluated according to rubrics for dramatic performance and effective oral communication. (See Appendix C.) Throughout the course of the intervention, students compiled portfolios containing seven artifacts—videos of dramatic performances as well as discussions related to the learning unit. Students were, therefore, given opportunities to speak both “in character” and as themselves. The scope and sequence of the performance assessments in the theatre arts intervention were designed according to deeper learning principles, beginning with low-stakes performances and open-ended discussions and progressing (deepening) to more sophisticated performances and more targeted, reflective discussions by the end. Table 8 provides a description of each performance assessment (artifact) contained in the portfolio.

Table 8. *Overview of Performance Assessments.*

<b>Task</b>	<b>Description of the Task</b>	<b>Rubric Used</b>
<i>Avengers</i> Movie Dubs	Learners chose a short scene from the Marvel Cinematic Universe to do a voice-over video. These “dubs” allow learners to speak as the character in a low-stakes performance (they are heard but not seen) with read-along captions not dissimilar to karaoke.	Dramatic Performance Assessment Rubric
Anne Frank Video Diary	Learners chose an entry from <i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i> . They were to perform that diary entry as a dramatic monologue on camera. Exemplars from <a href="https://www.youtube.com/annefrank">https://www.youtube.com/annefrank</a> were shown in class as inspiration.	Dramatic Performance Assessment Rubric
Discussion #1: Analysis of <i>Anne Frank</i>	To prepare for this analysis, learners read articles, watched videos, and explored the play; along with a read-aloud in class, these activities helped learners to understand the characters in <i>Anne Frank</i> and what their feelings and conflicts were.	Oral Communication Rubric (SCALE) (table continued)

Group Scene ( <i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i> , the play)	Learners chose a scene from the play, <i>The Diary of Anne Frank</i> . They were to perform that scene in small groups by editing together their individual parts.	Dramatic Performance Assessment Rubric
Monologue or Scene (Student choice)	Learners chose a monologue or scene from a major work of drama/theatre/film to perform on camera. A list of recommended works was given: <i>Life of Pi</i> , <i>Hamilton</i> , <i>Star Wars</i> , <i>The Matrix</i> , <i>Cast Away</i> , <i>Up</i> , <i>Romeo &amp; Juliet</i> , <i>The Sound of Music</i> , <i>Dead Poets Society</i> , <i>Avengers</i> , <i>Harry Potter</i> .	Dramatic Performance Assessment Rubric
Discussion #2: Monologue development and context	Learners were asked to summarize their chosen work of drama/theatre/film. Via a FlipGrid video, they analyzed and explained the scene that they chose to perform and their process in developing it.	Oral Communication Rubric (SCALE)
Discussion #3: Final reflection	Via a FlipGrid video, learners were asked to reflect upon their learning in this unit. They were given a set of guiding questions such as: What are your thoughts about this final unit? How did you feel doing these activities? How can drama activities help us to learn to speak English? Did your English speaking confidence increase as a result of doing these activities?	Oral Communication Rubric (SCALE)

Combined with the data from the WIDA and Crestwood assessments, an evaluation of learners' artifact portfolios allowed for a more up-close and detailed view of their spoken English proficiency and communicative competence.

For this study, five participants were selected from the treatment group as representative of the cohort: three for Archetype #1 (Growth), one for Archetype #2 (No growth), and one for Archetype #3 (Mixed results). Students' names have been changed by the researcher—into Shakespearean monikers, befitting an English and theatre arts study—for the sake of anonymity. Profiles of selected participants' learning in this unit are given below, and these illustrate how the theatre arts integrated intervention impacted their ability to communicate effectively in English.

***Learner Profile for Ariel (Archetype #1: Growth)***

Ariel was chosen as a representative example for this study because she was, in many respects, a typical student in the class with (initial) English proficiency scores right in the middle of the cohort. Over the course of the theatre arts intervention, Ariel made significant growth according to both WIDA and Crestwood assessments. On WIDA, Ariel improved by a whole developmental level, scoring 23 scale points higher on her post-test than she did on her pre-test. Given that the intervention was only 6 weeks in duration, this amount of progress is considerable; WIDA suggests that typical *annual* growth for high school EFL learners is 10-25 scale points (Cook, 2009). According to the WIDA speaking rubrics, her oral English was “comprehensible, fluent, and generally related to purpose” and “characterized by controlled, fluid use of oral language to convey meaning, including for effect.” For Ariel, the results suggested by the WIDA assessment are directly supported by the results of the Crestwood interview analytics, which indicate substantial progress from the pre-interview to the post-interview. Table 9 provides an overview of Ariel’s Crestwood analytics.

Table 9. *Crestwood Analytics for Ariel*

Core Statistics				Progress Over Time		
Triforce performance vs. Peer Group (as of 2020-07-16)				Triforce performance (historical)		
Datapoint Value	CW Score	Percentile	Classification	Datapoint	2020-05-29	2020-07-16
Interview ID	ZH-4568-0312			Interview ID	ZH-6029-8137	ZH-4568-0312
Mastery	1130	58%	Average	Mastery	1013	1130
Vocabulary (V)	481	61%	Above Average	Vocabulary (V)	401	481
Fluency (F)	548	68%	Above Average	Fluency (F)	505	548
Disfluency (D)	100	less than/equal to 40%	Developing	Disfluency (D)	106	100

Ariel made marked improvement (growth of 117 points) according to her performance on her Crestwood pre- and post- interviews, increasing her range and sophistication of vocabulary as well as her fluency in terms of words spoken per minute.

Her performance assessments for the theatre arts integrated unit also revealed a steady improvement over time. In the beginning of the intervention, she chose to do her Anne Frank monologue as an audio file (no video component); although she could not earn the full marks on the rubric (absent the video component), her oral command and delivery—“voice” and “focus” on the dramatic performance rubric—were nevertheless proficient, earning 3 out of a possible 4 points. Similarly, in her student choice monologues, she chose to use the ‘movie dubs’ approach from the introduction to the unit, effectively doing a voice-over recording of scenes from famous movies. Again, without her physical performance, she could not earn the full marks on the rubric; however, her voice, focus, and character development in both were exemplary, showing evidence of “staying completely immersed in character” and “depth and range of emotion” in the performances. Her asynchronous video discussions were of a very high quality, indicating “lines of reasoning that are clear and easy to follow” as well as an ability to give “direct and complete responses to questions.” She was able to clearly communicate the background and context of her chosen performances and her interpretation of them.

Whereas in the dramatic performance videos learners have to rehearse and perform lines from a chosen work of drama, the discussion videos offer insights into learners’ own voice and ability to communicate. These unscripted demonstrations of learners’ communicative competence serve as useful samples of their spoken English. For example, in her discussion of the play, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Ariel responds to the prompt, “Do you agree with Anne’s assertion that ‘Deep down, people are really good at heart?’” with the following:

*I don’t agree with the idea that people are inherently good, because I think people are selfish to begin with, and most of them are not altruistic.*

She then goes on to explain that Anne Frank is not “most people,” and that Anne does seem to have a genuine desire to help others, even strangers. Here, Ariel’s discussion video—in which she has produced an extended piece of oral communication in response to an open-ended question— shows a high level of understanding and sophistication. Her facility with vocabulary, including words like “altruistic” and “inherently,” shows some technical ability, and her language control resembles that of native speakers. This confirms the high proficiency level attributed to Ariel by her WIDA scores.

For her student choice monologue and related discussion video (scene analysis and context), Ariel chose a scene from the end of *Life of Pi*, where the mystical tiger, Richard Parker, parts ways with protagonist Pi for the last time. In this round of performance, Ariel has made some noticeable improvements from earlier in the unit. For one thing, she has included the video component that was absent in her Anne Frank Video Diary performance; however, the video is still a movie dub and not her own physical performance. Nevertheless, with the movie dub technique there is an element of delivery and timing that was not present in her previous performance, which was essentially a cold reading from the text. On her *Life of Pi* monologue, Ariel achieves the rank of “exceptional” (4 out of 4) for “voice” on the dramatic performance rubric, indicating that she “utilizes her voice to include variations of pitch, rate, volume, and tone consistent with her character,” as when she delivers the following lines:

*My strength was gone. I was so weak. I was afraid that in two feet of water, so close to deliverance, I would drown.... I was so spent. And, so, Richard Parker went ahead of me.... Then, at the edge of the jungle, he stopped.*

Her performance is smooth and consistent from start to finish, demonstrating her ability to stay in character. In her discussion video analyzing this scene, Ariel explains:

*I think the tiger is actually fictional. When they were finally rescued, the tiger left Pi. I think this is a process of self-liberation. After being rescued, the story told in the hospital may be the real experience of Pi. The island [and other things] that he experienced before were all part of his inner thoughts. Maybe he missed his family or his previous life.*

That Ariel was able to give a detailed and insightful analysis of this scene—and the theme of the story as a whole—is indicative of deep understanding of the work. That she is able to clearly communicate her ideas in English via this discussion video shows evidence of proficiency (3 out of 4 on the oral communication rubric), wherein Ariel “uses appropriate language and style that is suited to the purpose, audience, and task,” and her “speaking is fluid and easy to follow.” In her final reflection, Ariel claimed that her English-speaking confidence had increased as a result of doing these activities, explaining:

*When we are doing our videos... we need to talk like the characters talk.*

With Ariel, the theatre arts integration intervention appears to have worked as hypothesized, according to each facet of the system of assessments.

### ***Learner Profile for Benvolio (Archetype #1: Growth)***

Like Ariel, Benvolio made progress in spoken English proficiency and communicative competence according to every assessment in the system. Initially, Benvolio ranked slightly below average for the cohort (40<sup>th</sup> percentile) on WIDA and Crestwood measures; however, he made above average growth during the course of the intervention, gaining 28 scale points on WIDA and 120 points on Crestwood. Looking more closely at Benvolio’s Crestwood performance, he not only spoke more words, more fluently in his post-interview, but he also demonstrated a noticeable improvement in his ability to *minimize disfluencies* such as filler words, stutters, and repetitions. He went from an average

disfluency score (58<sup>th</sup> percentile) in the pre-interview to the highest disfluency score in his group in his post-interview. This improvement is likewise reflected in Benvolio's discussion videos; his later videos are much more detailed, fluent, and well-executed than his initial ones.

In his discussion of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Benvolio scored an average of 2 out of 4 on the oral communication rubric, with "inconsistent, incomplete, or uneven understanding of the topic" as well as "minor lapses of awkward or incorrect language use." For example, in responding to the question of how Anne and her family were affected by the Nazi occupation, Benvolio put forward a rather unsuccessful attempt at communication via his first discussion video:

*I think it's the soldiers... the way they treat... Na- Na- Na- (Nazis). The way they treat the people, so she is afraid of them. So, she will do that kind of behavior.*

With Benvolio, it is easy to see a marked improvement from his initial discussion to his later ones. Towards the end of the intervention, in his analysis of his chosen scene from *The Sound of Music*, Benvolio speaks more freely:

*In the monologue I choose, the singing part from "Do Re Mi," Maria wants the kids to get happier and want to teach them how to sing. And do-re-mi is the start of singing. She believes music can change people's lives, because she used to sing in the church.... So, she decided to teach the kids music. And the fact is that it truly changed the kids' lives. So, yeah.*

Here, although there are still some minor errors (i.e. "choose" instead of "chose"), Benvolio's speech is "clear and easy to follow" and "demonstrates an understanding of the topic," earning him a 3 out of 4 on the oral communication rubric.

Whereas Ariel chose not to fully commit to performances wherein she physically performed on camera, Benvolio was committed to giving personal, physical performances with gestures and mannerisms related to the character(s). For example, in his ‘Anne Frank Video Diary’ video, Benvolio delivers the line, “Look Peter! The sky!” while looking up and pointing out the window. There is also an unmistakable emotionality to his performance here, with his voice conveying a whispered intensity. In his dramatic performance of his chosen scene from *The Sound of Music*—the one where Maria teaches the Von Trapp children solfege with the song “Do Re Mi”—Benvolio both acts and sings, and this added musical element appears to have a strong positive effect on his fluency and pronunciation: while singing, his words are clear and easy to understand, more closely resembling speech patterns of native speakers. In his final reflection video, Benvolio communicates:

*I feel happy when I watch the movie and then act it out. I think drama can help us to learn to speak English by listening to it and practice it and then performing it. My English-speaking confidence increased as a result of doing these activities.*

With Benvolio, the theatre arts integration intervention appears to have worked as hypothesized, according to each facet of the system of assessments.

### ***Learner Profile for Cordelia (Archetype #1: Growth)***

Cordelia made, by far, the most growth in the treatment group according to the system of assessments. Initially, Cordelia ranked in the bottom third of the cohort, rising to the top half by the end of the intervention. According to WIDA, her English-speaking proficiency improved by 21 scale points (again, a very strong performance on par with typical year-long growth). Likewise, her performance on the Crestwood interviews showed a *dramatic* (no pun intended) increase of 226 points from the pre-interview to the post-interview. With increased confidence, Cordelia was able to speak more than 100 additional distinct words in the course

of the second 10-minute interview. For Cordelia, the sharp rise in vocabulary and fluency was accompanied by an increase in speech errors as a percentage of total words spoken, leading to a decline in her Crestwood disfluency score even as her overall score increased considerably. It appears that as she spoke much more freely and in greater detail in her second interview, she also collected more stutters, filler words, and repetitions. (Committing fewer speech errors in the course of an interview yields a higher disfluency score according to Crestwood's scoring system.) Important to note is that these so-called disfluencies, while noticeable, were not severe in the sense that they prevented one from being able to understand/ comprehend her spoken English; rather, this finding is supportive of the idea that second language acquisition is dynamic and non-linear (Hohenberger & Peltzer-Karpf, 2009). Emerging foreign language speakers will naturally make speech errors and mistakes even as they increase their output and comprehensibility. (Moreover, even native speakers engaged in authentic discourse will speak with a certain amount of such "disfluencies," which Crestwood tracks as a percentage of total words spoken in the interview.)

Cordelia's artifact portfolio was, also by far, the strongest in the cohort. Her asynchronous video discussions suggested "in-depth understanding of the topic" and "clear and convincing" lines of reasoning, earning a mix of proficient (3 out of 4) and advanced (4 out of 4) scores on the oral communication rubric. This student clearly had an affinity for theatre arts, and she remained highly engaged throughout the intervention. Her performances were engaging and captivating, showing evidence of high levels of focus, preparation, and character development as well as voice, props, and movement. For Cordelia's dramatic performances, the story is one of good to great: in the beginning of the intervention, her Anne Frank Video Diary, which scored 3 (proficient) out of 4 (exemplary) points, showed evidence of "clear enunciation" and "varied pitch and tone, reflecting some level of expressiveness."

Then, in her *Anne Frank* group scene, Cordelia “found appropriate props and costume to enhance the overall performance,” and indeed has staged her bedroom as Anne’s hidden loft. This artifact clearly meets the highest level (4 out of 4) on the dramatic performance rubric, wherein the “life and world of the character is shown brilliantly through the actor’s performance,” and the “student fluidly delivers her lines while hitting her marks confidently, staying completely immersed in her character throughout the entire performance.” In a highly compelling scene, Cordelia, as Anne, wakes loudly from a nightmare, making her fellow stowaways extremely nervous that they will be heard, and their hiding place discovered. Throughout the scene, Cordelia’s “depth and range of emotion is ongoing,” from high energy terror to a confrontation with Mr. Dussel to a touching interaction with her father, Otto, who slowly and gently manages to calm her down to sleep again. Cordelia’s final performance—in which she sings a duet as two different characters (one male, one female) from the Broadway musical *Rent*—was exemplary in virtually every way. Fully costumed and well-rehearsed, Cordelia was totally convincing as both of her chosen characters. Using video-editing tools, she spliced her two performances into one video—she is, in essence, acting (and singing) with herself. This artifact (along with the rest of her portfolio) represents the zenith of student achievement in terms of the theatre arts intervention, and it is notable that this learner was the most improved of the cohort.

Cordelia’s discussion videos also proved revelatory in terms of her English proficiency and progress. Her first, in response to the play, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, begins with a disclaimer to the viewer:

*I didn’t prepare this video, so it might be a little not smooth. So, if you are watching this video, please don’t send it to anyone others. OK. Let’s begin.*

She then proceeds to speak at length for several minutes, discussing the characters and themes from the drama. Despite her apologetic opening, even this initial discussion video satisfies the oral communication rubric's indicators for proficiency (3 out of 4), being generally comprehensible and easy to follow and drawing on supportive examples from the text. Since she has told the viewer directly that her remarks are not prepared in advance, it is safe to assume that the language being produced in this video is an authentic, real-time sample of her oral communicative competence. In it, Cordelia does "occasionally grope for needed vocabulary" at times, which corresponds exactly with her initial performance on WIDA, according to the WIDA speaking interpretive rubrics. For example, in attempting to communicate her interpretation of the play's theme, she says:

*The story about Anne is not a... which not have a good end.... It's not a happy ending, because they are all killed by the Nazis. So "good triumphs over evil" did not... um... in this story... This is not a story in this... thing. In that time. It's not come true. It didn't come true, so this "truth," or we can call it... the word is "reality?" Yeah. We can call this reality is not a happy ending. So, it's contra...contradi... It contradict the theme, which is "good triumphs over evil."*

Here, evidence of Cordelia's developing English language proficiency can be seen as she attempts to communicate original ideas and grasps for precise vocabulary to convey meaning. Later, in the discussion video for her chosen scene from *Rent*, Cordelia clearly reaches the advanced level (4 out of 4) on the oral communication rubric. Her speech is fluent and error-free, with evidence that she had prepared at least some of her remarks in advance. Preparation and rehearsal were key factors in this learner's ability to communicate effectively, and this was true for the dramatic performances and discussion videos alike.

***Learner Profile for Duncan (Archetype #2: No growth)***

Only two learners did not experience growth on the WIDA speaking assessment, and both declined on their Crestwood interview scores in the post-interview. One of them, however, only declined by 9 points (out of 1800 total points on the Crestwood proficiency metrics), and even improved her disfluency scores in the process. The other, Duncan, declined by 71 points, and was selected as the more fitting representative to profile for this archetype. Duncan was removed from the comparisons of growth data for WIDA because he received the maximum score on the WIDA speaking domain in both the pre- and post- tests. Despite his “zero” growth, according to WIDA this is the student with the highest spoken English proficiency in the entire cohort. Duncan’s performance in this course exemplifies the utility of the system of assessments approach: if we had used WIDA measures alone, it would appear that this learner had nowhere to grow, and that no change occurred from the beginning to the end of the intervention. Actually, according to the Crestwood analytics, this learner experienced a decline in performance from the pre-interview to the post-interview, speaking fewer distinct words overall as well as fewer words per minute. Table 10 summarizes the Crestwood interview performance for Duncan.

Table 10. *Crestwood Analytics for Duncan*

Core Statistics				Progress Over Time		
<b>Triforce performance vs. Peer Group (as of 2020-07-17)</b>				<b>Triforce performance (historical)</b>		
Datapoint Value	CW Score	Percentile	Classification	Datapoint	2020-05-29	2020-07-17
Interview ID	ZH-9826-7134			Interview ID	ZH-8514-2706	ZH-9826-7134
Mastery	1100	53%	Average	Mastery	1171	1100
Vocabulary (V)	497	73%	Above Average	Vocabulary (V)	555	497
Fluency (F)	471	48%	Average	Fluency (F)	512	471
Disfluency (D)	132	41%	Average	Disfluency (D)	104	132

Although Duncan was able to achieve a “perfect” score on the WIDA speaking test, the Crestwood interview analytics reveal that this learner still has quite a bit of room for growth.

And, although he was the top performing student (in the treatment group) on the initial Crestwood interview, he was not the top performer in the final interview, having been surpassed by Ariel and tied by Benvolio.

An examination of Duncan's artifact portfolio shows an overall lack of preparation and effort with regard to his videos. Most of his performance artifacts fall in the range of 1 or 2 out of a possible 4 points, showing evidence that "the student is doing little more than reading from the book" and "makes little to no attempt at staying in any type of character." In his Anne Frank Video Diary video, Duncan simply reads the text aloud from a certain part of the play. He "never truly immerses enough into his character to produce any kind of believability" and "lacks any fluidity in movement and delivery of lines," instead choosing to deliver his performance like this:

*And Mr. Frank said, "She'd never telephone us." And Mr. Dussel said, "Mr. Frank, answer that. I beg you, answer it." And Mr. Frank said, "No." And Mr. Van Daan said, "Just pick it up and listen."*

This student is reading the parts—and telling the audience who is speaking which line—but he is not really *acting*. There is no suspension of disbelief, no effort made in the way of props or costumes or even facial expressions. The scene described above is a highly climactic and intense scene, fraught with the tension of a constantly ringing telephone that Mr. Frank dares not answer. None of this comes across in the student's performance, although he was able to make it through his read-aloud fluently with minimal issues with comprehensibility.

Duncan's final student choice performance video, done as a movie dub, was somewhat awkward and disjointed—the voice (audio component) didn't always match up with the characters or the captions (video component). This was especially disconcerting considering that his chosen "monologue" or "scene" was the cinematic trailer for *Star Wars*

*VII: The Force Awakens* and is essentially a montage of quick clips from many different scenes with many different characters. Whereas Cordelia successfully played the part of more than one distinct character in her scene (a couple's duet), adopting different personality affects and voices and dressing in distinct costumes complete with makeup and fake facial hair, Duncan did *not* achieve a proficient level on his *Star Wars* trailer according to the dramatic performance rubric. Rather than taking this theatre arts intervention as a learning opportunity (replete with character development, rehearsal, etc.), this learner appeared to record his videos on the first take, reading the scripted lines for the first time as he was "performing" the scenes. In contrast to Escalus (see below), Duncan performed much better on the WIDA and Crestwood assessments—even considering the decline in the post-interview—than on his video artifacts.

Duncan's discussion videos were somewhat better, indicating that he does indeed have a rather strong grasp of spoken English; these fall in the range of 2 or 3 out of a possible 4 points. However, just as in his performances where he was "doing little more than reading from the book," in his discussion videos Duncan appears to be reading directly from online sources (of what I can only assume are summaries of the films) rather than communicating original ideas. There is no indication of growth or improvement from the beginning of the intervention to the end, which corresponds with his results on WIDA and Crestwood measures. In Duncan, we see a student who was at the top of the class (in terms of English-speaking proficiency) at the outset of the intervention but was no longer the top performing student at the conclusion, having been overtaken by some of his peers. That he did not experience the same kind of progress that his peers did is perhaps unsurprising, considering his low effort and engagement in the intervention itself.

### ***Learner Profile for Escalus (Archetype #3: Mixed results)***

Escalus was among the lowest-level EFL learners in his group based upon the initial assessments, scoring at the beginner level in spoken English. According to his WIDA tests, Escalus made *significant* progress over the course of the intervention, increasing his speaking domain scores by 30 scale points, exceeding typical expectations for even a whole year's growth. At the same time, his Crestwood interview overall score declined, albeit slightly. A closer examination of his Crestwood interview analytics reveals that Escalus, while scoring 18 points lower on vocabulary and 17 points lower on fluency, actually increased his disfluency score by 12 points; a gain on his Crestwood disfluency score indicates that on his post-interview he demonstrated some modest improvement in his ability to avoid stutters, filler words (such as "umm"), and repetitions. Therefore, it is possible that Escalus' slightly lower overall performance on the Crestwood post-interview *nevertheless* represents a kind of progress in the sense that it was slightly more comprehensible, with fewer speech errors (as measured by Crestwood). Though an overall decline, none of his Crestwood metrics varied by more than 18 points, which could also indicate that this learner simply didn't change much in his spoken English proficiency over the course of the intervention in terms of his ability to communicate with a native speaker in an open-ended interview. The WIDA speaking test is a different type of assessment and, though a valid and reliable measure of English-as-a-foreign-language proficiency, contains only 10 speaking tasks. In his initial WIDA test, Escalus met expectations for 5 out of 10 of these tasks; in his post-test, he met expectation for 7 out of 10. It could be that Escalus' improvement on the WIDA speaking test was due in part to WIDA's inclusion of scripted prompts and visual cues and graphics as well as his familiarity with the questions, since the pre- and post- tests were identical. An examination of Escalus' artifact

portfolio sheds light onto his spoken English proficiency and his progress over the course of the intervention.

In an early performance, Escalus reads aloud a monologue from *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I should note that his chosen piece is quite long, more than 4 minutes, and that memorizing the whole thing and performing it in character would be a tall order even for an experienced actor. As mentioned before, Escalus struggles with spoken English, and although he did not reach the proficient level (3 out of 4 point on the dramatic performance rubric) for this video, it did reveal some effort in the delivery, particularly as he struggled and persevered through long passages in the script. Later, in his *Anne Frank* group scene, Escalus is clearly acting in character, delivering at least some of the lines from memory and using props and different camera angles. Due to COVID-19, all participation was fully online from home, and so these group scenes required a little creativity on the part of the students. For example, in his group scene, Escalus delivers the line, “A little coffee?” while “passing” a coffee mug off screen, and his scene partner appears to “receive” the mug from him. On this performance, Escalus did achieve proficiency (3 out of 4 points) according to the dramatic performance rubric. While in scene with his group, he “delivers lines and hits marks well and with few errors,” while making “appropriate use of body movement and facial expression to enhance character.”

At the end of the intervention, Escalus submitted his final performance artifact, a video wherein he spliced together segments from the film *Cast Away* with his own homemade segments to create a believable and sustainable dramatic scene. Like Cordelia, Escalus chose to play both characters in his scene and succeeded, with distinguishable costumes, voices, and mannerisms. In his discussion video analyzing this scene, Escalus says:

*The clip I chose is Chuck's last conversation with his girlfriend, Kelly, in the car at the airport, before the plane crash. This part describes the process of exchanging Christmas gifts between them and the conversation between them. I used the color and location of my clothes to distinguish the two people. The red shirt indicates that I am playing Chuck, while the blue T-shirt is for his girlfriend, Kelly.*

The objective of this discussion video was to deconstruct the scene and his interpretation of it vis a vis his performance video, and here Escalus meets the proficient level (3 out of 4) according to the oral communication rubric, using “appropriate language and style that is suited to the purpose, audience, and task.” It is clear from his discussion video that he has watched the film and that he knows and understands the characters and events (i.e. that this particular scene is that last meeting of these two people before the plane crash), indicating “a direct and complete response to questions, demonstrating an adequate command of the facts and understanding of the topic.” It appears that Escalus has written out parts of his response and is reading his remarks into the camera, which can be inferred from his eye movement as well as phonetic “sounding out” of complex or unfamiliar words. That he did so is not a detraction; while I did ask learners not to merely read from something that they found online, writing out notes or a script to assist with these oral presentations was encouraged. For Escalus, the ability to prepare and rehearse his words enabled him to have a stronger performance on his video artifacts than on either of the other two real-time assessments.

As for Escalus' performance video, this well-prepared artifact clearly meets the level of exemplary (4 out of 4) in many areas on the dramatic performance rubric, including his ability to “consistently use his voice expressively and articulately,” which is notable as this is an area in which this student is known to struggle, according to other assessments. In other words, the learner spoke more fluently and more closely resembled native speakers while

performing in character than he did on either the WIDA speaking tasks or the real-world interviews. It is evident in the video that Escalus’ “lines are delivered flawlessly from memory” and that he “obviously spent a significant amount of time on the project and came to class ready and prepared.” In a number of students’ videos (including Escalus’ earlier ones), the actor can be seen simply reading text from the screen into the camera on their computer—that is not the case for Escalus’ *Cast Away* video. He “found appropriate props and costume to enhance the overall performance,” including a gift-wrapped package (complete with the gift inside), which he “receives” from off-screen in a manner very similar to the “coffee mug” example described above in his *Anne Frank* group scene. Escalus set up the camera in such a way as to allow him, in the driver’s seat of a car as Chuck, to have a conversation with himself, as Kelly, in the passenger seat. Finally, it must be said that Escalus’ final performance “shows phenomenal use of movement and facial expressions to enhance character.” He put in noticeable effort with regard to character and believability, and his large, expressive mannerisms and reactions “always reflect purpose” and contributed to a strong performance.

## **Summary**

This chapter communicated the results of the multiple assessments used in this study. First, the results of the WIDA pre- and post- test showed significant progress overall and specifically in the domain of speaking, with 12 out of 14 participants in the integrated theatre arts group experiencing measurable growth. Next, analytic data from the Crestwood pre- and post- interviews was examined to determine what impact, if any, was made from the beginning to the end of the intervention according to that assessment. Though the results are not as decisive as the WIDA data, the majority of the students in the treatment group (8 out of 14) experienced an increase in their spoken English proficiency according to Crestwood’s

interview analytics. Triangulation of these two data sources yielded three archetypes: cases in which a student progressed according to both assessments (Archetype #1: Growth), cases in which a student made no growth on the WIDA speaking test and declined according to Crestwood measures (Archetype #2: No growth), and cases in which a student progressed according to WIDA speaking but declined according to Crestwood measures (Archetype #3: Mixed results). These archetypes were helpful in selecting five representative participants from the treatment group for the final process of triangulation: incorporating analyses of the students' portfolios of performance assessments from the theatre arts intervention.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions

### Discussion of the Case

This case study was designed and conducted to investigate the potential impact of theatre arts integration on Chinese high school students learning English as a foreign language. Three modes of data collection were utilized in a mixed-methods system of assessments: the WIDA MODEL English-as-a-foreign-language test, Crestwood interview analytics, and an evaluation of learners' competency-based artifact portfolios. A treatment group with 14 participants (ELA-1A) underwent a 6-week theatre arts integration intervention in their Introductory English class; a comparison group of 13 demographically identical participants was selected from another Introductory English course (ELA-1B) at the same school site, a competency-based high school in China. Other than the fact that the two courses were taught by different instructors (with ELA-1A using theatre arts integration and ELA-1B using non-arts-integrated approaches), the selection differences between the two groups were minimal, and both classes were conducted accordance with competency-based educational principles and in similar online environments. Initial WIDA test results yielded identical means—385 out of a possible 600 overall (composite) scale points—for the two classes, indicating that both groups of participants began the study at the same level of English.

Based on the findings from the system of assessments used in this case study, the researcher concludes that theatre arts integration was highly effective in enhancing learning outcomes for Chinese students studying English as a foreign language. Comparing the results of the treatment group with the results of the comparison (non-arts) group, it appears that the two groups progressed similarly according to both WIDA and Crestwood measures, indicating that theatre arts integration was *as effective or more effective* than other

competency-based approaches at the school site. By this, I do not mean that both groups performed *normally*, according to typical or expected progress benchmarks; analysis of multiple data sources indicated that the treatment group and the comparison group both, independently, made outstanding measurable progress over the same timeline with regard to the following:

- Learners' overall (composite: reading/writing/speaking/listening) English level according to the WIDA MODEL test
- Learners' speaking proficiency level according to the WIDA MODEL test
- Learners' spoken English proficiency in an open-ended interview with native speakers according to Crestwood interview analytics.

Whereas much of the literature surrounding arts integration points to it having the potential to be more effective than a traditional (test-centric) approach, this case study suggests that, in a competency-based learning environment, theatre arts integration is a suitable and effective pedagogical approach that is, at a minimum, on par with other best practices in competency-based teaching. Furthermore, the fact that the treatment group outperformed the comparison group in overall growth on the Crestwood spoken English interviews with native speakers suggests that arts integration was more effective in promoting transfer of learning from activities in the class to real-world situations. It should be noted that the treatment group experienced more *consistent* results, having a lower standard deviation for growth in performance according to each analysis, which may suggest that theatre arts integration is not only a viable strategy but also a reliable one.

Arts integration can be conceived as a comparable and even a preferable option for educators in a competency-based environment, particularly when a particular art form or forms is/are thoughtfully—elegantly—woven together with academic learning objectives.

The integrated theatre arts program curriculum sought to achieve “elegant integration” by carefully pairing Common Core standards for speaking and listening with National Core Arts standards for theatre in a unit of study designed to provide learners with opportunities to develop and to demonstrate their English-speaking abilities. Wiggins (2005) calls for outcome-based educators to “seek to expand the normal repertoire” of classroom instruction and assessment, and “not to choose this or that tactic to the exclusion of others” (p. 10). Therefore, rather than seeking universal adoption, I want to clarify that the claim *arts integration has the potential to enhance learning* is about adding and including one or more art forms, creating new possibilities for learning to occur in and through the arts. For example, the theatre arts integration intervention in this study provided learners with opportunities to prepare and present performances (artifacts) of their learning in addition to the test and interview measures; the manner of assessment itself was supportive of students’ learning—in this case with regard to spoken English proficiency and communicative competence. Perhaps part of what makes arts integration an effective mode of instruction is simply that it provides opportunities for engaging, interactive, competency-based teaching and learning to occur.

The addition of arts-based instruction and performance assessments into the curriculum afforded students experiential learning experiences that were supportive of deeper learning, learning for transfer. Participants’ video artifacts—particularly the polished, summative projects—represent the kind of evidence of learning that students at competency-based schools in the Mastery Transcript Consortium (MTC) school network will include on their college application transcripts (see Appendix D). Therefore, this research contributes to the school site’s emerging MTC assessment structure, with students’ having produced

artifacts as evidence of their abilities in multiple areas: academic (English language arts), artistic (theatre arts), and competency-based (effective communication).

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

A ceiling effect created a limitation for one student who scored a perfect score on the WIDA speaking test before and after the intervention, impeding the researcher's ability to measure his development. A delimitation of the study is that it constrains its focus to the domain of communicative competence for English language learners; the system of assessments is focused on participants' development in this domain and—other than the WIDA overall (composite) score—leaves aside questions related to reading, writing, listening, and other academic standards. Further research is needed to establish other potential impacts of theatre arts integration with Chinese ELLs. Another limitation of the study is generalization. The findings of this case study may or may not apply to EFL learners in other settings, such as Spanish-speaking students learning English in a U.S. high school; therefore, further research is needed to determine if the impacts described in this case study, which occurs in extant EFL classrooms at a competency-based high school in China, have applications in other English language classrooms and contexts. Finally, a major limitation of the study is time. With only 6 weeks of instruction, it is not possible to see the kind of mastery one associates with achieving fluency in a foreign language—a process which takes years. Instead, multiple measures are used to analyze growth over time between comparison groups and to establish performance profiles for individual learners.

The Deeper Learning Network, in addition to providing a working model of 21<sup>st</sup> century competencies, offers useful guidelines for designing instruction for deeper learning:

1. Pick compelling subjects and help students frame big but specific questions;

2. Set rigorous goals and outline high quality products that will be produced and judged with standards-based rubrics;
3. Make the projects long enough to go in depth and build in milestones to keep teams on track;
4. Ask students to publish their work and create venues for presentations of learning to the school community. (Vander Ark & Schneider, 2014, p. 13).

Due to mitigating circumstances related to online instruction and reduced class time due to COVID-19, all of these guidelines could not be fully realized in this study. This study's investigation into whether or to what extent theatre arts integration can provide opportunities for deeper learning is couched in practical limitations such as the inability of any of the students and teachers to meet face-to-face or to exhibit any live theatrical performances. The researcher contends that high quality theatre arts integration was *possible* via exclusively online instruction but concedes that this mode, perhaps, limited the full force of the intervention. Note: There was at least one possible benefit of doing theatre arts in the online video format; students had the opportunity to record many takes of a scene (i.e. take one, take two, takes three...) in a self-reflective process of trying to polish and perfect their performances. Had we done these scenes live in class, that may have proven to be a more challenging or even more anxiety-producing performance assessment for some learners. Being in the security of their own home environment afforded learners a great deal of control over what was presented in their videos, which created a safe and audience-free zone for them to work on their scenes until they felt comfortable sharing them with the class.

### **RQ1: Impact according to WIDA MODEL English-as-a-foreign-language test**

Theatre arts integration appeared to have a significant positive impact on learners in the treatment group (ELA-1A) according to WIDA measures, with average growth of 12.77

overall (composite) scale points and 24.15 speaking domain scale points over the course of the intervention. According to WIDA, typical growth for high school ELLs is 10 to 25 points annually (Cook, 2009). The comparison group (ELA-1B) also made significant progress over the 6-week period, averaging gains of 11.85 overall (composite) scale points and a remarkable 62.23 speaking domain scale points. The comparison group had two outliers who jumped more than 100 scale points on the speaking domain, accounting for the high mean and a high standard deviation of 30.99. The strong performance by the comparison group suggests that more research is needed to determine the range and effectiveness of other competency-based pedagogies (e.g. portfolios, performance assessments, and blended learning with adaptive online programs) that are not arts-integrated.

Overall, the two groups performed very similarly on the WIDA assessment, and the findings suggest that theatre arts integration was highly effective in enhancing learning outcomes for the participants—and that it was *as effective* as other competency-based pedagogies at the school site. Learners in the theatre arts group were able to experience growth on this standardized assessment, suggesting a transfer of learning from the arts-based curriculum to academic contexts. This finding concurs with the conclusions of Catterall, Chapleau, and Iwanaga (1999) that experience in theatre arts contributes to language learning while also addressing a gap in the research:

Evidence for specific impacts of theatre and drama claimed by these and other scholars tends to be weak. ...What we tend most to benefit from is the accumulation of case studies and the informed observations of senior scholars who have been attached to... drama in education and who have come to their own understanding through the gradual acquisition of research and professional knowledge. (p. 16)

Furthermore, although the researchers posited that “theatre is a language-rich environment and actively engages students with issues of language,” their study “[did] not contain a measure of spoken language skills” (Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999, p. 17). The focus on spoken English in my own theatre arts integration study contributes to reducing this gap; at the same time, the results of the WIDA overall (composite) scores lend further support to claims that theatre arts integration has the potential to enhance learning outcomes in the other domains (reading, writing, and listening).

### **RQ2: Impact according to Crestwood interview analytics**

The Crestwood interviews were a useful component in the system of assessments in this study. As a quantitative measure of an interviewee’s spoken English proficiency, the researcher contends that this technology-enabled tool was aptly chosen for this research, and that it yielded fair and accurate results. The majority of students in both groups experienced progress over the 6-week period, with the treatment group ( $M = 33$ ) slightly outperforming the comparison group ( $M = 25.62$ ) in overall growth according to Crestwood’s scoring system. At the same time, more than a quarter of the participants experienced a decline from the pre-interview to the post-interview; therefore, two-tailed, paired t-tests revealed that neither group met the criteria for statistically significant growth. (Both t-tests yielded  $p$  values greater than .05.) These mixed results indicate that some learners performed differently on an open-ended interview with a native speaker (trained Crestwood interviewer) than they did on the WIDA MODEL online test. At the same time, the Crestwood data confirms the story told by the WIDA scores—that both groups performed similarly over the course of the intervention. Four learners in the treatment group demonstrated gains in vocabulary and fluency scores alongside a decline in disfluency scores. Three others demonstrated an increase in disfluency scores alongside a decline in vocabulary and fluency

scores. For example, in the case of Escalus, it appears that he spoke a bit more slowly and carefully in the second interview, perhaps consciously trying not to make mistakes. By contrast, Cordelia made noticeably *more* disfluency errors as she jumped up in total number of words spoken and words spoken per minute. This connects with the research of Hohenberger and Peltzer-Karpf (2009), which affirms that second language acquisition is a dynamic and non-linear process; foreign language learners follow different learning trajectories along diverse developmental paths. The researcher contends that the results of the Crestwood assessment show a modest yet measurable indication of growth in spoken English proficiency, and that more time (an intervention of much more than 6 weeks) and more participants are needed to see long-term trends.

Apart from whole group analysis, examining individual learners' Crestwood data indicated that the learners who were highly engaged and achieved the most growth in the theatre arts intervention made the most progress on their Crestwood overall spoken English proficiency scores from the pre-interview to the post-interview. For Ariel, Benvolio, and Cordelia, learning in the theatre arts curriculum (as described in the learner profiles above) appeared to translate into improved ability to speak the language with improved command and confidence in a real-world situation that required an extended interaction with a native speaker. This indication of *transfer of learning* supports the researchers claim that theatre arts integration has the potential to foster deeper learning in the English-as-a-foreign-language classroom.

### **Comparison of WIDA and Crestwood Measures**

The comparison group (ELA-1B) was assessed using the WIDA and Crestwood measures alongside the treatment group (ELA-1A) to determine if theatre arts integration was more or less effective than other instructional approaches at the school site; these quantitative

comparisons yielded three archetypes: growth, no growth, and mixed results. The majority of the students (more than 60%) belong to the growth archetype, and only 2 students did not experience growth according to both quantitative assessments; a few students in each group increased according to WIDA but declined according to Crestwood. Based on these archetypes, five participants from the treatment group were selected as representative of the cohort, and profiles of their learning were established using all three forms of assessment. These profiles incorporate qualitative evaluations of participants' competency-based artifact portfolios, which contain the video performance assessments from the theatre arts intervention, providing further insights into their performance and progress.

Several participants experienced a decline on their Crestwood second interview performance, while none experienced a decline on their WIDA speaking test; this can be attributed to the different modes of these two assessments. The WIDA speaking tasks, of which there are exactly 10, were identical in the pre- and post- tests and provide learners with pictures, text, and scripted guidance from the test administrator. Students clearly recognized all of the speaking tasks in the post-test, and 100% of the participants were able to score *as well or better* on the post-test than they did in the pre-test. The Crestwood semi-structured interview protocol is much more open-ended, requiring students to speak in depth and at length on topics of interest; the interviewer elicits and prompts for elaboration and detail as novel topics arise. As more authentic representation of students' communicative competence in a real-world context, the Crestwood interview scores reflect the non-linear nature of second language acquisition (Hohenberger & Peltzer-Karpf, 2009). Just like in real life, individuals will have good and bad days, strong and weak performances, for a variety of reasons. One student in the comparison group, upon examination of his first interview, responded to the interviewer's first question ("How are you feeling today?") with an

explanation of how he had been up very late the night before and had not gotten much sleep—that he was not feeling at his best. Thus, his remarkable “growth” from the first interview to the second might best be characterized as that student *under-performing* in the first interview and then performing normally in the second. Additionally, while WIDA provides a singular proficiency score for speaking, Crestwood analyzes different aspects of spoken English including vocabulary, fluency, and disfluency. Thus, it is possible for students to experience improvements in some areas and declines in other areas from one interview to the next. For example, a number of participants in this study experienced a decline in their ability to minimize disfluency (stutters, filler words, repetitions, etc.) while at the same time experiencing a significant increase in their range and sophistication of vocabulary as well as their fluency (words per minute). These students are objectively speaking more words in their second interview and making more attempts at communication, which appears to correspond with an uptick in disfluencies, at least at this stage of their language acquisition. Crestwood measures, overall, corresponded with WIDA measures in the sense that all participants tested right in the middle range—with group means approximately 3.1 out of 6 on WIDA and approximately 950 out of 1800 on Crestwood—and that most participants experienced growth in their oral English proficiency. More research is needed using Crestwood’s quantitative spoken English assessment system to determine long-term trends of theatre arts integration with specific aspects of language acquisition, such as the ability to speak more fluently and to minimize speech errors.

### **RQ3: Impact according to artifact portfolios**

Evaluation of learners’ artifact portfolios suggested that theatre arts integration had a positive impact on their spoken English proficiency and communicative competence, and learners’ performance vis a vis their video artifacts strongly correlated with their performance

on the quantitative assessments. The student who showed the highest level of engagement and achievement in the theatre arts program experienced the most significant growth according to test and interview measures; a student with low levels of engagement and achievement on the theatre arts activities did not experience growth.

Participants also had the opportunity to create asynchronous discussion videos, engaging in open-ended speaking tasks that included analyses of the *The Diary of Anne Frank* (the play), explanations of their performances, and a final reflection on their learning in the integrated theatre arts program. These videos, ranging in length from 3 to 7 minutes, represent authentic performance assessments of learners' oral communication skills, and the evaluation provides an additional layer to analyses of student learning beyond what can be reached by scores alone. The videos in which learners explain and give context to their chosen scene provide a unique window into their process and indeed their performance in the scene, as one learner, in her asynchronous discussion for *The Sound of Music*, illuminates:

*The segment that I chose to perform is... a dialogue between Maria and the Captain after Maria took the kids for a day of crazy fun in their play clothes. From the dialogue, we can see that Captain considers the behavior to be very farcical, unruly, and out of their character should be (sic). It also shows that the Captain is not very good at expressing love and care to his kids. But the Captain's mood suddenly changed a little after he hears the children singing....*

Through this performance assessment, the student was able to demonstrate mastery of Common core standards (students adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate), National Core Art standards for theatre (students select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation), and the deeper learning competency of effective communication (students communicate complex

concepts to others in... oral presentations). These types of performance assessments are both learning experiences in and of themselves as well as measures of a student's ability to speak English to communicate effectively.

In the final video, learners were asked directly to reflect on their learning in the integrated theatre arts program. One learner reported: *I really enjoy the method of performing our own interested drama show.* Another stated: *It can let us practice our speaking.* These responses echo Gill (2016), who claimed that extended speech production emerges from meaningful, low-anxiety opportunities to generate output such as those provided by classroom drama activities. Another student had a more revelatory response:

*I think the combination of drama and acting is my favorite way to practice speaking.*

*First, I like drama, and also like speaking. So, I really feel fun during this project. But there was truly a big challenge with acting and communication online...*

This “truly big challenge” speaks to the main limitation of this study—namely, that the fully online environment necessitated by COVID-19 represented a meaningful obstacle to realizing the full potential of the intervention. At the same time, it is clear that some aspects of the theatre arts integration made a positive impact on the learner, who claimed it was her “favorite” way to practice speaking English, and that she had “fun during this project.” One of the discussion prompts for this assignment asked students if they felt their English-speaking confidence had improved as a result of doing theatre activities; many students responded in the affirmative, but one response in particular attempted to explain why:

*In drama, we can learn the tone and state of the characters, which I think gives us confidence.*

When this learner says, “In drama, we can learn the tone and state of the characters,” she is describing a process of learning to adopt the speech patterns of native speakers. Experiential

learning through drama created a situation in which learners experience, study, memorize, and emulate native speakers in the form of compelling characters from films chosen by the students. For most learners, this led to improved speaking confidence. Some of the learners in this case more closely resembled native speakers in terms of their pronunciation when acting in character than when speaking normally in their discussions, further indicating that theatre arts had a positive impact on their ability to use English effectively. For example, Escalus spoke with a more natural rhythm and pace and with more comprehensible pronunciation in his dramatic performances than in his discussion videos, which are much less expressive and did not always reach proficiency, supporting Heath's claim that "role playing moves language learners beyond their usual performance in ordinary classroom presentations" (1993, p. 177).

The dramatic performances and asynchronous discussion videos provided evidence of learners' communicative competence. The researcher contends that the theatre arts-based processes of preparing, rehearsing, and performing through these performance assessments provided learners with useful and effective practice with spoken output in English that contributed to their enhanced proficiency. Throughout the intervention, students engaged with learning objectives aligned with Common Core standards (CCSS) for speaking and listening (see Appendix B). According to the National Research Council (2012), "The CCSS-ELA offer a policy framework that is highly supportive of deeper learning" as well as interdisciplinary instruction (learning across the curriculum). And although the NRC (2012) does mention oral communication in their research, it is only in passing, with a much heavier emphasis on reading and writing skills:

The domain of cognitive 21st century skills, developed through deeper learning, is well represented in the CCSS-ELA. What is missing, both from the new CCSS and

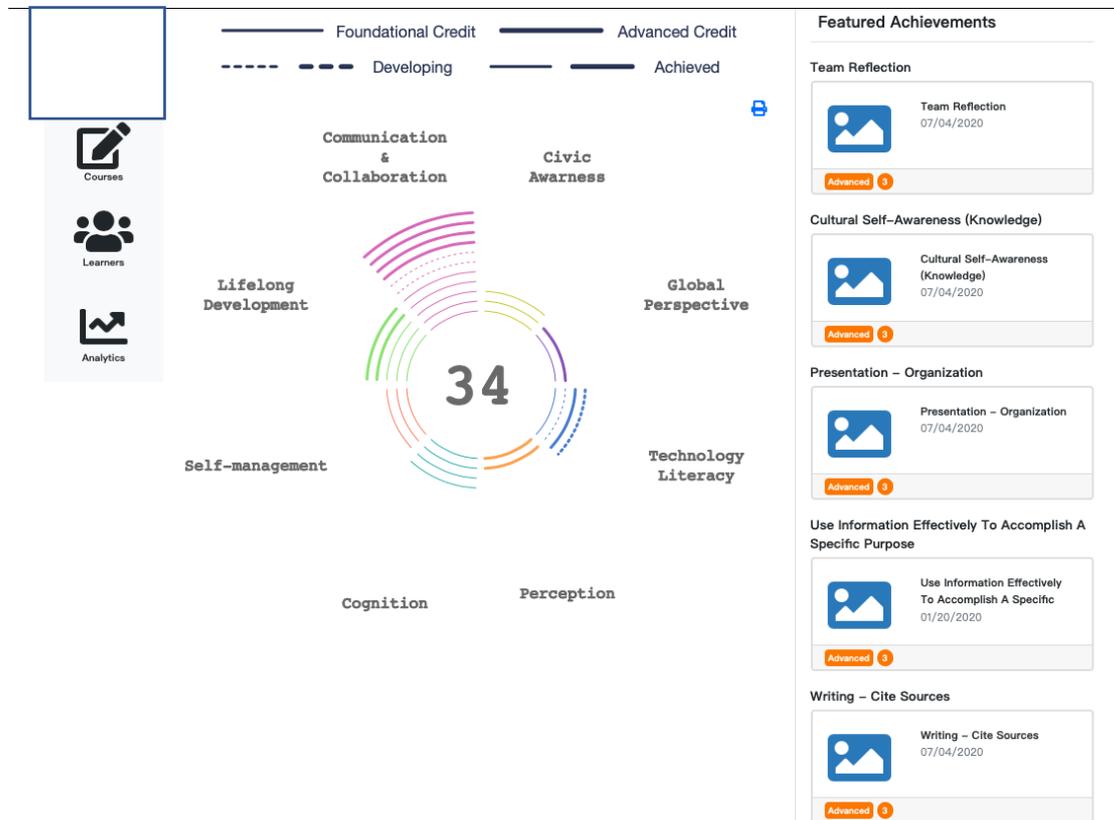
from the larger discussion of goals for reading and writing instruction... is any serious consideration of the intrapersonal and interpersonal domains.

Therefore, this case study contributes to the ongoing work of investigating the connection between academic standards in English language arts and deeper learning in the interpersonal competency of effective communication.

Finally, a major conclusion of this study is that arts-based performance assessments—in addition to *supporting* deeper learning—can serve as meaningful artifacts of students' mastery of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills and competencies, across the curriculum. Such artifacts are an essential feature of the Mastery Transcript Consortium network in terms of assessment, credit verification, graduation, and college admissions. The MTC high school transcript that is sent to colleges and universities is an interactive digital document, and samples (image only) provided by MTC are attached in Appendix D. At the school site for this study, students accumulate artifacts and credits throughout their high school career, periodically updating their MTC dashboard with “featured achievements.” Figure 4 is a sample (image only) of one student's burgeoning MTC dashboard; it is, at this stage, only a model and does not represent an actual participant. Each school in the MTC network has their own customized set of competencies with a variety of different terms, taxonomies, and emphases, in keeping with MTC guidelines. Students in the integrated theatre arts program in this study had the opportunity to develop tangible evidence of their learning through their theatrical video projects; they now have high quality artifacts (verified by their teacher) which they can choose to use as “featured achievements” on their school MTC dashboard and later on the MTC transcript that they send to colleges. The colorful wheel represents high school credits, with the colors representing the different areas of a particular school's competency model. On the right, a curated set of artifacts which represent mastery of corresponding

competencies in a school’s credit verification system, represented by the MTC dashboard below (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. *Sample Student MTC Dashboard (image only)*



Students in the comparison group likewise developed artifacts of learning; however, artifacts from the integrated group reflected the interdisciplinarity of the theatre arts intervention, allowing learners to demonstrate proficiency not only in academic areas but in artistic areas as well. The MTC dashboard at the school site contains academic credits, credits in the arts, and credits related to 21<sup>st</sup> skills and competencies; through a portfolio of performance assessments, learners in the integrated theatre arts program were provided with opportunities to develop as well as to demonstrate their skills and abilities in all three credit areas.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

The researcher recommends further research in a number of areas based on the study's findings. First, a follow-up study with the participants from the cohort (or other graduates of the school) when they are in English-speaking universities overseas. Student perceptions could be investigated to determine if theatre arts integrated English or their competency-based high school experience more generally adequately prepared them for success in an English-speaking environment. Another logical proposal is to repeat this study or conduct a similar study with a different comparison group—one from a traditional school model. Though selection differences will be more difficult to manage, the contrast between learning outcomes in competency-based settings and traditional settings is one the researcher contends is ripe for investigation. Truthfully—and based on the comments of students in their final reflections—it merits suggestion that the study could be repeated in person as opposed to purely online. Without the limitations of COVID, it is possible and even likely that the intervention would provide additional insights into the value and possible benefits of integrating theatre arts into the EFL curriculum, providing students with more opportunities for interaction with each other and with audiences. Other competencies (e.g. collaboration, self-direction) could be investigated in addition to communication.

For both groups ( $n = 27$ ), the results of the initial Crestwood interviews corresponded exactly with the participants' initial WIDA assessment, with mean Crestwood speaking proficiency scores of 945 out of a possible 1800 points and mean WIDA speaking proficiency levels of 3.1 out of 6.0. This speaks to the accuracy and reliability of Crestwood's analytics and approach. That being said, the researcher recommends that a reliability/validity study be conducted for the Crestwood instrument, which represents a new concept in the field of spoken English assessment. Crestwood markets their interview analytics as “real-world

measures of spoken English proficiency,” and quantitative measurements of learners’ spoken English proficiency periodically over time (ideally a longitudinal study) will allow for sophisticated analyses related to second language acquisition. Crestwood metrics could be used to establish a sort of “fluency curve” that can bring new understandings to the dynamic and non-linear nature of language learning. Furthermore, the real-world, open-ended style of the interview and the nature of the “performance analytics” establishes Crestwood as quantitative performance assessment—highly unusual in a field dominated by interpretive rubrics and descriptive indicators. The use of Crestwood in this study invites further research into how technology can drive progress in the field of EFL assessment.

Based on the success of ELA-1B, the researcher calls for more studies examining competency-based pedagogies. That the non-arts group also experienced statistically significant growth (according to WIDA measures) suggests that further research should be conducted to investigate the effectiveness of other competency-based instructional approaches that are not necessarily related to arts integration. For example, in the comparison group (ELA-1B), learners prepared for an academic-style oral presentation which, like the theatre arts performances, provided with opportunities to prepare, rehearse, and present a speech (akin to a TED talk) to an online audience; they also compiled written artifacts including a mock business plan related to a long-term project. Thus, it appears that competency-based approaches such as performance assessment and project-based learning had a positive impact even when the arts were not present.

## **Conclusion**

Leaders in the competency-based education (CBE) movement claim that a system of assessments is required to be able to capture both traditional academic and competency-based learning objectives (Conley & Darling Hammond, 2013). By utilizing a strategic collection of

measures via an assessment *system*, teachers can get a better and more comprehensive picture of what learners know and are able to do. Since learners' ability to speak English effectively cannot be assessed via a multiple-choice test—and since most high school English-as-a-foreign-language instruction in China tends to focus heavily on the reading and writing skills related to high stakes tests—spoken English proficiency was selected as a target area representing a need in the field. Oral communication (in English) has been presented in this study as essential 21<sup>st</sup> century competence—particularly for EFL learners with overseas college-and-career aspirations, or indeed for a great many college and career paths in their home country which demand effective communication with foreigners and international clients and partners from all over the world who use English as a global lingua franca (Bolton, Kingsley & Graddol, 2012; Duan & Yang, 2016; Gill, 2016; Yeung, 2017; Zhang, 2017; Zhou, Bauer, & Erb, 2004). This mixed-methods case study was able to provide a clear and comprehensive picture of learners' progress in spoken English proficiency over a 6-week period using a system of assessments that included standardized speaking tasks, analytics based on interviews with native speakers, and portfolios of video artifacts. The assessment system utilized in this study can serve as a model for other educators in competency-based school settings and more generally in the field of foreign language instruction. Furthermore, some of the practices adopted for online-only instruction may yet prove beneficial in on-campus settings, such as using FlipGrid videos as a platform for students to upload their performances assessments. Rather than putting them on the spot to perform in front of the class, learners could watch and celebrate one another's performance videos together in class but be able to work on them in their own way outside of class. Online platforms also open the possibility for a large and global audience, and future studies could explore concepts of performing and experiencing performances as an audience through an online environment.

Through an integrated theatre arts program, learners achieved academic and artistic learning goals while developing the deeper learning competency of effective communication, engaging in quantitative and qualitative assessments which demonstrate “effective transfer of learning in authentic and worthy performance” (Wiggins, 2005, p. 78). Learning in and through the arts created opportunities for deeper learning in this study, and the instructional design as well as the approach to assessment can serve as model to educators in the competency-based movement. The researcher concludes that theatre arts integration had a positive impact on student learning, increasing participants’ overall English level and, in particular, their spoken English proficiency and communicative competence. In this way, English language learners became immersed in creating and experiencing a curriculum brought to life through the arts.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A:

The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation's Deeper Learning Framework

Hewlett Foundation's Deeper Learning framework:



In an effort to better define Deeper Learning, the Hewlett Foundation has identified six Deeper Learning competencies that are essential to prepare students to achieve at high levels and succeed in college, career and civic life:

1. **Master core academic content.** Students develop and draw from a baseline understanding of knowledge in an academic discipline and are able to transfer knowledge to other situations.
2. **Think critically and solve complex problems.** Students apply tools and techniques gleaned from core subjects to formulate and solve problems. These tools include data analysis, statistical reasoning, and scientific inquiry as well as creative problem solving, nonlinear thinking and persistence.
3. **Work collaboratively.** Students cooperate to identify and create solutions to academic, social, vocational and personal challenges.
4. **Communicate effectively.** Students clearly organize their data, findings and thoughts in both written and oral communication.
5. **Learn how to learn.** Students monitor and direct their own learning.
6. **Develop academic mindsets.** Students develop positive attitudes and beliefs about themselves as learners that increase their academic perseverance and prompt them to engage in productive academic behaviors. Students are committed to seeing work through to completion, meeting their goals and doing quality work, and thus search for solutions to overcome obstacles.

In this study, the fourth competency is emphasized in the course design and assessment system:

- Deeper Learning Competency: Communicate Effectively
  - Students clearly organize their data, findings, and thoughts.
    - Students communicate complex concepts to others in both written and oral presentations.
    - Students structure information and data in meaningful and useful ways.
    - Students listen to and incorporate feedback and ideas from others.
    - Students provide constructive and appropriate feedback to their peers.
    - Students understand that creating a quality final communication requires review and revision of multiple drafts.
    - Students tailor their message for the intended audience.

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Appendix B:

Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (Speaking and Listening);

National Core Arts Standards (Theatre)

## **Common Core Standards for English Language Arts (Speaking & Listening)**

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.5

- Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.6

- Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

## **National Core Arts Standards for Theatre (Anchor Standards)**

### **CREATING:**

#### **Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.**

- Anchor Standard #1. Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

### **PERFORMING:**

#### **Realizing artistic ideas and work through interpretation and presentation.**

- Anchor Standard #4. Select, analyze and interpret artistic work for presentation.
- Anchor Standard #5. Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.
- Anchor Standard #6. Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

### **RESPONDING:**

#### **Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.**

- Anchor Standard #7. Perceive and analyze artistic work.
- Anchor Standard #9. Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

### **CONNECTING:**

#### **Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.**

- Anchor Standard #11. Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

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Appendix C:  
Rubric Design Guidelines from  
Stanford Center for Assessment and Learning in Education (SCALE);  
Performance Assessment Rubrics

**SCALE CHECKLIST FOR QUALITY RUBRIC DESIGN****Purpose - Learning Centered Design**

- Communicates the criteria for a proficient performance.
- Is **analytic**: provides specific feedback to students and teachers to inform revision.
- Is a common rubric:
  - Measures progress toward long-term performance outcomes within or across courses.
  - Is usable across a course or grade span (e.g., 6-8, 9-12) so that the rubric can be used across multiple tasks, teachers, and/or grade levels.

**Content**

- Is tightly aligned to the performance outcomes.
- Measures worthwhile knowledge and skills - standards-aligned content, higher order thinking skills, and 21st century skills.
- Is not task specific - generalizes to a variety of tasks within the discipline.

**Structure & Organization**

- Rubric is short - for usability and focus.
- Dimensions are distinct and focused, with few criteria or indicators.
- Dimensions are sequenced in a logical order.
- Indicators should not be grouped together if student performance on those indicators often varies.
- Indicators are not repeated across dimensions.
- Indicators are parallel across score levels.

**Score Levels**

- Score levels reflect a developmental progression and real differences in student performance.
- Has a sufficient number of score levels to capture progress within a grade level or grade span, and especially in the range where the majority of students fall.
- Proficiency is not normative, but based upon agreed upon standards-based criteria.

**Language**

- Score level labels are neutral in tone and avoid stigmatizing language.
- Describes observable behaviors and skills in the work sample; describes what students can do and not what they can't do.
- Language is simple, clear, and provides clear distinctions between levels; is student friendly.
- Communicates how a student can get to the next level.
- Is qualitative, not quantitative.
- Is descriptive, not value-laden.

Performance Assessment Rubric (Theatre Arts):

Dramatic Performance Assessment					
	Exceptional 4 pts	Good 3 pts	Fair 2 pts	Poor 1 pts	
Voice	<p><b>Exceptional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student consistently uses their voice expressively and articulately.</li> <li>*Student projects their voice clearly.</li> <li>*Student utilizes their voice to include variations of pitch, rate, volume, and tone consistent to their character.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Good</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student enunciates clearly.</li> <li>*Student varies voice pitch and tone, and reflects some level of expressiveness.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fair</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student strives to enunciate and add variations, but overall effect is flimsy - due to either too much or too little expression.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Poor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student exhibits poor vocal enunciation and no variations in volume and/or pitch.</li> </ul>	
Character Development	<p><b>Exceptional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Character's motivation is well-defined.</li> <li>*Depth and range of emotion is ongoing.</li> <li>*Life and world of character is shown brilliantly through actor's performance.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Good</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Character's motivation is somewhat defined.</li> <li>*Depth and range of emotion is adequate.</li> <li>*Life and world of character is superficial, but adequately displayed through actor's performance.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fair</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Character's motivation is lacking.</li> <li>*There is little depth or range of emotion.</li> <li>*Life and world of character is not shown by actor's performance.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Poor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student is doing little more than reading from the book.</li> </ul>	
Movement	<p><b>Exceptional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student shows phenomenal use of movement and facial expressions to enhance character.</li> <li>*Student's movements always reflect purpose.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Good</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student uses appropriate use of body movement and facial expression to enhance character.</li> <li>*Student's movements usually reflect purpose.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fair</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student strives to use appropriate use of body movement and facial expression to enhance character but overall affect is flimsy - due to either too much or too little expression.</li> <li>*Student's movements rarely reflect purpose.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Poor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student employs little to no movement and facial expression in the scene.</li> <li>*Student's moves are without purpose.</li> </ul>	
Preparation	<p><b>Exceptional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student's lines are delivered flawlessly from memory.</li> <li>*Student fluidly delivers her/his lines while hitting their marks confidently.</li> <li>*Student obviously spent a significant amount of time on project and came to class ready and prepared.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Good</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student delivers lines and his marks well and with few errors.</li> <li>*Student spent an appropriate amount of time preparing for project.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fair</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student has trouble delivering lines without calling for them.</li> <li>*Student lacks any fluidity in movement and delivery of lines; did not spend nearly enough time in preparation.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Poor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student cannot perform without the book.</li> <li>*Student has no fluidity and is obviously not prepared.</li> </ul>	
Focus	<p><b>Exceptional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student stays completely immersed in their character throughout the entire performance.</li> <li>*Student never breaks focus, even during missed lines/cues.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Good</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student weaves in and out of character slightly throughout performance.</li> <li>*Student subtly breaks focus when thinking of next line/cue or out of obvious nervousness.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fair</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student never truly immerses enough into their character to produce any kind of believability.</li> <li>*Student's focus is easily broken; attention wavers often.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Poor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student makes little to no attempt at staying in any type of character.</li> <li>*Student lacks focus and seems unprepared.</li> </ul>	
Props	<p><b>Exceptional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student has found appropriate props and costume to enhance the overall performance.</li> <li>*All props and costume are relevant, appropriate and do not interfere with the overall presentation.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Good</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student has found appropriate props and costume to enhance the overall performance.</li> <li>*Most props and costume are relevant, appropriate and do not interfere with the overall presentation.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Fair</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*Student has found only minimal props and costume.</li> <li>*The props and costume are not relevant or appropriate and tend to interfere with the overall presentation.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Poor</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>*No props or costume are present.</li> <li>OR</li> <li>*Props and costumes are irrelevant to the monologue.</li> </ul>	





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**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION RUBRIC – ORAL PRESENTATION (GRADES 9-12)**

SCORING DOMAIN	EMERGING	E/D	DEVELOPING	D/P	PROFICIENT	P/A	ADVANCED
<b>CLARITY</b> <i>What is the evidence that the student can present a clear perspective and line of reasoning?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents an <b>unclear</b> perspective</li> <li>Line of reasoning is <b>absent, unclear, or difficult to follow</b></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents a <b>general</b> perspective</li> <li>Line of reasoning can be <b>followed</b></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents a <b>clear</b> perspective</li> <li>Line of reasoning is <b>clear and easy to follow</b></li> <li><b>Addresses alternative or opposing perspectives</b> when appropriate</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents a <b>clear and original</b> perspective</li> <li>Line of reasoning is <b>clear and convincing</b></li> <li>Addresses alternative or opposing perspectives in a way that <b>sharpens one's own perspective</b></li> </ul>
<b>EVIDENCE</b> <i>What is the evidence that the student can present a perspective with supportive evidence?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draws on facts, experience, or research in a <b>minimal way</b>;</li> <li>Demonstrates <b>limited</b> understanding of the topic</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draws on facts, experience, and/or research <b>inconsistently</b>;</li> <li>Demonstrates an <b>incomplete or uneven</b> understanding of the topic</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Draws on</b> facts, experiences and research to support a perspective</li> <li>Demonstrates an <b>understanding</b> of the topic</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facts, experience and research are <b>synthesized</b> to support a perspective</li> <li>Demonstrate an <b>in-depth</b> understanding of the topic</li> </ul>
<b>ORGANIZATION</b> <i>What is the evidence that the student can organize a presentation in a way that supports audience understanding?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A <b>lack of organization</b> makes it difficult to follow the presenter's ideas and line of reasoning</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Inconsistencies in</b> organization and <b>limited</b> use of <b>transitions</b> detract from audience understanding of line of reasoning</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organization is <b>appropriate</b> to the purpose, audience, and task and <b>reveals</b> the line of reasoning; <b>transitions guide audience understanding</b></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organization is <b>appropriate</b> to the purpose and audience and <b>supports</b> the line of reasoning; <b>effectively hooks and sustains audience engagement</b>, while providing a <b>convincing conclusion</b>.</li> </ul>
<b>LANGUAGE USE</b> <i>What is the evidence that the student can use language appropriately and fluidly to support audience understanding?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses language and style that is <b>unsuited</b> to the purpose, audience, and task</li> <li>Stumbles over words, <b>interfering with audience understanding</b></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses language and style that is <b>at times unsuited</b> to the purpose, audience, and task</li> <li>Speaking is fluid with <b>minor lapses of awkward or incorrect language use</b> that detracts from audience understanding</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses <b>appropriate</b> language and style that is suited to the purpose, audience, and task</li> <li>Speaking is fluid and <b>easy to follow</b></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses <b>sophisticated and varied</b> language that is suited to the purpose, audience, and task</li> <li>Speaking is <b>consistently</b> fluid and easy to follow and</li> </ul>



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*Effective Communication*



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**EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION RUBRIC – ORAL PRESENTATION (GRADES 9-12)**

SCORING DOMAIN	EMERGING	E/D	DEVELOPING	D/P	PROFICIENT	P/A	ADVANCED
<p><b>USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA / VISUAL DISPLAYS</b></p> <p><i>What is the evidence that the student can use digital media/visual displays to engage and support audience understanding?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital media or visual displays are <b>confusing, extraneous, or distracting</b></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital media or visual displays are <b>informative and relevant</b></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital media or visual displays are <b>appealing, informative, and support audience engagement and understanding</b></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Digital media or visual displays are <b>polished, informative, and support audience engagement and understanding</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>PRESENTATION SKILLS</b></p> <p><i>What is the evidence that the student can control and use appropriate body language and speaking skills to support audience engagement?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Makes <b>minimal use</b> of presentation skills; lacks control of body posture; does not make eye contact; voice is unclear and/or inaudible; and pace of presentation is too slow or too rushed</li> <li>Presenter's energy and affect are <b>unsuitable</b> for the audience and purpose of the presentation</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates a command of <b>some aspects</b> of presentation skills, including control of body posture and gestures, language fluency, eye contact, clear and audible voice, and appropriate pacing</li> <li>Presenter's energy and/or affect are <b>usually appropriate</b> for the audience and purpose of the presentation, with minor lapses</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates a <b>command</b> of presentation skills, including control of body posture and gestures, eye contact, clear and audible voice, and appropriate pacing</li> <li>Presenter's energy and affect are <b>appropriate and support engagement</b></li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates <b>consistent</b> command of presentation skills, including control of body posture and gestures, eye contact, clear and audible voice, and appropriate pacing <b>in a way that keeps the audience engaged</b></li> <li>Presenter maintains a <b>presence and a captivating energy</b> that is appropriate to the audience and purpose of the presentation</li> </ul>
<p><b>INTERACTION WITH AUDIENCE</b></p> <p><i>What is the evidence that the student can respond to audience questions effectively?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides a <b>vague response</b> to questions; demonstrates a <b>minimal command</b> of the facts or understanding of the topic</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides an <b>indirect or partial response</b> to questions; demonstrate a <b>partial command</b> of the facts or understanding of the topic</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides a <b>direct and complete response</b> to questions; demonstrates an <b>adequate command</b> of the facts and understanding of the topic</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides a <b>precise and persuasive response</b> to questions; demonstrates an <b>in-depth understanding</b> of the facts and topic</li> </ul>



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*Effective Communication*

Appendix D:

Sample “Mastery Transcripts” from Mastery Transcript Consortium



10035 95th Ave NE  
San Mateo, CA, CA 94403

**Nueva**

,

The Mastery Transcript is an online document. To view additional detail about this student's mastery credits and the evidence associated with them, use the access information below:

**URL**  
[transcript.mastery.org](https://transcript.mastery.org)

**ACCESS CODE**

## Student Statement

Kavita Singh is a STEM enthusiast and social justice-advocate. She is an aspiring biomedical engineer and hopes for her work to have a tangible impact on marginalized communities.

## Credit Profile

Distribution of credits earned by student.

**FOUNDATIONAL CREDITS**  
18 completed  
0 in progress

**ADVANCED CREDITS**  
14 completed  
0 in progress

### Credit distribution

— Foundational Credit (FC)    — Advanced Credit (AC)  
- - - In Progress (FC)        - - - In Progress (AC)



# Juliet Guastella

GRADUATION 2020



MASTERY  
TRANSCRIPT  
CONSORTIUM™

1 Main Street  
Burlington, VT 05401

**Enosburg Falls High School -  
SAMPLE**  
65 Dickinson Ave  
Enosburg Falls, VT 05450

The Mastery Transcript is an online document.  
To view additional detail about this student's mastery credits and  
the evidence associated with them, use the access information  
below:

URL  
[transcript.mastery.org](https://transcript.mastery.org)

ACCESS CODE

## Student Statement

Juliet believes in the principle of choosing one's own path. Driven by the notion of making the world a better place, her strengths lie within places she can help others succeed and realize their importance

## Credit Profile

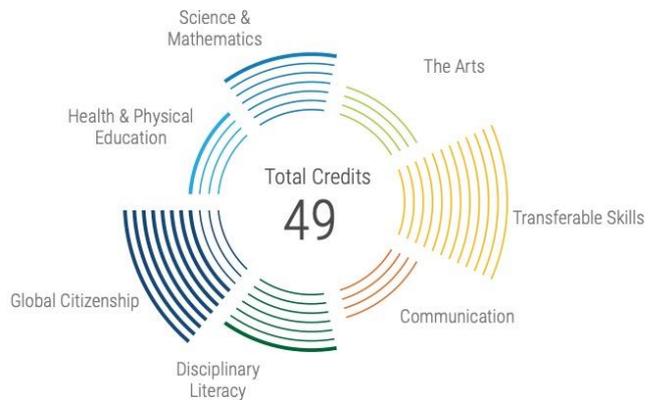
Distribution of credits earned by student.

FOUNDATIONAL CREDITS  
38 completed  
0 in progress

ADVANCED CREDITS  
11 completed  
0 in progress

### Credit distribution

— Foundational Credit (FC)    — Advanced Credit (AC)  
- - - In Progress (FC)        - - - In Progress (AC)



Appendix E:

WIDA MODEL English Speaking Rubric

Reproduced with permission from WIDA. (See Appendix H).

WIDA Speaking Interpretive Rubric Grades 1-12			
	Discourse Level	Sentence Level	Word/Phrase Level
	Linguistic Complexity	Language Forms	Vocabulary Usage
<b>Level 6 Reaching</b>	<p>Response is fully comprehensible, fluent, and appropriate to purpose, situation and audience; comparable to the speech of English proficient students meeting college- and career-readiness standards; characterized by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sustained, connected oral language characterized by confidence, coherence, and precision in the expression of ideas tailored to purpose, situation, and audience</li> <li>clear evidence of consistency in conveying an appropriate perspective and register</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a full range of oral phrase and sentence patterns and grammatical structures matched to content area topics</li> <li>controlled, skilled use of oral language to convey meaning, including for effect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>consistent usage of just the right word or expression in just the right context related to content area topics</li> <li>facility with precise vocabulary usage in general, specific, or technical language</li> </ul>
<b>Level 5 Bridging</b>	<p>Response is comprehensible, fluent, and generally related to purpose; generally comparable to the speech of English proficient peers; characterized by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>sustained, connected oral language that shows appropriate and coherent expression of ideas related to purpose, situation and audience</li> <li>clear evidence of conveying an appropriate perspective and register</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a broad range of oral phrase and sentence patterns and grammatical structures matched to the content area topic</li> <li>controlled, fluid use of oral language to convey meaning, including for effect</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>usage of technical and abstract content-area words and expressions as appropriate</li> <li>usage of words and expressions with precise meaning related to content area topics as appropriate</li> <li>vocabulary usage that fulfills the speaking purpose</li> </ul>
<b>Level 4 Expanding</b>	<p>Response is generally comprehensible, fluent, and related to purpose; characterized by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>connected oral language that supports the expression of expanded or related ideas through emerging coherence, detail and clarity</li> <li>some evidence of conveying an appropriate perspective and register</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a range of oral phrase and sentence patterns and grammatical structures characteristic of the content area</li> <li>generally controlled and fluid use of oral language to convey meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>usage of specific and some technical content-area words and expressions as appropriate</li> <li>usage of words and expressions with multiple meanings or common idioms across content areas as appropriate</li> <li>vocabulary usage that generally fulfills the speaking purpose</li> </ul>
<b>Level 3 Developing</b>	<p>Response is generally comprehensible (though comprehensibility and fluency may from time to time be compromised in more complex speech); characterized by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>oral language that shows the development of connected language in the expression of an expanded idea or multiple related ideas</li> <li>evidence of a developing sense of perspective and register</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>developing range of oral phrase and sentence patterns and grammatical structures common to content areas</li> <li>developing control in use of oral language to convey meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>usage of some specific content words and expressions as appropriate</li> <li>usage of words or expressions used frequently in content areas, as appropriate</li> <li>vocabulary usage that attempts to fulfill the speaking purpose</li> </ul>
<b>Level 2 Emerging</b>	<p>Response is generally comprehensible (though comprehensibility and fluency may often be compromised in more complex speech); characterized by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>oral language that shows emerging expression of ideas; some attempt at connecting ideas may at times be evident</li> <li>some amount of language that may be repeated from the prompt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>chunks of language, repetitive oral phrase patterns, and formulaic grammatical structures used in social and instructional situations or across content areas</li> <li>variable control in use of oral language to convey meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>usage of general content words and expressions</li> <li>usage of social and instructional words and expressions across content areas</li> <li>possible usage of general vocabulary where more specific language is needed</li> </ul>
<b>Level 1 Entering</b>	<p>Response is generally comprehensible (though comprehensibility and fluency may be significantly compromised in language beyond words, oral phrases, or memorized chunks); characterized by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>words, oral phrases, or memorized chunks of oral language used to represent ideas</li> <li>varying amounts of language that may be repeated from the prompt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>words, chunks of language, or simple phrasal patterns associated with common social and instructional situations</li> <li>occasional control in use of oral language to convey meaning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>usage of highest frequency general content-related words</li> <li>usage of everyday social and instructional words and expressions</li> </ul>

8/11/2017

The six levels of English language proficiency are **1-Entering, 2-Emerging, 3-Developing, 4-Expanding, 5-Bridging, and 6-Reaching**. They describe the trajectory of language development that students typically follow over time. In the Interpretive Rubrics, the dimensions of academic language development work together to describe speech or written text at each proficiency level.

Appendix F:

Crestwood Interviews and Analytics

## The Crestwood Interview Process

- 1 Interview kickoff.** Interviewer starts audio recording, confirms interviewee name, and asks “are you ready”. When student says “yes”, the conversation commences
- 2 Interviewer picks a topic from question list.** These are open-ended (not “Yes/No”), and designed so the student can speak at length (e.g. “tell me about your favorite class”)
- 3 Interviewer asks follow-up questions when appropriate.** Ideally these are also open-ended, and dig more deeply into the main topic (e.g. “why is English your favorite class?”)
- 4 Interviewer changes topics at their discretion.** If the student runs out of comments, or the interviewer wants a change, a new question is asked (from list or made up are both okay)
- 5 Interview completes.** Once the interview has run for at least 12 minutes, the interviewer can finish the interview and begin the consult. Audio file is emailed to Crestwood for processing

	Kickoff questions	Basic questions	Advanced questions
<b>What it is</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions that start the conversation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions about concrete, tangible topics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Questions about abstract or conceptual topics</li> </ul>
<b>Sample question</b>	“How are you today?” “What did you do today?”	“Tell me about your family?” “Tell me about your school?”	“Tell me about a book you like?” “Tell me about a favorite sport?”
<b>Duration (minutes)</b>	<b>1-3</b>	<b>3-7</b>	<b>3-7</b>
<b>What it tests</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Basic conversation ability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to describe typical things in a person’s life or environment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ability to discuss abstract or more complicated subjects</li> <li>Ability to explain things and tell stories</li> </ul>
<b>Notes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Always used to commence interview (standard opening)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviewer time in this section depends on interviewee fluency level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If interviewee cannot converse at this level, interviewer reverts to ‘basic’ questions and topics</li> </ul>

	Interview	File processing	Data processing	Delivery
<b>What it is</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The interview itself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Audio file and transcript prep</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviewee data and analytics prep</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>File completion and delivery</li> </ul>
<b>Outputs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raw interview audio file (full conversation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Final audio file</li> <li>Verbatim transcript of final audio file</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statistics and cohort comparisons, based on transcript</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Final report made available to end users (students, schools)</li> </ul>
<b>Duration (days)</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2-3</b>	<b>2-3</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Notes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interviewer sends audio to Crestwood after interview completes</li> <li>Mp4 format, can be sent by email, WeChat, etc.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cohorts generated based on desired comparison groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PDF booklet of results emailed to school or interviewee</li> <li>Educators may access student or class-level data via Crestwood enterprise portal</li> </ul>

## Overview of Crestwood Performance Measures

### Your performance summary

---

★ **Definition**

An overview of your spoken English capabilities, as measured against your Peer Group

---

🎯 **Your “Triforce” performance**

★ **Peer Group reminder**

Nationality	China
Native language	Chinese (mandarin)
Grade level	7

*Note: Peer Group may have additional filters. See the 'Interviewer Information' page for complete details*

---

📁 Category	💬 What it is	★ Your rating
Vocabulary	Words you spoke during your interview, including distinct and advanced distinct word count	High
Fluency	Ability to speak fluidly and at length, measured by sentence descriptiveness and words per minute	Above Average
Disfluency	Ability to avoid speech challenges such as filler words, stutters, and repeated words and phrases	Developing
Mastery	Your combined ability across all three skills above, as measured against your Peer Group	High

---

Appendix G:

Parental Consent Letter & Student Assent Form

Chinese Version:



亲爱的家长：

您好！我是新奥尔良大学课程与教学学院 Pat Austin 教授的在读博士生。我正在进行一项研究，主题是艺术和项目制课程对于英语非母语学习者英语能力提高的影响。

经过探月学院的批准，我计划把我的研究和在探月教授的课程结合起来。针对英语课程（ELA-1A和ELA-1B），在原定的英语课程基础上增加两周时间。同时，作为研究，我会收集三种数据：测试、采访、作品集。

我想请您同意我收集您孩子的学习相关数据并用到我的研究中。那些能帮助我收集数据的测评内容，本身就是用作正常教学的练习，所以不会给学习者带来额外的负担——即使不进行研究，全校的学习者也会进行这些练习。如果您同意自己的孩子参加这个项目，代表您同意孩子成为我的研究对象，也代表着您允许我在研究中使用所有收集到的数据。当然，学校名称和学习者的姓名都会匿名。

您的孩子参与本次研究是自愿选择。您和您的孩子有权利不参与或者随时退出，并且不会承担任何不利的后果(不会影响您孩子的分数或等级)。研究结果虽然可能被公布，但是您孩子的姓名不会出现在其中。尽管本次研究可能不会给您的孩子带来直接的回报，但是在此过程中，他们可以看到自己英语口语能力的进步，并且积累至少 10 件作品来用于年终答辩。

参与本次研究的潜在风险微乎其微，可能涉及到的是在网上分享文件时存在的风险，但这和我们日常经历的潜在风险一样，尤其是在线上教学期间。

如果您有任何关于本次研究或者您孩子参与本次研究的疑问，欢迎微信联系我（微信号：andrewzutell）。如果您对您和您的孩子作为研究对象有权益方面的问题，或者您觉得您的孩子可能面临风险，您可以联系新奥尔良大学的Dr. Ann O'Hanlon（电话：+1 504- 280-3990）。

谨上  
Andrew Zutell

在下方签字后，代表着您同意自己的孩子\_\_\_\_\_成为本次研究的研究对象。

姓名

签名

日期

English Translation:



Dear Parent:

I am a doctoral (PhD) student under the direction of Professor Pat Austin in the Department of Curriculum & Instruction at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a dissertation research study at \_\_\_\_\_ to examine learners' progress with regard to speaking English as a foreign language. The other teachers and I have designed a special project-based curriculum for the learners in the Introductory English (level one) course. Your child will benefit from extra English practice with a high-quality curriculum.

I am requesting your child's participation, which will involve attending their online English class (ELA-1A or ELA-1B) 2 to 4 times each week for 50-minute sessions from June 1 to July 10, 2020. By signing this letter, you are granting your permission for Andrew Zutell and Moonshot Academy to use your child's data in an official PhD research study with the University of New Orleans. This data will be kept secure and anonymous; the results of the research study may be published, but students' names will not be used.

There are three types of data which will be collected: exam, interview, and portfolio. These assessments are already present as common practices at the school, and their sole purpose is to measure students' learning and progress in English. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to have your child participate or to withdraw your child from the study at any time, there will be no penalty (it will not affect your child's grade or level). The risks associated with participating are minimal and include using the Internet and online platforms to communicate and share files. These risks are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life, particularly since this semester is being conducted fully online.

If you have any questions concerning the research study or your child's participation in this study, you may contact me on WeChat (username: andrewzutell). If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Ann O'Hanlon at the University of New Orleans at +1(504) 280-3990.

Sincerely,

Andrew Zutell

**By signing below, you are giving consent for your child, \_\_\_\_\_, to participate in the above study.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



WRITTEN ASSENT FORM FOR MINORS:

I have been informed that my parent(s) have given permission for me to participate in a study concerning spoken English development.

I will be asked to attend my normal English (online) classes and to complete different types of assessments, all of which are normal practice at the school.

My participation in this project is voluntary and I have been told that I may stop my participation in this study at any time. If I choose not to participate, it will not affect my grade in any way.

---

Signature

---

Printed Name

Appendix H:

Permissions to reproduce copyrighted materials

## Crestwood Permission Letter:



September 17, 2020

Nick Kovalevich  
CEO, Crestwood Analytics

Dear Nick:

I am completing a doctoral dissertation at the University of New Orleans entitled "More than Mastery: Theatre Arts Integration for Deeper Learning in the English-as-a-Foreign-Language Classroom." I would like your permission to reprint in my dissertation excerpts from the following:

CRESTWOOD INTERVIEW GUIDE (2019).

The excerpts to be reproduced are attached with this letter. The requested permission extends to any future revisions and editions of my dissertation, including non-exclusive world rights in all languages, and to the prospective publication of my dissertation by the University of New Orleans. These rights will in no way restrict republication of the material in any other form by you or by others authorized by you. Your signing of this letter will also confirm that you own [or your company owns] the copyright to the above-described material.

If these arrangements meet with your approval, please sign this letter where indicated below and return it to me at [azutell@uno.edu](mailto:azutell@uno.edu). Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Andrew Zutell

PERMISSION GRANTED FOR THE USE REQUESTED ABOVE:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick Kovalevich'.

Date: 2020-09-20

Nick Kovalevich

## WIDA

Hi Andrew,

Thank you for your request to use WIDA materials in your dissertation.

WIDA grants these request via email.

You have permission to use the WIDA materials as requested.

Please let me know if you need anything else.

Good luck with your dissertation.

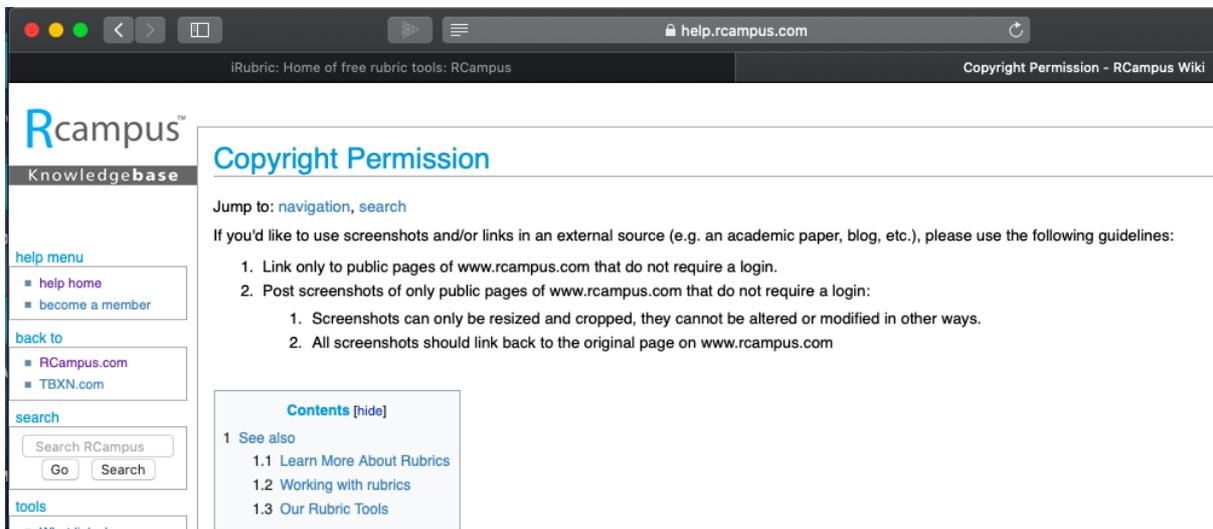
jim

\*\_\*\_\*

Jim Lyne, M.S., J.D.  
Senior Admin Program Specialist  
Wisconsin Center for Education Research  
268 Educational Sciences  
1025 W Johnson St.  
Madison, WI 53706  
(608) 265-2262

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# iRubric



## National Core Arts Standards

### National Coalition for Core Arts Standards Copyright Guidelines

**SECTION I: Free and Unlimited use is granted for the following categories:**

1. Overarching Anchor Standards
2. Framework Matrix Template

**SECTION II: Permission is needed for the following categories:**

5. *Conceptual Framework for Arts Learning* (2014)
6. Discipline-specific Performance Standards
7. Discipline-specific Process Components
8. Discipline Specific Enduring Understandings
9. Discipline Specific Essential Questions

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## VITA

The author obtained bachelor's degrees in English and Philosophy at Tulane University in 2009 and a Master of Arts in Teaching (English, Grades 6-12) from the University of New Orleans in 2017. Andrew joined the doctoral program in Curriculum & Instruction at UNO to elevate his practice as a lifelong educator and arts integrationist as well as to prepare himself to take part in educational reform at the level of school leadership, professional development, and policy. He is currently the head of the Humanities department at a competency-based high school in China, where he pursues his mission to promote deep and meaningful learning through the arts.