

# Non-participation, imagined communities and the language classroom

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## INTRODUCTION

A practice that has begun to receive some attention in the language education literature is that of resistance and non-participation in second and foreign language classrooms. Canagarajah (1993), for example, reports on the non-participation of students in a Sri Lankan classroom in which he was teaching English as a second language (ESL). By the third month in the year-long course, participation had fallen to 50 per cent, while comments and drawings in textbooks provided convincing evidence of the students' ambivalence towards learning English. Giltrow and Calhoun report that most of their forty Guatemalan refugee informants had 'retired from the ESL classroom, either by physically removing themselves and no longer attending regularly, or by adopting an aloof, unengaged way of attending' (1992: 63). Norton Peirce, Harper and Burnaby (1993) note the complex reasons why workers resisted participation in a workplace ESL program, linking non-participation to larger socioeconomic issues. Language learners in other contexts, such as a South African university, have resented being labelled as 'disadvantaged' (Thesen, 1997), while others have used code-switching as forms of resistance (Lin, 1997; Rampton, 1995b). In this chapter, I examine the relationship between non-participation and what I call the 'imagined communities' of two ESL learners in Canada, linking the discussion to the learners' changing expectations of ESL courses, their shifting identities and their unique investments in the target language.

My use of the term 'non-participation' is drawn from the work of Wenger (1998: 164), who, working within a community of practice framework (Lave and Wenger, 1991), argues as follows:

We not only produce our identities through the practices we engage in, but we also define ourselves through the practices we do not engage in. Our identities are constituted not only by what we are but also by what we are not. To the extent that we can come in contact with other ways of being, what we are not can even become a large part of how we define ourselves. (Wenger, 1998: 164)

This perspective on non-participation, and in particular its relationship to questions of identity, has theoretical promise in the analysis of non-participation of learners in the language classrooms. It offers explanatory potential to aspects of overt and covert participation identified by Breen in Chapter 6 and it exemplifies learner agency in action as discussed by Lantolf and Pavlenko in Chapter 7. Indeed, as Faltis (1997) has argued, the work of Lave and Wenger offers interesting theoretical perspectives for future research in language and education, a trend that has already achieved some momentum (see, for example, Toohey, 1998, 2000). In this chapter, I take the opportunity to draw on the work of Lave and Wenger (1991) and Wenger (1998), in particular, to analyse data from a study I conducted with immigrant language learners in Canada (Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000) which addresses the conditions under which two learners, on two separate occasions, withdrew entirely from participation in their ESL classrooms. In drawing on a community of practice perspective, I do not propose a definitive analysis of the data, however. My purpose is to examine the data through a new theoretical lens, with a view to enhancing my understanding of the learners' stories of non-participation. Such stories, which are seldom heard and rarely analysed, offer an important contribution to research on second language learning and teaching, focusing as they do what works – and does not work – in classrooms.

I begin the chapter with a more detailed examination of Wenger's theories of non-participation, linking this theory to his conception of identity and modes of belonging. Thereafter, I turn my attention to the stories of Katarina and Felicia, whose experiences of marginality led to the most extreme form of non-participation: withdrawal from the language class. I discuss and analyse the data with reference to the notion of imagined communities, which helps to explain the learners' acts of resistance. After examining the relationship between imagined communities, investment and language learning, I conclude with some reflections on the pedagogical implications of my research.

## THEORIZING NON-PARTICIPATION

Lave and Wenger (1991), working within an anthropological framework, are centrally concerned with the relationship between learning and the social situation in which it occurs, a relationship they refer to as situated learning. Through a process of *legitimate peripheral participation* newcomers interact with old-timers in a given community setting, become increasingly experienced in the practices that characterize that community, and gradually move towards fuller participation in that community. Lave and Wenger recognize, however, that particular social arrangements in any community may constrain or facilitate movement towards fuller participation, noting as follows:

The key to legitimate peripheral participation is access by newcomers to the community of practice and all that membership entails. But though this is essential to the reproduction of the community, it is always problematic at the

same time. To become a full member of a community of practice requires access to a wide range of ongoing activity, old-timers, and other members of the community; and to information, resources and opportunities for participation.

(Lave and Wenger, 1991: 100)

They present data from a variety of communities of practice, illustrating variability in the access each provides to activities, other people and resources for participation. In more recent work, Wenger (1998) has developed more fully the notions of participation and non-participation, focusing in particular on their relationship to the construction of a learner's identity. He argues that our relation to communities of practice involves both participation and non-participation, and that our identities are shaped by combinations of the two. Non-participation in some communities is inevitable because our experiences include coming into contact with communities to which we do not belong, in Wenger's graphic words, 'catching, as we peek into foreign chambers, glimpses of other realities and meanings' (1998: 165). This kind of non-participation differs from that when we are non-participatory in the practices of communities to which we *do* belong. In the latter case, his distinction between *peripherality* and *marginality* is a useful one. By 'peripherality', he refers to the fact that some degree of non-participation can be an enabling factor of participation, while 'marginality' is a form of non-participation that prevents full participation.

## STORIES OF NON-PARTICIPATION

The two stories of non-participation are drawn from a study of immigrant language learners in Canada, conducted in the early 1990s (Norton, 2000; Norton Peirce, 1995). The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationship between identity and language learning, focusing on language learning practices in the home, workplace and school. The five participants in the study included Mai from Vietnam, Katarina and Eva from Poland, Felicia from Peru, and Martina from Czechoslovakia, all of whom were recent immigrants to the country. Data was collected over a twelve-month period through interviews, a diary study and participant observation. Katarina and Felicia's stories of non-participation, which receive more elaborate treatment in Norton (2000), follow.

### **Katarina's story**

Shortly after their arrival in Canada, all of the five learners participated in the same six-month ESL course. After the course was complete, two of the learners, Katarina and Martina, were given the opportunity to take an additional nine-month subsidized English skills upgrading course. Katarina and Martina were in the same class and had the same teacher. After four months in this course, Katarina dropped out of the course in anger and indignation. At a diary study meeting, Katarina explained why she no longer wished to

participate in the class. She said that she had come into conflict with her teacher because her teacher had said that Katarina's English was not 'good enough' to take a computer course, intimating that Katarina spoke 'immigrant English'. Katarina was angry and never returned to the class.

At the diary study meeting, Katarina indicated that she felt her instructor did not take her teaching job seriously because the students were immigrants, and Katarina said she was made to feel 'stupid' in class. Katarina had liked her first ESL class, where she learnt new vocabulary, read the newspaper and learnt grammar. But with the second ESL teacher, she felt like a student in first grade, objecting to having to learn '72 definitions for test' and listen to the teacher all day. At the meeting she asked Martina how she felt about the teacher, saying, "Immigrants, immigrants" – Martina, maybe you think this is normal?' In addressing Martina this way, Katarina imitated the teacher's voice, saying 'immigrants, immigrants' in a dismissive tone of voice. She then sought affirmation from Martina that her interpretation of her teacher's attitude was a valid one. Receiving no satisfaction from Martina, she positioned Martina as someone who had limited expectations of her teachers, acquiescing to the identity 'immigrant' without struggle. Martina, indeed, had other investments at stake and remained in the course until she was awarded a certificate. Katarina, having left the ESL class, entered the computer course and successfully completed the 18-month program.

### **Felicia's story**

At another diary study meeting, Felicia described her unhappy experiences in a Grade 12 ESL course that she was taking with a group of adult immigrants in a local school. The teacher had asked each of the students to bring in information about their home country to share with the class. After the session, the teacher summarized the main points that had been raised, but neglected to mention the points that Felicia had made about Peru. Felicia was angry, and asked the teacher why she had not included Peru in her summary. The teacher explained that Peru was not a major country under consideration. Felicia never returned to the class.

## NON-PARTICIPATION AND IMAGINED COMMUNITIES

In developing their theories of situated learning and communities of practice, Lave and Wenger (1991) draw on research in which newcomers to a community, such as a community of midwives, tailors or insurance claim agents, participate in attenuated ways with old-timers in the performance of community practices. The purpose of such joint participation is for the less experienced participants to increase their expertise in the performance of community activities. Thus communities are composed of participants who engage in differential ways with the practices of their communities, engagement which constitutes learning.

In conceptualizing the language classroom, such theories seem particularly apt in situations in which second language learners (newcomers) enter a classroom in which speakers of the target language (old-timers) constitute the more experienced members of the community. It is important to note, however, that school classrooms are characterized by many kinds of expertise, and that native English speakers – like language learners – would be newcomers to a variety of school practices and agendas. Toohey's (1998, 2000) research with ESL children in a public school, who attend classrooms in which the majority of children are native English speakers, shows a community which includes many 'mentors' who are experienced English speakers. In my research, however, the classrooms in which Katarina and Felicia participated were not communities in this sense. All of the members of their classroom communities, apart from the teacher, were newcomers; the only old-timer was the teacher. The question that arises then is what community practices did Katarina and Felicia seek to learn? What, indeed, constituted 'the community' for them?

In this regard, Wenger's discussion on identity and modes of belonging is a useful one. Drawing on his research with insurance claims processors, Wenger notes that the claims processors' experience of both participation and non-participation reached beyond the walls of their office:

They see themselves as participants in social processes and configurations that extend beyond their direct engagement in their own practice. They have to make some sense of the many artifacts they encounter coming from practices they do not have access to. They may have to use their imagination to get a picture of these broader connections. (Wenger, 1998: 173)

Wenger develops this point by hypothesizing that there are three modes of belonging, referred to as engagement, imagination and alignment, respectively. By 'engagement' he refers to active involvement in mutual processes of negotiation and meaning; 'imagination' addresses the extent to which we create images of the world and see connections through time and space by extrapolating from our experience; 'alignment' addresses the extent to which we coordinate our energies and activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises.

It is the second mode, that of 'imagination', that I believe is central to an understanding of the non-participation of Katarina and Felicia. As Wenger notes:

My use of the concept of imagination refers to a process of expanding our self by transcending our time and space and creating new images of the world and ourselves. Imagination in this sense is looking at an apple seed and seeing a tree. (Wenger, 1998: 176)

As Wenger notes, imagination should not be confused with misleading fantasy or withdrawal from reality. This mode of belonging, he argues, is a creative process of producing new images of possibility and new ways of understanding one's relation to the world that transcend more immediate

acts of engagement. At the same time, however, imagination does not necessarily result in the coordination of action. It is here that the notion of alignment becomes central, because it is through alignment that learners do what they have to do to take part in a larger community.

It is possible to argue that the communities of practice that characterized Katarina and Felicia's learning trajectories were communities of the imagination – what could be called imagined communities. When Katarina and Felicia entered their language classrooms, they not only saw a classroom with four walls, but envisioned a community that transcended time and space. Thus although these learners were engaged in classroom practices, the realm of their community extended to the imagined world outside the classroom – their imagined community. It is important to note further that while Katarina and Felicia has similar investments in their imagined communities, they each had differential access to these communities. Katarina had almost no connection with her imagined community of professionals in Canada, while Felicia's connection to Peruvian expatriates, although tenuous at times, held greater promise for access.

### **Katarina and Felicia's imagined communities**

More specifically, then, what exactly were Katarina and Felicia's imagined communities, and how does this notion help to explain these learners' non-participation in the ESL classroom? In order to address these questions, it is necessary to consider Katarina and Felicia's particular histories and changing identities. In her native country, Katarina had been a teacher who had taught for seventeen years. In this position, she was a highly respected professional. When she came to Canada, she could not find employment as a teacher, and enjoyed little status or respect as a part-time homemaker for the Community Service, a job that was only good 'for now'. She eagerly sought recognition from people who were fellow professionals, and wished to have a profession in Canada in which she could meet like-minded people. Her imagined community, then, was a community of professionals. In essence, Katarina's imagined community was as much a reconstruction of her past as it was an imaginative construction of the future; as in Poland, it was only members of her imagined community (the teacher, the doctor) who could validate her history and her identity as a professional. Thus Katarina's ESL teacher was not only a language teacher, active in practices of engagement, but an old-timer in an imagined community, a community in which Katarina believed she had already achieved old-timer status. When Katarina felt that her ESL teacher failed to acknowledge her professional history, positioning her as a newcomer, she was angry. When, indeed, the teacher appeared to discourage Katarina from taking a computer course that would give her greater access to her imagined community, she refused to continue participating in the course. It is significant that Martina, on the other hand, whose imagined community, history and investments were distinct from those of Katarina, successfully completed the upgrading course.

With reference to Felicia's response to her ESL teacher's omission of Peru in a summing-up exercise, I thought at the time that Felicia had overreacted to this event. However, when I understand the event within the context of Peru and Peruvians as central to Felicia's imagined community, the teacher's marginalization of Peru takes on added significance. Felicia had been very reluctant to leave Peru. She had led a privileged life in her native country and had left only because of the increasing turmoil in the country. As she wrote,

We downed our standard of living in Canada. We used to have a relaxed life in our country. My husband had a very good job. Canada doesn't give my husband the opportunity to work. I never will understand why the government gave him the professional visa.

Felicia vehemently resisted the immigrant label, summing up her feelings as follows, 'I've never felt an immigrant in Canada, just as a foreigner person who lives here by accident.' Felicia's friends at work validated her Peruvian identity, but it appeared that her ESL teacher did not appreciate the significance of Peru to her. Indeed, the very reason why Felicia may have been accepted by her friends at work was because she positioned herself as a 'wealthy Peruvian' rather than a recent immigrant in the workplace.

I was talking with the ladies who work with me, about a land that I'm selling in Peru. Last month there was a person interested to buy it. My sister in law was talking with her for many days, and called me by telephone collect, receiving my instructions to sell, but at last the lady didn't buy the land. And I have to pay about \$600 for calls.

In sum, for both Felicia and for Katarina, their extreme acts of non-participation were acts of alignment on their part to preserve the integrity of their imagined communities. Non-participation was not an opportunity for learning from a position of peripherality, but an act of resistance from a position of marginality.

#### IMAGINED COMMUNITIES, INVESTMENT AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

I have argued thus far that while Katarina and Felicia were actively engaged in classroom practices, the realm of their community extended beyond the four walls of the classroom. This imagined community was not accessible to the teacher, who, in each case, focused her energy on practices of engagement, rather than on practices of the imagination. It was for this reason that Katarina and Felicia ultimately withdrew from their ESL classes. The second argument I wish to make, however, is that different learners have different imagined communities, and that these imagined communities are best understood in the context of a learner's unique investment in the target language and the conditions under which he or she speaks and practises it.

The concept of investment, which I have introduced in Norton Peirce (1995), signals the socially and historically constructed relationship of

learners to the target language, and their often ambivalent desire to learn and practise it. The notion presupposes that when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Drawing on Bourdieu (1977), I have taken the position that if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will increase their value in the social world. Learners will expect or hope to have a good return on their investment in the target language – a return that will give them access to the privileges of target language speakers. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space.

It is interesting to note, by way of example, that for all the participants in the study, their motivation to speak was mediated by investments that conflicted with the desire to speak. Although all the participants took extra courses to learn English, participated in the diary study, and wished to have more social contact with anglophone Canadians, all the learners felt uncomfortable talking to people *in whom they had a particular symbolic or material investment*. By symbolic investment, I refer to the desire and need learners had for friends, education and religion, while material investment references the desire for capital goods, real estate and money. I wish to argue that the very people to whom the learners were most uncomfortable speaking English were the very people who were members of – or gatekeepers to – the learners' imagined communities. Data to support this position was obtained in response to the question: 'In general, when do you feel comfortable speaking English and when do you feel uncomfortable using English?' In response to this question, the data from Katarina and Felicia is compelling. It is significant that Katarina, who had a great affective investment in her status as a professional, said that she felt most uncomfortable talking to anglophone professionals: 'I feel comfortable using English when I speak with my school friends. I feel uncomfortable using English when I speak with my teacher, with the doctor', she said. Felicia, on the other hand, who had great affective investment in her Peruvian identity, felt most uncomfortable speaking English in front of Peruvians who speak English fluently. As she said:

I feel comfortable using English with people I know and have confidence with them, specially with the ladies who I meet each week to practice English and Spanish conversation. I feel uncomfortable with new people and never can speak English in front of Peruvian people who speak English correctly.

The central point here is that a learner's imagined community invited an imagined identity, and a learner's investment in the target language must be understood within this context. Both Katarina and Felicia were highly invested in the target language, but for different historical reasons and with different consequences for their engagement with speakers of the target language. Both learners believed that they had a legitimate claim to old-timer

status in their imagined communities, but had learnt, at the same time, that they could not take this status for granted. It was this ambivalence that led to their discomfort in the company of experienced participants in their imagined communities. While both learners could speak English in the company of friends, they were both silenced in different ways by different kinds of old-timer.

In this regard, the study provides convincing evidence that language learning is a social practice that engages the identities of learners in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. By 'social practice' I refer in particular to its formulation by Lave and Wenger:

In contrast with learning as internalization, learning as increasing participation in communities of practice concerns the whole person acting in the world. Conceiving of learning in terms of participation focuses attention on ways in which it is an evolving, continuously renewed set of relations. . . . Insistence on the historical nature of motivation, desire and the very relations by which social and culturally mediated experience is available to persons-in-practice is one key to the goals to be met in developing a theory of practice.

(Lave and Wenger, 1991: 49–50)

In this view, the anxiety Katarina and Felicia experienced when they attempted to speak to members of their imagined communities must not be seen as an invariant characteristic of their ability in the target language. Their difficulty was differently constructed in diverse encounters with target language speakers and must be understood with reference to their investment in particular kinds of social relationship.

## CHANGING EXPECTATIONS OF LANGUAGE COURSES

If learners' imagined communities are best understood in the context of their investments in the target language, what are the implications for classroom teaching? How can teachers address the imagined communities of learners in classrooms in which there may be over thirty learners, each with her or his own investments, histories and desires for the future? This question is a subset of a larger question concerning the expectations that learners have of their language classes and the kind of curriculum they might find most useful in seeking old-timer status in a given community. In order to address this issue, at least for adult immigrants, I draw once again on the contributions of the language learners in my study. In a questionnaire, administered in December 1990, I asked the following question:

Please examine the course descriptions for three different English language courses for new adult immigrants in Canada. Please rank the courses from 1 to 3, starting with the one you think would be most useful to new adult immigrants who do not speak English as a mother tongue.

*COURSE A. In this course, most of the time will be spent learning English grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. There will be some free conversation and newspaper*

*work. Students will work mostly from language textbooks and grammar exercise books.*

*COURSE B. In this course, most of the time will be spent learning English by learning about Canadian society: the health care system, schooling, housing, transportation, work. Students will work mainly from material designed for new immigrants to Canada.*

*COURSE C. In this course, most of the time will be spent learning about job opportunities in Canada: how to read advertisements, how to fill out job applications, how to interview for jobs. Students will work from community newspapers and classified advertisements, and take part in role plays.*

Course A can be broadly identified as a traditional ESL course, in which the focus of instruction is on the linguistic code of the target language; Course B is characteristic of a more communicative approach to language teaching; while Course C could be defined as a course in English for Specific Purposes. Clearly there are important overlaps between the courses, but for the purposes of the research, I wished to make them prototypically distinct.

It is interesting that in December 1990, four of the learners indicated a preference for Course A, while Felicia preferred Course C, saying that 'Course C is one of the ways a person can learn English and at the same time to learn something important'. The reason why most of the learners preferred Course A is best summed up by Katarina:

If somebody want to live for good in Canada, should be spoken the English language. In this course, people will spend most of the time learning English grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary because it is base English.

At that time (December 1990) all the learners, including Felicia, drew sharp distinctions between language as a linguistic system and language as a social practice. The learners hoped that the linguistic code could be mastered with little reference to the conditions of its use, and they assumed that interaction with other Canadians would give them the information they needed about the way of life in Canada, job opportunities in Canada, and access to resources in Canadian society. It is significant that by December 1991, however, only twelve months later, the participants had begun to question the usefulness of a more traditional second language course. By that time, all the learners indicated that they wanted more practice using English in the classroom so that they could transfer their skills to learning contexts outside the classroom. In an interview on 23 January 1991, Eva said that the lack of opportunity to practise English in the classroom meant that she felt 'scared' when she had to use the language outside the classroom:

Practice is the best thing to learn. When we were by the school we were in a lot of contact with English, but when I had to go out to work and speak the language, I was so scared. You don't have the practice, just the structures.

Although all the learners agreed they needed the opportunity to practise English in the classroom, they did not agree on what kind of curriculum the language teacher should develop. The learners had different expectations of

formal language classes because of their unique experiences of natural language learning outside the classroom. They looked to the formal language classroom to *complement* the kind of learning that took place in other sites. Thus Mai, for example, who had the opportunity to speak English in the workplace, wanted the opportunity to *write* in the ESL class: 'Speaking I can learn every way – outside, in the bus, on the bus, or on the train. Everywhere. But for reading and writing I have to go to school.' Martina, on the other hand, who had a great deal of writing practice in her upgrading courses, wanted the opportunity to talk in the ESL class: 'If I wrote, I can correct by myself and I can think about it. The problem with speaking – I don't have time to think about it. But if I write something, it's not big problem.'

As a result of experiences in their communities, the learners also indicated that they would like an ESL course to familiarize them with the cultural practices of Canadian society. The learners suggested that the ESL course had given them a rather idealized picture of the kinds of communicative contexts in which they would be required to use English outside the classroom. Martina wrote the following in her diary entry of 17 February 1991: 'After the ESL course when I had the interview, they asked me very different questions, the ones that we didn't study in school and I was very surprised.' Such a comment was an echo of a previous statement she had made in an interview on 17 January 1991:

Ya, I was there. I had interview about two hours long. They want to know everything about me. They asked different questions. I never heard these question. Some question was 'What I will do if the boss was shouting at me'. And I was very surprised. I thought 'My boss never, never shouted at me'.

And I don't know, I said 'If I do something bad, I try to do better. And I will apologize'. But I don't know because never, never, I don't think about it.

Of particular concern is that all of the learners had come to the realization that their access to anglophone Canadians was compromised by their position as immigrants in Canadian society. Martina said that Canadians are 'fed up' with people who don't speak English. Eva said that a co-worker had indicated that he didn't like working with people who 'aren't Canadian'. Felicia said that Canadians 'look down' on immigrants. Indeed, all the learners noted that whenever a breakdown in communication occurred, it was they who felt ashamed, while the target language speaker expressed impatience. Like the learners in the European Science Foundation Project (Bremer et al., 1996; Perdue, 1993), the learners in my study had found that the onus is on the *learner* to understand and be understood, and not on the native speaker to ensure that the learner understands.

In sum, despite their initial enthusiasm for Course A, the learners found that intensive instruction in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary was of limited value when they had little opportunity to interact with the wider community. Even when opportunities did arise, as I have indicated above, they found that there were particular social conditions under which they were most uncomfortable and unlikely to speak. (On this issue see also

Auerbach and McGrail, 1991; Cumming and Gill, 1992; Goldstein, 1996; Rockhill and Tomic, 1995.) It is important to note, further, that Katarina and Felicia's acts of resistance took place *after* their initial exposure to a course similar to Course A. As Katarina said, she liked her first ESL class, where she learnt grammar and vocabulary and occasionally read the newspaper, but in the second ESL class, in which she resisted participation, she felt like a student in first grade. It could be argued, in fact, that as language learners seek more contact in the wider community, their investments in their imagined communities may grow stronger, and the risk of non-participation in language courses may increase correspondingly. In addition, as Toohey (personal communication) notes, while language learners may be comfortable in being positioned as newcomers to the knowledge and skills of the grammar teacher, some may resist being positioned as newcomers to the practices of being an adult, such as renting an apartment, going to the doctor and taking a bus.

#### BEYOND THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY

Thus far I have argued that a language learner's non-participation in a second language class may result from a disjuncture between the learner's imagined community and the teacher's curriculum goals. This disjuncture is made more complex by the fact that a learner's expectations of the second language curriculum will likely change over time, partly as a result of the nature of the learner's interactions in the wider target language community. While non-participation is a highly complex practice, there are two points, drawn from my research, that may have pedagogical and research significance. The first point to note is that whether or not learner investments are recognized as an integral part of the second language curriculum, the methods that a teacher uses in the classroom will nevertheless engage the identities of learners in diverse and sometimes unsettling ways. If we do not acknowledge the imagined communities of the learners in our classrooms, we may exacerbate their non-participation. My research suggests that teachers might encourage learners to think of themselves as living in multiple communities, including the classroom community, the target language community and the imagined community. As teachers help learners interrogate their investments in their imagined community, with its unique possibilities and limitations, they may simultaneously address the risk of non-participation in the language classroom.

My second and concluding point concerns the implications of my findings for further research. The key to such research arises from the finding that learners have different investments in particular members of the target language community, and that learners may be most uncomfortable speaking to people in whom they have the greatest investment. Further, the people in whom learners have the greatest investment, my research suggests, may be the very people who represent or provide access to the imagined community of a given learner. I think it would be interesting for teachers, learners and

researchers to ask to what extent such investments are productive for learner engagement in the wider target language community. To the extent that such investments are productive, they could be fostered and encouraged. However, if such investments compromise a learner's engagement with the wider target language community, in general, and second language classrooms, in particular, they raise important questions for teachers, learners and researchers alike. Thus, while we may acknowledge a learner's imagined community, it may be problematic to celebrate this community unconditionally. This point is made convincingly by Simon (1992) who argues that memories, images and desires should be the source for radical renewal, and that students should be encouraged to interrogate why they desire what they do, and whether such desires are consistent with a vision of future possibility. I hope that further research will shed light on the intriguing relationship between learners' non-participation and their imagined communities.

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