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# The Role Of Collaboration And Performance-Based Assessment In Engaging Learners To Promote Real World Proficiency In Foreign Languages For An Increasingly Multilingual World

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**THE ROLE OF COLLABORATION AND PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT IN  
ENGAGING LEARNERS TO PROMOTE REAL WORLD PROFICIENCY IN FOREIGN  
LANGUAGES FOR AN INCREASINGLY MULTILINGUAL WORLD**

by

**SABRINA FICANO**

**DISSERTATION**

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

2017

MAJOR: CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

(Foreign Language Education)

Approved By:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor

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Date

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my loving and supportive family. This degree would not have been possible without their love and encouragement and I want to give special thanks to all of them – Marco, Rosalia, Mom, Dad, Grandpa Tony, Bobby, Kate – and all of my grandparents and great grandparents who are still with us in memory: Mafalda, Paris, Lena, Virginia, and Boleslav.

My passion and inspiration for learning began with my great grandparents and grandparents whom I was so fortunate to get to know so well. Many of them crossed an ocean leaving behind the life they knew in search of a better life and opportunity for future generations of our family. They worked hard at multiple jobs to provide for their loved ones and were dedicated to giving the world to my parents. They took care of all of their grandchildren and also helped raise us to be who we are today. I miss all of you every day but I am also so thankful that my grandfather Tony is here to see me graduate and I feel so lucky that I have him in my life.

My passion is continually fostered by my parents who, from the day I was born, instilled in me that I could do anything I set my mind to. You both believed in me even when I did not always believe in myself, supported me through good times and bad, and always sacrificed yourselves and your needs to ensure that I could pursue my dreams. I am forever grateful for your love and encouragement and do not know what I would do without you!

Finally, I want to thank my husband Marco and my daughter Rosalia. You helped me get through this process filled with tears and joy and made sure I kept going to the end. Marco, you gave me endless support and love as a caring husband and father to our daughter and I cannot imagine where I would be without you. Rosalia, you have already sacrificed more for me than your little heart can understand because of all of the times I was writing and wishing that instead I was with you. I hope that one day you know that I did this for you and that it shows you that you too can accomplish anything you want to do and be whomever you want to be.

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The world, as we know it, is becoming a smaller and more interconnected place. With faster and more affordable travel and the rapid development of Internet communication, people can physically and virtually connect across the globe more easily than at any time in human history. Virtual conferencing with Skype or Facetime, instant email and chat programs, such as Twitter and Facebook Messenger, on every smart phone and similar electronic devices and easy-to-use applications (i.e., apps) allow people to communicate across long distances in ways that are faster and more efficient than ever before. In other words, when people want to communicate with each other, they can do so instantaneously. In addition to the shrinking world due to increased technology, people from around the world are also migrating at higher rates than ever to the United States. In 2013, a report from the Migration Policy institute reported 41.3 million migrants from across the globe are living in the United States, which means that the communities in which we live are increasing multilingual.

All people, no matter which device they use or where they live, need *language* to make a meaningful connection. Despite the need in our global society to know more than one language to communicate, whether virtually or within our own communities, learning a second language is not a highly-valued skill. Even President Barack Obama admitted, “I don’t speak a foreign language; it’s embarrassing!” (Gavrilovic, 2008). The majority of U.S. students who complete the one-or two-year high school foreign language requirements remain unable to use those language skills in their personal or professional lives. Nevertheless, if U.S. foreign language educators make a commitment to effective instruction and assessment, we can promote our students’ proficient, life-long second language skills. In addition, I argue that the keys to creating language proficiency are collaborative group work and performance assessments. Therefore, in this study, I explored the ways in which collaborative learning and performance assessments positively support student

success in developing proficiency in a second language, but also foster students' use of those skills in real-world contexts over a long period of time.

### **The State of Foreign Language Education in the United States**

Learning foreign languages in general is very undervalued in the United States and as a result, foreign language education has been on the decline since the late 1800s. This was not always the prevailing attitude, however. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century speaking more than one language was revered and thrived within several bilingual immigrant communities. With the Louisiana Purchase of 1803, for example, the United States gained a large French-speaking population that lived there. After the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), the United States incorporated over 75,000 Spanish and indigenous language speakers. Laws were passed to protect these groups between 1847-1849 allowing Anglo-French instruction in Louisiana schools and insuring the Spanish-language rights of citizens of the southwest immigrants. However, a shift in ideology in the 1880s followed a large influx of non-English-speaking immigrants from Europe and created a reactionary nationalist movement calling for the “Americanization” of people and culture (Franklin, 2013) within the U.S. Many Americans associated new European immigrants—who tended to be poorer and less educated than previous immigrants to the United States—with overcrowding, disease, and lack of jobs (Brackemyer, 2012).

Following 1880, new laws and legislations arose to remove foreign-language rights of the immigrants. The California Constitution, for example, was re-written such that all laws, official documents, and legal proceedings were to be conducted only in English. This “English only” movement reached a new peak during World War I as wide-spread campaigning against the German language pushed for English to be considered the social equivalent of being “American” and the speaking of English as a symbol of support during the war (Franklin, 2013). Before and after the war, legislation continued to promote the “English only” movement, especially in schools,

resulting in the removal of foreign language instruction from the majority of elementary programs (Franklin, 2013). This abolition negatively impacted language learning on all levels and, unfortunately, the lack of foreign language instruction is still reflected in modern elementary curriculums. Today, society and life differ greatly compared to what people experienced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and yet the negative attitudes toward immigration and, consequently, the use of foreign languages persists today. Thirty states and territories, for example, have declared English as their official language even though there is no law establishing an official language for the United States as a whole. Groups such as ProEnglish, U.S. English, and English First, all non-profit lobbying organizations, also continue to support movements within the government to make English the official language. The question that arises is why does there remain any foreign language education at all in the U.S. if it is so undervalued? The answer is simple: in today's global society, we need to be able to communicate in other languages with other countries and cultures to continue to participate as a nation on a global level.

Around the world people speak an estimated 6,700 languages (<http://www.ethnologue.com/statistics>), and one does not have to travel far to encounter a language and culture different from one's own. Despite the perpetual English-only movement, residents of the United States speak approximately 311 languages and, for over 55 million of them, English is not their primary language (Shin & Kominski, 2010). In an increasingly smaller, more globally interconnected world, the ability to speak more than one language will be the key to building and maintaining personal and professional relationships both within the United States and across the globe.

Effective communication, however, includes more than being able to speak another language; it includes the ability to understand the culture from which it was born. Foreign language teachers recognize the importance of connecting language and culture in students' classroom

experiences. Byram (1997) describes the unique role and dynamic that language and culture create within communication. Applying Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) framework demonstrates that incorporating (1) intercultural attitudes, (2) knowledge, (3) interpreting and relating, (4) discovering and interaction, and (5) cultural awareness in a foreign language classroom setting offers students opportunities to become interculturally competent speakers of a foreign language and possess both communicative competence in that language as well as particular skills, attitudes, values, and knowledge about a culture. As a result, the student can turn intercultural encounters into intercultural relationships, which will allow them to gain an insider view of foreign culture while also contributing an outlook reflective of their own culture in the exchange. Moreover, when considering the National Standards and Benchmarks in language education today, the combination of language and cultural components define the key to success for students to effectively communicate in the target language with people from other cultures by perpetuating a mutual understanding and an attitude of openness (ACTFL, 2013).

Athanasopoulos et al. (2015) similarly demonstrate the significance of cultural awareness by analyzing the thoughts and perspective of bilingual speakers. Athanasopoulos suggests that, "a second language can play an important unconscious role in framing perception... By having another language, you have an "alternative vision of the world" (as cited by Weiler, 2015, para. 8). Thus, the unique relationship between language and culture is so intertwined that one cannot be proficient in a language without also being familiar and versed in the culture of the people who speak it.

Increasing linguistic and cultural diversity across the globe has influenced changes in multiple fields, including medicine, education, business, science, government, technology, and law enforcement (Koning, 2009). In 2011, nearly one third of the 31 million U.S. employees of multinational firms worked outside of the United States and the numbers have continued to grow



(Matthews, 2012). Business leaders in the U.S. argue that they can no longer survive economically without being involved in the global market because “that’s where the sales are” (Matthews, 2012, para 1). Both doing business with and in other countries by contracting with a foreign company to provide a product or service (i.e., outsourcing) and/or opening a factory in another country (i.e., off-shoring) are increasing trends for U.S. businesses (Matthews, 2012). Furthermore, business leaders recognize that to compete successfully in the global marketplace, they need employees who can communicate and work effectively with foreign employees, and that entails both speaking multiple languages and understanding other cultures (Petro, 2007).

The United States government also has an increasing need to employ people who are proficient in multiple languages and cultures in order to foster relationships around the globe, including federal employees who work with an increasingly diverse American population, gather intelligence for government agencies, serve as diplomats or staff in foreign embassies, or serve as translators (Lee, 2012). In testimony to the U.S. Senate, Vice Present of Business and Government Relations Michael Petro stated, “The FBI and other federal government agencies lack sufficient linguists to translate intelligence information in critical languages in a timely manner. Furthermore, our diplomatic efforts often have been hampered by a lack of cultural awareness” (Petro, 2007, p. 3). Petro argues that the United States perpetually denies that its people are in fact ignorant of language and cultures around the world, and calls for an increase in coverage of foreign affairs, world events, and foreign broadcasts. By not becoming more globally aware, he argues, the United States only further increases the risks to our national and economic security. The people of the United States no longer have the luxury of living in linguistic isolation.

While stakeholders in the United States cite the political and economic necessities of being fluent in more than one language and culture, our multilingual European counterparts aspire to change global relationships. UNESCO and the Council of Europe promote global citizenship,

peace, and human rights through foreign language study to prepare students to engage in world issues, not just local ones, such as migration, mobility, social inequity, or the destruction of the environment (Cates, 2005). Through the interdisciplinary study of language within their cultural contexts, students develop a deeper understanding of global expectations, behaviors, perspectives, cultures and values (Georgiou, 2009). Franklin (2013), a professor of Arabic at a Texas University, eloquently states, “We are blessed with such diverse communities here in the United States, and English is common among all of us, but we need to create other [linguistic] links, not just to American citizens, but also to other citizens of the global village” (para 11). Like our European neighbors, we do not have to leave our borders to experience a variety of diversity and culture that makes our nation what it is today. If students in the United States experienced this understanding of many languages and cultures they would be better prepared to be active participants and problem solvers within in the U.S. as global citizens and leaders.

Despite the critical need for the United States to be a multilingual society for our economic success, national security, and participation in global citizenship, there continues to be a significant lack of participation on a national level in foreign language education programs (Petro, 2007; Rhodes & Pufahl, 2009). In fact, as the world becomes more interconnected and accessible, the U.S. educational system continues to experience a decrease in foreign language study, especially in K-12 programs (ACTFL, 2010). There are several symptoms of this decline that include a continual decrease in government funding from already reduced-budget programs, lack of space in the curriculum for foreign language study, federal mandates that impact the curriculum by focusing on testing, a lack of available qualified instructors resulting in poor quality programs, and an overall indifferent societal attitude towards the value and necessity of foreign language (Phillips, 2011). Even when there is legislation mandating foreign language education, many adversaries suppress the requirement as “a threat that needs to be quelled” (Franklin, 2013). In

order to understand how foreign language education got to the state it is in today, it is important to understand how underlying symptoms of decline in foreign language education affect existing second language programs.

### **Symptoms of Continued Decline Affecting Foreign Language Education**

**An English-only movement.** One of the main symptoms of decline affecting foreign language education stems from the continuation of the “English only” movement perpetuated by government legislation such as the “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB) of 2001. NCLB was signed into law in 2002 with the goal of ensuring that every child in the United States meets the high learning standards set forth by each state. Measures put in place to assure states are meeting their goals include annual testing of students in the state standards three times in each student’s career, aggregation and disaggregation analysis of data regarding students’ achievement in these tests, and 100% of students meeting state standards. These requirements affected language education by stipulating that all limited English proficient students need to be completely proficient in English. As a result, NCLB essentially eliminated bilingual education and reduced second language education programs by only continuing to fund and support English Language Learners (ELLs) in English-only learning environments along with the core content areas of mathematics, science, English and social studies (Crawford, 2002). The goal was to raise accountability in not only English proficiency but in proficiency in the core content areas; priorities that proponents of NCLB believed impossible in bilingual programs and without taking funding from non-core content areas. So despite an increasing need in the United States for foreign language proficiency, federal legislation policies are creating a “great disconnect between these needs... moving the country in the opposite direction” (Wright, 2007, p. 1). A recent poll by Gallup (2013) demonstrates that this attitude goes beyond the realm of education, citing that 72% of Americans believe all immigrants should learn to speak English, but only 20% of them believe

Americans should learn another language besides English (Jones, 2013). This echoes the prior “English only” sentiment of the 1800s in a modern platform, which could be motivated in part by the anti-immigrant sentiments regarding the host of new immigrants entering the country today. Although NCLB is no longer federal law, its effects linger.

**Lack of curriculum space due to federal mandates.** Another symptom of decline impacting foreign language education is the focus on the common core curriculum areas for which schools are accountable on standardized tests, which consequently, do not evaluate foreign language content. This shifted curriculum away from foreign language as NCLB mandates brought national attention to student achievement in English, math, science, and social studies. Achievement in these content areas continues to be the focus of newer education reform to resolve achievement issues in legislation known as the “Common Core State Standards” (CCSS). The Obama administration offered \$4.35 billion in federal funds for districts willing to implement the Common Core State Standards framework. As a result, 46 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS in hopes of enhancing American students’ performance in English, mathematics, science, and social studies as well as their “college and career readiness” (Loveless, 2012; Ravitch, 2013). The CCSS framework aims to have students experience a common curriculum, take comparable tests and, thus, be compared in performance levels on a national scale. While CCSS is still relatively new, there have yet to be studies regarding its direct effect on foreign language programs. However, as a mandate very similar to NCLB, the potential effect of implementing the CCSS on foreign language education can easily result in continued foreign language program reduction or elimination.

**Under funding.** Given the focus on core content areas in the curriculum coupled with the continued “English only” movement in schools, it is no surprise that NCLB and CCSS also resulted in reduced funding for second language programs. Across the nation, many school districts are

dedicating their financial resources to the CCSS framework making them “[rethink] whether they can really afford to introduce foreign tongues to their youngest students while under constant pressure to downsize budgets and raise achievement in English and other core subjects” (Hu, 2009, para. 5). In this time of “increasing educational accountability” foreign language education professionals also have to constantly defend their programs’ merits simply to compete with the effects of NCLB or continuous budget cuts to survive (Glisan, 2010, p. 1). A survey by the Counsel for Basic Education (CBE) revealed three quarters of school principals reported an increase in instructional time for the core content areas schools are evaluated for in Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) measurements and, therefore, also instructional time in the arts, social studies, and foreign language (Harmon Rosenbusch, 2005). The same survey revealed that insufficient funds, lack of administrator support for foreign language education, and state testing were the top reasons for cuts to their programs. New programs like CCSS cost a great deal of money and schools are fast to eliminate subjects not under constant scrutiny in achievement such as physical education, the arts, music, and, of course, foreign language.

Programs like NCLB and CCSS create confusion as to what curriculum should be valued for students today by only funding and scrutinizing achievement in the core content areas. This confusion continues to negatively affect foreign language education as indicated by Ravitch’s (2013) plea to the public:

How the nation can adopt national standards without any evidence whatever that they will improve achievement, enrich education, and actually help to prepare young people -- not for the jobs of the future, which are unknown and unknowable -- but for the challenges of citizenship and life? The biggest fallacy of the Common Core standards is that they have been sold to the nation without any evidence that they will accomplish what their boosters claim (para. 29).

In other words, programs like the CCSS that are supported by billions of dollars from the federal government make schools and stakeholders quick to implement and fully support them at the cost

of other subjects before they have even been truly tested. This is done at the cost of cutting foreign language.

**Lack of commitment to language study.** While common core subjects are extremely important to students' futures and careers, this overemphasis and national obsession with test scores in the core-content areas continues to negatively impact foreign language education. In addition to foreign language programs that are eliminated completely at the elementary level due to budget constraints, middle and high schools' programs often fail to receive proper money and resources to sustain and enhance foreign language learning; another symptom of decline and a lack of commitment to fostering successful foreign language education. An example of this lack of commitment is the constant flux of graduation requirements. Currently, only 28 states in the U.S. implement a foreign language requirement for graduation ("National Council," 2015). In the state of Michigan, high school students are required to complete four credits of English, four credits of mathematics, three credits of science, and three credits of social studies but only one credit of foreign language (Michigan Department of Education, 2014). This is a reduction of the previous two-credit requirement the state originally mandated for the class of 2016.

In addition to the reduction in foreign language graduation requirements, the advent of mandates in achievement in the core subject areas of mathematics, science, English, and social studies, school investment in resources for foreign language programs has also markedly decreased (Harmon Rosenbusch, 2005). According to a recent survey by The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) (2010), in 68% of districts nationwide, other core areas are given preference in time for instruction (class offerings), budget allocations, professional development opportunities, and assessment development. As Ravitch (2013) points out, "[b]ecause of budget cuts, many schools have less time and resources for the arts, physical education, foreign languages, and other subjects crucial for a real education. As more money is

allocated to testing and accountability, less money is available for the essential programs and services that all schools should provide” (paras. 30-31).

In other words, the necessary time and resources are not being dedicated to the maintenance and improvement of foreign language education and curriculum. This is true in not only the public but also private sector of education. For example, a high-performing private school in Westchester, NY that offered foreign language education even at the elementary level reported that class consolidation and budget cuts lead them to “decide the time and resources — an estimated \$175,000 a year — could be better spent on other subjects” (Hu, 2009, para. 1). A nearby district followed suit, replacing all of their Spanish teachers with Rosetta Stone, an interactive computer program that only cost \$70,000, less than half of the teachers’ combined salaries (Hu, 2009). The concern with implementing a computer program like Rosetta Stone is that a computer program simply cannot provide the authentic discourse and interactive experience that students would receive from having an actual foreign language teacher (Hu, 2009). In addition to concerns with where to dedicate funding, a school’s commitment to particular subjects is also influenced by fears for losing funding if certain levels of scores are not achieved. Thus, schools are so anxious to reach the strict mandates for achievement set forth by NCLB and CCSS that they do not believe there is enough time or money to dedicate to improve the curriculum in both the core content areas and elective subjects like foreign language.

However, successfully maintaining dedication to both “core curriculum” areas and foreign language study is possible. Students in Finland, for example, dedicate 16 hours a week to foreign language study in a minimum of two languages outside of their mother tongue and also rank 2<sup>nd</sup> in the world in achievement in science, 3<sup>rd</sup> in reading, and 5<sup>th</sup> in math based on the national PISA comprehensive assessment, ranking 2<sup>nd</sup> overall across all categories (“20 Embarrassing Facts,” 2012; [www.oph.fi](http://www.oph.fi); Shepherd, 2010). To be competitive in today’s global society, we need to

increase, not decrease our dedication, curriculum, and funding to foreign language education and that this will be the only way to increase overall student achievement in the United States so that our students can have outcomes comparable to their international counterparts.

**Failure of current foreign language programs.** The failure of current programs includes their lack of ability to attract students as well as their failure to adequately prepare them for continued use of a foreign language. Another symptom of decline regarding the lack of value of foreign language education is that students do not want to dedicate themselves to the lengthy amount of time it takes to truly build language proficiency, creating a reduced interest in continued language study (Lewis, 2015). According to Gallup (2001), only about one in four adults report being able to hold a conversation in a second language and only 19% of those surveyed felt it was an essential skill (McComb, 2001). This is no surprise when looking at the current enrollment in language programs. A recent survey by ACTFL (2010) revealed that only 18.5% of students nationwide are enrolled in a foreign language course in the K-12 levels (Glisan, 2012). As if this number was not low enough, there is also a decline in enrollment in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades in most states (Forbes, 2012). There has also been a reduction specifically in the number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) foreign language exams. In 2014, of the 4.2 million language exams taken only 5% were in foreign languages (Lewis, 2015). In other words, the continued lack of value of languages other than English is obvious in the current abysmal enrollment in foreign language programs across the country.

A significant factor in this decline is the reduction of early language programs. A long sequence of language study is paramount to developing proficiency and this means starting language study at the pre-school or elementary levels; not only because it increases the mere hours of study, but also because students have the most positive outlook towards learning at an early age (Glisan, 2012; Heining-Boynton & Haitema 2007). Despite significant research indicating the



markedly increased achievement in foreign language proficiency when students begin their study at an early age, elementary language programs are usually the first to be cut and the vast majority of Americans do not start their language study until high school (Glisan, 2012; Pufahl & Rhodes, 2001). A recent survey showed in 1997, 31% of elementary schools offered foreign language classes, but by 2008 that number was reduced to 25% (Rhodes & Pufahl, 2010). This decline is also connected with NCLB where schools felt the need to direct funding to tested subjects making “FLES [Foreign Language in the Elementary School] ... a luxury” (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011, p. 272). Even within those existing programs, resources are slim. The same survey found that in more than half of the elementary schools there was only one foreign language teacher for every 150 elementary students. This teacher travels from school to school giving less than 120 minutes of instruction per week in an exploratory format. Studies show that the most efficient means for creating proficiency are immersion environments which only 6% of the schools surveyed provide. “This means that many of those elementary students who are receiving foreign language instruction will not achieve any measure of proficiency” (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011, p. 274).

Consequently, a lack of language proficiency is evident at the high school and university levels as well. A study by the Center for Applied Language Studies (2010) showed that of students who commit to four years of high school language study (or the equivalent of 720 hours) only 15% reach ACTFL’s Proficiency Guideline’s “Intermediate-Mid” level of proficiency. Research by Conrad (1978) demonstrated that even of students who major in foreign language at the university level, less than half reach a “minimal professional proficiency” (pp. 1-2). Clearly the approach and curriculum of the majority of today’s foreign-language programs are flawed. However, in spite of the challenges faced by these programs, foreign language education continues to survive because community leaders have kept programs in the curriculum; educators, families, and ethnic communities still voice their opinion that foreign language education significant. Therefore,

despite the budget cuts, lack of curriculum space, and tensions created by the English-only movement, in some way, there has always been, at least, some movement to keep foreign language learning alive.

### **Purpose of the Study**

There are many issues foreign language educators cannot control regarding foreign language curriculums and programs. Nevertheless, we can influence the implementation of classroom practices that promote proficiency and create effective foreign language education programs that meet the needs of today's 21<sup>st</sup> century students. In today's global society, there is an emerging need for people who are proficient in, not only specific skills (i.e., the ability to interpret specific input or create output) in a foreign language, but also in the ability to communicate and function within an authentic cultural setting. I argue, therefore, that we need to focus on improving existing foreign language education programs so students can experience success in their language study as future global citizens.

In this study, I demonstrate that collaborative learning and performance-based assessment are related to an increase in students' perceptions of their language proficiency, as well as their long-term foreign language use, and represents a significant improvement in foreign language instruction and assessment. In addition, I show how these goals are representative of the ACTFL 5Cs Foreign Language National Standards and Benchmarks. In a recent study, Adair-Hauck et al. (2006) stated, "although current research suggests new paradigms for assessments, virtually no assessments have focused on measuring learner progress in attaining the standards while capturing the connection between classroom experiences and performance on assessments" (p. 360). In light of this gap, this study endeavors to address the need in the United States to strengthen foreign language education as experienced by diverse 21st century learners to be more engaging, meaningful, and authentic. Three research questions will guide this investigation:

1. In what ways do former high school foreign-language students perceive the collaborative instructional and performance-based assessment approaches they experienced as fostering their foreign language proficiency and communicative competence?
2. Do these former foreign-language students perceive themselves as people who continue to use the foreign language they learned in high school? If so, in what ways have they used their foreign-language learning in real-world contexts after graduating from high school? If not, why not?
3. Do these former foreign-language students perceive themselves as having a passion for language use and/or study? Why or why not?

## CHAPTER 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the most important parts of understanding where foreign-language education needs to go, is understanding underlying theories related to how students learn language and the ways in which they are applied in current foreign language programs. As discussed in chapter one, while the understanding of language acquisition has continued to evolve over the past 30 years, our teaching and assessment practices have remained relatively stagnant. Many foreign language classrooms continue to employ more traditional approaches to teaching and assessment, such as grammar-based approaches, as the primary focus of instruction, and pencil and paper tests of non-contextualized and discrete-point content as the primary means of assessment (Adair- Hauck & Pierce, 1998; Adair-Hauck et al., 2006; Bachman, 1990; Chalhoub-Deville, 1997; Glisan & Foltz, 1998; Liskin-Gasparro, 1996; Schulz, 1998; Wiggins, 1998). While these practices can contribute to students' understanding of language mechanics and allow teachers to measure progress of students attaining specific linguistic knowledge, they alone will not foster students' abilities to apply their language in a meaningful and communicative context. Therefore, foreign language programs from the primary to the university level not only need to focus on acquiring skills of language proficiency, but also need to integrate cultural, authentic, and contextual curriculums that go far beyond teaching only basic language skills. This understanding has led to the need for new approaches to foreign language teaching and learning that marry foreign language skills with the study of content and cultural knowledge from many disciplines. This study investigates the experiences and perceptions of former advanced high school Spanish language learners in order to determine if they believe that the collaborative and performance-based experiences they had in their high school AP Spanish class contributed to their continued use of Spanish after graduating from the program. In this chapter, I examine the theoretical foundations of foreign-language acquisition and connect them to collaborative and performance-based approaches to instruction

and assessment. I demonstrate that these approaches to teaching and learning language in a classroom contribute to authentic, real-world outcomes for students who live in a global context that is increasingly multilingual and interconnected.

### **A New Direction for Foreign Language Education**

#### **Sociocultural Theory**

Of the many theories of language acquisition that are applied in foreign language education practices today and the theorist that stands out in, not only language research, but also broadly in understanding cognitive development, is renowned Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky and his Sociocultural Theory (SCT). SCT has been part of broader research in numerous fields since its inception, such as child psychology and education (Kozulin, 2003). The theory originated from Vygotsky's research interests in demonstrating that higher-level functions, such as memory, understanding concepts, or acquiring skills, are a direct result of interactive experiences with others (Kozulin, 2003). According to Vygotsky, language learning is a result of both a child's environment—and the people in it—as well as the child's own cognition (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf, 2006). Learning occurs on two levels: first on a social level (through interaction with others), and then on an individual level (within the child) (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf, 2006). Therefore, the original intention of Vygotsky's theory seemed to be to serve as the basis of human psychology for understanding the general origins, functioning, and development of people (Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf, 2006).

Vygotsky attempted to overcome a crisis that had arisen from the variety of diverse perspectives and objects studied in the field based on either a natural science approach or a humanistic tradition approach to understanding development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). SCT arose from Vygotsky's effort to create a unified theory that offered a new way of thinking about the human mind and development in regard to human consciousness and the ability to voluntarily

control the world through higher-level cultural tools, such as language, literacy, numeracy, categorization, rationality, and logic (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). He based his ideas on the belief that human development, specifically in children, was a result of practical activities combined with social environment. In other words, social factors shape human mental activity in that people do not only react to the world, but they also change the world with their reactions (Lantolf, 2006); as a result, development is not completely predictable. When applying SCT specifically in the field of language acquisition research, Vygotsky believed language played two critical roles in cognitive development: (a) as the primary means adults transmit information to children, and (b) as the child's most powerful tool for intellectual adaption (McLeod, 2014). Vygotsky never proposed specific teaching methods or strategies, but rather aimed to emphasize the significance of social interaction in overall learning and development. Therefore, in order to look at this theory from a more practical application standpoint, or what SCT might look like in a classroom, it is important to examine the ways the underlying principles of the theory have been applied in order to study instructional and assessment practices for language teaching, and proficiency development in language learners.

### **Sociocultural Theory and Current Trends in Language Learning**

#### **Collaborative Learning**

Up until the 1960s, some thinkers stressed an individualist approach to instructional practices based on the belief that isolating students to learn independently at their own rate created strong language skills in individuals (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). However, social scientists criticized this belief citing the significance of peer interaction and relationships in socialization and learning (Hartup, 1976; Johnson, 1980; Ladd, 1999). Moreover, from a feasibility standpoint in education, the group approach to instruction also made sense because “the practical circumstances force most teachers to plan activities on the scale of classes or groups, not

individuals” (Mercer & Fisher, 1997, p. 209). By the 1980s, collaborative learning gained popularity and acceptance in education and continues to be widely implemented (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). This corresponds to the principles of SCT that demonstrate that learning occurs between people before a person internalizes their learning; therefore, in order for language learning to occur, there must be social component involved in learning like collaboration in the classroom between the learner, teacher, and peers. This social collaboration or collaborative learning is defined as building knowledge through a collective exchange of ideas and mutual support by learners engaging in dialogues to promote knowledge acquisition (Vygotsky, 1966). This study directly investigated the influence of collaborative learning on former high-school students’ perceptions of their past and present language proficiency.

Collaborative learning in the context of education is referred to in many different ways such as “cooperative learning, collaborative learning, collective learning, learning communities, peer teaching, peer learning, or team learning” (Dooly, 2008, p. 21). However, no matter how educators discuss this idea, the goal behind all of these references to collaboration is the same: getting students to work together to accomplish a shared goal. In the foreign language classroom, teachers implement collaborative learning activities to foster peer interactions that will build knowledge while simultaneously demonstrating responsibility for their own as well as their group’s learning and improvement (Dooly, 2008).

Research on collaborative learning has reported positive outcomes in education such as students exhibiting better knowledge retention and an increased level of enjoyment of the material (Beckman, 1990; Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Donato, 1994; Harden, Arnd, & Dirkköhler, 2006; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). These outcomes were apparent when students were responsible for engaging in social collaboration learning activities to both guide and support not only their own learning by the learning of each group member. The idea of students socially collaborating in this

way to guide each other through tasks to gain knowledge is called scaffolding. According to Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976), scaffolding is the interaction between an adult and learner in a problem-solving scenario. Wood et al. (1976) describe scaffolding as an adult guiding a learner through the task with calibrated support. This support is guided by six features: (1) “recruitment” or gaining the learner’s interest; (2) “reduction in degrees of freedom” or utilizing step-by-step problem-solving processes; (3) “direction maintenance” or keeping the learner on task towards the goal; (4) “critical feature marking” or indicating to the learner what is significant; (5) “frustration control” or making sure the learner does not feel angst while working on the task; and (6) “modeling” to show how to solve the task which the learner in turn imitates (Boblett, 2012, p. 2).

While the idea of scaffolding was developed over 40 years after Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, researchers tied the ideas together to explain how learners collaborate with an expert to gain knowledge they otherwise could not acquire independently (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Boblett, 2012; Cazden, 1979; Ohta, 1995; Palincsar & Brown, 1984). Even though studies focus on the scaffolding between a teacher and learner, more recent studies have revealed there is great benefit in learners also engaging in scaffolding with their peers as the social interaction among learners creates opportunities for support that can bring about significant progress in learning (Ahlquist, 2015; Donato, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Pufahl, Rhodes, & Christian, 2000).

Specifically, in foreign language education, researchers found collaborative learning and scaffolding can improve students’ second language acquisition and proficiency (Donato, 1994; Harden, Arnd, & Dirkköhler, 2006). Harden, Arnd, and Dirkköhler (2006), for example, studied the positive impact of collaborative dialogues in language study. They noted that providing learners opportunities to identify their linguistic shortcomings and then having them use those shortcomings to co-construct and amend knowledge and meaning was largely overlooked in traditional foreign language instruction, which tends to view language acquisition as an internal



mental process. Harden et al. (2006) found that collaborative learning started with simplistic tasks that elicit replication by students and eventually learning became complex, communicative, and sociocultural. When learning was transformed in this way, students moved beyond replication and into an understanding of conceptual meaning of content. In order for learners to move from simplistic ideas to complex gains in knowledge, however, collaborative dialogues were essential because they provided students not only with opportunities to discover what they know, but also to uncover what knowledge they were lacking.

Donato (1994) also explored how students co-construct knowledge in a language classroom setting by building their second language development in social contexts. Donato studied students who worked together in a variety of small group projects on familiar topics. He found their discourse predominantly reflected the voice of a single speaker that supported “students highly collective orientation to their work” (1994, p. 40). As a result of students working together in these open-ended collaborative tasks, they mutually constructed their second language knowledge and thus improved each other’s performances in language production. Learners were simultaneously “individually novices and collectively experts, sources of new-orientations for each other, and guides through this complex linguistic problem solving” (Donato, 1994, p. 46), the very definition of scaffolding. In order to create the fundamental social interactions that successfully foster language learning from these studies, however, there are several principal phenomena from SCT that must be in place, including the more knowledgeable other (MKO), mediation, and cultural tools for learning.

**More knowledgeable other.** The MKO is someone who has more knowledge or a better understanding than the learner in a specific task, process, or concept (Lantolf, 2000 & McLeod, 2014). While many times the MKO is an adult or teacher, other students or peers can also serve as the MKO in many instances. Therefore, in collaborative instruction, students can engage with

their teacher or peers to gain knowledge. In this study, collaborative learning played a central role in instruction, especially in the upper-level classes. Moreover, peers were crucial to helping students gain knowledge in both in-class activities as well as out-of-class group projects or performance-based assessments. In class, peers worked collaboratively in numerous Reading Apprenticeship activities to help them understand the culture, literature, or even grammar study with only minimal guidance from the teacher. Reading Apprenticeship (RA) is a framework that aims to build high-level literacy by demystifying the reading process for learners by giving them cognitive awareness of the reading process as well as promoting collaboration between beginner and expert readers in a variety of collaborative tasks (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012). The RA framework links the four dimensions of classroom learning: social, personal, knowledge building, and cognitive. Students “think about and discuss their *personal* relationships to reading, the *social* environment and resources of the classroom, their *cognitive activity*, and the kinds of *knowledge* required to make sense of the text” (Schoenbach et al., 2012, p. 25).

A typical example of an RA activity is called Think-Pair-Share, in which students are first assigned a reading or topic to study for homework either by completing an accompanying vocabulary sheet, talking to the text, or writing up a journal entry. The next day, students engage with their peers where each small table group divides up by numbers one through four and each numbered group meets together to become experts on their assigned section of the text. The teacher chooses the combination of the smaller table groups with a seating chart and purposefully pair two students whose abilities are beginner-level with two students whose reading levels are more advanced. Even after students break out into expert groups and leave their original group, there is an opportunity for scaffolding between beginning-level learners and MKOs, who usually lead the discussion and provide support to the beginner-level learners who may have struggled in understanding the material for homework. Students must collaborate as an expert group to identify

key information for their assigned material by discussing their understanding of the text as unified group and deciding the three most important items they will write down and share with their original group members. The expert group is required to write identical points to share and they follow this procedure to ensure they are awarded their participation credit. Experts then return to their original table and they share out or read the information they wrote down with the members of their original expert group who take notes on what the expert is reading. When every expert has had a turn, everyone should have a complete picture of the information in the article. Because the material is divided into four parts, by the end of the activity, students will have a new perspective from each expert in the group on the entire piece studied. When students collaborate in this way, both types of learners benefit from the activity. Struggling learners benefit by receiving support from the MKOs in their expert group in understanding the material, and MKOs benefit from the opportunity to truly internalize their comprehension of the material by explaining it in new ways while guiding the beginner learners. All students, in turn, benefit from the numerous opportunities to review and revise their understanding of the material before they are assessed. After this process is complete students must participate by volunteering answers to participation questions about the material. This is only one of many examples of how students collaborate and are supported by peer MKOs to promote language learning. My investigation of the students' perceptions of the relationship between this style of instruction and their language proficiency in this study supports the development of understanding of language learning methodologies.

**Mediation.** Mediation is “the process whereby an individual connects to and learns from the surrounding social and cultural environment, [and] lies at the core of sociocultural theory... [it] forms the basis of how a community manages to communicate, and...comes to understand the meaning and value of experiences and material goods” (Boblett, 2012, p. 4). SCT implies that all higher-order thoughts are mediated and thus the brain organizes these thoughts by integrating

symbols, cultural tools, and social conventions (Boblett, 2012; Lantolf, 2000). In language acquisition, Vygotsky recognized that cultural tools, activities, and concepts mediate language learning or use language to structure the learning process and influence how it in turn affects or reshapes the thinking process (Cross, 2010; Lantolf, 2006; Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). This can happen in family life, through peer groups, or in instructional settings, such as the workplace or school (Cross, 2010; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

**Cultural tools.** Higher-level cultural tools function as a “buffer between the person and the environment and act to mediate the relationship between the individual and the social-material word” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 199). When using the cultural tools, learning is mediated or guided by human regulators (either oneself, the teacher, or classmates) and objects that affect a learner’s thinking either in terms of a biological perception or cultural perception of concepts through the interaction of voluntary and conscious activities. At first, students’ actions or thoughts are a result of subordination to adult interactions and observation of the use of objects (e.g., direct instruction or modeling by the teacher) that they eventually use to regulate their own behavior and thoughts (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This happens in three stages: in the first stage learners are controlled by their environment (object-regulation); in the second stage others provide assistance or direction that influence a learner’s behavior (other-regulation); and finally, the learner enters self-regulation because they have internalized what they learned in the previous two stages (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

In a language education, setting the use of cultural tools or artifacts is part of everyday instruction and assessment. Culture artifacts could be authentic materials (e.g., articles, audio recordings, or materials intended for a native speaker audience) or collaborative classroom learning activities, such as group investigations (Sharan & Sharan, 1976), jigsaw activities (Aronson et al., 1978), RA strategies, such as LINK, reciprocal teaching, Know-Want to know-

Learned (K-W-L), Question, Answer, Relationship (QAR), or Think-Pair-Share (Lyman, 1981; “RA Reference Guide,” 2015). Learners go through the stages described above by observing language and how it is used in the classroom, seeing it modeled by peers, videos, or other relevant cultural artifacts and eventually producing their own language as the learning process continues. The more learners engage in a language-filled environment, the more proficiency they build over time and, thus, the more spontaneous and creative their language production becomes.

Collaborative learning that incorporates MKOs, mediation, and cultural tools supports learning. In a study by Ahlquist (2015), for example, students worked collaboratively in activity called “the storyline approach” in which a fictitious world is created in the classroom (serving as the cultural tool) and all students are given a role to take on as one of the “characters” in the story. In the activity, students have to interact with each other to find answers to questions to help the story unfold and resolve (p. 40). The teacher conscientiously creates groups that mix MKOs with struggling students to help promote learning by having “used knowledge of the talents, proficiencies and personalities of the learners to create groups which can be expected to work effectively together, and will provide guidance, rather than answers, as the groups work on the key questions, keep the learners on track and provide regular opportunities for reviewing learning” (Ahlquist, 2015, p. 41). As a result of the collaborative storyline activity, students had reduced levels of speaking anxiety. Students reported feeling less anxious to speak the foreign language, were more likely to use their language openly in the classroom, had an increase in listening comprehension with less need for native language translation for instruction, and teachers reported a significant improvement in free-form writing.

In another collaborative learning example, Moeller & Nugent (2014) demonstrated how students collaborated in expert groups to gather information about the target language and culture with the teacher serving as a facilitator through a QAR activity. They found that engaging in

learning in small groups and then in a whole-class discussion made students more knowledgeable about cultural practices and beliefs, both essential elements in language proficiency. Davin & Donato (2013) found that providing even young language learners with access to cultural tools like collaborative groups allowed students who did not necessarily participate in whole-class discussions to verbalize their concerns and thoughts through the support of peer scaffolding, resulting in students being able to pool their knowledge and understanding to successfully complete language performance-tasks.

While all of these studies feature different aspects of group collaboration by students simply working together in a group task, they show the ways in which MKO and cultural tools mediate students in developing important common-life skills. For collaborative learning to be successful in any of the above tasks, students need to work collaboratively to accomplish shared goals by developing trust, communication, mutual support and respect, as well as conflict-resolution abilities (Johnson & Johnson, 2009). This study endeavored to show that these social skills that 21<sup>st</sup> century students developed by engaging in a collaborative learning environment, not only by showing language proficiency but also by applying their knowledge to their future careers and relationships. In other words, this study showed that collaborative instruction had a significant impact on language learning on many levels. As Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines, & Galton (2003) state, the future is not only about acquiring information or knowledge but being able to engage and interact with people in meaningful ways. “[C]o-learners—that is, pupils learning from and with each other, and making sense of the information available to us all” (Blatchford et al., 2003, p. 169) are going to be the key to our students’ future success. Students who can learn by engaging with their peers can attain new level of proficiency that will allow them to become global participants who have the ability to engage their language skills in an authentic real-world setting in meaningful contexts. For that reason, the next step is to evaluate the success of collaborative

instruction by finding a proper measure of student proficiency outcomes that is interconnected with collaborative instruction.

### **Connecting Instruction with Assessment Practices**

To test the success of collaborative instruction requires an appropriate assessment of student achievement. Traditionally, language assessment is described as “multiple-choice, one-shot approaches that characterized most standardized and... classroom tests [that are] paper-pencil tasks and are one-time events” (Donham, 2005, pp. 250-251). Traditional testing in a foreign language, whether formative or summative, focuses on isolated skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening in the second language. Students’ skills are individually measured through oral exams, multiple-choice and true/false tests on culture and content knowledge, as well as translation, fill in the blank, and short-essay prompts. These tests are efficient, easy to administer, and provide fast data-driven results, information that is in great demand by administrators, policy makers, and the state and federal governments. Language assessment, however, is facing new challenges as the result of changes in educator’s understanding of “the social character of its construct and practices” (McNamara, 2001, p. 333). While traditional assessments have a place in teaching and learning, they are not a form of evaluation that can meaningfully measure student proficiency across a variety of foreign language skills, competencies and authentic contexts. “Language proficiency is complex and can only be described using complex models. It is not sufficient to deal with theoretical aspects of language proficiency in isolation” as many traditional assessments do (Luecht, 2003, p. 533). Assessment is moving in a new direction and away from traditional tests as the primary evaluation tools of student achievement toward tools that require students to create and perform tasks that are communicative or functional in the second language thereby effectively informing learners, teachers or parents as to students’ potential performance in a more authentic context (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006).

McNamara (2001) points out that the traditional approach to language testing is seen as positivist, or scientific, and factual in its orientation, and there are numerous debates in the field that are challenging this status quo stating language testing should take a more social or socially-constructed approach to match the social nature of language and foreign language learning. Therefore, another major issue with traditional tests as they stand is “the assumption of performance as a direct outcome of competence is problematic, as it ignores the complex social construction of test performance, most obviously in the case of interactive tests such as direct tests of speaking” (McNamara, 2001, p. 337). While traditional tests are efficient and provide fast and statistically measurable results, there are many studies that show, if educators are willing to move away from the traditional approach to assessment, the gains that can be made in language proficiency will outweigh the difficulties with an alternative, authentic approach in language testing (ACTFL, 2012; Liskin-Gasparro, 1996; McNamara, 2001; Poehner, 2007; Ricardo-Osorio, 2008). Therefore, the goal of this study is to demonstrate the advantages that performance-based assessments can bring to language learning.

### **The Advantage of Performance-Based Assessment**

Alternative approaches and performance-based assessments are the key to developing students’ language proficiency and supporting life-long language learners who are prepared to engage in real-world situations in a second language. To promote changes and progress in language assessments, several alternative forms of performance-based assessments have been nominated as effective formats for evaluating students’ progress in proficiency because they require goal-directed use of language, use of multiple skills or modes of communication, and integration of content (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006; Liskin-Gasparro, 1996; Wiggins, 1998). Alternative assessment simply refers to any assessment that differs from the traditional assessment and are not single events, but part of a broad learning experience integrated with instruction



(Donham, 2005). The most common form of an alternative assessment is called authentic assessment which “engage[s] students in applying knowledge and skills in the same way they are used in the real world” (Donham, 2005, p. 251). Wiggins (1998) further details the crucial elements of authentic assessments:

Realistic by testing the learner’s knowledge and abilities in real-world situations, or those that occur outside of the classroom context; requires judgment and innovation on the part of the learner; asks the learner to “do” the academic subject by carrying out work within the discipline instead of reciting, restating, or replicating through demonstration what he or she was taught; replicates or simulates the contexts in which adults are “tested” in the workplace, in civic life, and in personal life; these contexts involve situations that have particular constraints, purposes, and audiences; assesses the learner’s ability to efficiently and effectively integrate a repertoire of knowledge and skill to negotiate a complex task; and allows appropriate opportunities to rehearse, practice, consult resources, and get feedback on and refine performances and products. (pp. 23-24)

Authentic assessment materials are often integrated into dynamic assessments or performance-based assessments. Dynamic assessment (DA), a phrase coined by Vygotsky’s colleague Luria (1961) and made popular by Feuerstein in 1979 (Poehner, 2007), is not so much an actual assessment, but rather an approach to mediating learning through collaboration between the assessor and the learner (Poehner, 2007). DA does not distinguish between instructional and assessment activities because every interaction between the mediator and the learner contains both. Performance-based assessments (PBA), on the other hand, are activities or evaluations that refer “to students demonstrating their understanding with a tangible product of observable performance” (Donham, 2005, p. 251). In PBA, learners use their repertoire of knowledge and skills to create a product or a response, either individually or collaboratively by responding to prompts (complex questions or situations) or tasks with more than one possible correct response to the assignment. (Liskin-Gasparro, 1996). While PBA has often been applied to disciplines in the arts (e.g., acting in a musical or theater performance) or sports (e.g., students playing in a game), the idea of students demonstrating their knowledge through PBA is expanding to other disciplines, such as foreign language.

**The zone of proximal development.** This shift in thinking to a progressive goal-oriented evaluation in foreign language is also consistent with SCT, most specifically through the application of the principle Vygotsky called the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The construct of ZPD states that learning and development play critical roles in language acquisition with learning defined as “gaining knowledge, comprehension, or skills not possible through maturation” and development as “progress from earlier to later stages of maturation” (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 21). Vygotsky stated that learning precedes and contributes to development, and the learner’s ability to produce language with others will exceed what the learner can accomplish alone (Shrum & Glisan, 2005). The learner has an *actual development level* or what the learner can do without assistance and a *potential development level* or what the learner can achieve with the help of a more capable adult or peer; the distance between these two levels is the learner’s ZPD (Shrum & Glisan, 2005). A learner’s ZPD will advance overtime, assuming the learner continues to develop by gaining knowledge and building proficiency in the second language. ZPD also relates to the important language acquisition concept called scaffolding, or “the interaction between the expert and the novice in a problem-solving task (Shrum & Glisan, 2005, p. 23). The expert or MKO provides help based on what the learner is doing by enlisting their interest, simplifying, motivating the learner, highlighting relevant facts, and reducing stress and anxiety towards learning.

The concept of ZPD is significant to the development of the PBAs used in my classroom. The PBAs I have developed are often cumulative projects that, upon completion of a unit of study, incorporate the language skills and cultural knowledge students acquire through collaborative learning activities. Given proficiency is the primary goal of language education, effective PBA will evaluate a student’s progress through their ZPD of language learning as well as offer effective feedback to assure students reach their potential development level. Vygotsky believed ZPD was

important because looking at what a learner could do with help was far more significant than examining what the learner could do alone. For that reason, the majority of my PBAs are group projects where peers must collaborate to create a product that is either interpersonal or presentational in nature and in which their language skills will be evaluated individually and collectively. This form of group assessment is also supported by Vygotsky's notion of creating movement through the ZPD through interaction as being between learners and MKOs. While this context is often described as being between one learner and one MKO, according to Poehner (2009) it is also possible to organize classroom activities in a way that "enables teachers to explore and promote the group's ZPD while also supporting the development of individual learners" (p. 471). This further reinforces the usefulness group performance-based assessments to allow students to learn by collaborating with peers of various proficiency levels.

Unlike conventional assessments that focus on specific product outcomes, PBAs that consider learners' ZPD focus on promoting students' overall language development in proficiency. A specific example of PBA that reflect this idea and that is similar to those that I implement in my classroom is called Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA). IPA is defined as:

A cluster assessment featuring three tasks, each of which reflects one of the three modes of communication--Interpretive, Interpersonal and Presentational... The three tasks are aligned within a single theme or content area, reflecting the manner in which students naturally acquire and use the language in the real world or the classroom. Each task provides the information and elicits the linguistic interaction that is necessary for students to complete the subsequent task... They are standards-based; performance-based; developmental in nature; integrative; designed to be used with scoring rubrics that rate performance in terms of whether it meets expectations, exceeds expectations, or does not meet expectations for the task; and valid and reliable ("Center for Advanced Research", 2015, para 1).

Adair-Hauck, Glisan, Koda, Swender, and Sandrock (2006) conducted a three-year study to test an IPA prototype to measure students' progress towards the 5Cs National Standards and Benchmarks in Foreign Language developed by The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Through performance-based and authentic assessments, learners complete

realistic assessment tasks that require in-depth involvement from students and teachers assisted by rubrics that demystify performance expectations by providing exemplars or models along with detailed instructions and expectations (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006). Along with rubrics, progress is monitored by detailed feedback from teachers so the assessment helps improve—not just elicit—performance just as current research suggests that there is a need to combine instruction and learning to assessment in order to directly to provide a positive *washback effect* in curriculum and instruction practices (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006). Researchers found that IPAs helped both students and teachers identify strengths and weaknesses in students’ progress to achieve the standards and the feedback loop was essential in providing students details of their progress and where they needed to focus on before moving on to the performance-task. The description of IPA is very similar to the approach that I took in my classroom in described this study by having students practice the three modes of communication in a themed unit, receive feedback, and work towards a final performance assessment. This study argues that there are many things foreign language education can gain by implementing PBAs practices in today’s classrooms.

Alternative assessments, including those that are performance-based, are not without drawbacks, however. Wiggins (2011) discusses the current state of reform in terms of authentic assessment in education. His concern is that as people begin to accept the term “authentic” in assessment practices, educators will still not be fully aware of what it means to make an assessment authentic. Wiggins' original intention for authentic assessment in school was to “educate (and motivate) students about the real world of adult challenges. Assessments should better replicate or simulate what mathematicians, scientists, and historians do, not just what they know” (p. 63). The same could easily be said in the context of foreign language education. What Wiggins discussed is the same standard I hold in my classroom still today: not simply to succeed at school (i.e., get As in class), but rather to use assessments to demonstrate that students have learned what

was taught and if they are truly ready for the challenges they will face in their future. In addition, students need to demonstrate whether or not they can transfer their learning to real-world, authentic situations. Wiggins emphasizes the need for change in education by begging the question, “When will schools finally make the leap to the modern era of assessment?” (Wiggins, 2011, p. 63). My study shows that when a teacher “makes that leap,” the students are not only better prepared with foreign language skills for real-world contexts, but that they perceive themselves as more able and willing to engage in those contexts.

### **Proficiency Evaluations and Standards**

To understand how PBAs can be utilized to promote proficiency in current foreign language classrooms, it is important to understand how they are used to evaluate student language proficiency across various domains (i.e., speaking interpersonally about perspectives unique to the target culture). In the late 1980s and 1990s, there was movement in language education to implement PBAs (Ricardo-Osorio, 2008). This growing interest in PBA started with Wiggins (1998; 2011) who believed standards were used to inform performance evaluations. In response to this interest in PBAs, ACTFL, an organization dedicated to improving and expanding language instruction on a national level, and the Educational Testing Service developed the Proficiency Guidelines (1986) to help professionals evaluate language skills with the intention of taking theory and putting it into practice for assessments and program designs. While the guidelines do not give any recommendation as to how learners should acquire language, they serve as “an instrument for the evaluation of functional language ability” (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, para. 6) and describe what students should be able to do in language in regard to speaking, writing, listening, and reading in authentic contexts. ACTFL updated the guidelines in 2012 to reflect real-world assessment needs to reflect what students should be able to do in a “spontaneous and non-rehearsed context” (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012, para. 5). The proficiency guidelines clearly

distinguish individuals' ability levels in speaking, writing, listening, and reading. For each skill, there are five major levels of proficiency: distinguished, superior, advanced, intermediate, and novice (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012). The major levels Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice are subdivided into High, Mid, and Low sublevels (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012).

These proficiency guidelines are the basis for the rubrics used by the College Board for the AP language exams and also serve as the main evaluation tool for student proficiency in my PBAs for speaking and writing. Across all of the language skill areas, the different levels of proficiency share commonalities in how the students' abilities are defined. The ACTFL 2012 Proficiency Guidelines define each level in the following ways: A *novice* level of proficiency is characterized by being able to communicate with short isolated words or phrases with limited formulaic structure and limited content knowledge. An *intermediate* level of proficiency reflects the ability to recombine learned material to make language production more personal although communication is still simple and uses loosely connected structures, mostly in the present tense. An *advanced* proficiency reflects the ability to engage in high-level conversations about one's self, community, nation, or world in a variety of tenses and structures. Communication also becomes more elaborate and connected. A *superior* level of proficiency entails communication that is accurate, fluently, and fully participatory with opinions, sporadic speech, and a low frequency in errors and structures. Communication is now also more complex and can occur in a broader variety of contexts. Finally, a *distinguished* level of proficiency shows language that is skillful, accurate, efficiency and effective around a variety of global issues and abstract contexts that are authentic and with a variety of audiences. Communication has a high level of discourse and sophistication as well as being complex and culturally relevant.

## **Measuring the Language Proficiency and Efficacy of 21st Century Students**

### **The 5Cs National Standards and Benchmarks**

To further elaborate on the proficiency guidelines and put them into a more meaningful context that represents what students can do with a foreign language, ACTFL developed a set of standards called the 5Cs National Standards and Benchmarks. ACTFL created the new standards with the hopes of taking the core interactive nature of a variety of modern approaches in instruction and assessment and pairing it with a well-rounded set of expectations that increase language proficiency and cultural understanding of foreign language learners by developing their communicative competence (ACTFL, 2013). In 1993, a partnership of four national language organizations including ACTFL, Teachers of French, American Association of Teachers of German, and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, received government funding to develop national standards for foreign language education, and their collaborative result is seen as “an unprecedented consensus among educators, business leaders, government, and the community on the definition and role of foreign language instruction in American education” (“Standards for Foreign Language Learning,” n.d., p. 2). The associations that created these standards do not see them as a current reflection of the experience of most language learners today, but as a tool to measure progress as we work to improve foreign language learning for today’s 21st century students. The 5Cs or the standards for communicative language proficiency include: Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. Each skill is laid out in a comprehensive “21<sup>st</sup> century skills map” with the applicable real-world context.

### **Can-Do Statements**

For this study, data collected regarding on my students’ perceptions of proficiency, was measured using a survey tool that was not only contextualized within the students’ school and

Spanish classroom expectations of proficiency, but also that was comparable to their proficiency score on the Spanish AP exam. Therefore, for this study I created a survey based on the new Can-Do Statements developed by ACTFL and the National Council of State Supervisors (NCSSFL). These Can-Do Statements outline what language skills in learners can perform in various contexts at every proficiency level (NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015). ACTFL and NCSSFL developed the Can-Do Statements based on the 5Cs Foreign Language National Standards and benchmarks to be a common reference for the practical application and expectations of real world performance-based skills guided by the domains of Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. As stated by ACTFL, “it is only through knowing the language of others that we can truly understand how they view the world” (21st Century Skills Map, 2011, p. 3). Instilling this outlook in my students even after they leave the classroom and venture into the real world is my goal. Therefore, this study argues that the 5Cs Foreign Language National Standards and Benchmarks are a well-respected framework in the field of foreign language that represents language proficiency whether students are collaborating in the classroom, engaging in a PBA, or out communicating in the real world. Moreover, the 5Cs and Can-Do Statements were an excellent tool to measure students’ perceptions of the true applicability their capabilities in Spanish that they acquired while collaborating and performing in my classroom.

### **Significance of the Study**

By offering collaborative learning and project-based assessments in my classroom, I created a meaningful connection among teaching, learning, and assessment, and as a result, I have seen my students make great progress towards becoming the proficient, global citizens the world needs. Due to this integrative approach of collaborative learning and performance-based assessments, my students were successful in attaining proficiency at the AP level. An AP or advanced placement class is a course that students complete in high school that is followed by an



exam that awards them college credit for a passing proficiency score. As a regular part of my practice, to evaluate the success of my program I looked at my class's overall averages against the national average of all students who take the Spanish AP exam. When comparing students in my class to global averages in proficiency ratings, for example, data from the AP College Board shows that every year my students' proficiency average in free response skills has exceeded the global average in the two top tiers of proficiency combined. In 2014, my AP Instructional Planning Report showed the number of students from my Spanish 5AP class more than doubled the global average at the highest level of proficiency with 54% with the highest proficiency rating compared to 25% of students globally attaining that level of proficiency; also only 4% of my students scored in the lowest proficiency group compared to 25% of students globally. After comparing student scores to the scores nationally on the College Board website, I contend that these outcomes are unprecedented and serve as one of the main reasons it was important to investigate if what I did in the classroom is had a lasting impact on students and their language experiences after they graduated from my program.

Moreover, there has been a “growing demand for demonstrable foreign language proficiency” causing a need for “special attention [to be] given to defining proficiency in the context of comprehensive PBAs” (Ricardo-Osorio, 2008, p. 595). In the current educational climate, educators across all disciplines, including foreign language, are bombarded with obligations to cut back on their curriculums and programs in lieu of raising high-stakes tests scores in core content areas, increasing standardized-test format practices, and completing excessive evaluation processes to demonstrate teacher accountability. Therefore, teachers are not getting the time or the training to conduct such research or to even try and apply these new ideologies to their current practices. Educational researchers like myself must take the first steps into investigating the experiences of our students in real-world contexts after they have been taught

using these new practices. The outcomes of this research study could bring all foreign language-teaching professionals from theoretical perspectives about evaluating students' success in language proficiency and performance across a common framework to practices that encourage change and application in their classrooms.

The 5Cs and Can-Do statements outline the importance of communicative competence in students' interpersonal, intrapersonal, and presentational skills. However, although many educators are aware of the significance in evaluating students across these competencies, neither educators nor researchers have conducted a significant number of studies that focus directly on the standards and their effectiveness. Glisan (2012) calls for researchers to bring about work that would determine if the 5Cs "realistically represent what learners can achieve in specific contexts, where the Standards might need to be modified or further elaborated, and how they can best be translated into classroom practice that results in positive outcomes for language learning" (p. 523). Her sentiment is echoed by Troyan (2012) who states, "research on outcomes beyond the Communication goal is lacking. Furthermore, the research outside of K-12 is rarely connected to the National Standards, and within K-12, little research is carried out" (p. S135). A study by Adair-Hauck et al. (2006) stated, "although current research suggests new paradigms for assessments, virtually no assessments have focused on measuring learner progress in attaining the standards while capturing the connection between classroom experiences and performance on assessments" (p. 360). Due to the lack of research in both learning and assessment that reflect the standards, but also in their lasting effects on students' language proficiency in the real world, this study is a significant contribution to the field of foreign language education.

## CHAPTER 3 METHOD

This chapter describes the study's research methodology and mixed-methods approach. First there is a review of the focus of the study, research questions and an introduction of the research paradigm. Next the methodology is outlined in detail in the descriptions of the research design, establishing rigor, setting, participants, researcher's role, curricular context, as well as research instrument and data collection procedures, and finally data analysis.

### Focus of the Study

This study addresses the need in today's global society for people who are proficient in a foreign language and also have the ability to communicate and function within an authentic cultural setting by evaluating students' perceptions of their ability as a result of their experiences in collaborative learning and performance-based assessment. I investigated the potential relationship between students' perceived abilities and their experiences by exploring three research questions:

1. In what ways do former high school foreign-language students perceive the collaborative instructional and performance-based assessment approaches they experienced as fostering their foreign language proficiency and communicative competence?
2. Do these former foreign-language students perceive themselves as people who continue to use the foreign language they learned in **high school**? If so, in what ways have they used their foreign-language learning in real-world contexts after graduating from high school? If not, why not?
3. Do these former foreign-language students perceive themselves as having a passion for language use and/or study? Why or why not?

### Research Paradigm

Taking a mixed-methods approach to research also implies a mixed-approach to beliefs and epistemologies. This is a primarily qualitative study supported by quantitative data; therefore, my primary theoretical perspective comes from the same belief I hold in language learning, social constructivism. My beliefs of language learning are deeply rooted in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, or the idea that learning is a result of the combination of children's social environment and

cognition (Vygotsky, 1978 & Tomasello et al., 1993). According to the theory, one of the “tools” students use for learning is collaborative learning where a group of peers work together to understand each other and acquire a specific skill (Tomasello et al., 1993). As a consequence of the constructive and social perspective I hold regarding language learning, my approach in research inevitably comes from a similar point of view. My research was “constructed socially” among myself as the teacher, the students, and the students they collaborated with for their performance assessments in the study. The social component is very significant to the quantitative and qualitative data because students’ social interactions had a direct impact on their performance scores and the experience collaborating in itself had an impact in shaping their future interactions with the language and working with people once they leave the classroom. Constructivist research is concerned with building understandings of the world that are agreed upon among research participants themselves and the researcher; and, in the case of this study, regarding the effect of collaborating and engaging in performance-based assessment and students’ proficiency and experiences with language after high school. In order to gain the most in-depth knowledge and perspective about the students’ capabilities and the ways they applied their knowledge after their experiences concluded, I collected both quantitative and qualitative data from high school graduates regarding how engaging in performance-based assessments personally affected their language capabilities and lives after leaving my classroom.

The importance of collecting data both quantitatively and qualitatively also comes from the pragmatic worldview, which Creswell (2009) defines as a worldview that “arises out of actions, situations, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions...with applications—what works—and solutions to problems” (p. 10). This perspective supports my goal of having a direct impact on foreign language education, specifically in the area of assessment. Pragmatism also supports the idea that there are several acceptable ways to collect and analyze data to further understandings.

Pragmatist research, like my own, occurs in a “social, historical or political context and reflects some form of social justice” (Creswell, 2009, p. 11). In my study, the social context is the world of foreign language education. I see social justice in my efforts to promote linguistic equity and diversity by changing classroom learning and assessment practices coupled with the promotion of foreign language proficiency to support the development of people who can be “citizens of the world” in an ever-shrinking global environment. In my view, social justice is not only related to students becoming proficient in Spanish, but also to seeing themselves as having acquired important life skills that are critical to their future interactions with people across linguistic boundaries both in college and in their future careers no matter where they are or what job they hold.

### **Research Design**

To study a complex topic requires a complex approach. In mixed-methods studies, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected and combined to offer the researcher a more complete understanding than either form of data could show alone (Creswell, 2009). Mixed-method research is suited to this study because it allows me as the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of performance assessments not only in relation to the standards, which was determined via quantitative data, but also to determine how applicable students’ skills were in the real world, which was done via the collection of qualitative data. In other words, this approach offers me a more holistic perspective on the relationship between these concepts.

Within mixed methods, I used a transformative design approach known as the concurrent triangulation strategy (Salkind, 2012), with which I collected both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. The concurrent triangulation strategy is characterized by the collection and analysis of quantitative and then qualitative data and then combining two methods in the interpretive phase of the study (Creswell, 2009). Typically, the concurrent triangulation strategy

uses qualitative results to help explain and interpret the study's quantitative data in more detail, especially in instances when the research reveals surprising results. The quantitative and qualitative data I collected were the perceptions of students' experiences in high school Spanish class and the impact those experiences had on their current use of Spanish. In this study, I used the software program "Qualtrics Research Suite" ([www.qualtrics.com](http://www.qualtrics.com)) to concurrently collect my data in the form of an electronic survey sent to participants. For the data analysis, I separated all of the survey questions first by what research question they addressed, and then by the form of data they presented (quantitative, qualitative or background information). The primary purpose for choosing the concurrent triangulation strategy in this study was to confirm and cross-validate data within a single study in order to establish rigor in my data analysis.

### **Establishing Rigor in Data Collection and Analysis**

All research has the potential for bias and this study is no exception. Therefore, I engaged in several strategies to address bias and establish validity in this study. These strategies included recognition of the past teacher-student relationship, triangulation, and peer debriefing.

### **Past Student-Teacher Relationship**

I recognize that past teacher-student relationships between the participants in my study (i.e., former students) and myself (i.e., former teacher) present the potential for bias in both the participants and myself and, therefore, in the data that were collected and analyzed. As a teacher, I was completely committed to the success of these students. Even though they are no longer my students, my continued interest in their success in my subject area (i.e., Spanish) may influence my interpretation of their comments. Moreover, I have a continued friendly relationship with several of my former students, who sometimes contact me through letters or email to keep me up on what is going on in their lives, to ask how I am doing, and to tell me about their new adventures. On rare occasions, students will come visit me during the last month of school when they come

back in town for the summer from college to tell me in person how they are doing. Thus, I am invested in their present as well as their past successes as people.

As students, I sensed that these participants wanted to do well in my classes while in high school. As adults, they may also want continue to want to “do well” in Spanish and to position themselves in a positive light for me in relation to language learning or to position what they have learned from me in a positive way so that I may “look good” for my study. While the potential for bias is a limitation in any study, it may also be an asset. I believe that my continued relationship with my students/research participants presents an asset to this study because our familiarity and long-standing honest, open relationships carried over to the data collection. While the experiences of these particular participants are not generalizable to every student who has ever taken Spanish in high school, our past and present connections have allowed me to gather in-depth insights into their experiences and my own teaching practice so as to develop implications for the teaching and assessment in the area of language.

### **Peer Debriefing**

I insured that these data are reliable by engaging in peer debriefing. Peer debriefing consists of sharing one’s research analysis and conclusions with a colleague or peer who is familiar with the participants, the research topic (Long & Johnson, 2000) or both. The peer review process not only helps verify the researcher’s interpretation of data at various stages of collection and analysis, but also helps prevent premature closure when looking for meaning and patterns in the data (Long & Johnson, 2000). By including peers who are familiar with the context or the content of the research, the researcher receives valuable information and critique about her interpretation of the data.

For this study, I asked two fellow teachers in my Spanish department to review all the feedback on the student surveys. Both agreed to participate. The peer review process took place

two times. The first time was immediately after the survey had been administered, and again after I had completed my quantitative and qualitative data analyses. Before the first meeting, the peer reviewers received a blinded copy of all the survey responses and were asked to read all of the survey data at least two times and take notes on their understandings of students' responses to questions about their language skills, proficiency, and how they are using the language (or not) today to establish the best approach for the analysis phase of the quantitative and qualitative data. Then, the peer reviewers met individually with the researcher and compared notes. These peer meetings and our discussion outcomes were to determine how to most efficiently organize and analyze the data in the interpretation phase that followed. The main goal of this peer review was to insure the researcher's reading of the data was as accurate as possible. In this study, the peer reviewers confirmed and critiqued my interpretations of the data and offered insights into my ideas and identified interpretations I missed. I amended my findings accordingly. This process stimulated the exploration of additional perspectives of my findings (Long & Johnson, 2000). Based on our discussions, we agreed that a Pearson Product-Moment correlation would be best to provide data relevant to research questions one and two and that a content analysis would be the best for the data analysis of all three research questions. After completing first my quantitative and qualitative analyses, I shared my data analysis approach with each individual and we again met separately to compare notes to see if they agreed or disagreed with my data analysis procedures and research findings for each research question. I specifically asked the peer reviewers to pay close attention to comments that may suggest a student was trying to "please" the researcher in his or her responses so that I could weed out bias in the data. Neither I nor my peers found any indication of this potential bias in our findings.



## **Triangulation**

Triangulation strengthens the interpretation of data. While there are many forms of triangulation in research, I employed the most common method of gathering similar data from multiple sources (Long & Johnson, 2000). While triangulation does not in and of itself demonstrate data validity, it may “illuminate different perspectives on the problem” (Long & Johnson, 2000, p. 35) and therefore allow the researcher to discover if the inferences about the data are valid. Creswell (2009) further describes triangulation as gathering and examining evidence from different data sources in order to build a coherent justification for themes. He stated that the process adds to the validity of the study by establishing themes through the convergence of several data sources and perspectives of participants. Figure 3.1 below represents the model I used in order to implement triangulation in data collection and analysis phases in my study.

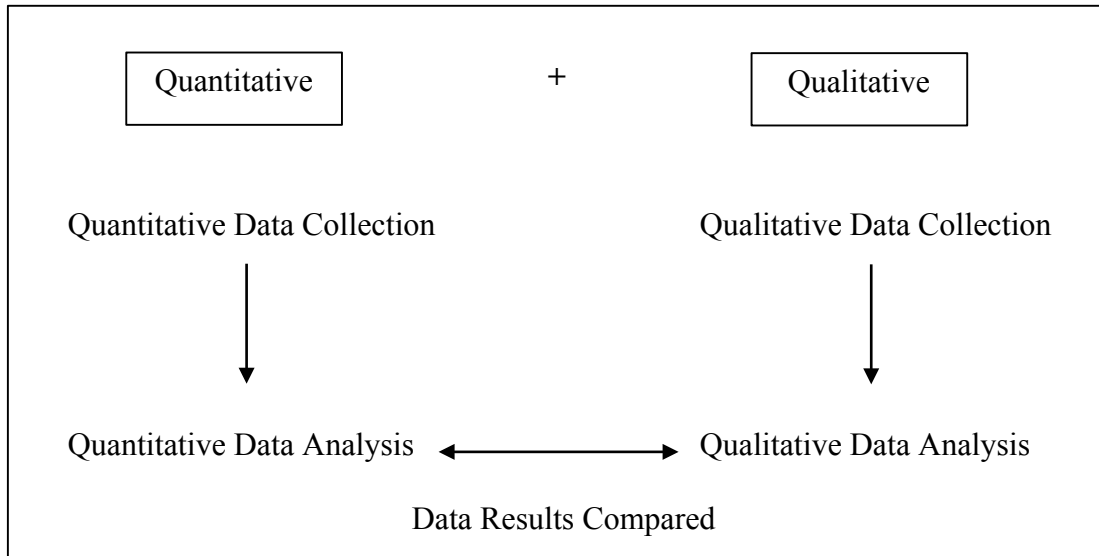


Figure 3.1. Concurrent triangulation strategy (Creswell et al., 2003, p. 226).

This figure is based on a research design of concurrent triangulation strategy from Creswell et al., 2003, p. 226. The figure shows that quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same time and analyzed in parallel. The intent of this design is to combine the strengths of both methods in data collection and analysis (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The simultaneous quantitative and qualitative data collection was also important as I was the sole researcher collecting and managing an extensive quantity of data for the study. Moreover, collecting each set of data in parallel allowed me to triangulate both methods by directly comparing and contrasting statistical (quantitative) results with descriptive (qualitative) findings in the analysis phase, providing a more complete understanding of the effect of performance-based assessment on students past and current language outcomes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

More specifically, triangulation was achieved in this study by searching for themes to address each research question as they emerged. As themes arose from the data, I examined the responses to similar questions posed in different forms. In other words, I triangulated my analysis of the data by asking for the same information in two ways: quantitatively and qualitatively. Survey questions first asked participants to rank their language abilities and accomplishments on a Likert

scale (i.e., quantitatively). Later in the survey, participants were asked to describe their language abilities and accomplishments in open-ended questions (i.e., qualitatively). In one specific example, a ranking question asked, “How do you feel your level of proficiency in Spanish has changed between high school and now in the following interpersonal mode contexts?” (Note that as part of the question, I defined what I meant by *proficient* and the *interpersonal mode* to help clarify these ideas for the respondents.) Respondents ranked their perceived level of proficiency on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree or “I was never able to perform this task” to Strongly Agree or “I was proficient in high school in this task and I can still perform it or have improved in performing it now.” In this question, respondents were asked to rank their proficiency in several areas, including:

1. I can communicate effectively on a wide variety of present, past, and future events.
2. I was proficient in high school in this task but cannot perform it now;
3. I was proficient in high school in this task and I can still perform it or have improved in performing it now; 3.
4. I was NOT proficient in this task in high school but I can perform it now;
5. I was never able to perform this task. (see Appendix F, Question 24).

A corresponding follow-up question then asked respondents to qualitatively describe the same competencies. The specific follow-up question to the survey question above was, “Explain why your abilities to communicate with others in Spanish through speaking or writing did or did not change” (Appendix F, Question 27). There were seven sets of corresponding quantitative and qualitative questions (see Table 3.1 below). To triangulate the data, I compared and contrasted the participants’ responses across these questions to see if there was consistency or not.

Table 3.1 summarizes the seven sets of corresponding quantitative and qualitative questions from the survey and lists the qualitative questions that address research question three (which did not have corresponding quantitative items). Each set of quantitative and corresponding qualitative questions aimed to ask students for similar information in different formats to strengthen the validity of their responses and allow them to elaborate or clarify their quantitative

ranking responses. While the table above shows the initial intention of the survey for how the questions were intended to coordinate with each other, during the data analysis phase, there was often overlap in the qualitative data clarifying or elaborating on results from several different quantitative questions.

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Table 3.1

*Corresponding quantitative and qualitative survey questions that asked students for similar information in different formats divided by research question (RQ).*

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Quantitative Research Questions RQ1

24. How proficient do you feel at this time in the following contexts when communicating interpersonally in Spanish
25. How proficient do you feel at this time in the following contexts when writing or speaking in the presentational mode in Spanish?
26. How proficient do you feel at this time in the following contexts when listening and reading in the interpretive mode in Spanish?

Qualitative Research Questions RQ1

27. What was the most helpful thing we did in Spanish to make you a proficient communicator (in speaking, writing or obtaining cultural knowledge)?
28. What four projects in any class (Spanish 2AC-5AP) that you had with me do you remember and like the most?
29. Why did you enjoy these projects the most?
30. What Spanish skills (such as speaking, writing, listening, reading, or acquiring cultural knowledge) did you learn from the projects you enjoyed most?
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Quantitative Research Questions RQ1 and RQ2

31. How do you feel your level of proficiency in Spanish has changed between high school and now in the following interpersonal mode contexts?

33. How do you feel your level of proficiency in Spanish has changed between high school and now in the following presentational contexts?

35. How do you feel your level of proficiency in Spanish has changed between high school and now in the following interpretive contexts?

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Qualitative Research Questions RQ1 and RQ2

32. Explain why your abilities to communicate with others in Spanish through speaking or writing did or did not change.

34. Explain why your abilities in Spanish to write or orally present information did or did not change.

36. Explain why your abilities to listen and understand various audios in Spanish or read and understand various texts in Spanish did or did not change.

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Quantitative Research Questions RQ3

*There were no quantitative research questions collected for research question three.*

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Qualitative Research Questions RQ3

18. Why did you choose to study Spanish in high school?

19. What motivated you to continue studying Spanish through the AP level?

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### Research Setting

The research participants were asked to respond to an online survey; however, the setting of survey was their high school experiences of language learning at a midsized and affluent public school district located in a small city in the Midwestern U.S. The participants were graduates of Alta High School<sup>1</sup>, one of six comprehensive high schools in a district of approximately 1500 students and 76 full-time teachers. The school district was located near a large university, which may have accounted for the school district's diverse racial and ethnic makeup, affluent status as well as the large number of students with highly-educated parents. At the time of the study, about

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<sup>1</sup> The school's name is a pseudonym.

half of the students at Alta High School were White (55.29%). Other groups represented included Asian-America (14.4%), African-American (13.83%), Hispanic/Latino (6.7%), and students who identified with two or more races (9.41%). The graduation rate for the district was 89%. Alta High School was a relatively new school in the district, having opened only seven years before the study began. All students who lived within the district could attend any one of the district's five high schools. Alta High School was unique among the district's five high schools because it offered four magnet programs from which students could choose in their sophomore year. The magnet programs focused on areas of business, communications, design, and health. Other special features of the school included small learning communities (SLCs), a full athletic program, national and state acclaimed performing arts programs, mastery teaching, peer-to-peer mentoring, and a student-action senate. All of these features helped to realize Alta High School's mission of creating agile and inquisitive minds, promoting personal connections, and fostering caring relationships with students.

This study asked participants – former Alta High School students – to reflect on their experiences of Alta High School's Spanish language program. Alta High School's language program also offered French, Chinese (Mandarin), and Latin. The program offered five levels of coursework with a regular-track and accelerated-track for levels two through four and a level five Advanced Placement (AP) course. At the time of the study, the district required the completion of two years of study of the same foreign language to graduate even though the state only required one. Of all of the languages offered at Alta High School, Spanish had the highest enrollment. Although there was a total of five Spanish courses that spanned four years of high school for Spanish students, most Spanish students took two years of Spanish, in order to fulfill the district's language requirement. Approximately half of the Spanish students (roughly 200 students) continued to participate in upper-level coursework each year (levels three, four, and five), and

these students are the subjects of this study. The data for this study were collected from 2012-2015 graduates of Alta High School who participated in the Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish (level five) course that were taught by the researcher.

### **Participants**

The participants came from a group of approximately 96 students who completed the majority of their Spanish coursework with the researcher and graduated from Alta High School between 2012-2015. In particular, the data were collected from students in Spanish AP (level five), which is the final course of the accelerated track. The accelerated track and AP programs moved at a faster pace and engaged in a more rigorous course of study than the regular Spanish program. Accelerated-track coursework for levels four and five was considered to be at university level in difficulty. To complete the level five coursework, students took the *Spanish AP Language and Culture Exam* ([www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)) and may have received college credit for a passing proficiency score, which is another motivating reason to participate in the accelerated track.

Accelerated-track students were generally high-level learners who were highly motivated had a strong desire to study a foreign language, and often had a keen ability for or enjoyment of language learning. Students succeeded in the accelerated language program for varied reasons, such as wanting accelerated credit factored into their high school grade point average (GPA) and looking competitive for university admissions. Others were natural language learners or simply had a love and passion for foreign language. A few students were native speakers from Mexico, Argentina, and Chile. Several students were from affluent families who had traveled in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Participants ranged in age from 16 to 18 years (i.e., high school juniors or seniors) at the time they were enrolled in Spanish 5AP. In this group of 96 students, there were 21 males and 75 females. All students were 18 years old or older at the time of data collection. Because this

particular group of students came, for the most part, from socially and culturally privileged backgrounds as evidenced by their international travel, this could be significant factor in their language-learning success as well as in their motivation to begin and continue language study. Although this is a potentially limiting factor in the data, the study seeks to identify factors outside of student socio-economic status and background that motivated and enhanced their language study resulting in findings that could benefit future research in foreign language education. The study probed beyond the students' language graduation requirement to help uncover important motivating factors toward success in language learning that can make a significant contribution to future foreign language education of all students.

Moreover, this group of students participated in a particular style of Spanish learning that included collaborative learning activities and performance-based assessments over a long period of time (i.e., four to eight semesters), which, I will argue, was paramount to developing language proficiency. This study looked at students who had already demonstrated commitment to language study through the AP level and sought to find out if they had become life-long language learners and the ways in which they thought their experiences of collaborative, performance-based Spanish in high school contributed to that end. This study also answers the call of language education researchers and advocates of ACTFL to bring about work that investigates whether or not the national language standards “realistically represent what learners can achieve in specific contexts” (Glisan, 2012, p. 523) by investigating the experiences of students who had engaged over an extended time in activities and assessments that were representative of the ACTFL standards.

### **Researcher's Role**

Between 2012 and 2015, the researcher (henceforth referred to in the first person) taught all the Spanish courses at Alta High School and, therefore, taught and knew personally all the study participants. As both researcher and former instructor, I am in close relationship to the study. Using



district-required curriculum of study, I created all lessons, activities, and assessments used with students. I did not get to choose the topics studied, however, I decided how to teach and evaluate the students throughout courses I taught, and was responsible for the pacing, structure, method of instruction, and creation of the performance-based assessments. My personal connections with the curriculum and students gave me an important perspective on the questions addressed in this study and helped me gather key information from participants. As previously noted, while I do not often meet with my former students in person, some of them do keep in contact with me through email or social media to share their current experiences.

### **Curricular Context**

The goal of language study as a whole is not only to provide students with the ability to express their own thoughts in a new language, but also to help them gain an understanding of knowledge and perspectives only available in the foreign language and culture (“AP Spanish Language and Culture,” 2013). Students begin their language study in the lower levels of Spanish by focusing on mastering communicative language competencies, such as vocabulary, grammar, and language control, and by the time students enter the pre-AP and AP programs, the curriculum takes a “holistic approach to language proficiency...[by] engaging students in an exploration of culture in both contemporary and historical contexts” (“AP Spanish Language and Culture,” 2013, pp. 5-6). At Alta High School, the goal of the AP program specifically was to develop students’ awareness of products, practices, and perspectives that can only be truly appreciated if studied through the lens of the target culture (“AP Spanish Language and Culture,” 2013). Thus, AP Spanish at Alta High School was more in depth – a three-trimester course, one trimester longer than all other accelerated courses.

As are all AP teachers in the U.S., I was responsible for crafting and submitting for approval an official syllabus to the College Board, a Board policy aimed to ensure the integrity of

all AP courses. I submitted a syllabus for the AP Spanish Language and Culture Course, which was updated in 2013 to match the revised College Board requirements integrating six new themes and 42 subthemes (see Appendix A) into the already proficiency-based AP exam. The six overarching themes are: Global Challenges, Science and Technology, Contemporary Life, Personal and Public Identities, Families and Communities, and Beauty and Aesthetics. My AP syllabus integrated the six themes and 42 subthemes into everything we studied by relating all in-class assignments, homework practices, and performance-based assessments to them. All of the units of study guided students to gain cultural and linguistic knowledge through communicative practice.

To meet the 5Cs (i.e., communication, culture, connections, comparisons, and communities) National Standards and Benchmarks set forth by ACTFL as well as maintain the high-level expectations for the AP course established by the College Board, all of my units of study ensured students engaged in all of the oral and written proficiency skills through three modes of communication: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational. Under the College Board AP framework, the three modes are defined as follows: the *interpretive mode* of communication is “characterized by the appropriate cultural interpretation of meanings that occur in written and spoken form where there is no recourse to the active negotiation of meaning with the writer or speaker” (“AP Spanish Language and Culture,” 2013, p. 16); the *interpersonal mode* of communication is “characterized by active negotiation of meaning among individuals. Participants observe and monitor one another to see how their meanings and intentions are being communicated. Adjustments and clarifications can be made accordingly” (“AP Spanish Language and Culture,” 2013, p. 8); and the *presentational mode* of communication is “characterized by the creation of messages in a manner that facilitates interpretation by members of the target culture where no direct opportunity for the active negotiation of meaning exists” (“AP Spanish and

Culture,” 2013, p. 22). My course incorporated the 5Cs framework in these three modes of communication. Therefore, I believe it provided an excellent framework for fostering proficiency. Each mode of communication was designed to promote the 5Cs as well as the interdisciplinary themes in global awareness and literacy in finance, economics, business, civics, and health that align with the new themes of the Spanish AP Language and Culture Exam (“21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills Map,” 2011). By incorporating these three modes of communication, I set a high curriculum standard for all students, and, I argue, motivated students to meet language and culture proficiency goals through a positive collaborative work ethic. The collaborative modes with which students engaged in language study fostered their capacities to communicate and develop language communities. These experiences, in turn, support long-term language learning and engagement.

The AP curriculum in this study was also comprised of a combination of teacher-created proficiency activities (e.g., fast-questions, improvisation performances, online scavenger hunts) along with textbook items that are formatted specifically to prepare students for success on the AP exam as well as providing them with the opportunities to learn how to utilize their language skills in meaningful real-world contexts. There were three commercially-available textbooks students study in AP Spanish: *Triángulo Aprobado* (Wayside Publishing), *Abriendo Paso Lecturas* (Prentice Hall) and *Abriendo Paso Gramática* (Prentice Hall). A committee of AP teachers across the Alta school district selected these textbooks before I arrived, therefore, I was required to use them. Nevertheless, these texts were excellent resources that supported my instructional goals. The first textbook, *Triángulo Aprobado*, contained thematic practice in all components of the AP Spanish exam, such as authentic readings and audios, statistical graphs, conversational and presentational speaking activities as well as formal email and persuasive essay prompts. The other two textbooks, *Abriendo Paso Lectura* and *Abriendo Paso Gramática*, focused on literary pieces from a wide variety of authentic sources with accompanying practices in reading, speaking, and

writing, and listening formatted in the style of the AP exam and an extensive grammar review. In this and other units, I incorporated authentic texts and sources. By authentic, I mean any text, audio, or visual material that was originally intended for native Spanish speakers. Because the school district required the integration of these textbooks into the Spanish AP curriculum, the instructor was free to select the parts of the texts that were used and to what degree the course relied on the textbook. In my curriculum, I used the *Triángulo Aprobado* textbook as an initial guide so that students could study each AP theme in order over six units of study (two units per trimester). I then selected literature pieces (one for each of the six units) from *Abriendo Paso Lectura* that corresponded with the overarching theme of each unit. The *Abriendo Paso Gramática* text was used to review general grammar concepts because it led the student from the most simplistic grammar structures to the most complex.

My courses were organized by starting with an overview of the unit theme from *Triángulo Aprobado* in which students engaged in various AP-style performance practice activities in reading, listening, speaking, and writing. Students also practiced their proficiency skills through teacher-created activities such as fast questions, Reading Apprenticeship strategies, student-created and teacher-created games (wheel of fortune, board games, verb cards, open market, etc.), and online research of historical or cultural contexts from authentic websites. Next, students read an accompanying literature piece either from *Abriendo Paso Lectura* or from an outside authentic source I have selected that was connected to the general AP theme or specific subtheme from that unit, such as global challenges, science and technology, or families and communities for example. Sometimes—although not in every unit of study—students were also assigned grammar review for homework. Throughout the units, students also had performance-based assessments that simulated an authentic context such as a newscast, environmental campaign, or beauty infomercial.

These assessments were completed as a group outside of class, but were evaluated in class. Finally,

my courses also incorporated authentic music daily (i.e., students sing a new pop song every two weeks) and one film per trimester, including *Mar Adentro* (Amenábar & Bovaira, 2004), *Diarios de Motocicleta* (Tenenbaum, Nozik, Tenkoff, & Salles, 2004), and *Casi Casi* (Racimo, Vallés & Vallés, 2006).

### **Organization of a Typical Unit: Contemporary Life**

In this section, I describe a typical unit of study, *Contemporary Life*, to provide a snapshot of the ways in which students engaged in learning and assessment in my courses. I include the subtheme *Education and Careers*, which is the first of several subthemes in the unit. The main goal of the Contemporary Life unit was to help students reflect upon and be able to answer overarching essential questions about contemporary life in Hispanic culture, such as: How do societies and individuals define quality of life?; How is contemporary life influenced by cultural products, practices, and perspectives?; and, What are the challenges of contemporary life? I chose this particular subtheme as my example because the performance-based assessment (i.e., a job fair) encompasses all three modes of communication (i.e., interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational). Below, I describe examples of the ways in which students engaged in thematic collaborative learning activities in each of the three modes of communication that prepare them for the cumulating performance-based assessment that evaluated their progress in building language proficiency and communicative competence in education and careers in Spanish culture.

**Interpretive communication.** The first education and career interpretive activity was an authentic listening activity with a Spanish pop song. Students followed the lyrics and discussed the general meaning of the songs. Students sang the songs as a group for two weeks and then were given an individual formative assessment on which they filled in missing lyrics. This activity helped them refine their listening skills by engaging with audio intended for a native audience, which made the listening authentic. The songs were chosen from the Latin Top 20 chart

(<http://www.billboard.com/charts/latin-songs>), which lists the most popular Spanish language singles in the U.S. The songs were chosen because they were popular and did not necessarily tie into the theme of the unit. For in-class and homework assignments students also interpreted authentic texts (e.g. newspaper articles or literary excerpts) and audios clips (e.g., radio broadcasts, commercials, or interviews) by engaging with them individually and then answering comprehension questions in a written format that mimicked the AP exam. The readings and audios covered topics of the sub-themes and in this unit students read an authentic cover letter, listened to a radio broadcast about education in Honduras and Central America, as well as an audio about holograms and professional careers. In class, students engaged in small group discussions about the themes of the reading and their various interpretations of the answers before we discussed the answers as a larger group.

**Interpersonal communication.** Students also worked on spontaneous language production by engaging in interpersonal conversations with their classmates. A typical interpersonal activity for each unit was *fast questions (preguntas rápidas)*. In fast questions, each student wrote three questions covering topics from the subthemes of the education and careers unit and then stood in an inner and outer circle facing a partner. The inner circle asked their first question and the partner had 20 seconds to speak about that question. A typical question might be “¿Qué es la diferencia en importancia de asistir a una universidad en Hispanoamérica y los Estados Unidos?” [What is the difference in importance in attending a university in Latin America and the United States?]. After 20 seconds students responded to their partner based on what they heard in their partner’s answer. Then, students switched and the person on the outside asked their partner the first question and the partner responded based on what they heard. The outside circle then rotated and the process started over again with a new question. Following this activity, students completed reflection questions about their speaking abilities as well as their cultural knowledge

needed to answer the questions. They engaged in a discussion in Spanish and shared strategies to improve both the content and language proficiency of their responses.

**Presentational communication.** The most practiced skill in most units of study was presentational communication because many interpretive and interpersonal activities can also have an additional presentational component. A typical AP presentational activity that integrated interpretive communication, for example, was a written five paragraph persuasive essay. When writing an AP essay students read an authentic text, listened to an authentic audio, and interpreted a statistical graph and then incorporated all of these sources as evidence to build their thesis and argument for the essay. In this unit students addressed the topic “¿Se debe elegir la carrera según la demanda socioeconómica?” [Should someone choose their career based on socioeconomic demands of the time?]. Their grades were evaluated using an AP rubric across three domains: task completion, topic development, and language use (see Appendix B). Another typical presentational AP task was the spoken essay. Students were presented with a question that had a culturally relevant theme. In this unit, for example, a spoken essay students practiced asked “¿Cuál es la importancia de los programas atléticos en tu colegio para la preparación profesional?” [What is the importance of athletic programs in your school for your professional preparation in the future?]. Students then had four minutes to prepare an argument with a thesis that presented at least one similarity and one difference in the cultural topic in both Latin America and the United States’ cultures. Their responses were also scored for proficiency across the same three domains as the essay but with content items more specific to comparing and contrasting the Latin American culture with our own culture (see Appendix B).

**Performance-based assessment.** In the contemporary life unit, the performance-based assessment encompassed all three modes of communication in one activity. To reflect the theme of education and careers, students engaged in a job-fair project for which they received a set of

instructions, a rubric, and a timeline of when all of the various components of the assignment were due (see Appendix C). First, students were presented with information from authentic websites to teach them how to write a resume based on the requirements in the Hispanic culture. For homework, students created a semi-fictional resume that combined their actual accomplishments with goals they hoped they would attain in the future. Students' rough drafts were graded using the same rubrics used to grade all presentational writing for the AP exam and then they had the opportunity to revise their work and submit a final copy (see Appendix B). Next, students each picked a unique profession that they researched in Spanish. They found information about that job and created a poster in the shape of a symbol that was important for that job. For example, a student who wanted to run an ice cream shop created her poster in the shape of an ice cream cone. Students also presented information about the main job duties, typical salary, hours, pictures of the jobsite, someone engaging in the job, as well as a list special requirements for applicants. Students also included an application for the job that they created and brought all these materials to the "job fair" that was held in class. All of these components constituted the presentational mode of communication for the assignment. Students displayed their posters around the room on the desks that were moved to create a circle in the middle of the room. Students each had one minute per "job station" where they took notes on what they read about each position. This activity represented the interpretive communication mode in the project. After reading the descriptions, students were chosen at random to "apply" for the job of their choosing. Once each student was assigned a job, she or he filled out the application, provided their resume to the interviewer, and then prepared to engage in an interview for that job the next day in class. Students did not know the exact interview questions in advance so they could only prepare in advance for questions they thought they might be asked. While students read the job descriptions, I looked over six interview questions each student had written for the potential applicants for the job they researched. Having



six questions was representative of interpersonal speaking portion of the AP exam that also contained six questions.

Finally, the job fair was followed by two days of interviews that incorporated interpersonal one-on-one speaking between the candidate (i.e., student who was assigned to that job) and the interviewer (i.e., student who wrote the job description). The pair sat in front of the class and were dressed either professionally or in attire that reflected the job for which they were interviewing. The interviewer asked the questions and the candidate had to respond in Spanish to each question for 20 seconds (mimicking the interpersonal simulated conversation on the AP exam). The rest of the class listened and took notes on language use and the interviewer commented on the content of the responses, both for participation credit. I evaluated the final grade with the AP rubric for interpersonal speaking (see Appendix B).

The above description showed very specific ways in which students collaborated in and outside of the classroom to practice the interpretive, interpersonal and presentational modes of communication in one of the AP sub-themes “Education and Careers.” The flow of the unit and activities described were all connected and crucial to help students practice their communication skills at various levels of difficulty and demonstrate their competence in a variety of authentic situations. This same structure was applied to all 6 major themes as students prepared throughout the year for the AP Spanish Language and Culture proficiency exam.

### **Research Instrument and Data Collection Procedures**

In this section I describe my research instrument (i.e., survey) and data collection procedures. Specifically, I describe in detail how I created the survey, the details and rationale of having both quantitative and qualitative survey questions, what kinds of quantitative and qualitative data were collected, and why I collected that particular data. Finally, I outline how I recruited participants and the administration procedures for the survey.

## Survey Instrument

The survey was adapted from the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements and self-assessments for the advanced to mid-level student to identify students' perceptions of their proficiency in Spanish language skills they that would have acquired by completing Spanish 5AP (see Appendix F). The Can-Do Statements are a clear outline of how the performance that language learners show in a traditional instructional setting reflects a specific proficiency level (NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, 2015). Furthermore, the Can-Do statements are a tool for learners to identify what skills they would need to function at a particular proficiency level as well as a tool for educators to plan curriculum, including units of instruction and lesson plans. The purpose of the survey was to measure student self-efficacy or perceptions of their foreign language proficiency (for complete survey, see Appendix F). Because the Can-Do Statements are so closely related to the curriculum I developed and taught and because the statements were a tool developed by NCSSFL-ACTFL to chart student progress in attaining proficiency, I integrated them directly into my survey as both quantitative and qualitative items. As mentioned in the section on triangulation, qualitative results can be used to help explain and interpret the study's quantitative data in more detail.

For the quantitative data collection, the Can-Do Statements for each mode of communication (i.e., interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational) were directly quoted in ranking questions along a Likert scale. The purpose of adding the Likert scale was to allow students to identify their perceived proficiency level in the three modes of communication as well as to determine at what time they felt they attained that level of proficiency (e.g., never, in high school but not now, in high school and now, or only in college). Then the same question about proficiency was asked in follow-up qualitative questions. The qualitative questions asked for the same proficiency rating as the quantitative survey items but were open-ended so students could

write as much or as little as they chose. Additionally, these questions asked students to elaborate on why they ranked their proficiency level as they did to gather further insight into students' responses.

**Survey background information.** I began the survey by asking for background information, such as name, which was used to infer gender, and then blinded the data by replacing the name with a code identifier. I also asked for language(s) spoken in the home and whether or not the participant studied that language growing up. Next, I asked for information about the participants' experiences of K-12 schooling, specifically related to Spanish study. For example, total number of years of Spanish in their K-12 schooling, languages studied in high school, total number of years studying Spanish specifically with me. I also asked for the participants' Spanish AP exam score. Only one of the respondents did not remember his AP score. Then, I asked for information related to college experiences, such as current year in college, college major, work experience, and languages studied in college. The purpose of this information was to give me a sense of the students' life and language background, specifically to address research questions two and three, namely why they did or did not continue their language study after high school as well as reasons they may or may not view themselves as having a passion for language study.

**Survey quantitative items.** A recent study by Brown, Dewey, and Cox (2014) applied a Rasch scale analysis to test the reliability of the ACTFL Can-Do statements against an oral proficiency interview (OPI) evaluation score and found the statements to be a reliable measure of proficiency and self-efficacy. The survey questions were appropriate for this study because they were designed specifically to serve as a self-assessment tool so that students could "validate... self-assessment estimates by comparing them to ratings on official tests... such as AAPPL, Advanced Placement, ACTFL OPI" (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2015, p. 1). Participants completed the self-evaluation of their language proficiency in the 5C skills by rating their perceived ability on

five-point Likert scale. The scale ranged from “Strongly Disagree” (i.e., I am not at all confident I can perform this task in Spanish) to “Strongly Agree” (i.e., I am completely confident I can perform this task in Spanish). The quantitative items on the survey were aimed at collecting information about participants’ experiences of language growing up, in and out of school, and in college or after high school. These quantitative survey questions gathered data for two purposes: first, to explore the relationship between collaborative learning and performance-based assessments and students’ perceptions of proficiency; and second, to see if there was a correlation between proficiency beliefs and frequency of language use.

**Survey qualitative items.** In the midst of the quantitative questions that addressed language proficiency, the survey asked seven qualitative questions that asked participants to elaborate on their language experiences as well as five qualitative questions that asked them to elaborate on their reasons for taking Spanish in high school (and possibly beyond) and what opportunities they may or may not have to use their Spanish today. The qualitative questions were open-ended allowing students to write as much or as little as they chose and some questions gave them the option to answer in either English or Spanish. The purpose of the dual-language option was to address to research question three, which asked if students had a passion for foreign language. In other words, participants may say they have a passion for language, but when given the opportunity to use it, will they choose answer in Spanish even if they do not have to? The qualitative survey questions collected data for two purposes. First, to find out if collaborative learning and performance-based assessment activities from my Spanish classes had a direct impact on students’ perceptions of their language proficiency. An example survey question that addressed this was, “What do you remember about the projects you liked the best? Why do they stand out for you?” Second, to uncover the reasons behind students’ answers to yes or no questions that asked about their general foreign language use in the “real world,” meaning any non-academic

setting. For example, the survey asked, “Do you use foreign language now? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not?” and “Are there any other ways that you use a language other than English (e.g., attending church services, culture events, etc.)? Please explain.” The most significant reason for including these qualitative follow-up questions was to gain further insight and detail for the reasons *why* students rated their proficiency the way they did in the quantitative survey items. While the quantitative items gave insight to specific proficiency tasks students could complete, qualitative data was necessary to explain why they felt they could (or could not) still perform these tasks and also why they believed the collaborative work they had done in my classroom contributed to their Spanish language abilities (or did not).

### **Recruiting Participants and Survey Administration**

For this study, participant selection was made through a convenience sample. Convenience sampling is a means of collecting representative data by selecting participants based on the ease of their availability. A convenience sample is appropriate when the number of participants is small and the investigator needs to study naturally formed groups (Creswell, 2009). In this study, the participants consisted of 96 former high school students. All of the participants had been students in my Spanish 5AP class at Alta High School between 2012 and 2015. I was able to directly contact these former students via email because the students had previously given me their emails when I was their teacher, and many of them had chosen to stay in touch since graduation. My email to the students explained the purpose of the study and requested their participation (see Appendix D for the email and Appendix E for the information sheet sent to participants). Students could agree to participate by clicking link to the survey using Qualtrics Research Suite (<https://www.qualtrics.com>). There were many advantages to administering an online survey. First, giving the survey online allowed students to take the survey from any location, which could mean a higher rate of participation. Second, they could begin and finish the survey at their

convenience (it did not have to be completed in one sitting) and it allowed me as the researcher to easily download and analyze the data. Using Qualtrics enabled me to keep the data private, safe, and secure. Although I asked for student's names when the survey began, the data were blinded immediately by replacing their names with an identifier code. Only I had access to the list of identifiers and participant names for research purposes. I needed their names in case I needed to contact participants with follow-up questions to clarify their survey responses.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

In this section, I describe my analysis procedures for the information collected in the survey. In the data analysis, I always began by looking at the quantitative data and then followed up with the qualitative data. The data analysis occurred in two separate phases beginning with research questions one and two (first, quantitative and then qualitative analysis as stated above) and ending with a qualitative analysis procedure for research question three. I began by sorting the survey questions by research question they addressed. The questions were further sorted as providing quantitative or qualitative data. Table 3.2 below outlines this organization by research question and data type (see Table 3.1 for the survey questions).

After the survey questions were sorted as seen in Table 3.2 above, I analyzed the questions by the groupings in which they were sorted, beginning with the quantitative items for research question one (questions 24, 25, and 26) and research question two (questions 31, 33 and 35). Following the Concurrent Triangulation Strategy, I then analyzed the qualitative items that were sorted with research question one (survey questions 27, 28, 29, and 30) and then research question two (survey question 32, 34 and 36). After analyzing the responses to the survey questions, I looked for further detail and explanation to students' ratings by completing a direct content analysis of student responses for research question one (analyzing survey questions 27, 28, 29, and 30) and research question two (analyzing survey questions 32, 34, and 36). There were only two

qualitative items that addressed research question number three (survey questions 18 and 19). Thus, I examined previous student responses from content analyses for research questions one and two and I then examined and integrated additional data from survey questions 18 and 19 in a third direct content analysis.

Table 3.2

*Quantitative and qualitative survey questions organized based on what research question (RQ) the survey items addressed.*

<u>Research Question (RQ)</u>	<u>Quantitative Survey Items</u>	<u>Qualitative Survey Items</u>
RQ1	24, 25, 26, 31, 33, 35	27, 28, 29, 30
RQ2	31, 33, 35	32, 34, 36
RQ3	N/A	18, 19

*Note.* See Table 3.1 for the questions that correspond to the above numbers.

### Quantitative Analysis

For the quantitative data analysis of research questions one and two, I examined the survey items identified in Table 3.2 by conducting two quantitative analyses: Cronbach's Alpha Score to determine scale reliability; and a Pearson Product Moment correlation to see if there was a correlation between students' experiences and their perceived proficiency. I downloaded the participants' responses for these survey questions from Qualtrics into SPSS and then I identified two main variables: performance-based assessment (P) and communication (C) in the various modes for which I had created subscales (i.e., interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive). These variables were chosen because they directly address research question one and two's objective of determining the impact of collaboration on communicative competence and continued language use, which are inherent to performance-based assessments.

The variable (P) was found in survey items that asked students about the impact of performance-based assessments and projects they completed on their Spanish communication abilities (i.e., survey questions 24-26). For example, survey question 25 asked, “How proficient do you feel at this time in the following contexts when writing or speaking in the presentational mode in Spanish?” The variable (C) was found in survey items that asked students to rank their abilities in each of the three modes of communication separately (survey questions 31, 33 and 35). For example, survey question 33 asked, “How do you feel your level of proficiency in Spanish has changed between high school and now in the following presentational contexts?” A summary of this data and its significance is outlined in chapter four.

To determine scale reliability, I first ran a Cronbach’s Alpha test on each of the three sets of questions to look at the interpersonal, presentational and interpretive modes separately. I knew I had achieved an acceptable Cronbach’s alpha when I reached at least Cronbach’s acceptable level of  $\alpha \geq .7$  (George & Mallory, 2003). Next, to determine if there was a correlation between performance-based assessment and communication and students perceived language proficiency and communicative competence I used a Pearson Product Moment Correlation 2-tailed test to compare students’ perceptions of their abilities in the three modes of communication with their perceptions of collaborating in performance-based assessments. The Pearson test gave a correlation based on a .05 significance level for each mode of communication separately. After completing my quantitative analysis, I put my results aside so I could conduct my qualitative portion of the analysis.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

Qualitative data were analyzed using a content analysis or an approach to organizing, reading, and coding data in search of themes and descriptions for interpretation to address the research questions (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), the coding process is



“organizing the data by bracketing chunks... and writing a word representing a category in the margins... by taking text data... and labeling those categories with a term based on the actual language of the participants (p. 197). The data collected for the qualitative analysis is descriptive data because it resulted from students describing their experiences with performance-based assessment in various contexts. To begin the analysis, I started with qualitative survey questions that specifically addressed the first research question. When the first research question was complete, I continued with research questions two and then three (see tables 3.1 and 3.2 for a list of the survey questions and which research question they addressed). The paragraphs below outline in more detail my content analysis procedures.

**Content analysis procedures.** Before I could begin organizing my data, I first had to organize the survey questions based on which research question each survey item addressed by cutting and pasting them in a word document. This document was divided into four sections. Sections one, two, and three addressed survey items that answered research questions one, two and three. Section four contained questions that gathered background information on the participants. I needed the information in section four to know which students majored in a foreign language and which students did not, which I explain below. Each of the survey questions appeared as follow-up question that collected descriptive data to further explain the quantitative ratings of students’ experiences that were analyzed in the quantitative analysis. Thus, the qualitative data are expository descriptions of students’ experiences collaborating on performance-based assessment and their abilities to communicate in Spanish. Once I organized all of the survey questions into one of the four categories I was ready to move forward to organizing specific student responses.

My next step was organizing students’ survey responses that addressed research question one. I extracted all of the data from Qualtrics into an excel file and separated the responses from the participants’ names by copying and pasting them into a new word document. However, before

copying and pasting the data, I divided the responses into one of two groups: (1) students majoring in foreign languages; and (2) students not majoring in a foreign language or those who remain “undecided” in their overall college major. The distinction between majors and non-majors was significant because I wanted to see if there was continuity or differences in students’ responses based on the decisions they made about foreign language being part of their future studies and or career (or not). Student survey results were randomized when they completed the survey, so their responses were in no particular order and blinded. Once I had all of the data in one central location, I began the coding process to look for major themes.

**Survey questions coding process.** To code the responses for research question one, I took one pass through the data by simply reading over all of the responses at once. After my first pass through the data, I noticed there were a lot of repeated words and phrases. As a next step, I took a second pass through the data and highlighted the words and phrases that were repeated throughout the responses. I took a third pass through the data and began to sort out key themes and bolded them in different colors. In the end, I took exactly five passes through the data total looking for repetitions to be sure I did not miss any keywords. During the sixth pass through the data, I began to think about how I might put these repetitions into categories.

To develop categories, I created an excel document with columns that each had their own headings or “codes” so that I could further organize students’ responses into the emerging subthemes. For research question one, I created exactly twenty codes or columns in the excel document. Example headings included: collaboration, reflection, presenting/performing for others, fun, constant target language, relevant to life, completing projects, and creativity. As I began copying and pasting each individual student response under each corresponding code I saw that some columns were closely related and could be combined. For example, I combined these codes: “collaboration” and “reflection”; “performing for others” and “improvisation”; “learning

was meaningful to real life” and “authentic”; “individualized projects” and “open-ended projects”; “develops reading” and “research”; and “variety of projects” and “frequency of projects.” After combining these codes, I had a total of 15 final codes that emerged for research question one.

After reviewing the responses and the condensed codes several times, I went back to the qualitative survey questions for the first research question and noticed that, not only were the student responses, but all of my questions were driven by three central themes around their experiences with performance-based assessment: (1) what students found to be helpful; (2) what students found to be enjoyable; and (3) what communication skills students developed as a result. In other words, students’ responses contained sub-themes or aspects of their answers in which they gave specific examples of how they found performance-based assessment to be helpful, enjoyable, and crucial to their Spanish communication skill development. As a final step, I created a color-coded image for each of the three sub-themes to further define students’ experiences with performance-based assessments as helpful, enjoyable, or specifically connected to language skill development. Again, I followed the same procedures for organizing data and creating codes for qualitative survey questions that addressed research questions two and three. Details for the analysis described above for research question one including survey questions, codes, and visual figures that on the research question two and three are further detailed in chapter four: findings.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter described my study’s research methodology and mixed-methods approach to analyze the potential relationship between students’ perceived abilities and their experiences through my research questions through the lenses of Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, constructivist research, and Creswell’s pragmatic world view. The methodology explained my personal role as the researcher and connection with participants, the survey instrument, as well as

the quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures. The next chapter on findings will outline the findings and results of the above-described procedures.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

This chapter describes the study's findings and results from the data analyses procedures described in the method chapter. The findings are organized into three sections. First, I summarize the findings related to the participants' backgrounds. Then, I examine the quantitative data that address research questions one and two using the Cronbach's Alpha Score test for scale reliability and a Pearson Product Moment. Finally, I examine the qualitative data, which includes goes into greater detail around quantitative items related to research questions one, two, and three.

### Participant Background Findings

As described in chapter three, the survey was sent to former students who completed the majority of their Spanish coursework with myself and graduated from Alta High School between 2012-2015. Data relating to participants' backgrounds came from answers to 17 survey questions collecting background information on the participants. The goal of these questions was to get an idea of the educational history of students responding to the survey, specifically in terms of their background with Spanish as well as to give me a lens to look through when considering their responses. I received survey responses from 36 former students. Of those 36 former students, 30 completed the survey in its entirety. Of the 30 completed surveys, seven (23%)<sup>2</sup> respondents were male and 23 (77%) were female ranging in age from 18-22. Of the students who completed the survey, 10 (33%) students spoke a language other than English at home, which included Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Tamil. Also, 13 students (43%) reported they intended to major or minor in a language, including American Sign Language, Arabic, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Papiamentu (a Spanish-based creole), Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. When asked if they had studied a foreign language independently or informally before or at the time of

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<sup>2</sup> All percentages are rounded off.

the study, 11 students (37%) responded affirmatively and checked American Sign Language, Arabic, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Norwegian, or Spanish. These data demonstrate that while fewer students had a family connection with a foreign language before studying Spanish in high school, more of them either formally studied a language in college or continued to use it independently or informally after high school. While the reasons for their study of language after high school was not clear (i.e., language may have been a college requirement), the initial findings indicated that after graduation, the desire to engage with language was strong. In the other findings presented in this study, I demonstrate more clearly whether or not there was a connection between the students' continued use of language after high school and their experiences of a collaborative instructional approach and performance-based assessments in high school.

The survey also collected demographic information regarding students' continued engagement with the Spanish language because that was the language of instruction for the instructional approaches I studied. Of the 30 respondents, two students (7%) reported studying Spanish for three or four years, seven students (23%) reported five or six years, 11 students (37%) for six years, and 12 students (40%) reported studying Spanish for seven to 10 years. Of all 30 students who completed the survey, 10 (33%) students studied Spanish specifically with me for two years. Most interesting is that the majority of the students (67%) went above and beyond their high school language requirement to study Spanish for three years (nine students or 30%) and four years (four students or 37%). Finally, the survey asked students to provide their score on the AP Spanish exam. The scores provided indicate that the students who participated in this study scored proficient (i.e., 3.0 or higher out of 5.0) on the AP Spanish exam. Six students (20%) reported receiving a 3.0, 16 students (53%) received a 4.0, and seven students (23%) earned a 5.0 on the exam. One student did not recall his AP score. The average AP score for all of the participants who completed the survey is 4.0. This high average is significant because, regardless of students'

self-perceptions of proficiency, their test scores demonstrate that all students whom completed the survey were indeed proficient in Spanish in high school according to the standards of the AP College Board (by receiving a three or higher on the exam).

Finally, in order to learn more information about the respondents' motivations for using a foreign language in their everyday lives, two survey questions asked about the context of participants' language use. Sixteen students (53%) stated their language study was for fun or personal interest (i.e., watching TV, listening to music, or travel). Nineteen students (63%) stated their language was to communicate better with friends and/or family, and 15 (50%) reported using a foreign language at their place of work or while volunteering. Thus, more students are using foreign language for enjoyment and for personal reasons than those who were applying it for their current careers or places of business. This finding is important because students' uses of language skills for more informal purposes would impact the ways in which they regard their overall proficiency. In other words, certain skill areas (e.g., interpersonal communication) would be "out of practice" if they had not been using the language informally or formally studying it. Furthermore, the participants expanded their language study beyond Spanish and acquired other languages as well. Students efforts to continue to study and learn a language – any language – demonstrates a passion for engaging with new cultures and world perspectives that they may not have held before.

### **Quantitative Data Findings**

The quantitative data were analyzed in three stages. First, I conducted a Cronbach's Alpha analysis to determine scale reliability for the survey questions in Table 3.1. Second, I calculated a Pearson Product Moment correlation to determine whether or not there was a correlation between students' experiences and their perceived proficiency. Third, I analyzed data for the research

questions consecutively beginning with research question one and then analyzing data from research question two.

### **Survey Reliability**

The purpose of the Cronbach's Alpha Score test was to determine scale reliability in the survey items. Cronbach's Alpha is "especially useful when you are looking at the reliability of a test that doesn't have right or wrong answers" (Salkind, 2012, p. 50), such as the survey questions that ask students to rate their experiences with performance-based assessment and those that ask them to evaluate their proficiency. As previously described in the method chapter, I downloaded the participants' responses for these survey questions from Qualtrics into SPSS and then I identified two main variables: performance-based assessment (P) and communication (C) in the various modes for which I had created subscales (i.e., interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive). Appropriate levels that describe internal consistency using Cronbach's Alpha range from acceptable to excellent as follows:  $.8 > \alpha \geq .7$  (acceptable),  $.9 > \alpha \geq .8$  (good) and  $\geq .9$  (excellent) (George & Mallory, 2003). The results of Cronbach's Alpha are shown in Table 4.1 below.



Table 4.1

*Evaluation of scale reliability of survey questions using Cronbach's Alpha.*

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Cases Valid</u>	<u>Cases Excluded</u>	<u>Cronbach's Alpha</u>
PInterpersonal	31	5	.881
PPresentational	31	5	.948
PInterpretive	31	5	.939
CInterpersonal	30	6	.782
CPresentational	30	6	.902
CInterpretive	30	6	.897

Table 4.1 shows the list of variables, the valid and excluded cases, and Cronbach's Alpha score for scale reliability. The variables of the scale are listed in the first column. The second column displays the numbers of valid cases per variable. Cases were considered valid when the survey respondents completed every survey item in that variable category and a complete score could be calculated for that category. Cases were excluded when scores could not be calculated because respondents did not complete all survey items for that variable. The number of cases varied by one across variables. To maintain the consistency across the both the quantitative and the qualitative data, I used the survey responses of only those 30 students' who completed all survey items across all variables and excluded cases that were valid in only three of the six variables. This means that, as a whole, the data are valid because I excluded those cases for all analyses both quantitative and qualitative. The final column reports the Cronbach's Alpha score. The results of Cronbach's Alpha demonstrate that all variables have an excellent level of internal consistency with the exception of the variable "CInterpersonal," which calculated at the acceptable level. Thus, the scores in Table 4.1 conclude that survey questions display reliable internal consistency.

### Correlation across Survey Items

Confident that the survey items demonstrate appropriate levels of internal consistency, I examined the relationship between engagements in performance-based assessments and students' perceived proficiency communicating in the three modes of communication. Using a Pearson Product Moment Correlation 2-tailed test, I compared students' perceptions of their abilities in the three modes of communication with their perceptions of collaborating in project-based assessments. Tables 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 below – each representing a different mode of communication: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational communication respectively – show there is a strong correlation between collaboration and students' perceived ability in the interpersonal and interpretive modes of communication. Surprisingly, there was not a strong correlation in the presentational mode.

Table 4.2

*Correlations between students' perception of their ability in interpretive communication and collaborating in performance-based assessments.*

		PInterpersonal	CInterpersonal
PInterpersonal	Pearson Correlation	1	.445*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.014
	N	31	30
CInterpersonal	Pearson Correlation	.445*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.014	
	N	30	30

*Note.* \*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.3

*Correlations between students' perception of their ability in interpersonal communication and collaborating in performance-based assessments.*

		PInterpretive	CInterpretive
PInterpretive	Pearson Correlation	1	.440*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.015
	N	31	30
CInterpretive	Pearson Correlation	.440*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	
	N	30	30

*Note.* \*.Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 suggest that there is a strong relationship between students' perceived ability to interpret language (i.e., listening and reading) and their ability to communicate interpersonally (i.e., spontaneous interactive speech) and the work they did collaborating on performance-based assessments, such as group projects. For example, the results from survey question 24, which asked if students were proficient in this skill overall, were compared to results in survey question 27, which asked when students felt they were proficient in the same skills. Survey question 24 stated, "How do you feel your level of proficiency in Spanish has changed between high school and now in the following interpersonal mode contexts?" Respondents ranked their perceived level of proficiency on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree or "I was never able to perform this task" to Strongly Agree or "I was proficient in high school in this task and I can still perform it or have improved in performing it now." Survey question 27 asked for similar information in a different context stating, "How proficient do you feel at this time in the following contexts when communicating interpersonally in Spanish?" Respondents ranked their perceived level of proficiency on a five-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree or "I am not at

all confident I can perform this task in Spanish” to Strongly Agree or “I am very confident I can perform this task in Spanish.”

The Pearson test results showed students’ perceived ability to function in the interpretive mode ( $r=0.44$ ) and the interpersonal mode ( $r=0.45$ ) positively correlated with their collaborative work on performance-based assessments with significance at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). In other words, students associated their ability to perform interpersonal tasks with their experiences collaborating in high school. Table 4.4 below shows the final test examining the correlation between students’ perceptions of the abilities in the presentational mode of communication and collaborating in performance-based assessment.

Table 4.4

*Correlations between students’ perception of their ability in presentational communication and collaborating in performance-based assessments.*

		PPresentational	CPresentational
PPresentational	Pearson Correlation	1	.329
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.076
	N	31	30
CPresentational	Pearson Correlation	.329	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.076	
	N	30	30

Unlike Tables 4.2 and 4.3 above, Table 4.4 demonstrates the presentational mode of communication did not yield a significant result. This was a surprising outcome because presentational communication is arguably the most practiced skill in performance-based assessments. In other words, it was surprising that the students did not feel confident in their abilities to engage in presentational tasks at the time of the survey even though they successfully collaborated and engaged in those tasks frequently in high school. I predicted the presentational mode would have shown the strongest correlation of all of the modes of communication given the

frequency of students engaging in this specific skill in performance-based assessments. To investigate this outcome, I looked back at specific survey questions for each of the three modes of communication to see where they may be differences across students' responses. Initially, I found that, while many students did report being able to engage in the presentational mode, they rated their abilities in the interpersonal and interpretive modes significantly higher. I provide a more in-depth analysis of this finding below in the quantitative data interpretations.

### **Interpretations of Quantitative Data**

The positive correlations shown in tables 4.2 and 4.3 above indicate there a relationship exists between students' experiences collaborating in performance-based assessments and their perceived abilities to communicate interpersonally and interpretively both in high school and at the time of the study. Achieving this correlation meant students rated themselves at a proficient level when asked about their abilities to perform both interpersonally and interpretively while they were in high school or engaging in school-like language-learning tasks and at the time of the study while they were using Spanish in the "real world" outside of school. The unforeseen statistically insignificant relationship between collaborating and completing performance-based assessments, as shown in Table 4.4, was surprising given that the nature of performance-based assessment projects is to, in fact, present via speaking and writing in the target language for an audience. To interpret this outcome, I revisited survey questions 31, 33 and 35 that asked students to rate their ability to engage in interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational tasks in Spanish both in high school and at the time of the study. What I discovered was that the average student responses stating they could perform presentational tasks while in high school and at the time of the study was 63%, (when averaging all of the tasks together from the survey question). The average student response for interpersonal tasks was 73% and the average response for interpretive tasks was 79%.

While 63% may have seemed like a high average initially, it was not high enough to be statistically

significant. Both the interpersonal and interpretive averages of students' abilities to perform those tasks were notably higher than students' perceived abilities to perform tasks in the presentation mode.

One possible explanation for this outcome is that both the interpersonal and interpretive tasks are more easily tied into every-day activities, such as conversing with people or being able to listening to a Spanish song and understand it. Presentational tasks, on the other hand, require a more formal setting that may have been less likely to occur in the participants' everyday lives. Additionally, there were more non-majors/undecided (18 students or 60%) that completed the survey than language majors (12 students or 40%). Students who do not major in Spanish would be less likely to use their Spanish in a presentational setting or outside of situations that were for their own enjoyment, such as communicating with others interpersonally (i.e., having conversations in Spanish for fun, with family or friends) or interpreting the language (i.e., listening to songs, watching movies, or reading texts). Students majoring in Spanish, on the other hand, would continue with these interpersonal and interpretive activities in addition to having more opportunities to communicate in the presentational mode in the classroom or in a work/career environment. This finding will be confirmed later when I present the analysis of the qualitative data. To find more in-depth explanation to these statistical outcomes, I followed up on this surprising result in the content analysis below in which I interpret students' responses to qualitative survey questions that asked specifically for explanations to students' scale-based quantitative survey questions. In the qualitative data analysis below, I continue to explore the students' responses to the research questions and dig more deeply into their descriptions of their language experiences in and after high school.

## Qualitative Data Findings

Qualitative data were analyzed using a content analysis through organizing, reading, and coding data in search of themes and descriptions for interpretation to address the research questions (Creswell, 2013). These data were analyzed consecutively beginning with research questions one, then two, and then three. The survey items associated with each research question can be found in Table 3.1.

### Content Analysis

**Research question one analysis.** I began the qualitative analysis by exploring the students' responses to descriptive survey questions that addressed research question one (i.e., survey questions 27, 28, 29, and 30). I first returned to the analysis in which I had divided these responses into two groups: (1) students majoring in foreign languages; and (2) students not majoring in a foreign language or those who remain "undecided" in their overall college major. After my initial coding (described in detail in chapter three), I had 15 codes that emerged as "subthemes" addressing this research question. Those codes included the following: (1) collaboration/reflection, (2) presenting or performing for others, (3) fun, (4) constant target language use, (5) completing projects as assessments, (6) learning in meaningful/relevant contexts, (7) creativity, (8) interactive [nature of the projects], (9) individualized/open-ended projects, (10) variety and frequency [of project completion], (11) develops speaking skills, (12) develops writing skills, (13) develops listening skills, (14) develops reading/research skills, and (15) develops cultural knowledge. I organized those codes into an array using Excel with each code at the top of a column. In each cell, I inserted quotes from the survey that corresponded to the code. Figure 4.1 below represents a sample from the Excel chart showing student responses categorized into three of the 15 codes.

Collaboration and reflection	Presenting/Performing for others, improv	Fun
Not only were they <b>fun and creative</b> but these projects allowed us (as classmates) to <b>work together</b> and get a <b>variety of points of views</b> . We practiced <b>speaking, writing, critiquing</b> the works of others and it <b>pushed us</b> to do our best work.	The <b>presentations we did</b> whether that be in person or on video. I liked being able to <b>speak Spanish</b> and practice saying all the different words and using the vocabulary.	The <b>many different projects</b> . It also helped that the projects <b>were fun</b> and not boring.
/ Cuentos de niños cambiados, I liked the <b>group I worked with</b> . It was also <b>super fun</b> to change familiar stories into interesting plot twists / Oscars/annuals were great because we <b>got to reflect back</b> on all the work we did :) All while <b>speaking Spanish!</b> STILL!	I really loved <b>having to go up in front of the class</b> during AP practice and have to act out something. it <b>forced you to think and act on your feet</b> and you did not have much time to plan out a scene.	Not only <b>were they fun and creative</b> but these projects allowed us (as classmates) to <b>work together</b> and get a <b>variety of points of views</b> . We practiced <b>speaking, writing, critiquing</b> the works of others and it <b>pushed us to do our best work</b> .
I really liked <b>making the video projects</b> - they were time consuming but it was really <b>fun to work creatively in Spanish with my friends!</b>	The most helpful exercises for <b>orally communicating in Spanish</b> , for me, was <b>doing presentations on a variety of topics</b> and having oral exams with the teacher (where she would <b>ask questions and we would have to make complete answers in return</b> ).	I had the <b>most fun completing these projects</b> .

Figure 4.1. Sample from excel chart content analysis of student responses for three example codes.

For example, the top row of Figure 4.1 shows a sample of the codes, including collaboration and reflection, presenting/performing for others and improve, and fun. The colors signified whether a student was a language major or non-major/undecided and to which survey question the responses were linked. In this sample, the pink color represented non-majors/undecided responses to survey question 29, “why did you enjoy [performance-based assessment projects] the most?”; and the purple response represented non-majors/undecided responses to survey question 27, “what was the most helpful thing we did in Spanish to make you a proficient communicator (in speaking, writing or obtaining cultural knowledge)?” Portions of the responses had been previously bolded in the Word document indicating key words in the coding process. I kept the bolded text here to guide my analysis.

**Research question two analysis.** I conducted the content analysis for the second research question by continuing the same coding process of student responses that I used for research question one but addressing different survey questions (i.e., survey questions 32, 34, and 36). The survey questions that addressed research question two were more straightforward than the survey items for research question one such that they asked students directly and specifically about their proficiency in the three modes of communication as well as why their proficiency improved or diminished in the major skill areas. This meant that the findings were separated into several groups



according to reason whether or not the skills diminished or improved over time and categories that represented the reasons given. After taking six passes through the student responses and highlighting relevant responses, I created an Excel document (see Figure 4.2) that divided responses by majors and non-majors/undecided and sorting those responses into categories. I also repeated the process of bolding keywords that were frequently repeated or directly connected to the big ideas from the survey questions. Eight codes emerged from the students' responses that fell into one of two categories: (1) reasons students' skills diminished and (2) reasons students' skills improved. Figures 4.2 and 4.3 represent a sample of student responses.

Reasons skills diminished		
Lack of practice / time away	Lack of exposure / opportunities	Not studying the language
I believe that I am not on the same level as I was before, but I think I am still able to do them. This is due to being <b>out of practice</b> for 1.5 years.	My abilities have definitely changed because I <b>no longer have exposure to Spanish</b> . I value speaking and understanding the most followed by reading and writing, but I <b>hardly have the chance to hear the language or speak it</b> . Therefore I am much slower at communicating and have forgotten many of the lesser used words we learned in class.	I can still kind of speak a bit, but not nearly as well as I could in high school. I <b>haven't studied</b> Spanish for three years so there are a lot of things that I don't remember anymore.
I still <b>remember</b> my skills but I haven't <b>practiced</b> them enough to improve much.	I have dramatically decreased in my <b>interaction with people</b> who speak Spanish so my speaking has become less elaborate and cohesive. I <b>can still communicate at the same level in high school</b> , but I would struggle if there was a complication in speaking to someone. My writing is not at the same level because I am not as strong in subjunctive and conditional as I was in high school.	I have <b>not formally looked at Spanish</b> material since the AP exam last year.

Figure 4.2. Reasons students stated their language skills diminished.

Reasons skills improved			
General exposure to the language / travel abroad	Exposure to authentic materials (songs, TV, movies)	Strong foundation / learning in high school	Taking Spanish classes in college
I practiced <b>more</b> and gained more <b>exposure</b> to the Spanish language which made it easier for me to communicate through speaking and writing.	I have not been out of high school for very long, and try to maintain my Spanish abilities by listening to music and watching television in Spanish.	Since I constantly am <b>practicing</b> , I feel that I was able to keep the skills I learned.	my ability to communicate improved due to many opportunities to <b>practice</b> through projects
I think my skills have gone down a bit since high school since I haven't had much <b>practice</b> (although I was able to learn some more during my short two weeks in Europe this summer), but I definitely haven't improved since coming to college.	<b>Listening to and watching Spanish television and music has helped me maintain my ability since high school</b>	I have dramatically <b>decreased</b> in my <b>interaction with people</b> who speak Spanish so my speaking has become less elaborate and cohesive. I <b>can still communicate at the same level in high school</b> , but I would struggle if there was a complication in speaking to someone. My writing is not at the same level because I am not as strong in subjunctive and conditional as I was in high school.	I felt very able in terms of interpersonal communication coming out of high school. The work I've done since then has extended that ability to a certain degree but it was <b>focused in a different direction</b> because it was a lot more academic in focus as opposed to casual conversation
I have gained more <b>exposure</b> to the language which helps me familiarize myself with the language, making it easier to understand.	<b>Though I did not have much practice, I did listen to a lot of Spanish music and watched some movies which kept my listening skills active.</b>	I think that <b>lack of practice</b> has led to a loss of vocabulary. This makes it more difficult for me to exchange information outside of my interests. However, I <b>have retained much of the structure and grammar that I learned in high school</b> , which has helped me continue to communicate in Spanish in the past, present, and future.	My Spanish class at Michigan is <b>grammar-based which helps me practice my writing</b> .

Figure 4.3. Reasons students stated their language skills improved.

Figure 4.2 shows a sample of the codes that fell under the diminished category, which included: (1) lack of practice/time away, (2) lack of exposure/opportunities, and (3) no longer studying the

Spanish language. Figure 4.3 shows a sample of the codes that fell under the improvement category, which included: (1) having opportunities to practice, (2) general exposure to the Spanish language/traveling abroad to Spanish-speaking countries, (3) exposure to authentic materials (i.e. songs, T.V., movies, and text), (4) having a strong foundation and learning from high school, and (5) taking Spanish classes at the college level. The colors of the responses also signified if a student was a language major or non-major/undecided as well as to which survey question the responses were linked. In these samples, the purple color represented non-majors'/undecided responses to survey question 32, "explain why your abilities to communicate with others in Spanish through speaking or writing did or did not change;" the red response represented non-majors'/undecided responses to survey question 36, "explain why your abilities to listen and understand various audios in Spanish or read and understand various texts in Spanish did or did not change; and finally the pink response represented non-majors'/undecided responses to survey question 34, "explain why your abilities in Spanish to write or orally present information did or did not change."

**Research question three analysis.** Finally, I conducted the content analysis by continuing the same coding process for student responses addressing research question three as I had in the previous two analyses. There were two survey questions that collected data to address the final research question (i.e., survey questions 18 and 19), which asked why students chose to study Spanish in high school and continued studying through the AP level. I again divided responses by majors and non-majors/undecided to look for either continuity or differences in students' responses and repeated the process of bolding keywords that were frequently repeated or directly connected to the survey questions. Six codes emerged; both survey questions, however, had four codes in common: (1) to improve prior skills/influence from middle school, (2) the Spanish language and/or culture is interesting/fun, (3) Spanish is practical or useful for a future college course or career,

and (4) the teacher/her teaching style. The two codes that were not in common emerged only in response to survey question 18, which included (5) having a personal or family connection to Spanish and living in a global society or the proximity and (6) access to Spanish in the United States. Figures 4.4 and 4.5 below show samples from the Excel chart of student responses categorized into three of the six codes.

Why chose Spanish in HS		
Interesting/fun/liked language or culture (16)	Practical/Useful language/Future college or career (16)	Mrs. FP teaching/loved class (4)
I like to study languages and Spanish is practical.	I like to study languages and Spanish is practical.	I started because it was what most of my friends did in middle school. I continued with when I entered high school because it was recommended that I do a language for college apps, and I wanted to explore what I want to do as a major. Although I decided it wasn't really my passion, I continued till the end of high school because I had a great experience in Spanish 4ac with Mrs. Ficano :)
It was the most interesting out of all of the options.	I thought the language was fascinating and it was practical because it is very common in the U.S. today	I love the language and really enjoyed the classes!
It was my favorite foreign language that I had taken in middle school.		Some language was required in high school, but I don't think that that ever changed my desire to continue learning Spanish. I learn Spanish fairly easily, and I love the language which is why I continued taking Spanish. After a while, Señora F-P also was a big factor in deciding to study Spanish or not.
I thought the language was fascinating and it was practical because it is very common in the U.S. today		I really loved learning the language, and Mrs. Ficano-Petricca made me very motivated to continue through high school.
I wanted to further educate myself with new and more expansive information.	The Spanish speaking world has a very rich culture, as well as the second most widely spoken language in the country.	
I love Spanish and it's a practical and very useful language to learn.	It's not too different from English, popular language	

Figure 4.4. Reasons students provided for why they chose to study Spanish in high school.

Why continued through AP level		
Interesting/fun/liked language or culture (10)	Practical/Useful language/Future college or career (8)	Mrs. FP teaching/loved class (18)
I enjoyed the language and Mrs. Ficano-Petricca's teaching style.	wanted to receive AP credit, enjoyed taking Spanish	I enjoyed the class and my teacher and I was improving with each year and semester.
Spanish was a super interesting language, and I found 4AC and 5AP to be the most engaging and fun classes I took in high school.	I was in 2AC freshman year so it was a natural progression. I felt like I was good at Spanish and I wanted college credit.	I enjoyed the language and Mrs. Ficano-Petricca's teaching style.
I love Spanish and I love Mrs. F-P!	I thought I might want to pursue a career involving Spanish	Definitely the teacher. If it were a different teacher at skyline, I would have not continued.
I wanted to learn more about how the language affected different aspects of the culture such as poetry, beauty and aesthetics, among other common themes. I wanted to be able to apply what I had already learned into a broader aspect of life.	I wanted to learn more about how the language affected different aspects of the culture such as poetry, beauty and aesthetics, among other common themes. I wanted to be able to apply what I had already learned into a broader aspect of life.	I liked Sra. Ficano because she made the material engaging and interesting. I also had a lot of friends that took the class and I wanted to be with them, but that was secondary.
I loved my teacher and the language.	I really enjoyed learning the language and was interested in continuing in college.	I wanted to continue developing my language skills so that I could study abroad or volunteer abroad in the future. Mrs. Ficano-Petricca also made the class extremely fun, rewarding, and an experience I will never forget.
I enjoyed learning the language.	Support from classmates and teachers as well as a desire to continue studying Spanish at the college level. The AP exam would ensure my placement at a higher level as well as give me a few college credits.	Mrs. Ficano-Petricca. Before senior year of high school, I told her that I wasn't sure if I should take Spanish AP, or if I should repeat Spanish 4/4AC. I love Spanish, but I thought with two other AP classes it might be a lot of work. Thankfully, Mrs. Ficano-Petricca easily convinced me to stay in Spanish, and I am really, really happy I did. I loved Spanish AP!

Figure 4.5. Reasons students provided for why they continued studying Spanish through the AP level.

Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show codes that describe why students chose to study the Spanish language in high school including why they continued studying Spanish through the AP level (and after their high school requirement was fulfilled). Their descriptive responses were organized about their

ideas related to the Spanish language and culture being interesting or fun, and Spanish being practical or useful in their future college studies or career. The colors of the responses again indicated if a student was a language major or non-major/undecided as well as to which survey question the responses were linked. For sample responses seen in Figure 4.4, the purple color represented non-majors'/undecided students' responses and the green color represented language major students' responses and both were linked to survey question 18, "why did you choose to study Spanish in high school?" For sample responses in Figure 4.5, the pink color represented non-majors'/undecided students' responses and the blue color represented language major students' responses and both were linked to survey question 19, "what motivated you to continue studying Spanish through the AP level?" As in the previous two content analyses, portions of the responses were previously bolded in the word document as key words identified in the coding process.

### **Content Analysis Findings**

Once I completed organizing the responses into coded subthemes for all of the research questions, I began to look at the data holistically to identify what factors were the driving student's responses to each research question. With that in mind, I continued my analysis by looking at each set of coded responses separately by research question and creating graphic images to visually represent my outcomes. The findings from the analyses for each research question are discussed and visually represented below.

**Research question one findings.** Research question one investigated the ways in which students perceived the collaborative instructional and performance-based assessment approaches they experienced as fostering their foreign language proficiency and communicative competence. Although I initially separated the data by non-major/undecided students and language major students, I found no significant difference in the codes or the responses that emerged for the two

groups for this research question. Therefore, I combined all student responses when creating the final codes. The 15 codes and quotes that emerged mentioned that students' performance-based assessment experiences influenced their language development. However, because there were so many codes for this question, I looked again to see if they could be organized into "big ideas" or larger categories. I looked back at survey questions 27, 28, 29 and 30 and realized that they directly created three larger contexts for students to discuss their performance-based assessment experiences. For example, as a result of survey question 27, students talked about performance-based assessment practices as being *helpful* when they performed for others because they always used the target language, and that the projects them many opportunities to practice the language. When responding to survey questions 28 and 29, students used other terminology to talk about what they *enjoyed* about the approach, such as it allowed them to be creative, made their learning meaningful, and the interactive nature of the projects. Finally, survey question 30 specifically asked students to describe *skills they acquired* in Spanish communication as a result of performance-based assessments and they mentioned acquiring speaking skills, writing skills and cultural knowledge. With this in mind, organized these ideas into three graphic images or wheels around the large themes of what students found to be "helpful," "enjoyable," and "skills acquired" as a result of engaging in performance-based assessment. Figures 4.6, 4.7, and 4.8 below show the resulting organization of the 15 codes.



*Figure 4.6.* Codes that were mentioned in students' responses to what they found helpful about engaging in performance-based assessments.



*Figure 4.7.* Codes that were mentioned in students' responses to what they found enjoyable from their interactions in performance-based assessments.



*Figure 4.8.* Codes that were mentioned in students' responses to what skills they developed as a result of completing in performance-based assessments.

Figures 4.6, 4.7 and 4.8 represent the key words in students' answers to what they found to be helpful (Fig. 4.6), enjoyable (Fig. 4.7) and skills acquired (Fig. 4.8) as a result of their experiences with performance-based assessment. Each figure is a different color simply to differentiate the three themes. Twelve codes emerged from the students' descriptions of why performance-based assessment was *helpful*; 12 codes as to why it was *enjoyable*, and five specific *skills they acquired*. I passed through the codes and responses three additional times to make sure I did not miss any key items. While completing these last passes, I noticed there was overlap in the codes in all three categories. I created a final figure to represent the overlap of codes among each of the three categories. Figure 4.9 below shows the resulting figure that shows the connection among all of the codes and the categories.



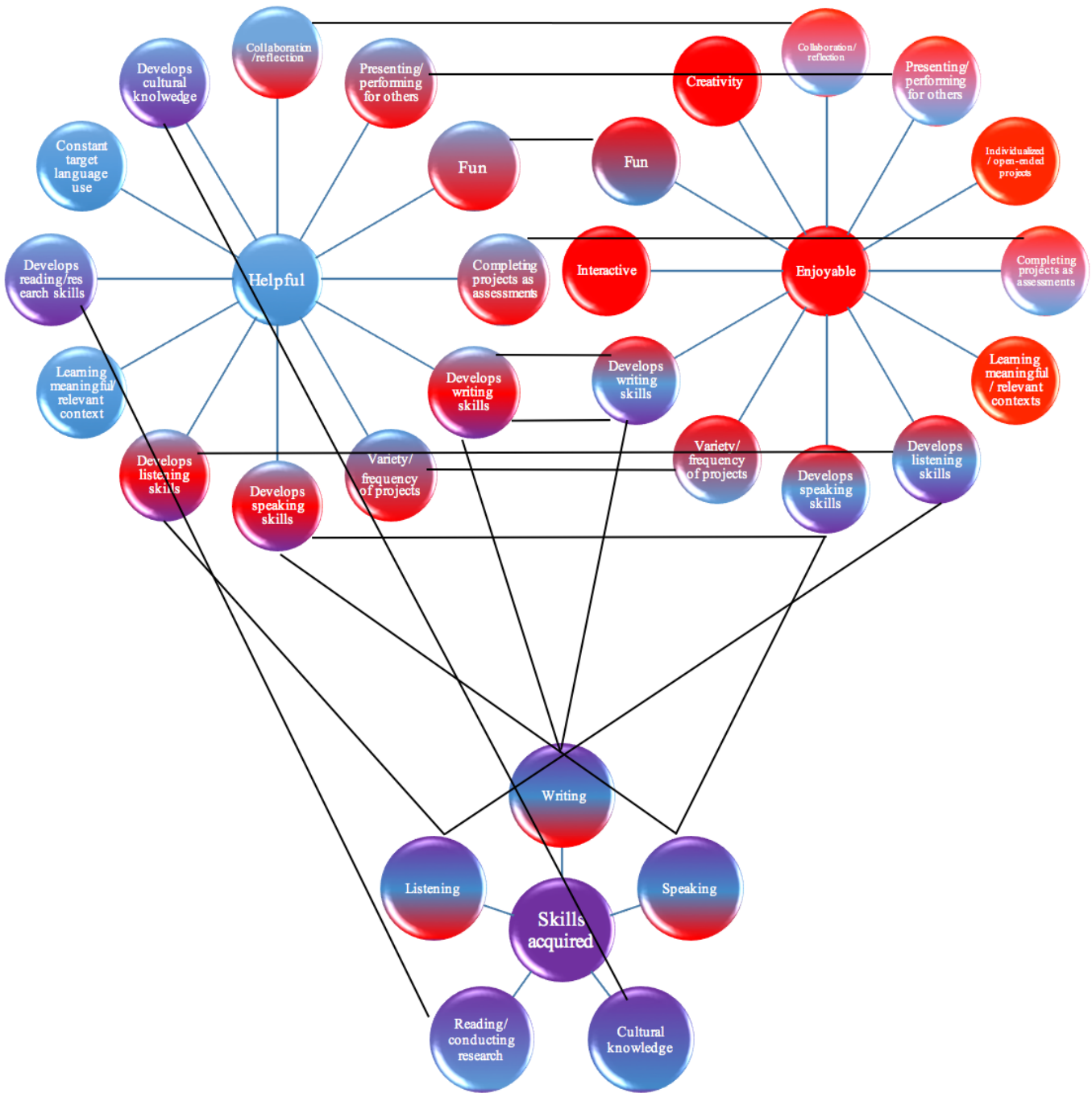


Figure 4.9. Overlap of students’ codes among the three large categories of “helpful,” “enjoyable,” and “skills acquired” through performance-based assessment.

Figure 4.9 represents the complexity in students’ responses. Where the codes were first mentioned, the color appears at the top of the circle. The black lines visually connect the ideas to show where

those same ideas were also mentioned. Circles that contain multiple colors indicate that students mentioned that code in multiple survey questions and demonstrate the overlap between the three larger categories. Blue indicates that students mentioned the code when responding to survey question 27 (the “helpful” category); red indicates students mentioned the code when responding to survey question 28 or 29 (the “enjoyable” category); purple indicates students mentioned the code in survey question 30 (the “skills acquired” category). Figure 4.9 symbolized, in the end, that all of the major categories associated with performance-based assessment experiences – being helpful, enjoyable, and promoting language skill development – are all interconnected to each other. In other words, subthemes that make performance-based assessment helpful, such as it being fun, providing opportunities to present in front of others, and allowing numerous opportunities for collaboration are also what makes it enjoyable and lead to students developing key language skills such as speaking, writing and listening.

To see which factors had the most influence on students, I counted the number of times a code was cross-referenced directly with a Spanish language skill. Table 4.5 below lists the frequency each code or subtheme was mentioned that students directly connected to their skill development.

Table 4.5

*Spanish skills students stated they developed by engaging in performance-based assessments (PBA) cross-referenced with the subthemes that impacted that skill development from students' survey responses to survey questions 27, 28, 29, and 30.*

<b><u>Factors mentioned in PBA:</u></b>	<b><u>Speaking</u></b>	<b><u>Writing</u></b>	<b><u>Culture</u></b>	<b><u>Listening</u></b>	<b><u>Reading</u></b>
Collaboration*	6	4	0	0	2
Presenting/ performing in front of others*	4	2	2	1	1
Fun*	5	3	4	0	0
Constant target language	3	0	0	0	0
Projects as a means of assessment*	5	2	1	1	0
Learning in meaningful/ relevant context	2	0	0	0	0
Creativity*	5	2	1	1	0
Interactive	0	1	1	0	0
Individualized / open-ended approach	1	0	1	0	1
Frequency / variety of projects	2	1	0	0	0

*Note.* \*Factors with an asterisk influenced at least three of the five communication skills in a significant number of survey responses

Table 4.5 demonstrates that to answer research question one there are several factors that demonstrate students perceive collaborative instruction and performance-based assessment as fostering their communicative competence in all five of major language skill areas of speaking, writing, listening, reading/conducting research, and building cultural knowledge. More specifically, students described factors that made performance-based assessment helpful, including collaboration/reflection, presenting, performing for others, fun, constant target language use, completing projects as assessments, learning being meaningful/ in a relevant context, variety and the variety and frequency of projects specifically contributed to their development of speaking, writing, listening, reading/research skills and cultural knowledge. The characteristics they found enjoyable about performance-based assessment, such as collaboration/reflection, presenting for others, fun, completing projects as assessments, learning being meaningful/ in a relevant context, creativity, interactive, the individualized nature/open-endedness of the projects, and the variety and frequency of the projects, specifically contributed to the development of their speaking, writing, and listening skills.

However, five characteristics mentioned by students in Table 4.5 stood out as having a more significant impact on students' overall proficiency in most or all of the skill sets (i.e., at least three out of five skills). Those characteristics were: (1) collaboration, (2) fun, (3) having the opportunity to present/ perform in front of others, (4) using projects as a means of assessment, and (5) having the opportunity to be creative. Below is a list of these five key influencing factors with a summary of what students stated in regard to each.

Key phrases from students' responses that summarized responses categorized as *collaboration* included:

Working together with peers on performance assessments in partners or small groups; working with friends; working together in the target language; thinking on our feet; created a tight knit class; fond memories; learning being exciting and open-ended; getting to laugh and enjoy ourselves; and building teamwork skills.

Key phrases that summarized *fun* included:

Making projects was fun, not boring; fun and creative allowing us to see many points of view while working together; pushed us to do our best work; had the most fun getting to complete projects (out of all of what we did); fun to see what others did; fun to write scripts and film; got to have fun incorporating learning from all previous years; creative and fun way to make something in Spanish; projects were fun and challenging but didn't feel like chores to complete; enjoyed acting and the projects gave a deeper meaning of the Spanish language through poetry, food, city attractions, fun to learn about other places, also funny, projects had us practicing Spanish in a fun cultural way; fun to learn culture by creating projects; projects created a tight knit class making language learning comfortable and fun; unveiling of projects was always incredibly fun; and fun creative way to use our Spanish skills.

Key phrases that summarized *presenting/ performing for others* included:

In person or making videos; different way to apply learning; think on your feet, present on a variety of topics; so helpful doing projects, get to hear the language watching the videos; individualized projects, got to showcase different talents for everyone; getting to speak entirely in Spanish, helped build confidence in a foreign language; everyone drove everyone to do their best work; built cultural knowledge, created memories, learning in a way with friends that was exciting; a lot of work but unveiling projects was so fun; learned as a whole class, enjoyed ourselves.

Key phrases that summarized *projects as means of assessment* included:

Each project focused on different topics allowing us to use new vocabulary and grammar in a variety of ways; projects were great making me use both written and verbal Spanish; video projects were the most helpful, doing presentations was the most helpful; we often got to do things on the spot like improve and conversations; got to showcase different talents; give a deeper meaning to the Spanish language and culture; the projects were well rounded in teaching us all aspects of Spanish; projects were inspiring; projects make us work hard; pushed Spanish speaking skills to the test, made us proud; tested abilities to work in groups; favorite projects were videos that were a fun way to apply what we were learning in class.

Key phrases that summarized *creativity* included:

Projects allowed a lot of creative input from students and allowed different methods of

expressing their ideas; projects were fun and creative pushing them to do their best work; creative and unique to see what classmates did; fun and creative while still learning about culture and practicing skills; creative way of incorporating writing and speaking in Spanish; liked being creative and using fun ways to make something in Spanish; projects allowed for creativity and a variety of options to choose from; time consuming but really fun to work creatively in Spanish with friends; all projects allowed for creativity and fun way to use Spanish skills; creativity was tied to teamwork in projects; creative projects allowed us to speak about things in Spanish that we talk about in English; the fun and creativity made projects memorable and enjoyable.

A specific example of a student response from this data analysis that represented the responses as a whole, was categorized under the “presenting/ performing for others” and “develops speaking skills” categories. The student stated, “The most helpful exercises for **orally communicating in Spanish**<sup>3</sup>, for me, was **doing presentations on a variety of topics** and having oral exams with the teacher (where she would **ask questions and we would have to make complete answers in return**).” Another example response that fell into the “collaboration/reflection,” “fun,” “creativity,” “develops writing skills,” and “develops speaking skills” categories was as follows, “Not only were they **fun and creative** but these **projects** allowed us (as classmates) to **work together** and get a **variety of points of views**. We practiced **speaking, writing, critiquing** the works of others and it **pushed us to do our best work**.”

An important reason the finding regarding the impact of these five characteristics of performance-based assessment is so significant is because these characteristics embody everything that traditional tests are not; they allow students to engage because they are being creative and having fun, but simultaneously gain language and life skills by collaborating, learning how to present in front of an audience, as well as how to interact in personal conversations all in a foreign language. One non-major/undecided student’s response summed this up perfectly stating:

“The **projects** were **alternatives to "standard" tests** or exams with short answer or multiple choice questions. This was **much better** for it **didn't test my ability to memorize**

<sup>3</sup> Text was **bolded** by the author to highlight parts of the student’s response.

a list of words or phrases, but it **analyzed how well I could genuinely write or speak Spanish**. This seems like a **much more effective and true test of my abilities**.”

Students’ responses also suggest working on performance-based assessments created a family-like atmosphere in the classroom that builds trust and comradery among students.

For example, one student stated:

“They [the projects] were an opportunity to **spend time learning with my friends** in a way that was really **exciting, open ended, and engaging**. It was **fun to write the script** and bounce **ridiculous ideas** off of each other to try to **create better projects** than the other groups. It was great how **everybody in the class drove everyone else to produce their very best work** to keep up.”

This type of classmate collaboration pushed students outside their comfort zones which in turn pushed them to go above and beyond in fun and creativity all while continually acquiring Spanish language skills.

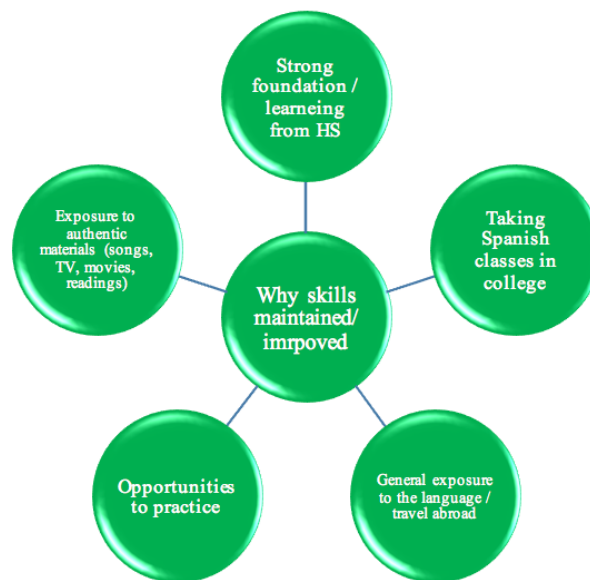
**Research question one conclusions.** Students’ survey responses clearly indicated that the performance-based assessment facilitated their acquisition of important Spanish language skills and that those skills could be and were applied to different “real world” contexts. In addition, they were able to connect their new knowledge with what they already knew and were comfortable with in their own culture. Moreover, while describing these learning experiences, respondents also used the words fun, memorable, helpful, or challenging. This demonstrates that students’ affective involvement with performance-based assessments may have made a deeper impact on them than learning language skills in a more traditional way. These language experiences made an impact on their personal lives as well. These experiences represented not only learning Spanish, but also an experience of the language and culture, as well as the classroom culture or the atmosphere of our learning environment that was special to them. In other words, while both quantitative and qualitative data show students clearly acquired Spanish language skills, students’ qualitative responses reveal that the collaborative instructional and performance-based assessment approaches were much more than “just learning Spanish” to them. This was evidenced in their

descriptions of how engaging in these performance-based assessments allowed them to foster friendships, taught them to work as team members, allowed them to learn to be competitive in a healthy way, pushed everyone to do their best work, and helped them explore their own creativity. Moreover, their descriptions showed how they applied what they learned from the projects, in both life skills and academics, in new ways. Their ability to utilize their new skills in such unique ways was described as a challenge, but also as a challenge, which was exactly what made the performance-based assessments creative and fun and led them to feel proud of their accomplishments. This was true of almost all students who completed the survey, whether they were majors or not. They all felt these same factors positively influenced their language and life skill development.

**Research question two findings.** Research question two investigated whether or not students continued to use the foreign language they learned in high school and why (or why not). Unlike the qualitative data for research question one, the data for research question two showed a substantial distinction in the responses of students who were non-majors/undecided versus those majoring in foreign language. For this question, there were eight codes for non-major/undecided students as well as eight codes for students majoring in foreign language. As with research question one, I took a pass through the codes for both sets six times to again organize them into “big ideas” or larger categories driven by the survey questions. Before conducting my initial three passes through the codes, I looked back at relevant survey questions and found there were two distinct categories reflected in students’ responses that also directly linked back to research question two: (1) why are students still able to use their Spanish skills the acquired in high school; or (2) why do they believe they are no longer able to apply them. The survey questions directly asked students to explain why their language abilities did or did not change since high school, especially as they related to being able to (1) communicate with others in Spanish through speaking



or writing, (2) write or orally present information in Spanish, and (3) listen and understand various audios in Spanish or read and understand various texts in Spanish. Students' responses could be categorized into either reasons why their skills *maintained and improved* since high school (meaning they can still use what they learned or have since built upon their Spanish knowledge) or why their skills have *diminished* since high school (meaning they are no longer able to apply them today). Applying the same organizational strategy as I did for research question one, I took my first three passes through the codes and put them into two figures around the large themes of "why skills maintained/ improved" and "why skills diminished" for both non-major/undecided students and students majoring in foreign language. Figures 4.10 and 4.11 below show the resulting organization for the eight codes for each group of students.



*Figure 4.10.* Codes that were mentioned in non-major/undecided students' and foreign language major students' responses to why their skills maintained or improved since high school.



*Figure 4.11.* Codes that were mentioned in non-major/undecided students' and foreign language major students' responses to why their skills diminished since high school.

Figures 4.10 and 4.11 show the key words in students' responses indicating why they were (or were not) able to apply their Spanish skills from high school at the time of the study. These responses included both non-major/undecided students and students majoring in foreign language. Each of the figures are a different color simply to differentiate their responses into abilities maintaining or improving versus diminishing for all students. Figure 4.10 shows students in both groups mentioned five key codes for the reasons their Spanish skills maintained or improved including (1) taking Spanish classes in college: (2) having opportunities to practice, (3) general exposure to the language or travel abroad to Spanish-speaking countries, (4) exposure to authentic materials (i.e., songs, TV shows, movies or authentic readings), and (5) having a strong foundation/learning from high school. Figure 4.11 shows both groups of students also mentioned three main reasons for why their Spanish skills had diminished since high school, including: (1) lack of practice and time away from Spanish, (2) lack of exposure to Spanish or opportunities to

hear or see the language, and (3) simply not studying the Spanish language any more. Even though non-major/undecided and foreign language major students mentioned the same codes in their responses, I found the frequency that each group mentioned each reason varied greatly. Therefore, to examine which of these reasons had the greatest impact on students' Spanish skills for each group, I counted the number of times a code was mentioned by either non-majors/undecided students or students majoring in foreign language. Table 4.6 below lists the frequency each code was mentioned by the two groups in addition to showing the total number of times the code was mentioned overall.

Table 4.6

*Reasons non-major/undecided students and students majoring in foreign language gave explaining their personal evaluations of proficiency in Spanish maintaining/improving or diminishing since high school.*

<b><u>Reasons Skills Maintained/Improved</u></b>	<b><u>Non-majors/undecided</u></b>	<b><u>Majors</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>
Opportunities to practice*	5	14	19
General exposure to the language / travel*	4	12	16
Exposure to authentic materials (songs, TV, movies, texts)	4	2	6
Taking Spanish classes in college*	4	22	26
Strong foundation/ learning from high school*	12	12	24
<b><u>Reasons Skills Diminished</u></b>	<b><u>Non-majors/undecided</u></b>	<b><u>Majors</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>
Lack of practice / time away*	18	1	19
Lack of exposure/ Opportunities	4	1	5
Not studying Spanish*	12	4	16

*Note.* \*Factors that most affected students' skills based on total number of responses for both non-major/undecided and foreign language major students

Table 4.6 demonstrates that all students, both non-majors/undecided and foreign language majors alike, were using a variety of the Spanish skills they acquired in high school to various degrees. Some skills had been maintained or improved, more than others for several reasons. The

factors most frequently mentioned by both groups that affected students' Spanish included (1) lack of opportunities or lack of practice, (2) exposure to the language or traveling abroad, (3) taking Spanish in college (or not), and (4) having a strong foundation in high school. Not surprisingly, there was an important distinction in the frequency of responses between students majoring in foreign language and those who are non-majors/undecided within these factors. Both groups shared common codes describing their language maintaining and improving or diminishing, the number of students who mentioned the codes differed greatly between the two groups. For example, one of the top reasons students stated their language skills maintained and improved was having opportunities to practice Spanish (5 non-major/undecided responses and 14 major responses) and taking Spanish in college (4 non-major/undecided responses and 22 major responses). For all of the reasons stated in the skills maintaining/improvement category, the number of foreign language majors always outweighed the number of non-major/undecided responses. Conversely, the top two reasons students' skills diminished were lack of practice/ time away from the Spanish language and no longer studying the Spanish language. The frequency of these responses was also interesting, but not surprising with 18 non-major undecided students to only one foreign language major mentioning lack of practice and 12 non-major/undecided students versus only four foreign language majors citing they are no longer studying Spanish. Those who reported being language majors at the time of the study in this group said they were majoring in a foreign language other than Spanish. Overall, in the reasons students' skills have diminished category, the number of non-major/undecided responses also outweighed the number of foreign language major responses. The most interesting and exciting outcome was that both groups equally reported that their language improved from having a strong foundation/learning in high school (with 12 non-major/undecided responses and 12 foreign language major responses totaling 24 of 30 respondents mentioning this factor as positively influencing their language skills).

Table 4.6 also shows six codes with an asterisk that stood out overall based on the total number of responses to explain why students' skills maintained/improved or diminished. The major reasons students' skills maintained or improved included opportunities to practice, general exposure to the language and travel abroad, having a strong foundation/ learning from high school, and taking Spanish classes in college. The two major reasons students' skills diminished included lack of practice and time away from Spanish and not taking Spanish classes in college. Below is a list of these six key influencing factors on students' language skills with a summary from students' survey responses that fell under each code.

Practice, whether discussed in terms of having opportunities or lack thereof, significantly influenced students' perceptions of their abilities to communicate in Spanish. Both non-major/undecided and foreign language major students discussed both lack and opportunities of to practice Spanish but in different contexts. Below are several key phrases that students' used to describe how having opportunities to practice and lack of practice impacted their skills.

Key phrases that summarized *lack of practice and time away from Spanish* included:

Not on the same level as before but can still do them because of being out of practice; remember skills but haven't practiced to improve them; no longer have exposure to Spanish; hardly have the chance to hear the language or speak it; skills have gone down a bit since high school since I haven't practiced but I was still able to learn some more in Europe, with time I have forgotten many terms.

Not surprisingly, all 18 non-major/undecided survey respondents mentioned lack of practice to only one foreign language major student. One particular quote represented what several non-major/undecided students mentioned regarding the impact of lack of practice: "I would **constantly have projects in high school** which **helped me improve my presentational skills** both **orally and through my writing**, but now I **barely use the language** in my regular day, so my **ability to perform these tasks** is not completely gone, but **is fairly diminished** both orally and writing."

I believe students are sometimes the hardest critics when it comes to judging themselves and their

own performance and capabilities and I also believe many of them may be able to do more in Spanish than they are willing to give themselves credit for. However, it makes sense that not having the opportunity to use any skill leads to loss just as having opportunities to practice leads to improvement. Therefore, I next examined how students having the ability to practiced described their ability to use Spanish differently than those who did not. Below are summaries of key phrases students in both groups used to describe the impact of practice on their language skills.

Key phrases that summarized *opportunities to practice* included:

Practiced more and gained more exposure making it easier to communicate; ability to communicate improved due to many opportunities to practice through projects; practice in different contexts and not all strictly academic; continued to use Spanish every day in class and at home communicating with dining hall workers in Spanish; all skills improved with practice and continuing to study the language; taking upper level literature and culture classes with essays and presentations.

In one specific example from the data, a student stated, “Well I have certainly improved my academic writing in college, I feel that because **we focused on it so much in high school I could already write in Spanish at a high level coming into college.** As for **speaking, my presentation skills have improved dramatically,** due to having to **present information much more frequently** and **just improving my generic conversation abilities.**” While this quote shows that this particular student has had opportunities to practice presenting also in college, many students majoring in Spanish reported that, with the exception of presentational writing, their courses focused more frequently on interpersonal and interpretive communication. These students referred to those activities as “learning Spanish in an academic context,” which they defined as reading literature, conversing in class, class discussions, interpreting audios, and communicating with native speakers. As a result, they do not have frequent opportunities to present orally so they rated their abilities in the presentational mode much lower than their other skills. This helps explain the lack of relationship revealed in the quantitative results between performance-based assessment and presentational skills. Students felt they had these skills in high school because we presented

in projects so frequently and now that they are in college they simply do not have the same frequency of opportunities, which has negatively impacted their perception of their abilities to present formally in Spanish.

Key phrases that summarized *general exposure to the language and travel abroad* included:

More exposure to the Spanish language making it easier to communicate; hearing Caribbean Spanish trained my [ear] for native speakers; Spanish improved living in a Spanish-speaking country and being immersed in the language and culture; living in a Spanish speaking country my abilities improved; having full linguistic and cultural immersion experience I am constantly and intensely using my comprehension skills.

Interestingly, in several samples of data, students connected their strong foundation of language learning from high school with continued improvement from traveling abroad to Spanish-speaking countries. One student said, “even though I **learned more Spanish than most of my peers in high school**, I have **continued to improve my abilities** in Spanish through **taking three years of Spanish classes in college and living in a Spanish speaking country**.” Another student stated, “I think **with experience, I have continued to grow and develop**. Particularly by **studying abroad**, I was able to further develop my listening skills. However, **my foundation from high school was very strong**.” I believe both of these examples demonstrate that students felt confident going abroad given their strong learning in high school and then being immersed by the language and culture naturally improved their skills in a way that is simply not possible in a classroom setting.

Just as traveling abroad and having the exposure to Spanish in an authentic context can improve students’ communicative abilities in the language so can continuing to study Spanish in a formal setting. The next set of factors, therefore, that both non-major/undecided and foreign language majors described as impacting their current Spanish skills was whether or not they continued their studies at the collegiate level. There were 12 responses from non-major/undecided students and 4 from foreign language majors stated they were not continuing to study Spanish in



college; 22 responses from foreign language majors and 4 responses from non-major/undecided students discussed the impact of taking Spanish classes in college on their language skills today. Below are summaries for how students described the current state of their language skills for both factors.

Key phrases that summarized *not taking Spanish classes in college* included:

I haven't studied Spanish for three years so there are a lot of things I don't remember; I have not formally looked at Spanish material since the AP exam last year; my Spanish got worse because I was away from it for so long focusing on Japanese, pursuing other interests I stopped my progress in learning Spanish; it's been a while since I studied Spanish; I remember these skills well but I have not done work to improve them as of now; I did not continue to expand my knowledge of Spanish outside of high school; I have lost a lot of vocabulary since ending my formal education in Spanish; my abilities to communicate in Spanish decreased since I began learning a different language.

Even students who felt their skills have diminished from not taking classes, they still reported feeling confident in their ability to use the Spanish language because of their previous experiences. For example, one student stated “I **haven't studied Spanish** in a while, so if I'm asked to produce Spanish (speak or write in great detail) I can't do a very good job. But **since I did study Spanish for so long, if I see or hear things in Spanish I can still understand the general idea/main point.**” Another student reported, “my Spanish has definitely gotten worse since I **stopped actively learning Spanish after graduation**, but I feel like I have such a **good foundation** that I can **still handle myself in situations in which I need to speak Spanish**, and it **would improve with practice!**” If skill decrease was the main outcome of not continuing formal study of Spanish, I expected the opposite to be true when looking at responses from students who continued to study Spanish at the collegiate level. Below is a summary of those responses, again from both non-major/undecided and foreign language major students.

Key phrases that summarized *taking Spanish classes in college* included:

More academic focused, grammar-based class helped practice writing; learning Spanish in academic context, writing research papers, reviewing old material learned in high school but improving speaking and listening; improved technical and written Spanish in college;

continuing to expand vocabulary; listening and topics of discussion can switch gears all of the time; spend a lot of time conversing, learning upper level literature doing presentations and essays; having a full linguistic and cultural immersion experience and upper-level Spanish classes constantly and intensely using comprehension skills; exposure to native speakers as teachers improved listening, reading and interpreting in academic context.

Interestingly, students once again tied their success in college language study to the strong language foundation they developed in high school. Several quotes from students reflect this notion: “However, it is a **purely grammar intensive course** so I would not be surprised if **my [presentational] skills have decreased a little bit because we don't do many presentations;**” “Well I have certainly **improved my academic writing in college, I feel that because we focused on it so much in high school I could already write in Spanish at a high level coming into college.** As for **speaking, my presentation skills have improved dramatically,** due to having to **present information much more frequently and just improving my generic conversation abilities;**” “While **I was proficient in most of these places before coming to college,** I have since **taken many college language courses that have further developed my abilities;**” In college, I went **straight into a 300-level (upper division) Spanish class** that had a large emphasis on writing. However, **I had the foundations in place to learn from my mistakes** and speak with the professor to ultimately get an A in the class.” These quotes emphasize that both college and continued language study are challenging, but students felt confident they could succeed and perceived that they indeed continued to improve and use their language skills as a result. It also became clear that both groups felt no matter what their current situation, they could rely on their previous knowledge and high school learning to communicate effectively.

With a strong high school foundation being a key theme that ties together all of these previous factors, I took an additional two passes through the data for this code to look for specific differences in how non-major/undecided and foreign language major students emphasized that

their strong foundation from high school impacted their Spanish skills today. Below are summaries of their responses for this code divided into the two groups.

Key phrases that summarized non-major/undecided students *having a strong foundation/ learning from high school* included:

Even if not at the same level, still able to perform all skills (good retention); remember skills just haven't been able to practice them; speaking and ability to communicate was strong; can still communicate at the same level in high school just have less interaction with speakers now; still remember skills just haven't worked to improve them; can understand the main idea or points; previous learning has not dramatically changed even without exposure to Spanish.

A central theme in all of these responses is non-major/undecided students' lack of opportunities to practice their Spanish which logically led to their skills being stagnant. In several specific responses from the data, students emphasized how the lack of practice impacted their perceived skill level: "I think that **lack of practice** has led to a loss of vocabulary. This makes it **more difficult for me to exchange information outside of my interests**. However, I have **retained much of the structure and grammar that I learned in high school**, which has helped me **continue to communicate in Spanish** in the past, present, and future;" "I have **stayed mostly at the same level in regards to interpretive listening** due to my **strong foundation of Spanish**. **Four years of consistent Spanish education** in high school have me a good base of Spanish that is engrained in my memory." A positive outcome of these results is even though non-major/undecided students are not improving, they do feel their Spanish is strong enough from high school that they have retained the skills they did acquire and can use them still today.

Not surprisingly, students majoring in foreign language emphasized different factors when discussing their current Spanish language abilities and the relationship with their learning from high school. Below are summaries of foreign language majors' responses for this code.

Key phrases that summarized foreign language major students *having a strong foundation/ learning from high school* included:

Reviewing old material; was already very proficient leaving high school; college assumes we already have a strong foundation so spend more time expanding knowledge; I was proficient and have only improved.

Several foreign language major responses emphasized their learning improved significantly because not only did they have a strong foundation from high school, but the college courses they completed taught them curriculum based on that expectation that students already had this strong set of Spanish skills. For example, students stated: “Even though I **learned more Spanish than most of my peers in high school**, I have **continued to improve my abilities** in Spanish through taking **three years of Spanish classes in college** and **living in a Spanish speaking country**;” “Well I have certainly **improved my academic writing** in college, I feel that **because we focused on it so much in high school I could already write in Spanish at a high level coming into college**. As for **speaking**, my **presentation skills have improved dramatically**, due to having to **present information much more frequently** and **just improving my generic conversation abilities**;” “I think **with experience, I have continued to grow and develop**. Particularly by **studying abroad**, I was able to **further develop my listening skills**. However, **my foundation from high school was very strong**.”

When considering data from both groups, almost all students reporting having a strong foundation from high school as a unifying influence on their Spanish today is perhaps the most significant finding of all. Other factors that influenced students’ perceived language skills are common sense; if students do not have the opportunity to practice, their skills diminish; if they have opportunities, their skills improve. However, both groups of students, regardless of the other factors they mentioned, still feel that they can perform skills because they built such a strong foundation of Spanish from the collaborative and performance-based approach to learning and assessment they experienced in high school. This points toward the true importance and impact

that engaging students in this style of assessment has on their perceived language abilities and how confident they feel they can retain them.

**Research question two conclusions.** Students' responses indicated that, although in different ways and to different degrees, they were using the Spanish they learned in high school in a real-world context at the time of the study. The reasons they described for their Spanish maintaining/ improving versus diminishing would be logical outcomes for any subject or set of skills a student might acquire. It makes sense that students who have more opportunities to practice their Spanish felt their skills were maintained or improved versus those who lacked those opportunities. The same could be said for those who continued to study Spanish at the collegiate level versus those who have stopped to pursue other areas of study. The key factor, however, regardless of students' current relationship with the Spanish language was students reporting they still have language skills they could use at the time of the study was because of the strong foundation they received studying Spanish in high school by way of collaborative instructional and performance-based assessment approaches. The data from research question one made it clear that students recognized their time collaborating and engaging in performance-based assessment was the most important characteristic of their Spanish studies in high school and as a key element for why their Spanish skills were still retained at the time of the study. This leads to the final piece of the puzzle addressed by research question three: whether majoring in Spanish or not, did students feel they had a passion for language?

**Research question three findings.** Research question three specifically addressed whether or not these former foreign-language students perceive themselves as having a passion for language use and/or study and the reasons why this may or may not have been the case. To address this research question, two survey questions asked students to reflect back on their experiences about how they got started with studying Spanish in the first place and what motivated them to

continue after they had completed the minimum requirement for graduation. For this research question, six codes emerged for both non-major/undecided students and foreign language major students. Having only two survey questions directly related to this research question, two distinct categories were automatically created: reasons why students chose to study Spanish in high school (survey question 18) and why they continued their studies through the AP level (survey question 19). As with the previous two research questions, I took a pass through the codes six times to see how each response fit into the codes that emerged addressing each survey question. I took three initial passes through the codes and put them into two figures around the large themes of “high school” and “AP and beyond” for both non-major/undecided students and students majoring in foreign language. Figures 4.12 and 4.13 below show the resulting organization for the eight codes for each group of students.



*Figure 4.12.* Codes that were mentioned in non-major/undecided students’ and foreign language major students’ responses to why they chose to study Spanish in high school.



*Figure 4.13.* Codes that were mentioned in non-major/undecided students' and foreign language major students' responses to why they chose to continue to study Spanish through the AP level.

Figures 4.12 and 4.13 highlight the key words in students' responses describing why they chose to study Spanish in high school and why they chose to continue to study Spanish through the AP level for both non-major/undecided students and students majoring in foreign language. Each of the figures are a different color simply to differentiate their responses each survey question individually (blue for survey question 18 and orange for survey question 19). Figure 4.12 shows students in both groups mentioned 6 key areas of why they chose to study Spanish in high school, including to improve their prior knowledge or that they studied it before in middle school, the language/culture was fun and interesting, Spanish is practical and useful for college or a future career, because of their relationship with the teacher or liking the structure of Spanish class, because we are now living in a global society and Spanish is the most widely-spoken language in the United States, and for personal or family connections to the language. Figure 4.11 shows both groups mentioned four of the six codes when explaining why they decided to study Spanish beyond

the graduation requirements through the AP level. Students mentioned to improve their prior knowledge or that they studied it before in middle school, the language/culture was fun and interesting, Spanish is practical and useful for college or a future career, and because their relationship with the teacher or liking the structure of Spanish class. Even though non-major/undecided and foreign language major students once again mentioned the same codes in their responses, I found the frequency that each group mentioned the codes varied. Therefore, to identify which of these reasons had the greatest impact on students' passion and commitment to the Spanish language, I counted the number of times a code was mentioned by either non-majors/undecided students or students majoring in foreign language. Table 4.7 below lists the frequency each code was mentioned by the two groups in addition to showing the total number of times the code was mentioned overall.

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Table 4.7

*Reasons non-major/undecided students and students majoring in foreign language gave explaining why they chose to study Spanish in high school and also why they decided to continue to study the language through the AP level.*

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<u>Reasons studied</u>	<u>Non-majors/undecided</u>	<u>Majors</u>	<u>Total</u>
<u>Spanish in high school</u>			
Improve prior skills/ began in middle school*	4	5	9
Language/culture was fun and interesting*	7	9	16
Practical/useful for college or future career*	10	6	16
Relationship with the teacher or the structure of the class	2	2	4

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Living in a global society/ Spanish widely spoken in the US	4	4	8	
Have personal/ family connection to Spanish	3	0	3	
<b><u>Reasons continued Spanish through the AP level</u></b>	<b><u>Non-majors/undecided</u></b>	<b><u>Majors</u></b>	<b><u>Total</u></b>	<b><u>Total for both survey questions</u></b>
Improve prior skills/ began in middle school*	7	4	11	<b>20</b>
Language/culture was fun and interesting*	5	5	10	<b>26</b>
Practical/useful for college or future career*	4	4	8	<b>24</b>
Relationship with the teacher or the approach of the class*	10	8	18	<b>22</b>

*Note.* \*Factors that most affected students' decision to study Spanish based on total number of responses for both non-major/undecided and foreign language major students

Table 4.7 shows that students were passionate about studying Spanish for a variety of motivating factors. The factors most frequently mentioned by both groups for why they had a passion for language study, included: (1) wanting to improve on the prior knowledge they built in middle school or in lower-level classes, (2) finding the language and culture both interesting and fun, (3) thinking of Spanish as practical overall and useful for their future college studies or careers, and (4) their relationship with the teacher or liking the approach to teaching and learning of the Spanish class. Interestingly, there was not a significant distinction in the frequency of responses

of non-major/undecided students and those majoring in foreign language. The most frequently mentioned reason overall for studying Spanish was student reported the Spanish language and culture are interesting and fun to learn (16 non-major/undecided responses and 10 foreign language major responses for this category). Mentioned almost equally in frequency, students reported studying Spanish as a “practical choice” (16 non-major/undecided students and 8 major student responses). As for why students found Spanish to be practical, reasons cited included: (1) that we are now living in a global society, (2) Spanish is widely-spoken in the US, and (3) it could be taken in college or used in a future career. Interestingly, more students chose to study Spanish in high school for this reason (16 responses or 53%) than those who mentioned it as a reason why they continued studying Spanish through the AP level (10 responses or 33%). An almost equal number of students mentioned the practicality of Spanish as a reason to study it in high school (24 responses or 80%) as those who said Spanish was the most interesting and fun language and culture to study (26 responses or 87%). Also interesting was students’ desire to become fluent in Spanish or improve upon previous skills students started to acquire in middle school. This was an important reason students stated for starting Spanish in high school (9 responses or 30%) and continuing on through the AP level (11 responses or 37%).

There were other factors that had less of an impact or showed more of a change in frequency of responses between the two survey questions. Family or personal connections to the language was not a major factor in students choosing to study Spanish with only three responses (10%) from non-major/undecided students mentioning this code. The proximity of Spanish-speaking countries as well as the accessibility to be able use the language in the US was a major factor for choosing Spanish initially (eight responses or 27%), but had no impact on students continuing through AP (0 responses). Finally, only 4 total responses (13%) mentioned the teacher as a reason why they chose to study Spanish initially in high school, but for the second survey

question 18 of 30 (60%) of all respondents surveyed specifically mentioned the teacher or teaching style as a reason they continued to study Spanish through the AP level.

Table 4.7 also shows six codes with an asterisk that stood out overall based on the total number of responses to explain why students' chose to study Spanish in high school and then chose to continue with Spanish through the AP level. The major reasons students decided studying Spanish for either of those categories were the same and included wanting to improve on their prior knowledge they built in middle school or in lower-level classes, they found the language and culture both interesting and fun, they think of Spanish as practical overall and useful for their future college studies or careers, and finally they loved me as a teacher or the structure of the Spanish class. Below is a list of these four key influencing factors on students' passion for language study with a summary from students' survey responses that fell under each code.

Key phrases that summarized *to build on prior skills/began studying Spanish in middle school* included:

To improve grammar and speak Spanish in a formal setting; had a background from choosing Spanish in middle school or friends took the language then; wanted to become fluent in another language/Spanish; love language and always want to learn more; started studying Spanish in elementary school; to challenge myself; I was improving with each year and semester; was a natural progression from starting the accelerated track as a freshman; practicing it would allow me to better retain it; and to further my proficiency.

Several of these students specifically mentioned starting Spanish in previous grade levels influenced their decision to continue studying Spanish in high school and through the AP level. Also, many students mentioned once they began studying the language, they developed a strong desire to challenge themselves and wanted to become fluent in the language. One particular student stated, "I **had enjoyed Spanish so much in the first three years of taking it at [Alta High School]**, I wanted the extra **challenge of taking it at an AP level.**" All of the students surveyed are clearly dedicated learners (as evidenced by their survey responses and previously discussed background information) and liked to finish what they started. Students personal

experiences while learning Spanish, however, may have altered their motivations for continuing to study Spanish as they began to get to know the language and culture better and develop a passion for what they studied.

Key phrases that summarized *the Spanish language and culture are fun and interesting* included:

I like to study Spanish; it was the most interesting out of all of the options; it was my favorite foreign language; I thought the language was fascinating; I love Spanish and it's a useful language to learn; I love the language and really enjoyed the classes; because it seemed fun; I liked Spanish and wanted to become fluent; I learned Spanish fairly easily and I loved the language; Spanish was a super interesting language; I wanted to learn more about how the language affected different aspects of the culture such as poetry, beauty and aesthetics and apply what I learned; I always want to learn more.

This was the most frequent response mentioned by students of the top four factors that influenced students' decisions to continue to study Spanish. The Spanish language and culture themselves were fun and exciting to students, but students almost always tied this explanation with how fun and excited they found the course work. The implications of this are described below in the research question three conclusions.

Key phrases that summarized *Spanish is practical and useful for future college studies or career* included:

I like to study languages and Spanish is practical; it was practical because it is very common in the U.S. today; it's the second most widely spoken language in the country; it is not too different from English, a popular language; it was the most useful language offered at my school; it was important to learn a language other than English and it was practical because it is spoke by so many people around the world; it would be very useful in today's society; in a country that is so global in background it is important for me to study a foreign language and I chose Spanish because it is so widely spoken in the U.S.; I want to use Spanish in my future career; it was recommended I take a language for college applications; I wanted to receive AP credit; I wanted credit in college; I wanted to apply what I had learned into a broader aspect of life; I was interested in continuing in college; support from classmates and teachers and I had a desire to continue in college; I wanted to study abroad or volunteer abroad in the future.

The practicality and usefulness of Spanish was the second highest influencing factor on students choosing and continuing to study the language. Students do look for purpose in what they are learning and they want to know why they are learning what they are. The fact that students view

Spanish as so useful could at least partially be what makes the language more interesting and appealing to them.

Key phrases that summarized *their relationship with the teacher or liking the style of the Spanish class* included:

I continued through the end of high school because I had a great experience in a previous level with Mrs. Ficano; I really enjoyed the classes; after a while, Señora FP was a big factor in deciding to study Spanish or not; Mrs Ficano-Petricca made me very motivated to continue through high school; I enjoyed the class and the teacher; I enjoyed the language and Mrs. Ficano-Petricca's teaching style; definitely the teacher, if it was a different teacher I would not have continued; Sra Ficano made the material engaging and interesting; Mrs Ficano-Petricca made the class extremely fun, rewarding and an experience I will never forget; Before senior year of high school, I told Mrs. Ficano-Petricca I wasn't sure if I should take Spanish AP... she easily convinced me to stay in Spanish and I am really happy I did, I loved Spanish AP; the enthusiasm of the AP teacher; Mrs. Ficano-Petricca is one of the most passionate teachers I have ever met and her dedication to education inspired me to continue learning in her class; Mrs. Ficano-Petricca's class was fun.

Students' enthusiasm when describing our class or my teaching style as engaging, memorable, and rewarding shows that my unique approach to language instruction that emphasized collaboration and performance-based assessments was also a significant influence on students' decision to continue to study Spanish through the challenging AP level. I believe the exposure over time to this collaborative atmosphere and creative, engaging and fun performance-based assessments helped motivate students who may have not continued otherwise.

**Research question three conclusions.** Students' responses show that they did have a passion for language study to varying degrees. The degree to which they were passionate and what motivated them to continue to be passionate about language varied from student to student and whether or not they majored in Spanish. That passion and excitement, for many students, started in middle school and led them to view the Spanish language and culture as fun, exciting and made them eager to learn more to become fluent. In this section of the survey alone, 60% of students stated that the style of the class made it "the most engaging and fun classes" they took in high school because of this approach to language learning. However, it was affect or emotion that

resonated with most students – wanting to explore the “fun” aspects of the language and culture rather more than their desire to apply this exciting language to their future studies or careers. In the final chapter, I develop this key idea that we, as educators, need to remember, especially when working with adolescents.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter summarized the outcomes of the data analyses to address the three research questions of the study. The data were analyzed both quantitatively (Cronbach’s Alpha and Pearson product moment correlation) and qualitatively (content analyses) for research questions one and two and qualitatively (content analysis) for research question three. First, the study determined former students perceived their proficiency in Spanish as having been fostered by collaborative instruction and/or performance-based assessment practices. Second, the data revealed students perceive of themselves as people who continue to use the foreign language they learned in high school in various contexts. Finally, the data showed students are definitely passionate about foreign language study to various degrees. The next and final chapter will outline the conclusions of these findings and their implications for the future of foreign language instruction.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

I believe the positive connection students describe in this study with an alternative approach to teaching and evaluation – collaboration and performance-based assessment – shows that a new direction already exists that promotes the proficiency outcomes foreign language educators strive for students to achieve. Of all of the challenges facing foreign language today, the ones that I believe can be overcome are our approach to practice and changing proficiency outcomes for foreign language learners. To discuss these changes, I have divided my discussion section below into three parts in which I discuss the implications of my findings for teaching and learning foreign language in high schools.

The outcomes students revealed in the survey have important implications for both foreign language education and educational practices as a whole. There are three major implications in this study that reflect important findings: the importance of collaboration and communicative competence, promoting foreign language proficiency in real-world contexts, and finally, cultivating students' passion for foreign language. Each of these implications is discussed below and followed by limitations of the study and suggestion for future research.

### **Collaboration, Performance-Based Assessment and Communicative Competence**

In this study, I investigated the impact of an alternative approach to traditional teaching and assessment practices: the influence of collaborative learning and performance-based assessment on students' perceived foreign language proficiency. I found that both of these practices had a significant impact on students' communicative competence both in high school and in the real world. Throughout all of students' survey responses, engagement was the key that tied together students' positive association with collaboration, performance-based assessment, maintaining their proficiency and having a passion for the language. The reason why this factor

was so important to students was simple: they want to feel engaged, interested, motivated, challenged and invested in what they were learning.

This confirms prior language acquisition research that explains why collaboration and performance-based assessment led students to maintain and grow their communicative competence and provides insight as to why traditional approaches to instruction and assessment have proven to be ineffective in promoting these same outcomes. Harden, Arnd, and Dirkköhler (2006) found that most foreign language students perceive themselves to be proficient communicators at a variety of levels. As a result of engaging in collaborative experiences involving communicative dialogue practice students not only identified their own and group members' linguistic shortcomings, but also co-constructed and amended knowledge leading to a better understanding of their own linguistic strengths and weaknesses. Students reported their learning to be more complex, communicative, and sociocultural as a result of this approach. The students' in this study reflected the same sentiments, describing their experiences learning and performing in collaborative experiences as not only an opportunity to engage in a similar process of working with others but also as a chance to shape and revise their own understanding of new knowledge. Moreover, students attributed this collaboration as a primary reason their language skills continued to improve as collaborating with others and evaluating others work motivated them to do their best work themselves.

Moreover, students associated their opportunities to present and perform in front of others as having "fun" and exploring and showing their personal creativity while they learned Spanish as developing useful language competency. Students' perceived their involvement in performance-based assessment tasks as leading to their gains in their language proficiency, at least in part, because they were being evaluated by way of meaningful performance tasks (as opposed to being evaluated through a traditional assessment). This perspective also confirms a study by Donato



(1994) that looked at students' engagement in the same type of collaboration and performance-based assessment tasks experienced by the students in this study. In Donato's study, students worked together in a variety of small group projects on familiar topics. He found their discourse predominantly reflected the voice of a single speaker that supported "students highly collective orientation to their work" (Donato, 1994, p. 40). As a result of students working together in these open-ended collaborative tasks, they mutually constructed their second language knowledge and, thus, improved each other's performances in language production. Learners were simultaneously "individually novices and collectively experts, sources of new-orientations for each other, and guides through this complex linguistic problem solving" (Donato, 1994, p. 46). My study confirmed these findings, with students reporting that collaborating on performance-based assessment tasks improved their language skills because they learned not only from working together to help improve their own and group members' language performance, but also from watching and evaluating others' performances which motivated them to do their best work.

The above examples demonstrate that collaboration alongside meaningful, performance assessments leads to higher student achievement. The current study, however, also demonstrates that collaboration and performance-based assessment had a significant impact on students' abilities to communicate in Spanish, but also in motivating them to continue their language study. Students identified multiple reasons why they initially chose and then elected to continue to study Spanish. Their reasons included wanting to improve upon their prior skills, seeing Spanish as a practical and useful choice because of the opportunities to practice within the U.S., the proximity of the U.S. to Spanish speaking countries, and because it would make them appealing to colleges or future employers. As an educator, these are the practical reasons I would have predicted. They were, however, not the central reason offered by the students in this study. For these students, the act of *engagement in learning* – collaborating with peers and applying their knowledge in

performance-based assessment – made the learning feel meaningful and relevant, which in, turn, motivated them to want to continue learning Spanish. There is certainly no denying that high school is a critical time in adolescences’ lives and their choices often reflect their future aspirations. Practicality plays a big part in those decisions, especially for college-bound students. However, students in this study clearly indicated that they were not in school just so they could get a job, and they certainly did not choose to continue to learn Spanish only because it is practical. While the practicality of Spanish was important, so was having “fun” with peers while learning. Perhaps the practicality of the Spanish language for people living in the U.S. motivated these students to choose to study Spanish in the first place, but it was the way in which learning the language engaged them that motivated them to continue through the advanced levels of achievement.

As adults and educators, we are constantly reminding students to think about their career, their college readiness, and their future. Moreover, we are trained from the beginning of our careers that the most important focus when working with students is to guide them to attain rigorous standards and reach proficiency goals at advanced levels. However, this study finds that students do not have the same goals as educators in traditional schools. In other words, while practicality is necessary, it is not sufficient to motivate students to learn Spanish and stay with the language after they left high school and entered the real world.

For educators, all of the standards set forth for our incorporation into our teaching – from ACTFL Proficiency Standards, to the 5Cs National Standards and Benchmarks, or the Common Core State Standards – focus on students’ readiness for the future, for college, or for their careers. As a foreign language educator, I also believe that the standard set forth by ACTFL are important, relevant, and meant to help students achieve proficiency in language and cultural knowledge to attain a global view of the world (21st Century Skills Map, 2011). My performance-based assessments all reflect these standards and were created to help students achieve them. Students’

strong performances and proficiency ratings on the AP Spanish and Culture exam demonstrate indisputably that they, indeed, did achieved the standards at the highest levels for high school students. But the students in this study also clearly stated that achieving standards was not their goal. In fact, one of the five main factors they described as to why they found performance-based assessment was so beneficial to their learning, was simple: fun.

“Fun” can be a tricky word in educational circles. Fun can connote playing games and does not usually make us think of rigor, high expectations, and achievement. Nevertheless, fun was the word that students used to describe their experiences, as well as why those experiences were meaningful and what motivated them to learn and to continue to take Spanish even after it was no longer a requirement for them. Educators do not usually aim for “fun” as their highest goal. So while the students may have thought of their classroom experiences as “fun,” educators would likely say what students were really describing *engagement in learning*. These students were enjoying themselves because they were so involved in the collaboration and performance tasks that were exciting, educative, and relevant. Certainly, these were not students who were goofing off. They achieved very high scores on the very rigorous AP Spanish exam. What they were saying was that the “fun” parts of learning helped them to become invested in their work and to stick with it, even when it was challenging, because it was also relevant, personalized, and meaningful to them. So while our goal as educators is not necessarily to make learning “fun,” we certainly do want to make it engaging. We also want to encourage students to continue to challenge themselves and acquire new knowledge in the hopes that one day that “fun” will turn into a passion that drives them to continue to learn and to apply their language in the real world, whether casually in their everyday lives or professionally in their future careers.

Adolescent students are at a point in their lives that they are “living in the moment” and in that moment, they are weighing the practicality of their choices with what they find to be

interesting, meaningful, and socially engaging (Farrington et al., 2012; Intrator & Kunzman, 2009). It is important that educators recognize adolescent students' priorities because, even though the idea that an exciting and new direction to language instruction and assessment is already out there in the world, the majority of foreign language instruction remains the same. Language educators must break away from what is traditional and comfortable and, instead, implement a more collaborative and meaningful approach in both instruction and assessment to help students attain a lasting proficiency in foreign language. For foreign language education and all educational subjects alike, this means we also need to "live in the moment" with our students and remember that adolescent learners hold a perspective and goals very different from what we think is important for them. We need to keep students engaged, interested, motivated and challenged with the hope that this will one day evolve into a passion that they want to keep with them. This study clearly demonstrates that collaboration and performance-based assessment builds a bridge between what is engaging and what will be useful for their futures. Even if that does not translate into students majoring in Spanish in college or seeking a job where they are required to use the language, it still can mean that they have become students who have a more open-minded and culturally-aware perspective of the world we live in and share.

### **Foreign Language Proficiency in Real-World Contexts**

Most students in this study continued to successfully use their language skills long after high school for a variety of reasons. Although in different ways and to different degrees, these students engaged in a continued study of Spanish and other languages in personal, college, or work contexts and remained proficient. Moreover, the students recognized a connection between their time collaborating and engaging in performance-based assessments and their continued use of Spanish. In fact, they stated that collaborating with peers in Spanish was the most important characteristic of their Spanish studies in high school because it facilitated a deep understanding

and integration of the language that carried over to real-world contexts, such as being a volunteer or traveling to other countries. Students' continued use of Spanish and willingness to learn other languages demonstrates the strong impact this approach to learning and assessment has had on students retaining their Spanish skills.

Social constructivism is at the root of my teaching philosophy in that it is concerned with creating a socially interactive environment, for both instruction and assessment, for myself, my students, and in their peer interactions. Students' reported positive outcomes in the learning and continued "real-world" proficiency as a direct result of their experiences that arose from social interactions and constructing knowledge with their peers. Allowing students to create and construct knowledge for their learning in this way made lasting impressions not only in language proficiency but also in life skills such as how to work in groups, present in front of an audience, apply an array of their skills and talents, and to feed off of the interaction and feedback of others. Students want this interactive learning environment because it is not only engaging, but it also led them to higher levels of real-world language proficiency. Moreover, collaboration and performance-based assessment allowed for other disciplines to be integrated into students' learning and knowledge construction, such as music, drama, science, and art. This made their learning not just about acquiring a single language skill or remembering new information, but instead it fostered interactive experiences helping students shape their new knowledge in realistic and authentic contexts that they could eventually apply in a real-world setting that is meaningful to them.

Students in this study clearly stated they much preferred this approach as opposed to traditional teaching methods of instructors going in front of the class and lecturing on what they think or even the students themselves being asked to answer questions and discuss their own opinions. They also specifically reported not wanting to be evaluated by traditional assessment measures described as "multiple-choice, one-shot approaches that characterized most standardized

and... classroom tests [that are] paper-pencil tasks and are one-time events” (Donham, 2005, pp. 250-251) that focus only on isolating and individually measuring students’ language skills out of context. Students’ descriptions of wanting to avoid such practices make sense because, as demonstrated in this study, defining students’ language proficiency and knowledge after they leave high school is not something that is concrete, fact-based or isolated. Moreover, “the assumption of performance as a direct outcome of competence is problematic, as it ignores the complex social construction of test performance, most obviously in the case of interactive tests such as direct tests of speaking” (McNamara, 2001, p. 337). In other words, students want to be evaluated in a way that they find not only meaningful and engaging, but also that reflects “real-world proficiency.” Therefore, teachers have to be willing to move away from these traditional teaching practices as well as traditional assessment practices to ensure that we are testing students in a way that shows what they can *do* with the language, not simply what they can memorize and regurgitate. So, while traditional tests can be efficient and provide quick, measurable results, this study stands with many other studies to show that if educators are willing to move away from the traditional approach to assessment, the gains that can be made in language proficiency will outweigh the difficulties that come with implementing a new, more complex approach to language testing (ACTFL, 2012; Liskin-Gasparro, 1996; McNamara, 2001; Poehner, 2007; Ricardo-Osorio, 2008).

The unwillingness by many teachers to move away from traditional practices could explain the current lack of proficiency and continuation of study in today’s foreign language programs. Previous research has found that a lack of language proficiency is evident at both the high school and university level. Conrad (1978) showed that even if students majored in foreign language, less than half reached a minimal professional proficiency. A survey by the Center for Applied Language Studies (2010) also found that of students who commit to four years of high school language study, only 15% reach ACTFL’s Proficiency Guideline’s “Intermediate-Mid” level of

proficiency. Students are simply not leaving programs as proficient as we hope given the high amount of education they are receiving. And yet, this study finds that drastically different outcomes are possible when looking at students' perceived proficiency in high school and today. Looking at AP scores alone, by the end of high school, 20% of this study's survey respondents reached the "Intermediate-Mid" level of proficiency and the other 80% tested even higher reaching the "Intermediate-High" level according to the standards of ACTFL and the AP College Board. This suggests that attaining real-world proficiency in high school is not impossible, but clearly the approach to both teaching and assessment practices (i.e., implementing collaboration and performance-based assessment practices) have to vary from current practices if we want improved proficiency results.

The ability for collaboration and performance-based assessment tasks to foster real-world proficiency as demonstrated in this study also confirms the findings of Adair-Hauck, Glisan, Koda, Swender, and Sandrock (2006). Adair-Hauck et al. (2006) conducted a three-year study to evaluate the effectiveness of an integrated performance assessment prototype that tested students through performance-based and authentic assessments to measure their progress towards the 5Cs National Standards and Benchmarks developed by ACTFL. Their study found that this approach helped both students and teachers identify strengths and weaknesses in students' progress to achieve the standards while providing feedback for improvement while moving through various performance-tasks. While this is a positive outcome, significant research in this area is still lacking today. Troyan (2012), for example, emphasized that "research on outcomes beyond the Communication goal is lacking. Furthermore, the research outside of K-12 is rarely connected to the National Standards, and within K-12, little research is carried out" (p. S135). Adair-Hauck et al. (2006) agreed in their study, stating, "although current research suggests new paradigms for assessments, virtually no assessments have focused on measuring learner progress in attaining the standards

while capturing the connection between classroom experiences and performance on assessments” (p. 360). This study filled those gaps not only in measuring students’ perceived abilities in the standards but also directly analyzing the connection between their classroom experiences and their continued proficiency after graduating high school. The positive outcomes my study show that it is more important than ever that there is continued research in this area, especially at the K-12 level, because while new ideas in performance-based assessment continue to arise, and studies like mine continue to demonstrate their significant impact on proficiency, on a national level, students’ abilities in “real-world” language skills and their desire to continue their language study continue to decline.

This approach of implementing collaboration and performance-based assessment to develop real-world proficiency skills is also significant not only in foreign language education, but across all school disciplines and levels, including higher education. When developing this study, I did not think to consider that the opportunities to construct and create knowledge are not a common practice at high school or collegiate levels. Students in my study reported, however, that one of the biggest reasons their presentational skills, for example, decreased was a lack of opportunity to practice in this mode even when they were taking Spanish college classes. They reported that even in upper-level college courses, the interactions consisted mainly of lectures, discussion, or study of discrete grammar items and there was very little opportunity or focus on creating and constructing new knowledge and then applying it into a meaningful end product or performance. This resulted in more students overall, including those majoring in Spanish, to report a decrease in their presentational abilities since high school. This implication is very important because it could explain the current lack of proficiency and continuation of study in foreign language programs that still rely on traditional assessment measures. Previous research has found that a lack of language proficiency is evident at both the high school and university level



nationwide. Conrad (1978) found even if students majored in foreign language, less than half reached a minimal professional proficiency. A survey by the Center for Applied Language Studies (2010) also showed that of students who commit to four years of high school language study, only 15% reach ACTFL's Proficiency Guideline's "Intermediate-Mid" level of proficiency. The bottom line is that students are not leaving programs as proficient as we would hope given the high amount of education they are receiving. This study found drastically different outcomes when looking at students' perceived proficiency in high school and today. Of all the survey in my study, 20% reached the "Intermediate-Mid" level and the other 80% tested even higher reaching the "Intermediate-High" level according to the standards of ACTFL and the AP College Board. What this study and prior research confirms is that providing the opportunity to create and construct knowledge in both learning in assessment, at all levels of education and across all disciplines, will be the key to providing students with the tools they need to be "proficient" in the real world, whether it be in language or any other area they study.

### **A Passion for Language Learning**

The students in this study saw themselves as people who had a passion for language study to varying degrees. The degree of their passion and the motivating factor that drove them to continue to study languages was the same as the reason why they stayed in language study in high school: engagement. Throughout this study, engagement has proven to be the key to instruction and assessment, to promoting real-world proficiency, and, I also believe, the key to creating passionate life-long language learners. Therefore, the final implication of this study is that if we do indeed change our teaching practices in foreign language education to reflect what students have expressed about their desire for engaging in their learning and assessment process, we also have to redefine how we look at the outcomes of those efforts for students engaging with Spanish

in their futures. In other words, a change to our approach to instruction and assessment also requires a change in how we define the “success” of foreign language students.

Based on the results of this study, my definition of success is multifaceted. The first way I saw success in students was in their outcomes on the AP Spanish Language and Culture exam. This is a more traditional way of talking about success, but the AP exam is an accurate measure of proficiency and a reflection of the standards. The students’ scores showed what they could do with their skills even after they graduated high school and entered the real world. The AP exam also provided an unbiased measure – apart from students’ own personal beliefs or that of the teacher – as to how their proficiency could be measured across all modes of communication. This outlook of students’ accomplishments alone, however, is not enough to say students are truly “successful” because there is a difference between what they *can* do with their language and what they *choose* to do.

Therefore, the second way I define “success” is the degree to which students choose to continue to study the language in high school even after it is no longer a formal requirement of their studies and reach a “real-world” level of proficiency. This study demonstrated that these students used Spanish and other languages more than the average American. They have made it part of their personal lives, college studies, and future careers. On a national level, however, students would not be considered “successful” in terms of what they are choosing to do with their language after high school nor in terms of reaching a “real-world” level of proficiency. ACTFL (2010) reported that only 18.5% of students nationwide are even enrolled in a foreign language course in the K-12 levels (Glisan, 2012) and there has been a reduction specifically in the number of students taking Advanced Placement (AP) foreign language exams (Lewis, 2015). In 2014, of the 4.2 million language exams taken only 5% were in foreign languages (Lewis, 2015). In this study, 100% of the students’, whether formally studying Spanish or not, reported not only

remaining proficient to various degrees in their communicative Spanish skills but also that Spanish is still part of their everyday lives in some way. This raises the question – if we use *continuance of language use* as a measure of success, why do we not see the same level of success nationwide that is reflected by students in this study?

There are many reasons why there is a nationwide struggle for success in terms of continued language study in both secondary and collegiate foreign language programs. First, as previously mentioned, too many teachers today continue to rely upon traditional practices for both instruction and assessment. This is understandable, given the great amount of extra work these approaches require. Coming up with creative project ideas, for example, is initially not only a lot of work, but also it is not an easy task. Thoughtful and effective project development requires time to work with colleagues and time to test out and revise the projects to measure their effectiveness in promoting proficiency goals for students. All the things teachers today are expected to do are “on their own time” as little to no collaboration time is provided to teachers during the school day. Also, teachers would need to find effective means of measuring proficiency outcomes through rubrics and take a more holistic approach to grading. If this is a new practice for teachers, it can be intimidating, especially when compared to traditional grading where evaluation is more straightforward. With discrete-point test items such as true/false, multiple choice, or fill-in-the-blank questions, for example, answers are usually “right or wrong” and a score can be easily calculated. Even if teachers were given time to develop performance assessments and received training for rubric-based grading, they could still be resistant to implement these practices because of the time alone it takes to have students present and then evaluate student work with performance assessments. Thus, the continued use of traditional approaches seems so much easier. The key issue to remember with a traditional approach, however, is that while these assessments are easy to grade, they do not provide meaningful

measures of student proficiency across a variety of foreign language skills, competencies or authentic contexts in addition to the fact that they have shown to have a negative impact on both proficiency and students' desire to continue in their language programs. Moreover, these are, unfortunately, only some of the factors impeding educators from changing their language teaching practice. In addition, they are already overwhelmed by the everyday tasks that teaching in today's society requires such as collecting and analyzing copious amounts of standardized data, meeting the requirements of over-burdened curriculums imposed by the government or completing now long and tireless teacher evaluation tasks to simply prove their effectiveness in their jobs.

As difficult as all of these factors are, I sympathize with the educator who faces these challenges. However, I think that with time and collaboration with supportive colleagues, these are things that can be overcome. All educators want what is best for students and I believe that what is best is a change to our traditional practices, although difficult, to bring new, positive outcomes for foreign language education and foreign language learners. If we, as educators want to instill passion in our students when it comes to language, we have to be passionate ourselves as their teachers and believe that the education we are bringing to our students is engaging, meaningful, and authentic. For myself as a researcher, this is even more significant than their achievements on the AP exam or students taking college classes because it truly shows students have become life-long language learners who continue to apply and develop their abilities.

Students' choice to continue to engage with language and to be able to do so with a "real world proficiency" are also tied to my third and final facet of success, developing a new perspective of the world. I believe success is not only in students' language use, but also in students having a passion not only for language but for opening up their views of the world by engaging with other cultures. Students are not just using the Spanish language to communicate, they are using it as vehicle to leave their comfort zones, travel the world, and to be open to

experiencing new cultures and meeting new people. I think this is the measure of success we hope for the most because these experiences are not something that can be taught, but rather, are something that teachers hope to guide students towards so the world continues to become a more global, interconnected, and accepting place.

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are limitations in the study that need to be addressed in terms of constraints on generalizability, self-reported data, and longitudinal effects. The sample size of this study is small in comparison to the number of students who are enrolled in foreign language programs across the country. A future replication of the study with a larger sample size would be useful to ensure a representative distribution of the population as well as the generalizability of results to the overall population of foreign language students. Also, another limitation it is important to recognize is the fact that I am studying my own students. When I had these students in class in high school, I sensed that they wanted to perform well. As adults, I recognize that they may also want continue to want to “do well” when talking about their abilities in Spanish and to position themselves in a positive light for me so that I as the teacher may “look good” in the study. While the potential for bias is a limitation in any study, it can also be an asset as I believe it was in this study because my continued relationship with my students because our familiarity and long-standing, honest and open connection also carried over to the data collection. Furthermore, even though the study relies on both pre-existing data as well as current samples from students, the data is all self-reported and therefore limited by the fact that it cannot truly be independently verified. This also opens up the data to potential biases such as: (1) selective memory (remembering or not remembering particular past experiences or events), (2) telescoping (confusing the timing particular events occurred) (3) attribution (attributing positive outcomes to oneself but negative outcomes to others), and (4) exaggeration (embellishing the details of events as more significant than they actually are) (Brutus,

Herman, & Wassmer, 2013; Hermam & Edwards, 2015; Senunyeme, 2013). Finally, although there are students who completed the AP Spanish program as far back as 2012, it would still be important to evaluate the long-term effects of their experiences over an even longer period of time in a longitudinal study.

### **Recommendations for Further Study**

Given the study's limitations there are several directions for future research that could begin to address these shortcomings. One approach would be to survey students in a long-term longitudinal study to see how their Spanish has or has not continued to evolve. Even though some respondents were on the verge of graduating college at the time of this study, it would be helpful to see how their relationship with Spanish changes as their adult lives continue to evolve after officially completing their formal education studies and entering their professional careers. Another important direction would be to examine, at an even deeper, level students' motivations for continuing with Spanish during their earlier years of secondary education. Future studies could examine the same practices and their impact on younger language learners (i.e., at the beginning of their middle or high school careers) and focus on both highly motivated students as well as those who choose Spanish because it is a requirement. An important comparative study would include explorations of the two groups to determine if there is a change in their relationship with their Spanish education as they engage in collaboration and performance-based assessment practices and face the choice of continuing their studies in high school or only completing the graduation requirement.

### **Final Thoughts**

This study has made it clear that helping students to cultivate language proficiency, a desire to continue study, and foster a passion for Spanish needs to start with piquing their interest by making it fun, meaningful, and engaging. Foreign language education needs to expand beyond

studying the language as a “necessity” so it taps into what students are saying is important and interesting to them – fun. Through performance-based assessment practices, developing skills not only in Spanish, but also in learning, collaboration, and creativity, students want to continue to study Spanish through the AP level and beyond because they are having fun in the process. This is what I believe will help develop in students’ passion, making that excitement evolve into something they feel they need in their future – whether in college studies, travel to new places or actually combining Spanish with their other life passions and using it in their future career. If we can get more students engaged because of this approach, then more of them may reach the point in their learning where they realize that beyond the fun, the excitement and the engagement of learning Spanish they have acquired important cultural knowledge and skills. And that – whether intentionally or not – can make them into compassionate, smart and open-minded global citizens that our society needs today.

## APPENDIX A AP SPANISH AND CULTURE EXAM THEMES

### 1. Theme: Global Challenges / *Los desafíos mundiales*

#### Recommended Contexts:

- Economic Issues / *Los temas económicos*
- Environmental Issues / *Los temas del medio ambiente*
- Philosophical Thought and Religion / *El pensamiento filosófico y la religión*
- Population and Demographics / *La población y la demografía*
- Social Welfare / *El bienestar social*
- Social Conscience / *La conciencia social*

### 2. Theme: Science and Technology / *La ciencia y la tecnología*

#### Recommended Contexts:

- Access to Technology / *El acceso a la tecnología*
- Effects of Technology on Self and Society / *Los efectos de la tecnología en el individuo y en la sociedad*
- Health Care and Medicine / *El cuidado de la salud y la medicina*
- Innovations / *Las innovaciones tecnológicas*
- Natural Phenomena / *Los fenómenos naturales*
- Science and Ethics / *La ciencia y la ética*

### 3. Theme: Contemporary Life / *La vida contemporánea*

#### Recommended Contexts:

- Education and Careers / *La educación y las carreras profesionales*
- Entertainment / *El entretenimiento y la diversión*
- Travel and Leisure / *Los viajes y el ocio*
- Lifestyles / *Los estilos de vida*
- Relationships / *Las relaciones personales*
- Social Customs and Values / *Las tradiciones y los valores sociales*
- Volunteerism / *El trabajo voluntario*

### 4. Theme: Personal and Public Identities / *Las identidades personales y públicas*

#### Recommended Contexts:

- Alienation and Assimilation / *La enajenación y la asimilación*
- Heroes and Historical Figures / *Los héroes y los personajes históricos*
- National and Ethnic Identities / *La identidad nacional y la identidad étnica*
- Personal Beliefs / *Las creencias personales*
- Personal Interests / *Los intereses personales*
- Self-Image / *La autoestima*

### 5. Theme: Families and Communities / *Las familias y las comunidades*

#### Recommended Contexts:

- Customs and Values / *Las tradiciones y los valores*
- Education Communities / *Las comunidades educativas*
- Family Structure / *La estructura de la familia*
- Global Citizenship / *La ciudadanía global*
- Human Geography / *La geografía humana*
- Social Networking / *Las redes sociales*



**6. Theme: Beauty and Aesthetics / *La belleza y la est\u00e9tica*****Recommended Contexts:**

- Architecture / *La arquitectura*
- Defining Beauty / *Definiciones de la belleza*
- Defining Creativity / *Definiciones de la creatividad*
- Fashion and Design / *La moda y el dise\u00f1o*
- Language and Literature / *El lenguaje y la literatura*
- Visual and Performing Arts / *Las artes visuales y esc\u00e9nicas*

## APPENDIX B AP LANGUAGE AND CULTURE EXAM RUBRICS

### Rúbrica: Español 5AP Interpersonal Writing Task (email)

SCORE:	DESCRIPTION	TASK COMPLETION / TOPIC DEVELOPMENT	LANGUAGE USE
<b>5</b> Demonstrates excellence (strong)	<b>HIGH</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates excellence</i> in Interpersonal Writing accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintains the exchange with a response that is clearly appropriate within the context of the task</li> <li>• Provides required information (e.g., responses to questions, request for details) with frequent elaboration</li> <li>• Fully understandable, with ease and clarity of expression; occasional errors do not impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varied and appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>• Accuracy and variety in grammar, syntax, and usage, with few errors</li> <li>• Mostly consistent use of register appropriate for the situation; control of cultural conventions appropriate for formal correspondence (e.g., greeting, closing), despite occasional errors</li> <li>• Variety of simple and compound sentences, and some complex sentences</li> </ul>
<b>4</b> Demonstrates command (good)	<b>MID-HIGH</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates command</i> in Interpersonal Writing accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintains the exchange with a response that is generally appropriate within the context of the task</li> <li>• Provides required information (e.g., responses to questions, request for details) with some elaboration</li> <li>• Fully understandable, with some errors which do not impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varied and generally appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>• General control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>• Generally consistent use of register appropriate for the situation, except for occasional shifts; basic control of cultural conventions appropriate for formal correspondence (e.g., greeting, closing)</li> <li>• Simple, compound, and a few complex sentences</li> </ul>
<b>3</b> Demonstrates competence (fair)	<b>MID</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates competence</i> in Interpersonal Writing accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintains the exchange with a response that is somewhat appropriate but basic within the context of the task</li> <li>• Provides required information (e.g., responses to questions, request for details)</li> <li>• Generally understandable, with errors that may impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate but basic vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>• Some control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>• Use of register may be inappropriate for the situation with several shifts; partial control of conventions for formal correspondence (e.g., greeting, closing) although these may lack cultural appropriateness</li> <li>• Simple and a few compound sentences</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> Suggests lack of competence (weak)	<b>MID-LOW</b> A writing sample that <i>suggests lack of competence</i> in Interpersonal Writing accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partially maintains the exchange with a response that is minimally appropriate within the context of the task</li> <li>• Provides some required information (e.g., responses to questions, request for details)</li> <li>• Partially understandable, with errors that force interpretation and cause confusion for the reader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>• Limited control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>• Use of register is generally inappropriate for the situation; includes some conventions for formal correspondence (e.g., greeting, closing) with inaccuracies</li> <li>• Simple sentences and phrases</li> </ul>
<b>1</b> Demonstrates lack of competence (poor)	<b>LOW</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates lack of competence</i> in Interpersonal Writing accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsuccessfully attempts to maintain the exchange by providing a response that is inappropriate within the context of the task</li> <li>• Provides little required information (e.g., responses to questions, request for details)</li> <li>• Barely understandable, with frequent or significant errors that impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very few vocabulary resources</li> <li>• Little or no control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>• Minimal or no attention to register; includes significantly inaccurate or no conventions for formal correspondence (e.g., greeting, closing)</li> <li>• Very simple sentences or fragments</li> </ul>
<b>0 (unacceptable)</b>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mere restatement of language from the stimulus</li> <li>• Completely irrelevant to the stimulus</li> <li>• "I don't know," "I don't understand," or equivalent in any language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not in the language of the exam</li> <li>• Blank (no response)</li> </ul>

### Rúbrica: Español 5AP Interpersonal Speaking Task (simulated conversation)

SCORE:	DESCRIPTION	TASK COMPLETION / TOPIC DEVELOPMENT	LANGUAGE USE
<b>5</b> Demonstrates excellence (strong)	<b>HIGH</b> A speaking sample that <i>demonstrates excellence</i> in Interpersonal Speaking accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintains the exchange with a series of responses that is clearly appropriate within the context of the task</li> <li>• Provides required information (e.g., responses to questions, statement, and support of opinion) with frequent elaboration</li> <li>• Fully understandable, with ease and clarity of expression; occasional errors do not impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varied and appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>• Accuracy and variety in grammar, syntax, and usage, with few errors</li> <li>• Mostly consistent use of register appropriate for the conversation</li> <li>• Pronunciation, intonation, and pacing make the response comprehensible; errors do not impede comprehensibility</li> <li>• Clarification or self-correction (if present) improves comprehensibility</li> </ul>
<b>4</b> Demonstrates command (good)	<b>MID-HIGH</b> A speaking sample that <i>demonstrates command</i> in Interpersonal Speaking accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintains the exchange with a series of responses that is generally appropriate within the context of the task</li> <li>• Provides required information (e.g., responses to questions, statement, and support of opinion) with some elaboration</li> <li>• Fully understandable, with some errors which do not impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Varied and generally appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>• General control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>• Generally consistent use of register appropriate for the conversation, except for occasional shifts</li> <li>• Pronunciation, intonation, and pacing make the response mostly comprehensible; errors do not impede comprehensibility</li> <li>• Clarification or self-correction (if present) usually improves comprehensibility</li> </ul>
<b>3</b> Demonstrates competence (fair)	<b>MID</b> A speaking sample that <i>demonstrates competence</i> in Interpersonal Speaking accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintains the exchange with a series of responses that is somewhat appropriate within the context of the task</li> <li>• Provides required information (e.g., responses to questions, statement, and support of opinion)</li> <li>• Generally understandable, with errors that may impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appropriate but basic vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>• Some control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>• Use of register may be inappropriate for the conversation with several shifts</li> <li>• Pronunciation, intonation, and pacing make the response generally comprehensible; errors occasionally impede comprehensibility</li> <li>• Clarification or self-correction (if present) sometimes improves comprehensibility</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> Suggests lack of competence (weak)	<b>MID-LOW</b> A speaking sample that <i>suggests lack of competence</i> in Interpersonal Speaking accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Partially maintains the exchange with a series of responses that is minimally appropriate within the context of the task</li> <li>• Provides some required information (e.g., responses to questions, statement, and support of opinion)</li> <li>• Partially understandable, with errors that force interpretation and cause confusion for the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>• Limited control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>• Use of register is generally inappropriate for the conversation</li> <li>• Pronunciation, intonation, and pacing make the response difficult to comprehend at times; errors impede comprehensibility</li> <li>• Clarification or self-correction (if present) usually does not improve comprehensibility</li> </ul>
<b>1</b> Demonstrates lack of competence (poor)	<b>LOW</b> A speaking sample that <i>demonstrates lack of competence</i> in Interpersonal Speaking accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unsuccessfully attempts to maintain the exchange by providing a series of responses that is inappropriate within the context of the task</li> <li>• Provides little required information (e.g., responses to questions, statement, and support of opinion)</li> <li>• Barely understandable, with frequent or significant errors that impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little or no control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>• Minimal or no attention to register</li> <li>• Pronunciation, intonation, and pacing make the response difficult to comprehend; errors impede comprehensibility</li> <li>• Clarification or self-correction (if present) does not improve comprehensibility</li> </ul>
<b>0 (unacceptable)</b>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mere restatement of language from the stimulus</li> <li>• Completely irrelevant to the stimulus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not in the language of the exam</li> <li>• Blank (no response)</li> </ul>

**Rúbrica: Español 5AP**  
**Presentational Writing Task (Persuasive essay)**

SCORE:	DESCRIPTION	TASK COMPLETION	TOPIC DEVELOPMENT	LANGUAGE USE
<b>5</b> <b>Demonstrates excellence (strong)</b>	<b>HIGH</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates excellence</i> in Presentational Writing accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective treatment of topic within the context of the task</li> <li>Demonstrates a high degree of comprehension of the sources' viewpoints, with very few minor inaccuracies</li> <li>Integrates content from all three sources in support of the essay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents and defends the student's own viewpoint on the topic with a high degree of clarity; develops a persuasive argument with coherence and detail</li> <li>Organized essay; effective use of transitional elements or cohesive devices</li> <li>Fully understandable, with ease and clarity of expression; occasional errors do not impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Varied and appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>Accuracy and variety in grammar, syntax, and usage, with few errors</li> <li>Develops paragraph-length discourse with a variety of simple and compound sentences, and some complex sentences</li> </ul>
<b>4</b> <b>Demonstrates command (good)</b>	<b>MID-HIGH</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates command</i> in Presentational Writing accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally effective treatment of topic within the context of the task</li> <li>Demonstrates comprehension of the sources' viewpoints; may include a few inaccuracies</li> <li>Summarizes, with limited integration, content from all three sources in support of the essay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents and defends the student's own viewpoint on the topic with clarity; develops a persuasive argument with coherence</li> <li>Organized essay; some effective use of transitional elements or cohesive devices</li> <li>Fully understandable, with some errors which do not impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Varied and generally appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>General control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>Develops mostly paragraph-length discourse with simple, compound and a few complex sentences</li> </ul>
<b>3</b> <b>Demonstrates competence (fair)</b>	<b>MID</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates competence</i> in Presentational Writing accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suitable treatment of topic within the context of the task</li> <li>Demonstrates a moderate degree of comprehension of the sources' viewpoints; includes some inaccuracies</li> <li>Summarizes content from at least two sources in support of the essay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents and defends the student's own viewpoint on the topic; develops a somewhat persuasive argument with some coherence</li> <li>Some organization; limited use of transitional elements or cohesive devices</li> <li>Generally understandable, with errors that may impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate but basic vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>Some control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>Uses strings of mostly simple sentences, with a few compound sentences</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> <b>Suggests lack of competence (weak)</b>	<b>MID-LOW</b> A writing sample that <i>suggests lack of competence</i> in Presentational Writing accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unsuitable treatment of topic within the context of the task</li> <li>Demonstrates a low degree of comprehension of the sources' viewpoints; information may be limited or inaccurate</li> <li>Summarizes content from one or two sources; may not support the essay</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presents, or at least suggests, the student's own viewpoint on the topic; develops an unpersuasive argument somewhat incoherently</li> <li>Limited organization; ineffective use of transitional elements or cohesive devices</li> <li>Partially understandable, with errors that force interpretation and cause confusion for the reader</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>Limited control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>Uses strings of simple sentences and phrases</li> </ul>
<b>1</b> <b>Demonstrates lack of competence (poor)</b>	<b>LOW</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates lack of competence</i> in Presentational Writing accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Almost no treatment of topic within the context of the task</li> <li>Demonstrates poor comprehension of the sources' viewpoints; includes frequent and significant inaccuracies</li> <li>Mostly repeats statements from sources or may not refer to any sources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimally suggests the student's own viewpoint on the topic; argument is undeveloped or incoherent</li> <li>Little or no organization; absence of transitional elements and cohesive devices</li> <li>Barely understandable, with frequent or significant errors that impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very few vocabulary resources</li> <li>Little or no control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>Very simple sentences or fragments</li> </ul>
<b>0 (unacceptable)</b>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mere restatement of language from the prompt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly does not respond to the prompt; completely irrelevant to the topic</li> <li>"I don't know," "I don't understand," or equivalent in any language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not in the language of the exam</li> <li>Blank (no response)</li> </ul>

**Rúbrica: Español 5AP**  
**Presentational Speaking Task (Cultural comparison)**

SCORE:	DESCRIPTION	TASK COMPLETION	TOPIC DEVELOPMENT	LANGUAGE USE
<b>5</b> <b>Demonstrates excellence (strong)</b>	<b>HIGH</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates excellence</i> in Presentational Speaking accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective treatment of topic within the context of the task</li> <li>Clearly compares the student's own community with the target culture, including supporting details and relevant examples</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates understanding of the target culture, despite a few minor inaccuracies</li> <li>Organized presentation; effective use of transitional elements or cohesive devices</li> <li>Fully understandable, with ease and clarity of expression; occasional errors do not impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Varied and appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>Accuracy and variety in grammar, syntax, and usage, with few errors</li> <li>Mostly consistent use of register appropriate for the presentation</li> <li>Pronunciation, intonation, and pacing make the response comprehensible; errors do not impede comprehensibility</li> <li>Clarification or self-correction (if present) improves comprehensibility</li> </ul>
<b>4</b> <b>Demonstrates command (good)</b>	<b>MID-HIGH</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates command</i> in Presentational Speaking accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generally effective treatment of topic within the context of the task</li> <li>Compares the student's own community with the target culture, including some supporting details and mostly relevant examples</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates some understanding of the target culture, despite minor inaccuracies</li> <li>Organized presentation; some effective use of transitional elements or cohesive devices</li> <li>Fully understandable, with some errors which do not impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Varied and generally appropriate vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>General control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>Generally consistent use of register appropriate for the presentation, except for occasional shifts</li> <li>Pronunciation, intonation, and pacing make the response mostly comprehensible; errors do not impede comprehensibility</li> <li>Clarification or self-correction (if present) usually improves comprehensibility</li> </ul>
<b>3</b> <b>Demonstrates competence (fair)</b>	<b>MID</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates competence</i> in Presentational Speaking accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Suitable treatment of topic within the context of the task</li> <li>Compares the student's own community with the target culture, including a few supporting details and examples</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates a basic understanding of the target culture, despite inaccuracies</li> <li>Some organization; limited use of transitional elements or cohesive devices</li> <li>Generally understandable, with errors that may impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appropriate but basic vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>Some control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>Use of register may be inappropriate for the presentation with several shifts</li> <li>Pronunciation, intonation, and pacing make the response generally comprehensible; errors occasionally impede comprehensibility</li> <li>Clarification or self-correction (if present) sometimes improves comprehensibility</li> </ul>
<b>2</b> <b>Suggests lack of competence (weak)</b>	<b>MID-LOW</b> A writing sample that <i>suggests lack of competence</i> in Presentational Speaking accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unsuitable treatment of topic within the context of the task</li> <li>Presents information about the student's own community and the target culture, but may not compare them; consists mostly of statements with no development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates a limited understanding of the target culture; may include several inaccuracies</li> <li>Limited organization; ineffective use of transitional elements or cohesive devices</li> <li>Partially understandable, with errors that force interpretation and cause confusion for the listener</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited vocabulary and idiomatic language</li> <li>Limited control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>Use of register is generally inappropriate for the presentation</li> <li>Pronunciation, intonation, and pacing make the response difficult to comprehend at times; errors impede comprehensibility</li> <li>Clarification or self-correction (if present) usually does not improve comprehensibility</li> </ul>
<b>1</b> <b>Demonstrates lack of competence (poor)</b>	<b>LOW</b> A writing sample that <i>demonstrates lack of competence</i> in Presentational Speaking accomplishes the following:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Almost no treatment of topic within the context of the task</li> <li>Presents information only about the student's own community or only about the target culture, and may not include examples</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Demonstrates minimal understanding of the target culture; generally inaccurate</li> <li>Little or no organization; absence of transitional elements and cohesive devices</li> <li>Barely understandable, with frequent or significant errors that impede comprehensibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Very few vocabulary resources</li> <li>Little or no control of grammar, syntax, and usage</li> <li>Minimal or no attention to register</li> <li>Pronunciation, intonation, and pacing make the response difficult to comprehend; errors impede comprehensibility</li> <li>Clarification or self-correction (if present) does not improve comprehensibility</li> </ul>
<b>0 (unacceptable)</b>	-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mere restatement of language from the prompt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clearly does not respond to the prompt; completely irrelevant to the topic</li> <li>"I don't know," "I don't understand," or equivalent in any language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Not in the language of the exam</li> <li>Blank (no response although recording equipment is functioning)</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX C EXAMPLE PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

¡Feria del Trabajo!  
 Busquemos empleo en español

Español 5AP  
 CV En Español

Señora Ficano-Petricca

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_ Fecha: \_\_\_\_\_ Hora: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Uds. son profesionales y están buscando un **trabajo en español**.
2. **Feria de trabajo:**
  - a. Van a escribir una descripción breve de un trabajo para que personas puedan aplicar con su CV en español. Incluyan información sobre:
    - i. Las responsabilidades del trabajo
    - ii. Las horas
    - iii. El salario
    - iv. Las capacidades necesarias para aplicar
    - v. Otra información que creen que es importante
    - vi. Fotos en un cartel pequeño con un resume de esta información en la forma de un símbolo de algo representante del trabajo.
  - b. Van a viajar alrededor de la clase y leer todas las descripciones. Después puedan aplicar para su favorito.
  - c. Necesitan dejar una copia de su CV y el “jefe” va a leerlo.
    - i. Necesitan modificar el CV para el trabajo que eligen.
3. **Para su “estación” del trabajo:**
  - a. Un papel con el nombre de la compañía con una foto del “edificio” o lugar del trabajo.
  - b. Crean el documento con la descripción del trabajo (bastante corto para leer en 1 minuto.)
  - c. Una aplicación corta para los candidatos de completar.
  - d. Un cartel en la forma de algo que simboliza el trabajo con fotos del trabajo y que muestra cómo será el medio ambiente al trabajo.
4. **Las entrevistas:**
  - a. Van a leer el CV de su candidato y crear un mínimo de 6 preguntas para entrevistar al candidato. Vamos a hacer las entrevistas delante de la clase.
  - b. El candidato necesita responder a las preguntas por **20 segundos cada pregunta**.
    - i. El/la jefe empieza por preguntar cómo está el candidato, describe en 1-2 frases el trabajo y comiencen la entrevista.
    - ii. Pregunta al candidato sobre su CV, capacidades, interés en el trabajo, por qué es el mejor candidato etc.
    - iii. La clase y el jefe van a decidir si la compañía va a contratar el candidato.

**Rúbrica:**

\_\_\_\_\_/30

**Todos** - Rúbrica AP “Presentational writing” (descripción del trabajo y la aplicación).

\_\_\_\_\_/20

**La entrevista** - Rúbrica AP “Interpersonal speaking” –Respuestas cortas de 20 segundos.

\_\_\_\_\_/10

**Estación del trabajo y accesorios** (Carteles, fotos, vestidos profesional del trabajo el día de las entrevistas).

\_\_\_\_\_/0

Esfuerzo extra

\_\_\_\_\_/60

**Puntos totales**



## APPENDIX D EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Email subject line: Participation Request in Spanish-Language Research Study by Sabrina Ficano-Petricca

Sabrina Ficano-Petricca  
2552 N. Maple Rd,  
Ann Arbor, MI 48103  
sficano@wayne.edu

Dear former students,

This is your former high-school Spanish teacher, Mrs. Ficano-Petricca! I am still teaching Spanish at the same high school, but additionally I am a researcher at Wayne State University currently working on my doctoral thesis. My area of interest is collaborative learning and performance-based assessment in foreign-language learning in regard to building proficiency and life-long language learners. I am conducting a research study to explore the influence of the activities and projects we completed in class on students' perceptions of their long-term proficiency in Spanish.

I am writing to ask for your participation in my research study through a 30-minute online survey about your language proficiency in Spanish. Some of the participants in the online survey will also be asked to participate in a follow-up conversation with me. This study could greatly benefit foreign language education teaching and learning by providing insights into the students' perceptions of their language proficiency after they have completed the Spanish 5AP program. If you agree to participate in the study, once you have completed the survey, only I as the researcher will have access to your responses and all of your identifying information will be removed.

Participation in this study is voluntary, but it could greatly benefit future foreign-language programs by providing insight into the impact of collaboration and performance-based assessments on proficiency. Provided below is an information sheet that outlines the details of the research study. Please read all of the information carefully before continuing with the survey.

If you agree to participate in this study, please click the link below to begin the survey:  
[https://waynestate.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_1H6va46cG0dKN2R](https://waynestate.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1H6va46cG0dKN2R)

I look forward to hearing from you! If you have any questions about this study now or in the future you may contact me by email at [sficano@wayne.edu](mailto:sficano@wayne.edu) or by phone (248) 345-3499.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Sincerely,

Mrs. Sabrina Ficano-Petricca

## APPENDIX E RESEARCH INFORMATION SHEET

Title of Study: *The Role of Collaboration and Performance-Based Assessment in Creating Speakers of Foreign Languages for an Increasingly Multilingual World*

Principal Investigator (PI): *Sabrina Ficano*  
College of Education  
(248) 345-3499

### Purpose

You are being asked to be in a research study that explores the influence of collaboration and performance-based assessments on students' perceptions of their long-term proficiency in Spanish because you have completed activities and projects like this in my classroom through the 5AP level. This study is being conducted at Wayne State University. The estimated number of study participants is about 96 students. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

In this study, I hope to demonstrate that students working together to learn Spanish in the classroom on various activities and then completing performance projects (such as creating videos) is related to students' increased abilities to communicate in Spanish outside of the classroom (through speaking or writing for example) in meaningful ways. This study strives to address the need in the United States to strengthen foreign language education as experienced by diverse 21st century learners to be more engaging, meaningful, and authentic.

### Study Procedures

If you agree to take part in this research study, you will be asked to complete an online survey and answer questions that ask about your abilities to use your Spanish as well as your experiences learning Spanish through my interactive classroom activities and projects. Simply return to the top of this email and click the link to the survey to begin. Once you have completed the survey and I download the results, I will replace your name with an identifier code. Only I as the researcher will have access to the list of codes for the purposes of this study.

The survey itself will take approximately 30 minutes. Throughout the survey will be asked a series of multiple-choice and open-ended questions about your language background, your current work or school activities, how you may or may not use Spanish now, your ability level in speaking and writing Spanish, and about your experiences learning Spanish in my classroom.

At the end of the online survey, you will be asked if I can contact you for a follow-up interview (in person, by phone, or by Skype, Facetime or Facebook chat depending on your availability) to get more in-depth details about your answers, specifically about questions asking about your experiences learning Spanish, your beliefs behind your ability to speak and write in Spanish, and more detail about why you may or may not have continued your Spanish study.

**Benefits**

As a participant in this research study, there will be no direct benefit for you; however, information from this study may benefit other people now or in the future.

**Risks**

There are no known risks at this time to participation in this study.

**Costs**

There will be no costs to you for participation in this research study.

**Compensation**

You will not be paid for taking part in this study.

**Confidentiality:**

You will be identified in the research records by a code name or number.

**Voluntary Participation /Withdrawal:**

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions or withdraw at any time. Your decision will not change any present or future relationships with Wayne State University or its affiliates.

**Questions**

If you have any questions about this study now or in the future, you may contact Sabrina Ficano or one of her research team members at the following phone number (248) 345-3499. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, the Chair of the Institutional Review Board can be contacted at (313) 577-1628. If you are unable to contact the research staff, or if you want to talk to someone other than the research staff, you may also call the Wayne State Research Subject Advocate at (313) 577-1628 to discuss problems, obtain information, or offer input.

**Participation**

By completing the online survey you are agreeing to participate in this study. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study.

## APPENDIX F SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The following is a paper copy of the survey that will be sent to participants. The survey itself will be web-based using the program Qualtrics.

### THE ROLE OF COLLABORATION AND PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT IN CREATING SPEAKERS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

1. Please enter your first and last name:(I will be removing your name and replacing it with an identifier code to protect your identity when I analyze the data):

2. Did you speak a language other than English at home when you were growing up?

- Yes (1)  
 No (2)

If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To What language did you speak growing u...If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Are you intending in majoring or mino...

3. What language did you speak growing up? Check all that apply.

- Arabic (1)  
 American Sign Language (2)  
 Chinese (3)  
 French (4)  
 German (5)  
 Italian (6)  
 Latin (7)  
 Spanish (8)  
 English (9)  
 Other (10) \_\_\_\_\_



4. Are you intending in majoring or minoring in a language?

- Yes I am majoring and/or minoring in Spanish (1)
- Yes I am majoring and/or minoring in another foreign language (2)
- No, I am not majoring and/or minoring in any foreign language (5)
- I have not decided my major (3)
- I am not enrolled in a college/university (4)

If Yes I am majoring and/or mi... Is Selected, Then Skip To What languages are you currently stud...  
 If Yes I am majoring and/or mi... Is Selected, Then Skip To What languages are you currently stud...  
 If I have not decided my major Is Selected, Then Skip To How many years have you studied Spani...  
 If I am not enrolled in a coll... Is Selected, Then Skip To How many years have you studied Spani...

5. What languages are you currently studying in college? Check all that apply:

- Arabic (1)
- American Sign Language (2)
- Chinese (3)
- French (4)
- German (5)
- Greek (6)
- Italian (7)
- Latin (8)
- Spanish (9)
- Other (10) \_\_\_\_\_

6. How many years have you studied Spanish after graduating high school?

- 0 years (1)
- 1 year (2)
- 2 years (3)
- 3 years (4)
- 4 years (5)

7. Do you now or did you in the past study a foreign language independently or informally (outside of a college or high school program)?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To What languages are you currently stud...  
 If No Is Selected, Then Skip To Do you use a language other than Engl...

8. What languages are you currently studying or did you in the past independently/informally? Check all that apply:

- Arabic (1)
- American Sign Language (2)
- Chinese (3)
- French (4)
- German (5)
- Greek (6)
- Italian (7)
- Latin (8)
- Spanish (9)
- Other (10) \_\_\_\_\_

9. Please describe the circumstances of your language study (for example, why did you choose to study a language outside of your college or high school program?).

10. Do you now or have you ever in the past had a job where you use a language other than English?

- Yes I am working in a job now where I use a language other than English (1)
- Yes I had a job in the past where I used a language other than English (4)
- No I have never had a job using a language other than English (2)
- I do not currently have/or I have never had a job. (3)

If Yes I am working in a job n... Is Selected, Then Skip To What position do or did you hold?If Yes I had a job in the past... Is Selected, Then Skip To What position do or did you hold?If No I have never had a job u... Is Selected, Then Skip To Are there any other ways that you use...If I do not currently have/or ... Is Selected, Then Skip To Are there any other ways that you use...

11. What position do or did you hold?

12. Which languages do you or did you use at your job? Check all that apply:

- Arabic (1)
- American Sign Language (2)
- Chinese (3)
- French (4)
- German (5)
- Greek (6)
- Italian (7)
- Latin (8)
- Spanish (9)
- Other (10) \_\_\_\_\_

13. In what ways do you or did you use language at work? How often?

14. Are there any other ways that you use a language other than English (attending church services, culture events, etc)? Please explain.

15. What languages did you study at your high school? Check all that apply:

- Arabic (1)
- American Sign Language (2)
- Chinese (3)
- French (4)
- German (5)
- Italian (6)
- Latin (7)
- Spanish (8)
- Other (9) \_\_\_\_\_

16. How many years did you study Spanish between Kindergarten and 12th grade?

- 1 year (1)
- 2 years (2)
- 3 years (3)
- 4 years (4)
- 5 years (5)
- 6 years (6)
- 7 years (7)
- 8 years (8)
- 9 years (9)
- 10 years (10)
- 11 years (11)
- 12 years (12)
- 13 years (13)

17. How many years did you study Spanish with Mrs. Ficano-Petricca?

- 1 year (1)
- 2 years (2)
- 3 years (3)
- 4 years (4)

18. Why did you choose to study Spanish in high school?

19. What motivated you to continue studying Spanish through the AP level?

20. What was your proficiency score on the Spanish AP Language Exam?

- 1 (1)
- 2 (2)
- 3 (3)
- 4 (4)
- 5 (5)

21. Please respond to the following question in English or in Spanish: Do you use Spanish now? If yes, in what ways? If no, why not? ¿Tienes oportunidades de hablar en español ahora? Sí es el caso, ¿por qué? Si no es el caso, ¿por qué no?

22. How often do you use Spanish now?

- Never (1)
- Less than Once a Month (2)
- Once a Month (3)
- 2-3 Times a Month (4)
- Once a Week (5)
- 2-3 Times a Week (6)
- Daily (7)

23. Please respond to the following question in English or in Spanish: Have you used a foreign language abroad? If yes, for what purpose? Describe the circumstances of your trip. ¿Viajaste al extranjero y tuviste la oportunidad de usar un idioma extranjero? Si es el caso, ¿para qué? Describe las circunstancias de tu viaje.

24. How proficient do you feel at this time in the following contexts when communicating interpersonally in Spanish? Proficient means you are able to communicate by either speaking or writing, both by understanding someone else speaking Spanish and producing Spanish yourself in a way that you are understood. The interpersonal mode describes how you engage in direct oral and/or written communication with others (e.g. face-to-face conversations, online discussions or video conferences, instant messaging and text messaging, exchanging personal letters or email messages). Strongly Disagree = I am not at all confident I can perform this task in Spanish Strongly Agree = I am very confident I can perform this task in Spanish

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Disagree or Agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I can communicate effectively on a wide variety of present, past, and future events. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can exchange general information on topics outside my fields of interest. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can handle a complication or unexpected turn of events. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

25. How proficient do you feel at this time in the following contexts when writing or speaking in the presentational mode in Spanish? Proficient means you are able to present information intended for someone who is fluent in Spanish and your message, presentation, or any information you and trying to convey will be understood by that person or audience. The presentational speaking mode describes how you speak to a variety of audiences (e.g. leaving a voice message, making a presentation to a class or other group, giving directions to a group, delivering a speech, giving a report, etc.). The presentational writing mode describes how you write for a variety of audiences (e.g. making lists, writing letters, recipes, summaries, reports, blogs, essays, papers, scripts, etc.). Strongly Disagree = I am not at all confident I can perform this task in Spanish Strongly Agree = I am very confident I can perform this task in Spanish

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Disagree or Agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I can write well organized texts for a variety of academic purposes. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can write well organized texts for a variety of professional purposes. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can write well organized texts for a variety of general interest purposes. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can present information about events of public or personal interest. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can convey my ideas and elaborate on a	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

variety of academic topics. (5) I can give presentations with ease and detail on a wide variety of topics related to professional interests. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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26. How proficient do you feel at this time in the following contexts when listening and reading in the interpretive mode in Spanish? Proficient in listening means your ability to listen to Spanish whether from a speaker, a movie, a song, etc. and understand the ideas or content. The interpretive listening mode describes how you interpret meaning from hearing or reading the language in a variety of ways (e.g. voice mail, podcasts, lyrics, television programs, radio, public announcements, speeches, theatre, etc.). Proficient in reading means you can read Spanish in an email, book, magazine, text message, etc. and understand the main ideas or content. The interpretive reading mode describes how you interpret meaning from reading the language in a variety of texts (e.g. posters, labels, brochures, personal messages, apps, directions, video games, short stories, reports, books, etc.). Strongly Disagree = I am not at all confident I can perform this task in Spanish Strongly Agree = I am very confident I can perform this task in Spanish

	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neither Disagree or Agree (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
I can understand the main idea and many details of descriptions or interviews. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand accounts of events. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand directions and instructions on everyday tasks. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



I can follow the general idea and some details of what is written in a variety of stories and autobiographical accounts. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand general information on topics outside my field of interest. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand messages on a wide variety of past, present, and future events. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

27. What was the most helpful thing we did in Spanish to make you a proficient communicator (in speaking, writing or obtaining cultural knowledge)?

28. What four projects in any class (Spanish 2AC-5AP) that you had with me do you remember and like the most?

Four projects I remember and like the most	
_____	Noticias de 5AP (4AC) (1)
_____	Día de los muertos alteres (5AP) (2)
_____	Debate de películas (5AP) - Diarios de Motocicleta o Mar Adentro (3)
_____	Salva el medioambiente/agua (5AP) (4)
_____	Agente de viajes (5AP) (5)
_____	Feria de trabajo (5AP) (6)
_____	Apartamentos de Madrid (5AP) (7)
_____	Infomercial - producto nuevo (5AP) (8)
_____	Oscars/Anuario (5AP) (9)
_____	Conde Lucanor - Don Juan Manuel (4AC) (10)
_____	Enfermedades y mitos (4AC) (11)
_____	Poemas visuales video (4AC) (12)
_____	Familia del año (4AC) (13)
_____	Mañana de sol (4AC) (14)
_____	Cuentos de niños cambiados (4AC proyecto final) (15)
_____	Other (16)
_____	Other (17)

29. Why did you enjoy these projects the most?

30. What Spanish skills (such as speaking, writing, listening, reading, or acquiring cultural knowledge) did you learn from the projects you enjoyed most?

31. How do you feel your level of proficiency in Spanish has changed between high school and now in the following interpersonal mode contexts? Proficient means you are able to communicate by either speaking or writing, both by understanding someone else speaking Spanish and producing Spanish yourself in a way that you are understood. The interpersonal mode describes how you engage in direct oral and/or written communication with others (e.g. face-to-face conversations, online discussions or video conferences, instant messaging and text messaging, exchanging personal letters or email messages).

	I was proficient in high school in this task but I cannot perform this task now (1)	I was proficient in high school in this task and I can still perform it or have improved in performing it now (2)	I was NOT proficient in this task in high school but I can perform it now (3)	I was never able to perform this task (4)
I can communicate effectively on a wide variety of present, past, and future events. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can exchange general information on topics outside my fields of interest. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can handle a complication or unexpected turn of events. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

32. Explain why your abilities to communicate with others in Spanish through speaking or writing did or did not change.

33. How do you feel your level of proficiency in Spanish has changed between high school and now in the following presentational contexts? Proficient means you are able to present information intended for someone who is fluent in Spanish and your message, presentation, or any information you and trying to convey will be understood by that person or audience. The presentational speaking mode describes how you speak to a variety of audiences (e.g. leaving a voice message, making a presentation to a class or other group, giving directions to a group, delivering a speech, giving a report, etc.). The presentational writing mode describes how you write for a variety of audiences (e.g. making lists, writing letters, recipes, summaries, reports, blogs, essays, papers, scripts, etc.).

	I was proficient in high school in this task but I cannot perform this task now (1)	I was proficient in high school in this task and I can still perform it or have improved in performing it now (2)	I was NOT proficient in this task in high school but I can perform it now (3)	I was never able to perform this task (4)
I can write well organized texts for a variety of academic purposes. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can write well organized texts for a variety of professional purposes. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can write well organized texts for a variety of general interest purposes. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can present information about events of public or personal interest. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can convey my ideas and elaborate on a variety of academic topics. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I can give presentations with ease and detail on a wide variety of topics related to professional interests. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
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34. Explain why your abilities in Spanish to write or orally present information did or did not change.

35. How do you feel your level of proficiency in Spanish has changed between high school and now in the following interpretive contexts? Proficient in listening means your ability to listen to Spanish whether from a speaker, a movie, a song, etc. and understand the ideas or content. The interpretive listening mode describes how you interpret meaning from hearing the language in a variety of ways (e.g. voice mail, podcasts, lyrics, television programs, radio, public announcements, speeches, theatre, etc.). The interpretive reading mode describes how you interpret meaning from reading the language in a variety of texts (e.g. posters, labels, brochures, personal messages, apps, directions, video games, short stories, reports, books, etc.).

	I was proficient in high school in this task but I cannot perform this task now (1)	I was proficient in high school in this task and I can still perform it or have improved in performing it now (2)	I was NOT proficient in this task in high school but I can perform it now (3)	I was never able to perform this task (4)
I can understand the main idea and many details of descriptions or interviews. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand accounts of events. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand directions and instructions on everyday tasks. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I can follow the general idea and some details of what is written in a variety of stories and autobiographical accounts. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand general information on topics outside my field of interest. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand messages on a wide variety of past, present, and future events. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

36. Explain why your abilities to listen and understand various audios in Spanish or read and understand various texts in Spanish did or did not change.

37. If I need to gather more information about your responses, are you willing to participate in a follow-up interview?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

If Yes Is Selected, Then Skip To ¡Gracias! Please provide a phon...If No Is Selected, Then Skip To End of Survey

38. ¡Gracias! Please provide a phone number, Facetime, Facebook, or Skype contact where I can reach you.

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**ABSTRACT****THE ROLE OF COLLABORATION AND PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT IN ENGAGING LEARNERS TO PROMOTE REAL WORLD PROFICIENCY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES FOR AN INCREASINGLY MULTILINGUAL WORLD**

by

**SABRINA FICANO****May 2017****Advisor:** Dr. Justine Kane**Major:** Curriculum and Instruction (Foreign Language Education)**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

Despite the need in our global society to know more than one language to communicate, learning a second language is not a highly-valued skill. Moreover, while the understanding of language acquisition has continued to evolve over the past 30 years, our teaching and assessment practices have remained relatively stagnant and many foreign language classrooms continue to employ more “traditional approaches” to teaching and assessment. If U.S. foreign language educators, however, make a commitment to effective instruction and assessment practices, we can promote students’ proficient, life-long second language skills. Therefore, this study explores the ways in which collaborative learning and performance assessments not only positively support student success in developing proficiency in a second language, but also foster students’ use of those skills in real-world contexts over a long period of time. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study analyzes a survey instrument adapted from the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements and self-assessments for the advanced to mid-level student to identify students’ perceptions of their proficiency in Spanish language skills they that would have acquired by completing Spanish 5AP. The study revealed three major findings: (1) former students perceived their proficiency in Spanish as having been fostered by collaborative learning and/or performance-based assessment

practices; (2) students perceived of themselves as people who continue to use the foreign language they learned in high school in various contexts; (3) students are definitely passionate about foreign language study to various degrees. The study has important implications for both foreign language education and educational practices regarding collaboration and communicative competence, promoting foreign language proficiency in real-world contexts through students creating and constructing their knowledge, and cultivating students' passion for foreign language through engagement in learning to create life-long learners.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

My passion for learning about foreign languages and cultures as well as my desire to share that passion with young people led me to pursue my doctorate degree in Foreign Language Curriculum and Instruction. I have been teaching high school Spanish for 10 years and I have also taught Italian at both the secondary and collegiate levels. Prior to completing my Ph.D., I received my Masters of Art in Teaching from Wayne State University with certifications in Italian, Spanish, and French. Before attending Wayne State, I graduated with a Bachelor's Degree from the University of Michigan Ann Arbor where I created my own major in four foreign languages, communications, linguistics, psychology, and business.

I have traveled quite extensively around the world thanks to my desire to experience new cultures and an adventurous European husband! I have visited France, Spain, Germany, Ireland, Mexico, the Middle East, China, the Netherlands, Greece, Turkey, Canada and Poland. My favorite travel destination, however, is Italy, where I visit yearly with my husband's family and continue to explore my own family's origins. During my college studies, I also participated in several study abroad programs. In one program, "Wayne in Aburzzo," I lived and studied in the small town of Gagliano-Aterno where both of my great-grandparents once resided.

Before pursuing a career in education, I worked in several business positions. Upon graduation from the University of Michigan, I moved to Manhattan, NY where I worked as a public relations executive for a pharmaceutical firm. Aside from my career in teaching, I enjoy many hobbies including running, reading, music, and world travel. A priority for me is spending time with my family – my parents, my brother and his family, my grandfather Tony, my husband Marco, my daughter Rosalia, and our twin babies (that are on the way)!

Teaching is my passion and I have an absolute love for all languages and cultures that I aspire to instill in my students. I hope that my teaching with authentic or "real-world" assessments can bring joy and meaning to what students learn in Spanish to their everyday lives.