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**REDUCING SPANISH II STUDENTS' ANXIETY TO FACILITATE ORAL  
PRODUCTION IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the impact on secondary Spanish II students' oral production in the target language when specific measures were taken to lower their anxiety. The researcher used cooperative learning activities, participant self-evaluation, reflective journaling, metacognitive conversations, and specific oral error correction strategies. The findings showed that while several indicators of student anxiety were reduced over the four-month period of the study, overall oral production in Spanish among the participants did not increase noticeably. English persisted as the preferred language of discourse for all participants, including two native speakers of Spanish, although use of interlanguage became slightly more prevalent by the end of the study. For most participants, knowing their classmates was the most important factor in being comfortable speaking Spanish in class. Insufficient content knowledge, differences in motivation for language learning, varied ability levels among learners, and class management and behavioral issues, were found to preclude use of Spanish as the sole language for all classroom functions.

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## **RESEARCHER STANCE**

### **How I Got Here**

I wanted to quit, plain and simple. Spanish II was too hard, the teacher didn't speak any English, and everyone seemed to be faring better than I was. Or at the very least they didn't seem alarmed. I, on the other hand, was very, very alarmed.

Such is my memory from the first month or two of my experience in Spanish II as high school freshman. I had nearly coasted through Spanish in the 7th and 8th grades and it is doubtful that I expected much to change in the following year, yet change it did. After hitting a brick wall in the form of my new Spanish teacher who would not, could not deviate from Spanish-only instruction, I found myself feeling more lost and frustrated as each day passed. I confessed these feelings to my parents in tears. Today, where I teach, students have a safety valve in their ability to drop courses. I may have had the same option, though I am not sure now whether I was aware of it, and in any event my parents would not have allowed it. I was stuck, and the only choices were sink or swim. Nearly two decades later, I wish I could remember exactly what changed in the following weeks. All I can say now is that by October or November of 1990 I had finally learned to swim—albeit in the Spanish classroom.

Fast forward four years. Having recovered my footing and my confidence in Spanish II, levels III and IV went smoothly. For a variety of reasons I did not continue in my senior year. Suffice to say that at that point I did not see the Spanish language as being part of my future plans. By August of 1994 I had begun my first (and I thought, at that time, my only) semester of Spanish in college. It was there that I felt challenged again. For the first time in four years I did not see myself as one of the more able students in my class. This was also the first time I had ever encountered an instructor with an Iberian accent (how exotic!), or started each class with a song in Spanish (how difficult to understand!), or tried my first bite of tortilla española (how strange to enjoy this egg and potato concoction!). I was hooked.

In the following semesters I took more classes, soon found myself halfway to a minor, and then decided that adding Spanish as a second major would allow me to stay in college for an extra year, including a semester of study abroad in Spain. Doing so prevented me from graduating with most of the friends I had made at the university. It also changed my life forever.

Nine years into my career as a Spanish teacher, I still find it awkward telling my students the story of how I came to this profession. My love of the language developed early, and out of that love came my

immersion in—and passion for—a different culture, and finally exposure to many others. But the teaching part came later. Indeed, when I first set foot in the classroom in September of 2000, I had never even observed a high school class from a teacher’s perspective. I scraped by in my first year. Surviving the second was a bit easier, by the end of which I had completed my certification program. After two years of teaching only Spanish II—the same course that had nearly shipwrecked me twelve years before—I was given the opportunity to teach other levels. At this point I have experience in all five years of study offered in the high school, and each has its unique challenges and rewards. One challenge has resisted my efforts to understand and effectively address it in the years that have gone by, and it is exactly this issue that I chose to research this year.

Students of world languages, it turns out, can be rather reluctant to speak the target language in their classes. This is no epiphany; research through at least the last few decades has documented the phenomenon (e.g., Haskin, Smith, & Racine, 2003; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999). What interested me most as I began this line of inquiry is the connection between oral production in Spanish and anxiety. I have seen anxiety in students since the first days I spent in the classroom (and felt quite a bit of it myself, once upon a time!). I have witnessed its severity when students tremble or simply “shut down”,

as well as manifestations so subtle that I nearly failed to notice them.

Anxiety comes in many forms and if one is not conscious of its presence in the classroom environment, it is easy to form inaccurate assumptions and wrong conclusions about students' aptitudes, levels of interest or motivation, and preparedness.

Arriving at incorrect judgments about students in a second language classroom may be such a pitfall due to the diversity present among learners gathered there. Where I teach, it is not uncommon in any given section of Spanish II to find students from all four grade levels. In this district a student may take his first full year in a second language course in the eighth grade, provided he does not need remediation in reading. That unfortunate circumstance will push the opportunity back to the ninth grade. Then there are other students who began even earlier in a different school system, and still others who study their first year as sophomores or even as juniors.

A second complication related to learner diversity is that of the native, or heritage, speakers of Spanish. There is a sizeable gray area between these labels, or how different individuals apply or interpret them. A reasonable distinction one can make is that native speakers have spoken the target language from their earliest developmental years, whereas heritage speakers come from families or environments in which

the language is spoken, but may not consider themselves (and may not be) fluent or proficient speakers. These learners often grapple with linguistic challenges and needs that are distinct from those of students with English-only backgrounds. When there is a mix of linguistic backgrounds in one classroom, some interesting things tend to happen. First, the challenge of meeting the array of differing language-acquisition needs becomes much more daunting for the teacher. Second, the anxiety of non-native, non-heritage speakers can and often does spike, as they find themselves in the presence of peers whose proficiency in the target language can be intimidating. This is an outcome I understand intimately, since one stressor for me as a Spanish II student was the ease with which my Portuguese-speaking friends negotiated the lessons and activities in our class. A third outcome, perhaps more difficult to conceive for those who have not seen it themselves, is that some of the students with a background in the target language become less likely to speak it due to factors such as wanting to fit in, or not wanting to seem “too smart”.

Oral production in the target language is important from the perspectives of teachers, students, families, prospective colleges, and the considerable body of professionals who developed the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages’ Standards for Foreign Language Learning (ACTFL, 1996) . The teacher who consciously combats student

anxiety must be willing to adapt his or her instruction in at least as many ways as there are students in a classroom. These adaptations take many forms, including differentiated instruction, instruction tailored to lower a learner's affective filter, the teaching of metacognitive strategies, and the monitoring of one's own behaviors as teacher. To understand the adaptations a given student may require is essentially to be able to situate oneself in that student's place in the classroom. What world language teachers seek is for students to communicate; that is, we want them to participate and to construct meaning, thereby installing themselves as integral parts of the learning and growth of the whole group and in the process enriching the experience of the other learners in their midst. Ideally this collective experience will come to be seen by them as a common mission, with the attending roles and responsibilities that characterize any organized group undertaking. As teachers, or facilitators of their learning, Dewey (1997/1938) says that we are then

responsible for a knowledge of individuals and a knowledge of subject-matter that will enable activities to be selected which lend themselves to social organization, an organization in which all individuals have an opportunity to contribute something, and in which the activities in which all participate are the chief carrier of control. (p. 56)

### **The Question**

Speaking a second language is a stressful and uncomfortable proposition for many beginning learners, and the anxiety they experience comes from many sources. With this in mind, my goal became to apply the findings and recommendations from research on anxiety and speaking in a second language in order to discover:

*What will be the observed and reported experiences in Spanish II students' oral communication when measures are taken to reduce student anxiety?*

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Today's students face something of a paradox when it comes to study of world languages in most schools. On one hand, there is the growing breadth and depth of languages offered, as more schools offer instruction through the Advanced Placement level of study, and the selection of languages taught expands beyond the standard Spanish/French/German/Latin to offerings as diverse as Italian, Russian, Japanese, Chinese, Arabic and others (Ataiyero & Mihalopoulos, 2008). On the other hand, vast numbers of secondary students continue to progress in a language only as far as is required for admission by their prospective colleges, and are not motivated by language learning itself. Several years after high school graduation, they will join the legion who make the familiar statement, "I studied (insert language here) in high school, and I don't remember any of it!"

Implicit in acquiring proficiency in a second language is the ability to speak and understand it. Imagine being literate in written French, German, and Italian while not being capable of uttering a single comprehensible word or phrase in any of the three languages. A tour of the Alpine region of Europe would be a slow and aggravating experience. While the idea of being a competent reader or writer of a second language without being

able to speak it meaningfully seems absurd, the situation in many high school language classrooms is uncomfortably reminiscent of such a scenario. Speaking and listening to a language other than one's native tongue is a frustrating and anxiety-ridden experience for many language students. The problem is that oral production and comprehension are fully one half, or more, of the outcome of successful language learning (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages [ACTFL], 1999). Not all students suffer from anxiety that cripples their oral production, nor do all students whose oral production is lacking experience this problem due to anxiety alone. Nonetheless, the body of research in anxiety as it pertains to oral production and overall achievement in the study of a second language shows convincingly that there is a negative relationship between anxiety and student performance (Ewald, 2007; Haskin, Smith, & Racine, 2003; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999).

### **Secondary World Language Instruction and Learning**

Despite the fact that the current nationwide trend toward increased standardized testing centers on mathematics, English, and sciences, world language education continues to occupy an important part of public education in many communities. In 2008, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) expanded its foreign language course offerings to include more Chinese

and Arabic classes, and to introduce a program of studies in Russian in multiple schools. Already home to the largest Chinese program in the nation, CPS is expanding its foreign languages program as a commitment to globalism in its students' education, with the goal of shaping its students into better world citizens (Ataiyero & Mihalopoulos, 2008). New Jersey, with similar goals at the state level, now mandates K-12 world languages education for its public school students (New Jersey Department of Education, 2005). Still, a majority of students continue to study a second language for only the number of years required for high school graduation and/or entry into college (Moore, 1993). For many students this used to be two years; these days, more students are completing three years of study in a foreign language (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

Spanish has been for some time, and remains today, the most popular choice of world languages among American high school students; in 2000, over 4 million (or 30%) of public secondary school students were enrolled in a Spanish course (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). This exceeded the combined number of high school students who in that year were enrolled in courses in French, German, Russian, Italian, Japanese, other modern languages, and Latin. Reasons for this include the fact that it is spoken by more people in the United States than other foreign languages, and the perception among students that it is easier

than other languages offered (Moore, 1993). Despite this belief, many students of Spanish seem to have difficulty holding their own in even the most basic conversations after two or three years of study.

After the Clinton administration rechristened the America 2000 program as Goals 2000, foreign languages became the last of seven subject areas to be included under the umbrella for the project (Omaggio Hadley, 2000). This was largely due to the work of ACTFL and several other professional language organizations in the U.S. By 1996 ACTFL had developed its Standards for Foreign Language Learning, which seek to give a structure for the content of K-12 world language instruction (ACTFL, 1996). The standards are not prescriptive; they do not propose to demonstrate the “how” of language instruction but they do attempt to outline the “what”.

The ACTFL standards are divided into five categories, known as the “5 Cs” (ACTFL, 1996). These are Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. Each content standards area is further articulated in sub-goal statements (Communication has three, others have two) that provide more detail about the specific kinds of learning that students should experience within them. Reading these standards, it is plain to see that the hundreds of people who took part in designing them had authenticity in mind as they did so. The

Communications content area focuses on interactive gathering and presenting of information, as well as expressing feelings, opinions, and ideas to audiences of different sizes. The Cultures component asks that students analyze the cultures they study to come to an understanding and appreciation of them. The ideas generated in doing so are then to be compared to and connected with their own experiences. The Communities content area, perhaps the hardest to evaluate in the classroom, is meant to be the impetus for students to take their language learning and use it in the world outside the classroom – the ultimate in authentic—and lifelong—learning.

Authentic instruction and authentic learning in the world languages classroom mean different things to different people. Examples of authentic sources for instruction provided by Haskin et al. (2003) include exposure to native speakers, videotapes, audiotapes, pen pals, email, Internet chat, newspapers, comic books, menus, and consumer goods packaging and literature. Authenticity is found in conversations that occur between students and between students and teachers. Whether these conversations occur extemporaneously or are planned instructional conversations, the interlocutors are “collaborators who navigate the multiple discourse practices of the language classroom to create extended, coherent verbal exchanges” (Todhunter, 2007, p. 606).

Teachers aiming for maximum linguistic authenticity should strive to conduct every form of classroom communication in the target language (Price, 2004; Szostek, 1994). This includes exchanges of information such as dealing with classroom management issues, explaining directions and requirements for student work, setting forth daily lesson objectives, and providing instructions to students for the smooth operation of cooperative learning groups.

Formal and informal assessments, too, must be authentic, and this includes conducting them in the target language. In this way, students will learn that the process and the content of their learning are equally important. Authentic assessments such as performance tasks are more valid indicators of what students have learned, as they require real-life application of new knowledge and skills (Diaz, 1999). If students are to discover and embrace the value of speaking a new language, then the oral communication demand should logically pervade all dimensions of their classroom experience, and not be set on a shelf to be taken down only for special speaking and listening diversions.

### **Oral Language Production and Proficiency**

Striving for authentic instruction would seem to imply availability of a wide range of contexts in which students might practice speaking the target language. Yet Williams and Sharp (1997), in their study of high

school Spanish II classes, found that 100% of the teachers surveyed felt that one cause of their students' inadequate oral proficiency was that the teachers themselves failed to place enough emphasis on speaking. The same group of teachers agreed that more emphasis is placed on written work, which is easier to implement and evaluate, and that oral assessment in their classes was infrequent or non-existent. In another study, almost half of the language teachers surveyed felt that students were unwilling to work diligently enough to develop meaningful target language proficiency, but 68% of those teachers admitted that in most of their language classes, the opportunities necessary to develop authentic communication skills were insufficient (Diaz, 1999).

Do language teachers not want their students to become proficient speakers of the target language? If not, what factor or factors are to blame? The most common problems cited by teachers are time constraints and a lack of other resources (Williams & Sharp, 1997). Oral language production should be a feature of every class meeting, whether as part of a formal practice activity, assessment, direct instruction, or class management (Price, 2004). However, when one teacher is faced with evaluating and giving feedback on the oral language use of each of 25 to 30 students, who meet for 40 or 45 minutes each day, the logistics become challenging.

The teacher's role in promoting classroom interaction in the target language cannot be underestimated. Students must not only be told that speaking Spanish (or Japanese, or French, or Russian) is essential; this must be demonstrated every day. Teachers can begin by modeling this oral production the second students enter the room by using a variety of greetings, as well as diverse commands, requests, and other expressions as the class proceeds (Haskin et al., 2003). The instructor models depth as well as breadth. If students hear complete sentences, they are more likely to begin producing similar utterances themselves—even if conversationally this would be somewhat artificial (Todhunter, 2007).

### **The Affective Domain and Oral Communication**

As it is for any human behavior, the motivation for students to enroll and participate in a foreign language program of study is typically composed of multiple factors. As Moore (1993) found in her study, though 89% of students surveyed said that one of the reasons they studied a foreign language was to meet college admissions requirements, 45% also listed personal desire as a motivating factor. While only 15% said personal interest was their chief motivator (compared to 67% who placed college admission at the top of their list), it is clear that there are overlapping influences within the decisions students make about second language study. Haskin et al. (2003) frame student motivation in the language

classroom in terms of instrumental versus integrative motivation. An individual motivated instrumentally to learn a language will do so for utilitarian purposes—travel, employment, or (in the case of high school students) admission to college. A person who seeks to learn a language due to integrative motivation does so with the goal of becoming part of a target language community. Someone who emigrates to a new country or who marries into a family speaking a language different from his own would fit in this category.

Motivation is not the easiest thing to measure; effective tools for doing so are teacher observations, student journals, and other forms of self-evaluation. Classroom practices found to have a positive effect on motivation are communicative practice activities (instead of grammar-centered instruction), de-emphasized textbook learning, an enhanced perception of the “need” for Spanish to function in the classroom, and a supportive atmosphere (Price, 2004). Students who learn in a classroom with these features experience significant gains in motivation vis-à-vis being able to say what they want to say, more often (Price, 2004).

Haskin et al. (2003) highlighted six factors related to motivation in foreign language learning: student attitude, student beliefs about self, student goals, personal attributes, overall involvement, and environmental support. Several of these factors are also pertinent to a discussion of

student anxiety. Motivation to speak Spanish in the classroom is adversely affected by the anxiety a student experiences. Ironically, very anxious students do indeed become motivated – to avoid engaging in classroom activities, at whatever cost (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Sparks & Ganschow, 2007). The unfortunate consequence of this is that students who are thus frequently (and intentionally) unprepared for class or indifferent to its proceedings are often mistaken by teachers for being low in ability or for having inadequate academic or language-specific background.

It is appropriate to make a few clarifications here. First, there is some doubt as to whether anxiety about speaking a foreign language comes from poor performance, or vice versa (Ewald, 2007; Sparks & Ganschow, 2007). The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, an instrument developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to measure students' anxiety tied to learning a second language, has been called into question with regard to whether it measures foreign language anxiety versus students' overall perceptions of their language skills. Clearly there is an interplay between the two. Sparks and Ganschow (2007) determined that there is a definite negative relationship between anxiety and retention in foreign language courses. Language learners may undermine their ability to target language input by dwelling on a recent poor performance and

even engaging in negative self-talk (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). There is also ample evidence to suggest that if a student believes himself to be a weak language learner, he will experience difficulties in comprehension (Diaz, 1999), and that anxiety will lead a student to communicate less information, or to tend not to express himself as well as his more relaxed classmates, despite the fact that he may indeed possess the requisite grammar and vocabulary knowledge to do so (Haskin et al., 2003; Sparks & Ganschow, 2007).

A second distinction that merits consideration has to do with different kinds of anxiety. Foreign language anxiety is a psychological construct that is difficult to define. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) conceived of it as encompassing various factors including a language learner's self-esteem, self-confidence, and risk-taking abilities. It must take into account complex factors such as a student's belief about language learning, the interactions between students and teacher, personal and interpersonal dynamics, classroom activities and assessments (Haskin et al., 2003). Other factors include teacher attitudes and behaviors, class climate, level of student preparation, and support from peers (Ewald, 2007; Young, 1990). Young (1990) defines two basic concepts of communication apprehension and social anxiety. Communication apprehension is an individual's level of fear or anxiety associated with

either real or anticipated oral communication with another person or persons. Social anxiety is defined as an anxiety which surfaces from the prospect or presence of interpersonal evaluation in real or imagined social settings. Both of these forms of anxiety represent oral communication scenarios that language learners face in their classes as well as in the world outside the school where their language proficiency may become useful or necessary.

The sources of student anxiety are nearly as numerous and diverse as the students who experience it. As noted above, various components of a student's psychological make-up are at play. Also significant are teacher characteristics and environmental factors. Researchers, with the help of input from students and teachers, have identified numerous specific behaviors and interactions that result in increased student anxiety. Many, if not all, of the following factors apply to language learners at the intermediate, secondary, and collegiate levels of study. Where oral communication witnessed by all class participants is concerned, students prefer to volunteer rather than be called on by the teacher, especially when they are unsure of the answer (Ewald 2007; Haskin et al., 2003; Young, 1990). They prefer to be one of several responders to a question rather than the sole responder (Haskin et al., 2003; Young, 1990), do not generally prefer to be "in front of the class" when speaking (Young, 1990),

and dislike having the spotlight on them in any way (Haskin et al., 2003; Young, 1990). When they do speak, learners of a second language often express fear of making errors in front of their classmates and their teacher (Ewald, 2007; Haskin et al., 2003; Young, 1990). Students' anxiety is acute when they think their peers are intellectually or linguistically superior to them (Ewald, 2007), leading some to fear that others will critique or laugh at them if they make mistakes - whether secretly or publicly. Students also express feeling more anxiety when they do not know their classmates well (Young, 1990). Many students are anxious about having their errors corrected by the teacher, or at least about the way in which errors are corrected (Ewald, 2007; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999; Young, 1990). Very few, however, indicate that they would enjoy a classroom environment where errors go entirely uncorrected (Young, 1990). Students become anxious when they perceive the teacher as waiting/looking for errors to pounce on and correct (Ewald, 2007), and when they are unprepared for class (Ewald, 2007; Young, 1990). Finally, many students are anxious if they sense that the class is moving too quickly through material or content areas (Young, 1990).

Little of this should be surprising to anyone who has taught a foreign language, or any subject. Indeed nearly all of the factors listed above apply to public speaking and academic situations in general. Haskin

et al. (2003) state that an environment for language learning in which the learner feels non-stressed and non-threatened is a prerequisite for that student to be receptive. This echoes Krashen's affective filter hypothesis and Maslow's hierarchy of needs: one must feel safe and secure before any learning can happen. Teachers can foster such an environment, though it involves careful planning and ongoing vigilance in the classroom. Research has turned up many other teacher behaviors that are useful for reducing stress of students in speaking (and all learning) situations. To begin with error correction, language teachers should confirm students' oral input by repeating what they say, while at the same time correcting grammatical flaws in the students' speech (Todhunter, 2007). Teachers should try to stress to all students that mistakes are not only made but are expected, and that this is a part of the learning process (Ewald, 2007; Young, 1990). Teachers must create a learning environment that is friendly and supporting; they should present themselves as helpful promoters of learning, not solely authority figures whose only concern is evaluating student performance; and they should establish expectations stressing learning and improvement over (the unattainable) perfect performance (Ewald, 2007). Young (1990) identified friendliness, a good sense of humor, patience and a relaxed demeanor as the four most important qualities of a teacher as indicated by the students she surveyed.

Haskin et al. (2003) cited Rubin's essential strategies for "good second language learners". Students categorized as such are willing and accurate guessers, have a strong drive to communicate, are uninhibited, do not mind making mistakes, use patterns and analysis when they focus on form in language, take advantage of all opportunities to practice using the language, monitor their speech and that of others, and attend to meaning. A quick glance at these eight qualities reveals a prototype of the student with whom any language teacher would be thrilled to fill his or her classes. Since that cannot happen, we must ask: what are the behaviors we can encourage, and strategies we can implement, that will lower students' anxiety in the foreign language classroom? There are many elements we can control. The following are some of them.

First, students must be involved to some degree in deciding what they will learn, or how they will learn it. Diaz (1999) found that when students had some control over their foreign language learning – they were involved with deciding what constituted quality work, and in developing instruments like scoring rubrics - they reported higher levels of involvement and motivation. Thus a different approach to evaluation led to student gains.

Another researched approach to language learning, and which has the net effect of reducing student anxiety, is organizing students in pairs or

small groups. Researchers find many benefits within this practice. More than 75% of Young's (1990) surveyed students responded that they enjoyed class when they worked in pairs. Ewald's (2007) students, who served as her co-researchers, said that group work can relieve anxiety for them. Diaz (1999) cites Dailey when she lists positive interdependence and individual accountability as two of the compelling reasons to implement cooperative learning in the language curriculum. And Szostek (1994) surveyed the students involved in her cooperative learning intervention to find that 78% believed that they had spoken more Spanish during the study, and 87% agreed they had heard more Spanish spoken in the class during that time.

One more area worthy of investigation and intervention in the effort to reduce language learners' anxiety has to do with the core beliefs they hold about second language acquisition. Onwuegbuzie et al. (1999), in their study of 210 university students, discuss student beliefs and expectations that they encountered in their study of factors that predict anxiety. One such belief that students may hold is that they should not attempt to speak in the target language if they cannot maintain accuracy, and that guessing at an unknown word is undesirable. Some learners believe that two years of study will be sufficient for one to become a fluent speaker in a second language. Still others harbor the notion that some

people have a special gift that allows them to learn a foreign language more easily or quickly than others. Finally, students' expectation of their overall achievement in their foreign language courses emerged as the top predictor of foreign language anxiety.

Perhaps the primary need when confronting students' anxiety should be to confront the unrealistic or erroneous beliefs students have about learning a new language. No student should be allowed to continue thinking that fluency, or proficiency, in a language can be attained in only two years of non-immersive coursework that takes place during limited hours in a classroom setting. Students must be made aware of the clear and complete goals of their language class, and should be aided in creating reasonable goals for themselves. This must include the goal of learning through risk-taking, educated guessing, and the acceptance of—and willingness to embrace and reflect on—the unavoidable errors that are part and parcel of second language learning. Teachers must dissuade students from thinking that some individuals have an inherent gift for language acquisition while providing positive reinforcement, reassurance, and empathy. Acknowledging the anxiety that many students feel will help students to deal with it constructively, and various interventions to identify, discuss, and reduce anxiety should be utilized (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999).

## Summary

Students take on the demands of learning a second language for different reasons. Some continue until they develop communicative proficiency, while others discontinue their language study when their instrumental goals have been reached. Regardless of student motivation, language teachers have a responsibility to make learning authentic, which entails emphasis on the four modalities of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Though each presents its own unique challenges, oral language production suffers from a plethora of factors that contribute to student anxiety.

The anxiety that second language learners experience is a complex construct which does not lend itself easily to definition, but researchers and students have identified many of its sources, several of which apply to students ranging in age from adolescents to adults. In describing the causes of foreign language anxiety, research has been able to point the way toward reducing it. Researchers have suggested numerous behaviors and strategies to reduce stress and anxiety among language learners. Although not all students have the qualities that are recognized as beneficial to those who study a second language, when students' stress or anxiety (affective filter) is lowered, and self-confidence is raised, they

should experience positive changes in their ability to express themselves orally in the target language.

## METHODOLOGY

### Setting

This research was conducted at a large public high school in eastern Pennsylvania. It is the only high school in the district, and its enrollment stands at just under 3,000 students. In addition to the high school, the district has six elementary schools, a lower middle school for grades five and six, an upper middle school for grades seven and eight, and also a separate facility for high school students that is set up in alignment with Pennsylvania's Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth program. The district draws students from urban and suburban areas that are home to families of diverse ethnicities and socioeconomic levels. Spanish is the most-spoken minority language in the school, but there are at least eight other non-English languages spoken, according to information on students in the ESOL program. The high school's world language offerings include levels I through IV of each of the following: Spanish, French, German, Latin, and Italian. Students of Spanish, French, and German may also take Advanced Placement courses. Three years of Japanese and two years of Russian round out the world languages offerings.

## **Participants**

The participants in this study were 21 high school students (14 females and 7 males) in one section of Spanish II. There were 11 freshmen, 8 sophomores, and 2 juniors. At the start of the study the students ranged in age from 14 to 17 years old. Students in this district may begin studying world languages on an everyday basis in the eighth grade, on the condition that their seventh grade reading assessment scores meet a certain threshold. Students who do not meet that criterion cannot begin second language study until they reach the ninth grade. Juniors and seniors appear in Spanish II classes for various reasons. Some have delayed language study until these grades, and others repeat levels of study in which they did not perform sufficiently well in a previous year. Still others, who began and/or are continuing to study one foreign language, begin taking another as upper-classmen.

**Table 1***Student Participants*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Experience</b>
Adam	9	2nd through 5th grades (in NJ)-Spanish; 8th grade-Spanish I
Carissa	9	7th grade-semester of exploratory Italian; 8th grade-Spanish I
Gina	9	8th grade-Spanish I
Jared	9	8th grade-Spanish I
Karen	9	8th grade-Spanish I
Kelly	9	8th grade-Spanish I; some Spanish at home (mother is Chilean)
Nick	9	8th grade-Spanish I
Nicole	9	8th grade-Spanish I
Nuria	9	Born in Mexico; Spanish spoken at home; 8th grade-Spanish I
Sasha	9	Speaks some Twi (parents are from Ghana); 8th grade-Spanish I
Vanessa	9	8th grade-Spanish I
Bridgette	10	8 <sup>th</sup> grade-Spanish I; 9th grade-Spanish II (opted to repeat); IEP
Brooke	10	9th grade-Spanish I; IEP
Dan	10	9th grade-Spanish I; IEP
Liz	10	9th grade-Spanish I
Noelle	10	8th grade-passed Spanish I but not promoted; 9th grade-Spanish I
Paula	10	Born in Peru; Spanish spoken at home; 9th grade-Spanish I
Todd	10	9th grade-Spanish I
Troy	10	8th grade-passed Spanish I but not promoted; 9th grade-Spanish I
Ashley	11	9th grade-French I; 10th grade-Spanish I
Donald	11	8th grade-Latin; 9th grade-Spanish I; 10th grade-dropped Spanish II

### **Trustworthiness Statement**

No research is worth conducting unless the researcher can emerge from the process confident that the work undertaken has been done ethically, and that honesty was a centerpiece of the efforts made and the conclusions drawn. As this study evolved I made certain that at every juncture I had done my utmost to record valid and objective observations, consider multiple viewpoints, share insights and be open to discussion with my researcher support group, abide by sound and ethical research practices, and faithfully represent the realities of the classroom throughout the intervention.

### ***Acknowledgement of researcher biases***

Entering this period of observation, reflection, and analysis, I was conscious of several biases that could affect my interpretations of what was to transpire in my classroom during the coming months. One bias I have that centers on my relationship to the language relates to the success I have had as a learner of Spanish. I overcame what I perceived to be a very difficult and frustrating situation when I was a Spanish II student many years ago. Ironically, the key for me at that time was to meet the challenge of being patient with myself and continuing to try to understand my teacher as she spoke an endless stream of Spanish in class. I rose to the occasion, and I will not deny that I believe that all of my

students are capable of doing the same. During the years that followed my initial struggle I came to love the sounds of the language, its irregularities, the cultures associated with it, and its literature. I became a proficient Spanish speaker after years of hard work, and one very significant six-month period in Spain. To expect that all of my students were to become proficient Spanish speakers this year would have been unfair, but I desperately wanted to see hints of progress. Obviously I hoped that students would begin speaking more and more as the study moved on, and that they would enjoy it or at least admit that they were able to sense the progress and found it meaningful. These are what I would call ideal outcomes. They would in many ways mirror developments that I observed in my own journey in second-language learning. Yet expecting them would be a liability.

Ely, Vinz, Downing, and Aznul (1997) state that our beliefs, attitudes, and experiences, as well as the theoretical stance we adopt in our teaching, all act upon the data we record and analyze. These elements play an important role in the making of meaning from the raw data. They also represent some of the lenses through which we gaze, or “angles of repose” (Ely et al., 1997, p. 32) from which we study what is happening, what has happened, and what it all means. I am somebody who has struggled and who has overcome. I am a non-native speaker of

Spanish in a classroom that includes native or heritage speakers. I am still a language learner myself. For much of my life I considered myself to be an introvert and did not always feel confident speaking in any class or group situation. Also, I am one of seven Spanish teachers who forms opinions (right or wrong) and speculates about what must happen in my colleagues' classrooms, when I observe former students of theirs who come into my room. Each of these components of my profession can come into play on a given day, in a given lesson. Each must be considered as possibly influencing my observations, reactions, and speculation.

Other potential biases pertain to my judgment of research participants. Students who are vocal or otherwise overt about their lack of enthusiasm for Spanish, or language learning in general, test the patience of language teachers at some level. Those who come to class unprepared; who put their heads down and try to sleep during class; or who mock the language, the teacher, or their own classmates, often find that they have fallen in the esteem of their teachers. Conversely, native speakers and Spanish heritage learners are frequently stereotyped as more proficient or interested than they may actually be. I do not claim to be immune to forming such preconceptions of students. Nonetheless it is another challenge I must meet for the sake of accurate reporting.

Even with so much care taken to represent data honestly, there can always be doubt along the way. Disclosing my successes, failures, and insecurities to my researcher support group was beneficial to me on many occasions. We have traveled through the same murky territory at one point or another, and having time to share ideas and help each other find our way has been invaluable.

Triangulation of my observations with various data that students produce has been carried out in earnest in the interest of establishing validity. Students completed daily self-evaluations of their use of oral Spanish in class during the first half of the study, yielding results that I tabulated and analyzed. They also wrote reflective journal entries in which they shared their thoughts and feelings about their motivation for learning Spanish, their feelings about speaking it in different classroom contexts, their preferences with regard to error correction, their perceptions of the relationships among their peers in the language classroom, and other related topics. I collected and analyzed specific artifacts of student's work and performances, both written and oral, during the semester. Bringing all these forms of data together for analysis and reporting was done in order to lend validity to my report.

Finally, I needed to stay open to the transformative process of conducting action research. Ely et al. (1997) state that truth is revealed "in

a series of shaping discoveries” (p. 36). And Dewey (1997/1938) expounds: “Failure to take the moving force of an experience into account so as to judge and direct it on the ground of what it is moving into means disloyalty to the principle of experience itself” (p. 38). This statement rings as true for maintaining flexibility in my research as it does for designing student experiences or changing direction mid-lesson to adapt to student needs. There were no certainties in September. My goal was to ask, plan, implement, observe, reflect, analyze, and ask again. I expected to be surprised at some point in the cycle. Had that not happened, I confess that I would have been disappointed. Advancing into the unknown means one must retain flexibility and curiosity. Naturally there were some things I had hoped to see by the end of December. But ignoring an answer to one of my questions simply because it was bizarre or did not fit into some pre-conceived plan would have weakened my reporting and negated the chance to discover something else that could be very interesting or revealing. If an action research study is worth conducting, then it merits doing so with honesty and an open mind.

### ***Ethical guidelines***

My study received approval from the Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) at Moravian College (see Appendix A). It was also approved by the head principal at my high school (see Appendix B). I took

the necessary time to explain my research in detail to the potential participants, and each was given an informed consent form to sign and to have a parent or guardian sign (see Appendix C). The students were made aware that they could choose not to participate, or to opt out at any given time. All were aware that they would incur no penalties by doing so. Students were also informed that their identities would be kept secret for the duration of the project and that their names would not be used in reporting on its proceedings.

I felt that it was both necessary and valuable to explain to students my rationale for using various modes of data collection. In doing so I hoped to expedite the process of collecting data and enhance the relationship of trust that I sought with the students. Trust was a key component, for students had to feel at all times that they could and should be honest in class discussions, in journal entries and self-evaluations, and indeed in all dimensions of the learning process. A researcher has no interest in reporting on false or contrived behavior, results, commentary, or dialog. Still, if students can be called upon to shed light on a particular observation that is made but whose meaning is difficult to discern even after reflection, then all the better. The perspective of Bogdan and Biklen (2002) is applicable here, as they suggest that using subjects as resources is permissible, and though they discourage deferring to them

completely, the authors admit that subjects can help to “fill in the holes of description” (p. 153). Use of the students’ voices in such cases can be all the more effective, which again calls to mind the issues of trust, confidentiality, and anonymity endorsed by Holly, Arhar, and Kasten (2005).

## Procedure

Various interventions were used during the 16 weeks of the research period. First, information about students' anxiety in the language classroom was gathered in the first week of classes using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS, see Appendix D), a 33-item, Likert-style inventory of questions that seeks information on students' perceptions of things, like speaking in class, making mistakes, having errors corrected, and emotions they experience during the foreign language learning process. Throughout the study, students completed frequent self-evaluations (see Appendix E) on their usage of the target language in the classroom. As the study evolved, students' stated preferences for error correction were integrated into daily class interactions. Three assessments in the form of oral presentations were performed by students during the semester; each of these was scored with a rubric presented to students in advance. Other quizzes and tests not exclusively focused on oral production were also implemented during the planned units of study.

Cooperative learning strategies used during the intervention period included the Three-step interview, Jigsaw, and dialog practice. Metacognitive strategies implemented were planning, self-monitoring, problem identification, and self-evaluation. Later in the study, I also used a

limited amount of metacognitive talk with students, particularly when one of them asked a question about a grammatical point. In the latter part of the study, these metacognitive conversations became more and more interesting to me, and helped to shed light on the invisible processes at work when my students endeavored to use Spanish to communicate.

One more technique used during the first two months of the study was to post on the classroom's whiteboard, in large letters, the language of intended discourse (INGLÉS or ESPAÑOL) during a given part of the lesson. The purpose of this was to modulate the use of English and Spanish among all individuals in the classroom, including the teacher. The intention was to show INGLÉS at the beginning and/or end of the class, for purposes of class management, assignments, or clarification.

The intervention period encompassed four units of Spanish II instruction and one mini-unit at the beginning of the year, the purpose of which was to re-introduce some grammar structures and vocabulary in order to get students thinking about Spanish after a summer spent (for most of them) away from the language. These units progressed as follows, and included the tools, strategies, and assessments listed. All unit titles are those given in our text, *Realidades 2*.

***Mini-unit: Para empezar (weeks 1 and 2)***

From late August to early September the students worked on a number of review topics from Spanish I. The unit was comprised of vocabulary and structures such as:

- noun-adjective agreement
- interrogative words
- the verb *ser* (to be)
- nationalities
- conjugation of regular *-ar*, *-er*, and *-ir* verbs
- seasons, months of the year, and days of the week

In the first week of school, the FLCAS was administered to the group. Results for the group were compiled and analyzed so that specific sources of anxiety could be targeted in planning and execution of instruction throughout the study. Metacognitive strategies discussed and modeled in this unit were self-monitoring and self-evaluation. This was done in order to facilitate students' self-assessment slips. Use of the "ESPAÑOL/INGLÉS" sign began in the first week of the year, when formalities such as class rules and procedures, and parental consent for the research study, had been clarified for students. Students also received a document (see Appendix F) containing a series of Spanish phrases and expressions that were meant to streamline classroom operations and daily

interactions, while attempting to keep class management and disciplinary interaction in the target language. These phrases and expressions were modeled in class for several days, with students participating in brief role plays and responding to me as I pantomimed situations where one of the phrases would apply. Implementation of students' target language self-evaluations began in the second week of classes, from September 2nd through the 5th.

Before the mini-unit final assessment, students participated in a modified game of Jeopardy, in which they were split into four groups and responded to questions from five categories posted on the board. The game required listening as well as reading comprehension, as some questions were strictly read to the players while others were posted in written form using the overhead projector.

The mini-unit ended with a test containing one oral comprehension task, one matching exercise, two different cloze-type fill-in sections, and one section that required students to label pictures representing vocabulary terms.

***Unit 1A: ¿Qué haces en la escuela? (weeks 3, 4, and 5)***

Information presented in this chapter centered on school activities, objects and materials, and rules. Vocabulary and grammar concepts in this unit included:

- Re-entry vocabulary and grammar: school subjects and materials, adjectives, and ordinal numbers
- the verb *tener* and other “go” verbs
- uses of the preposition *para*
- conjugation and use of various stem-changing verbs
- meanings and use of affirmative and negative words
- usage and forms of the verb *conocer*

In Unit 1A the participants engaged in their first cooperative learning activity, a dialog practice (see Appendix G) in which they worked on their pronunciation of thematic phrases and short interchanges. These in turn became the source material for the paired or group oral presentations, which were graded with the aid of a rubric (see Appendix H). Students wrote their first reflective journal entries (see Appendix I) during this unit. The journal prompt asked them to share their motivation for learning Spanish, things they enjoy about it, and strengths and/or weaknesses they sensed in their Spanish learning. They were also asked to name one person with whom they would like to be able to have a conversation in Spanish if it were possible, and to describe what they might talk about.

In Unit 1A the participants produced their first target language writing sample in the form of a paragraph describing a typical school day routine.

Class discussion topics within this unit included (a) the featured artwork (*El día del maestro*, by Simón Silva) at the beginning of the chapter, (b) a fragment of the poem *Versos sencillos* by José Martí, (c) the differences in classes, schedules, and grades observable on a report card from a Mexican high school, and (d) the city of Guanajuato, Mexico.

This unit concluded with a test that featured one oral comprehension/limited-response exercise, two multiple-choice exercises, two matching exercises, and a written limited response exercise.

***Unit 1B: ¿Qué haces después de clases? (weeks 6, 7, 8, and 9)***

As its title suggests, this unit's focus was extracurricular activities.

Vocabulary and grammar featured in the unit included:

- Re-entry vocabulary and grammar: places, activities and sports; the verb *ir*
- extracurricular activities
- talking about what and who people know and what they know how to do using the verbs *saber* and *conocer*
- making comparisons with *tan* and *tanto* expressions
- using *hace...que* expressions to express “how long”

During this unit, students were placed into cooperative learning groups that would last for the duration of the study. I assembled the groups based on my observations of students' work habits and personalities in the preceding weeks of classes. There were four groups of four students each, and one group of five students. Figure 1 shows the composition of these groups and their seating arrangement in the classroom.

The major speaking practice activity in this unit was the 3-step interview cooperative learning activity (see Appendix J), the outcomes of which were integrated into individual oral presentations in which students reported on what they learned about one classmate or another person from outside the class whom they interviewed. These presentations constituted the major assessment for the culmination of the unit. They were graded with the use of an oral presentation rubric (see Appendix K).

Additional speaking practice opportunities in this unit included a cooperative group reading and discussion of an article on Celia Cruz, paired practice with expressions of comparisons, and cooperative practice using expressions of time and duration. Class discussion topics included the chapter introduction artwork (Antoni Berni's *Club Atlético Nueva Chicago*), a brochure advertising a health club, and the Mexican city San Miguel de Allende.

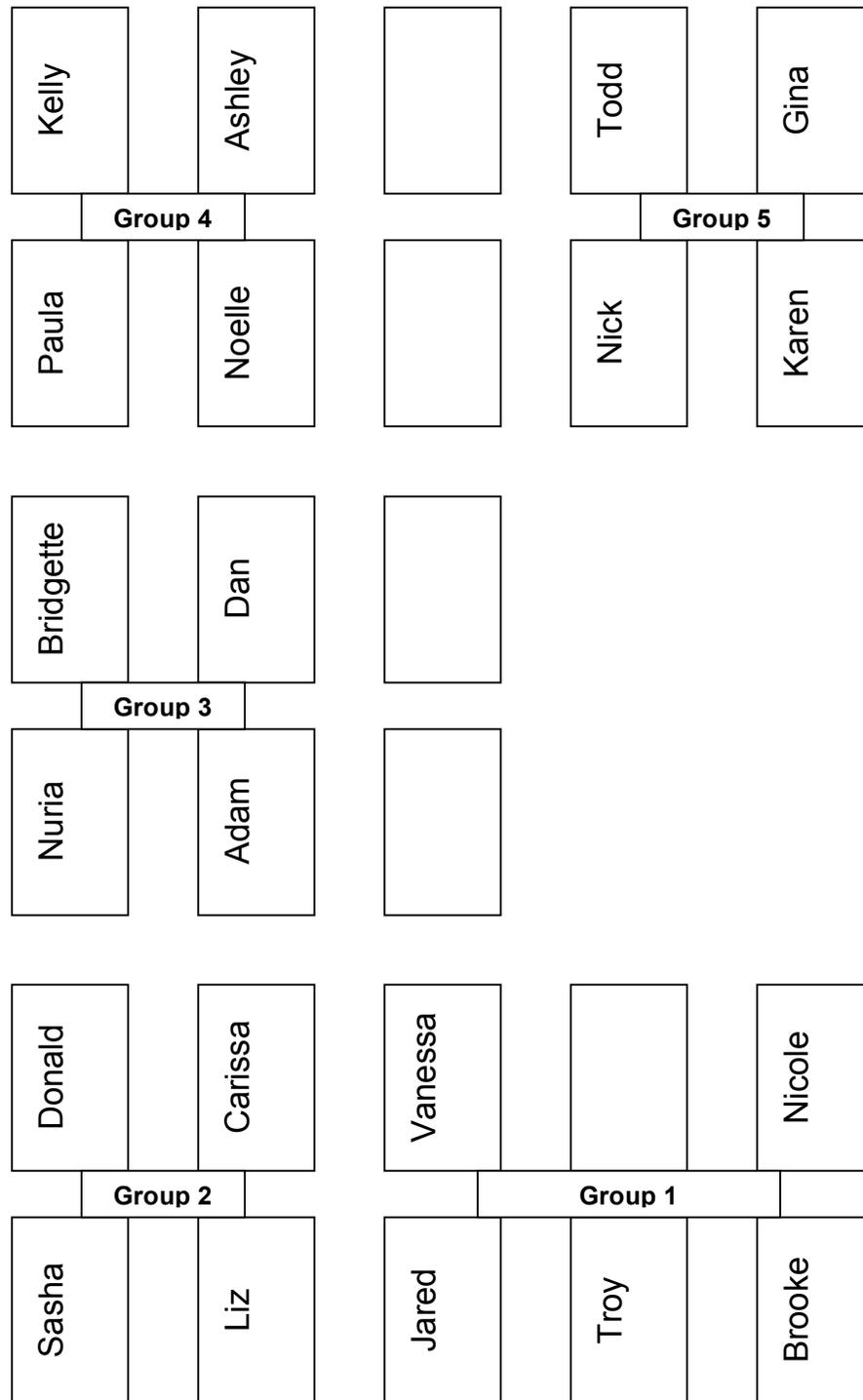


Figure 1. Cooperative group composition and seating arrangement.

**Unit 2A: ¿Cómo te preparas? (weeks 9, 10, 11, and 12)**

The theme of this unit was getting ready for a special event. The major grammar topic was the use of reflexive verbs and pronouns. Other featured grammatical and vocabulary categories were:

- Re-entry vocabulary and grammar: body and clothes; verbs that combine with infinitives
- vocabulary related to personal hygiene and taking care of oneself
- uses of and differences between the verbs *ser* and *estar*
- possessive adjectives
- special events in different cultures

The Jigsaw activity (see Appendix L) for cooperative groups was implemented in this unit. Each member of each group received a number from 1 to 4, and like-numbered students from around the room met at one of four areas. They were given one copy per group of a handout that explained a small portion of information about the long forms of possessive adjectives in Spanish. Ten minutes were provided to read and discuss this information with each other. Afterward the cooperative groups reconvened and each member was to share the information taken from the focus group. Students were asked to give feedback following this activity. For this they answered three questions:

- What was a positive outcome of this activity?

- What was a negative aspect of this activity?
- What do you think would have made this activity better?

In week 11, participants responded to the second reflective journal prompt (see Appendix M). This time they provided information about their attitudes and anxiety with regard to speaking Spanish in different contexts, and their opinions on having speaking errors corrected.

The entire last week of October was spent on reflexive verb instruction and practice. Various listening comprehension, written, and oral practice activities were used in class. One such activity involved cooperative groups selecting a picture of a celebrity from several that were available. Each group wrote a detailed description of the celebrity's routine for getting ready for a special event.

Part of one class was devoted to analysis of errors made by various students on one of the written reflexive verb activities. The errors were presented anonymously so that students would feel comfortable commenting on what mistakes were made, why they may have been made, and what corrections would be appropriate.

A sentence strip activity (see Appendix N) was used within cooperative groups to reinforce word order, reflexive constructions, and use of chapter vocabulary in context. Students were given color-coded pieces of card stock, each piece containing a different word. The pieces of

paper were to be arranged in the correct order to form a sentence or question. The activity is useful in getting students to analyze the details of a sentence including noun-verb and noun-adjective agreement, punctuation, and capitalization. Students were instructed to only speak in Spanish during the activity, and only one student was allowed to physically manipulate the word strips, responding to the verbal prompts of other group members.

After reading some students' responses to Journal 2, I began using the online instructional series *Mi vida loca* to try to address concerns about pronunciation. Several participants commented throughout the study that pronunciation was something they worried about when they communicated in the target language. The series in question was an entertaining, mystery-themed story that was experienced in first-person format. It was provided by the BBC on its website, [www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com). Although the series was designed for a purely novice learner of Spanish and contained a number of basic survival phrases, it offered very up-to-date video footage of Madrid and other locations in Spain, and was very engaging to students. More importantly, there was significant pronunciation modeling built into each episode, and students were prompted to repeat expressions and phrasings throughout.

Unit 2A concluded with a test containing one matching exercise, one multiple-choice exercise, one limited-response exercise, and two cloze exercises.

***Unit 2B: ¿Qué ropa compraste? (weeks 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16)***

This unit spanned mid-November to the holiday break, including the shortened weeks around the Thanksgiving holiday. The thematic focus of the unit was shopping. It was also the unit of study that featured the crucial introduction to the preterit tense, which marked the students' first foray into expressing events that are not either in the present, or continuing from some point in the past into the present. Major topics within the unit were:

- Re-entry vocabulary and grammar: shopping terms, colors and descriptions; cardinal numbers from 1 to 100,000
- clothing and making purchases
- use and forms of regular preterit tense verbs
- descriptive words
- words in Spanish with Arabic roots
- demonstrative adjectives
- using adjectives as nouns

In this unit of study there were three days when I dedicated time at the beginning of the lesson to engaging participants in instructional

conversations (2007). I would pose a question or speak briefly about my own conversation, then elicit responses or comments from students about the topic introduced. Two of these involved holiday or vacation experiences and one was about weekend plans. Students were encouraged to respond in Spanish but when they could not they were free to use English. The expectation was set, from the beginning, that after an English utterance the teacher would repeat what they said in Spanish, and in turn they were to repeat the Spanish phrasing.

Class discussion topics in this unit were (a) the featured artwork at the beginning of the chapter (one of Diego Velázquez' portraits of Margarita de Austria) and background information about the painting, (b) differences in clothing sizes and appropriate dress in Spanish-speaking cultures, and (c) Mexican participation in World War II.

Students wrote a third reflective journal entry during this unit, the prompt for which (see Appendix O) contained a number of questions about social interaction in their Spanish class. They were asked to consider how well they knew their classmates, how important they thought it was to know their peers, and how they thought this knowledge impacted their comfort level in class.

Cooperative group speaking practice in this unit required the participants to use the preterit tense for regular verbs, demonstrative

adjectives, and adjectives as nouns. These activities were carried out as modeled in the textbook, though as always I demonstrated a sample interaction for students prior to their independent practice.

The major oral language assessment for Unit 2B was a skit that was designed, rehearsed, and performed by students in their cooperative groups (see Appendix P). This skit was to include elements of clothing and shopping, and required integration of the preterit tense into the spoken lines of the participants. Three full class periods were allotted for brainstorming and writing the skit, and parts of three other periods were set aside for students to rehearse. Like the other oral communication projects, this one was assessed with a rubric that students had from the first day they began to construct it (see Appendix Q). Unlike the prior oral assessments, I used a dual rubric to form the grade for students – one component was based on individual effort and performance while the other was based on group dynamics and polish of the final product.

## **Data Collection**

Data to be analyzed from the intervention period was culled from multiple sources in order to ensure the highest degree of reliability.

### ***Participant observations***

Throughout the study I kept a clipboard in hand or close by in order to have a place to record what I saw and heard during the 42 minutes per day that I spent with the participants. Whether during teacher-centered time when direct instruction occurred and students reacted to me or each other, or during the frequent cooperative group or paired practice/conversation time, I made every effort to capture the students' comments, questions, discourse, actions, and reactions that form the tapestry of daily classroom reality. Some days yielded bountiful information and led me to reflect and ask questions which would change the direction of the class in days to come. On other days when I looked back on my notes to type them and enter them in my field log, it seemed as though I had sat by myself in a classroom, waiting in vain for something meaningful to happen. Such was the ebb and flow of energy in period five.

During these observations I tried at all times to maintain a level of objectivity that allowed me to record only what was there for all to witness, and to withhold my subjective reactions for later reflection. This was not always easy; getting to know students at the level it takes to represent

them truthfully and responsibly in a study like this requires one to have a human connection with one's participants. It took constant effort, especially in the first days of observation, to not cross into emotive territory while recording what was happening around me.

### ***Field log***

My participant observations, along with my reflections on those notes, were typed and transferred to my field log. The field log also included participants' responses to reflective journal prompts, FLCAS results, grades from oral and written assessments, a set of student reactions to the Jigsaw activity, and student interview transcripts. These items were maintained by category and chronologically within categories, and were all subject to coding and later analysis.

### ***Participant interviews and reflective journal entries***

Eight participants were interviewed on a voluntary basis at the conclusion of the intervention period. I used some general questions and some that were tailored to the individuals based on participant observations and my reflections (see Appendix R). Generally speaking, the questions used in the interviews addressed students' experiences speaking Spanish in class, and their perspectives on having done so in cooperative learning situations. In order to get the whole picture from the participants who volunteered, I tried to follow Seidman's (1998) advice by

avoiding leading questions and focusing on using those whose structure was more open-ended, using prompts such as “What was it like . . .” and “Tell me about . . .” whenever possible.

The students wrote three reflective journal responses during the study, however more had been planned originally. The prompts for the journal entries sought their perspectives on various dimensions of their Spanish II experience, and were tailored to facilitate triangulation with other sources of data. The responses produced insights that have added to my understanding of the students’ experiences in my classroom. Since they were written early enough in the study, the first and second responses also allowed me to adjust my strategies and procedures in class.

### ***The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale***

This was an instrument I discovered early in the formation of the research design, and was integral in the germination of my original research question. The participants completed the FLCAS at the beginning and end of the study period. I tabulated the answers from both for comparison purposes. Although the results were not subjected to any rigorous quantitative analysis, my intention was to add one more perspective on the journey we took together.

***Oral assessments and self-evaluations***

Individual scores on student oral presentations were added to the body of data available for analysis. Each of the three major oral communication projects had its own rubric for assessment, and the scores that these rubrics generated gave me one more way to look at the data. Finally, the participants completed self-evaluations of their Spanish usage at the end of many classes. From these numbers I was able to calculate averages for students on a lesson-by-lesson basis and by month.

## THIS YEAR'S STORY

### Alex, Enrique, or George?

I have heard it said that Spanish II is all about verbs. I have been teaching it for almost a decade now, and I would agree. In Spanish I students learn phrases, colors, numbers, adjectives, some nouns, and the fundamentals of oral and written communication. They operate in the present—the here and the now. In Spanish II the past tense enters the picture, and everything changes. Spanish verb tenses have their unique pitfalls and irregularities that make actions, and talking about them, more complex than in English. Confronted with the term *conjugate*, at one point or another many beginning learners of Spanish will ask overtly or internally, “What is this business of conjugating, and why do we have to do it in Spanish? After all, you don’t have to do it in English.” This is of course not true, but the process is different, and not necessarily intuitive. To pay homage to that lovely figure, the verb conjugation, with its six (or five, if one ignores the quintessentially Iberian *vosotros*) variations arranged in two columns (singular and plural), each containing the first-, second-, and third-person forms of the verb, allow me to introduce the participants in my study using each possible conjugation. The information that follows comes from the first reflective journal entry that the participants wrote during the study.

***First-person singular (yo)***

Yo soy Todd. That means “I am Todd”. Or “My name is Todd”. I’m not sure which, because I thought it was “Me llamo es Todd”. Either way, I am learning Spanish because I know you need a couple years of a language to get into most colleges. What am I going to do with it? I don’t know . . . maybe talk to some Latin girls? That would be great! But also I would be better set to talk to Spanish-speaking people who are moving to the USA. There are a lot of them, you know.

***Second-person singular, informal (tú)***

Tú eres Kelly. That is your name, right? So, I read here in your journal that your motivation is your family. They all got to live in Chile for a while, including your older sister, but you missed out on that. Born too late, huh? That is a shame. Don’t worry, you can learn a lot in this class, and if you keep at it you can have that conversation in Spanish with your sister that you mentioned. Oh, and you prefer reading in Spanish? Well, plenty of opportunities are on the way. But don’t forget that you have to speak it once in awhile, too.

***Third-person singular (él, ella, usted [the ‘formal’ you], and ‘it’)***

Él es Donald. He likes math, and he is good at it. Spanish? Well, not as much. It is more of a struggle. He is studying it to get into college. Latin in the 8th grade was too hard, and then in 9th he had *that* teacher,

you know, the one that was not invited back the next year? It gives him an excuse, no doubt about it. What about last year? Oh, well, last year he took Spanish II for about two weeks. Dropped it. Why? He said it was too hard. I can't imagine how hard this year is then, after not studying a foreign language for a whole year. Like Gina, Donald would choose to speak with George Lopez if he spoke fluently. Could it be that Donald admires Mr. Lopez' ability to make others laugh?

*Ella es Sasha.* This is her third language, since she can already speak Twi, the language her parents spoke in Ghana, their homeland. She says speaking Spanish will open doors for her later in life. Being conversant in three languages will certainly not hurt her chances. She says she would speak to David Archuleta if she had the chance, and maybe he would even sing her a song. He is her favorite singer, after all.

*Usted es Sr. Jacoby.* You are our teacher. Some days it seems like all you want from us is the right verb conjugation. Don't you know it's hard to know what to say or write sometimes?

*Es un grupo bastante grande.* Yes, a pretty big group. We're talking about the group of students who say that they are taking Spanish in order to get foreign language credits that the colleges will want to see on their transcripts. Two-thirds of the class! You already know about Donald and Todd, then there are Nicole, Brooke, Bridgette, Gina, Carissa, Liz,

Vanessa, and Adam. Jared too; he is even more specific. He is only a freshman, but has had his eyes set on Georgetown since he was little. And then Nick, yes, Nick is even thinking there might be a scholarship waiting for him if he does well enough. It is nice to see so many aspirations to college education. Hopefully this group has some interest in being able to communicate with people, too.

***First-person plural (nosotros)***

*Nosotros hablaríamos con nuestros cantantes favoritos.* What's that, you ask? We said "We would speak with our favorite singers". Well you know who I would talk to, I already told you. David Archuleta. But Nuria and Liz would rather speak with Enrique Iglesias. Carissa says Ricky Martin would be her first choice. Who is Ricky Martin?

***Second-person plural, informal (vosotros)***

*Vosotros hablaríais con unos jugadores de béisbol.* Did you all get that? Don't forget about *vosotros*. So, you all would choose to talk to some baseball players in Spanish if you could, eh? Jared tells me he would talk strategy with Vladimir Guerrero, Todd would like to talk to Alex Rodriguez, and Nick would like to get some pointers from Carlos Zambrano. You all better learn some baseball vocabulary first!

***Third-person plural (ellos, ellas, and ustedes [the “formal” you all])***

*Ellos hablarían con sus amigos.* They (Troy and Noelle) would talk to their friends. Troy has lots of friends and teammates on his soccer team who speak Spanish, and he would love to know what they’re saying and be a part of their conversations. Noelle’s friend, Martin, worked at the horse stables where she rides. He had to move to Texas. Noelle herself is hoping to be an equine veterinarian (specialty in anesthesiology) and knows that there are a lot of Spanish speakers in the equestrian world, so this is the language for her.

*Ellas hablarían con sus familias.* Who are *ellas*? They are Kelly, who would talk to her sister, and Nicole and Brooke, whose families don’t speak Spanish, but for whom they would like to show off what they have learned. Even Nuria, who speaks wonderful Spanish, knows that perhaps she could spell and read a little better than what she learned at home.

*Ustedes son un grupo diverso.* Very diverse indeed! Your interests are unique, and your motivations so varied! I hope I can meet all of your needs this year.

**Peruana? That Sounds Like . . .**

On a warm Tuesday morning in September it was brought to my attention that *peruana* (Peruvian) sounds like *marijuana*. Todd and Donald were indeed repeating the pronunciations of various Latin American

nationalities in Spanish as I had asked the students to do, but they were adding their own embellishments. Every time they could think of a way to do so, they said another word that rhymed or played a sort of association game with countries and their known exports—human, narcotic, or otherwise. This was to be the first full, five-day week of the school year; it was time to get down to business. With Labor Day, summer vacation, and daily class roster additions and subtractions fading into the past, fifth period Spanish II was already gearing up for the end of our first mini-unit, comprised of review topics from the Spanish I year.

We started today's lesson with a beleaguered-looking Dan arriving late, complaining that he had received too many punches in the shoulder for his birthday (this being a juvenile ritual that, thankfully, I cannot remember being part of my adolescence). Throughout the nationalities activity, Nuria and Bridgette were very vocal participants. I knew Nuria was a native speaker of Mexican heritage, but at that time I only suspected that Bridgette had some extra-class exposure to the Spanish language, based on her enthusiasm and well-tuned use of Spanish phonetics.

Despite the inappropriate stereotypes and language play, the lesson had gone well. I was convinced that I had heard a multitude of student voices and that everyone had begun to associate the nationalities

with their corresponding nations. There was energy in this class period, and that is a critical component of making oral communication happen .

### **Jeopardy!**

*That's not fair! Paula is answering everything!*

Bridgette was probably reflecting the thoughts of other students, and she was right on the second point. Nearly every question I asked elicited an answer from Paula, even when it was not her team's turn to respond. But was it unfair? Would it have been fairer to ask her to remain silent? Paula's Peruvian heritage and status as one of only two native speakers in the classroom made her an expert in our little review game. Unlike the television version of the game, students had to listen to my clues without any visual support. I repeated each question at least twice, and the game was turn-based so no team could dominate the contest by constantly being the first to respond. I also tried to make sure that the native speakers were on different teams so that the other students neither gave up nor complained excessively of unfairness.

Ten or fifteen minutes into the game, the other side of the proficiency coin was revealed in a most discouraging way. Todd, who had been talking about football off and on, and who had already attempted to answer at least twice, offered yet another incorrect response. As I opened up the question to the other teams (this happened any time a team gave a

wrong answer on its turn), I heard Bridgette and another of Todd's teammates advise him "not to talk anymore". Thus chastened, he was noticeably less apt to participate for the rest of that class, and spent most of what remained of our game with his head down or engaged in some other idle, distracted behavior.

It is not unusual for students to play this game in a competitive way, but to see it develop this way was frustrating. I always remind students to listen to the question carefully, and then converse with their team before anyone volunteers an answer. This procedure was only followed by some teams, and infrequently. Part of me felt that Todd had received his due for being off-task and distracting earlier in the game, but at what cost? His mannerisms thus far in the young school year had shown me a learner who tried and wanted to speak Spanish, but also one who lacked confidence and was self-deprecating in a rather public way. What would an episode like this one do to his self-image as a language learner? How willing would he be to contribute his ideas the next time an opportunity arose?

And then there was Paula. The questions in this game were so easy for her, which may have been a welcome change of pace in her daily academic schedule. Consequently she had to deal with being one of the two know-it-alls in the room, and with her classmates' vocalized

complaints about it. The game was Jeopardy, but if Paula had thought it was double jeopardy, who could blame her?

### **Dan's Incident**

At the end of week two, the class looked ahead to unit 1A. Part of the preparation involved reading the unit objectives and discussing them, allowing students to give their own interpretations of what they would lead to in terms of topics and activities. Our textbook series featured a different work of art for each unit introduction, often paintings that are thematically matched to the subject matter to be studied. They appear in the textbooks and on beautiful, full-color overhead transparencies. The painting in question on this particular day was Simón Silva's *Día del maestro*, which is a relatively straightforward image of a row of students standing, almost at attention, in front of a row of staggered books. The visual content is not difficult to grapple with, contains only a few items (the vocabulary for which should be known to students at this level), and offers multiple interpretations and avenues for class discussion.

Unfortunately, the discussion that I had hoped to foster on this day never developed as planned. Dan arrived late to class, mumbling vague complaints while students looked at the projection of Silva's painting. As I tuned in more to what was going on, so did many students, and soon the focus of the class had shifted away from the painting and to Dan.

**Dan:** *Yo sir! I need to go to the nurse.*  
**Bridgette:** *He says he's dizzy.*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *Dan, are you ill?*  
**Dan:** *Yeah, I don't feel good. I feel like I'm going to throw up or something.*

As I wrote him a nurse's pass, Dan managed to stand, gather his things, and sort of slide/shuffle for a few feet along the front wall. Unfortunately this was where the projection was, and it now acted as a sort of cruel spotlight on him.

Donald and Todd—not exclusively, but most audibly—were commenting on the spectacle in front of them. Dan heard them and muttered short replies as well as a running internal monologue on his predicament.

**Dan:** *Yeah, you're funny. Real funny! I just need some crackers or somethin'. You're funny! Need some crackers. Maybe it's cuz I didn't eat.*

My train of thought ran something like this: Is this kid diabetic or something? I have a mountain of paperwork about his accommodations and so on, but I did not remember reading about anything like that. I have never seen anything like this before. Wait, has more than a minute gone by, and he still hasn't reached the door?

**Sr. Jacoby:** *Dan, forget it, I'm calling to have somebody come to get you. Just sit back down for a minute and relax, okay?*

- Dan:** *What? They're gonna come with a wheelchair. Nah, I'm not going in no wheelchair.*
- Adam:** *Mr. Jacoby, if you want I can take him down to the nurse.*
- Sr. Jacoby:** *Gracias, Adam, but I can't take the chance. If he fell or something . . . we have to have somebody to come get him.*

About two minutes after I called, one of our school nurses arrived with a wheelchair and Dan got himself on it gingerly. Still muttering, provoking his onlookers even more, he was wheeled out of the room.

Academic outcomes aside, I learned much about my participants on this day. Although it was an isolated incident that would not be repeated, several students were utterly unsympathetic to Dan's plight. Many laughed openly during the incident. The seriousness of the problem may have been exaggerated by Dan; there was a degree of melodrama throughout. Dan returned to class perhaps ten minutes later, showing no discernable signs of his earlier affliction. One more casualty of the day's events? I ran out of time, and could not collect student self-evaluations.

Adam had volunteered to help Dan, and I was glad for that. Dan had shown a capacity for making friends that was less than impressive, and it was only mid-September. If he at least had Adam to lean on this year, it would help. However in coming weeks I would see that this friendship was fragile, and other students' acceptance of Dan, tenuous.

### **Weeks 3 and 4: Conversation, Isolation, and Frustration**

By the third and fourth weeks of the study I had begun to see patterns of behavior that would form my opinions of some participants, for better or worse. My observation-recording abilities were improving, and I was able to capture more bits of salient student discourse. This allowed me to reflect a bit more deeply on what they were thinking, and on how they were experiencing Spanish II so far.

Socially, it was hard not to notice certain trends, one example being the independent-learning preferences of Sasha and Kelly. I noted several times in my log that each had opted out of potential paired work in class. Sasha interacted with other students on a daily basis, but often chose to work alone. The same could not be said for Kelly, who on more than one occasion chose to sit somewhere that offered a buffer zone of at least one empty desk between her and any other student. Even when instructed to work in pairs she mostly avoided others. I ended up stopping by for a quick exchange or two, taking on the role of *Estudiante A* or *B* in whichever activity students were working on. I was not sure if this was the right thing to do, though. Was I simply enabling her anti-social behavior?

Todd, Donald, Adam, and Dan were showing variable levels of participation, engagement with subject matter, and on-task behaviors.

Donald would alternately show flashes of interest and lapses of concentration.

**Donald:** *Is that "Who is the professor"?*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *Sí, "¿Quién es el profesor?"*  
**Donald:** *Yes!*

**Sr. Jacoby:** *La página es treinta y dos. Treinta y dos. Okay, page 32, actividad doce. Primero leemos las direcciones, ¿vale? A ver...*  
**Donald:** *What page are we on?*

Todd continued to participate multiple times in some lessons and not at all in others. His contributions were hit-or-miss, and they were always issued in a loud, somewhat awkward voice that I had initially thought was done to mock the language or its phonetic system (but, I would later realize, was simply awkward). Sometimes, despite the fact that his efforts to communicate in Spanish were genuine, they were not warmly received.

**Todd:** *. . . muchos veces.*  
**Nick:** *(irritated) It's MUCHAS veces!*  
**Todd:** *I don't know, I'm trying!*

But as noted, the duality continued. On a nearly daily basis I noticed off-topic talk and other distractions. For many of these behaviors his co-conspirator was Donald. Todd was much more efficient when working with Nick. And so, the interaction above notwithstanding, his seating

assignment was changed to foster the latter paired work arrangement, and to eliminate the former.

Adam and Dan maintained an on-again, off-again cordiality and somewhat functional paired work partnership. They were not ideally matched, but I was content to leave things as they were, if for no other reason than that I had not yet seen any other feasible partnerships for Dan. These two were not always productive, frequently having only one textbook between them (usually Adam's) and often getting off to a slow start on practice activities both oral and written. Dan seemed supremely lacking in confidence where the Spanish language was concerned. I was therefore elated, albeit briefly, when upon entering class toward the end of September he greeted me first.

**Dan:** *Hola.*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *(a bit taken aback) ¡Hola, Dan! ¿Cómo estás?*

Dan's response was to slow down, glance at me for a second, and then walk past me to his seat without a word. Baby steps, I told myself.

At the end of the same class period students were handing in their writing assignments, and as Jared handed me his paper he made a telling comment.

**Jared:** *This isn't graded, is it?*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *No, this draft is for me to give you feedback and suggest corrections so you can take it back and improve what you wrote.*

**Jared:** *Kind of a big jump from Spanish I to this year. Last year I had like a hundred average.*

Jared did not have a 100% average on that day, nor had he on any other after the first set of grades were in. While it was clear from my observations that he was interested in Spanish, his work ethic was not the best and he was prone to distraction by Troy, who sat nearby, or Donald and Todd, who were loud enough to compensate for their distance.

At the end of week 4, I was feeling optimistic again. I had seen a productive exchange between Troy and Nuria in which she gladly provided him with Spanish of some English words he posed to her. Donald had asked, “How many *puntos* off is it if we hand it in *mañana*?” which, despite being an indication that he had not completed an assignment on time, was one of the first instances of students using interlanguage that I had heard to this point. Finally, I had given Dan a new (for him) notebook from the file drawer full of partially used notebooks that former students had used as journals but had never taken back. Ripping out the few used pages, he seemed genuinely grateful, and used it for several days in a row.

### **Verb Stems? Conjugating Adjectives?**

The lesson on stem-changing verbs was grammar-intensive, involved significant note taking by students, and went by quickly. Looking back on my participant observations later that day, I assumed that my

sparse notes were due to most of my time having been spent delivering top-notch grammar instruction and insightful, razor-sharp answers and examples that went right to the heart of the doubts that students had expressed during the lesson. In the following days, I discovered that I had not hit all of my targets, or that some of those had been hidden from view. There was work to be done.

As students reviewed answers to an exercise on stem-changing verbs that had been the previous night's homework assignment, I sensed confusion in the room. Sasha was the first to vocalize it.

**Sasha:** *How do you know when to change "e" to "ie"?*

I answered, reminding students why they might also hear these verbs referred to as "boot" verbs. Sasha seemed satisfied. Others were not.

**Bridgette:** *Yeah, but how do you know what changes?*

I thought for a moment and attacked this question by reiterating that it was always the second-to-last vowel, or the one before the ending, that would change. Bridgette's facial expression left no doubt that she was still unsure about how to proceed. She said something that I could not hear, and in response Noelle turned halfway around and said, over her shoulder, "You just guess".

Ouch. Informed guessing can be a useful strategy; indeed, Kohl (2002) affirmed that it "was more important than avoidance of learning"

(Delpit p. 148). It can sustain a conversation in a second language. It can lead to a higher score on one's SAT. But on this topic, I was so sure that I had left no room for misunderstanding, and after all it was just about conjugating stem-changing verbs. How easy was that?

Not so easy, Señor, was the answer. Not so easy at all. I had little time to spend worrying about this. Further along in the lesson students were working on integrating affirmative and negative words into an oral practice activity for pairs or small groups. I was reviewing one of the model statements.

<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>Why ningún and not ninguno?</i>
<b>Karen:</b>	<i>Because you conjugate it.</i>
<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>Okay, let's not use the c-word when we're talking about adjectives.</i>

In retrospect, this was not anything to take issue with, and I am glad I did not launch into some explanation of how one never hears “conjugate” mentioned as a process performed on adjectives. In fact I could have ignored it, since conjugating a verb means applying the appropriate ending to match the subject, and in a similar way Spanish adjectives must agree with the nouns they modify. No big deal. Except that a few days later I was checking on students' progress on some independent practice work, and I noticed that all of Donald's adjective forms were unchanged from the “root” form printed in the textbook.

- Sr. Jacoby:** *But remember, you have to change them because they're adjectives. They have to agree with their nouns.*
- Donald:** *Oh, I hate adjectives because you have to conjugate them.*

Why did this perturb me? On one level, precise grammar relies on rules and definitions. I think that in these students' utterances about conjugating adjectives I detected a general lack of awareness of parts of speech and how they interact in sentence structure. In reflecting on these moments, I had to confront a belief system of mine, or a weakness that I must acknowledge. I teach grammar almost exclusively via direct instruction. I eschew other approaches that hold that students will be able to assimilate the rules vis-à-vis ample exposure to correct form. And why is this? Is it related to the fact that I lack confidence in maintaining Spanish discourse throughout a class period? I believe this relationship exists, and it poses a very different question about the role of oral communication in Spanish in my classroom. Perhaps I need to explore this question in the future.

### **Getting to Know You. Or Not.**

Shortly after class began on September 29th, Noelle made a comment that would change the way I looked at my study, and would re-focus my observer's eye in the weeks to come. Arriving at her seat, she sat and began working. A minute or so later, she announced to nobody in particular that she was going to move up a seat. I was speaking to Jared

as I heard this and without looking up, I said “Okay, but who usually sits there”? Noelle replied, “I don’t know, some girl”.

I recorded this rather casual remark, so it must have made an impression on me at that moment. Later, reflecting on the day’s notes, I thought to myself, “Well, it’s only late September. Perhaps students are still in the process of ‘feeling each other out’”. I have seen cases where midway through a school year it came to light that students did not even know the first names of others in their class. Many times there was some embarrassment on the part of the unknowing student. It is easy to understand how this can happen, however. Lots of kids rotate through seven or even eight different classroom settings each day. Whereas a teacher’s priority early in the year is to learn as many names as possible, students’ responsibilities are ideally academic. Of course the social dimension exists; they are teenagers, after all. But as Donald would later note in Journal 3, there was some difficulty getting to know everyone because not all of the study participants were in the same grade. Though I would like to think that every student would try at least a little, that is just not the way it is. Kelly, for example, was not making any such effort. And Vanessa put it bluntly in her third journal: “I don’t think I need to know the other students better because if I wanted too (sic), I would”. Nicole concurred, partially: “I don’t feel it’s important b/c we’re here to learn and

we're not allowed to socialize so we can't. I wouldn't mind knowing them better. I just don't think it's real important unless we're in groups".

The last sentence had ended with a period after "important", but Nicole crossed it out and appended the afterthought "unless we're in groups". For Nicole, then, cooperative group scenarios that required interaction to function properly, were justification for getting to know one another a little better. I am not sure if Vanessa would have agreed, and my observations of her approach to group work suggest she may not.

Noelle's original comment led me to consult my literature review. Young (1990) in particular found that an important factor in student foreign language anxiety is how well students know their classmates. The participants' responses on the first FLCAS indicated higher levels of anxiety on five items in particular. Two of these are connected to interpersonal dynamics in class, though neither one (and none of the items on the FLCAS) directly addresses anxiety stemming from unfamiliarity with one's classmates. The two items of note were:

7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at Spanish than I am.
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking Spanish in front of others.

Implementing cooperative learning opportunities, I hoped, would help to address the issue of students' feelings of inferiority by putting them in

close contact with others who also felt they were struggling. They would see, shortly, that there were many others in the same who were dealing with linguistic challenges each day.

If students didn't even know the names of the people who sat in front of them, would not everything about classroom discourse be more taxing, and more stressful? I needed to consider this dimension of student anxiety more carefully.

### **It's All About Who You Know. Just Don't Tell Anyone.**

How to use the verbs *saber* and *conocer*, often expressed in Spanish lessons as *saber* "versus" *conocer*, is a topic that requires review at all levels of high school Spanish, since many students fail to fully grasp the differences in their usage the first time they learn about them. During this lesson I demonstrated the use of *conocer* by asking students what celebrities they knew or what interesting places (other cities, for example) they were familiar with.

**Sr. Jacoby:** *Bridgette, ¿conoces a Nueva York?*  
**Bridgette:** *Sí, conozco Nueva York un poco.*

**Sr. Jacoby:** *Nick, ¿tú conoces a una persona famosa?*  
**Nick:** *No conozco nadie famosa.*

Most students had little to say about knowing famous people. Then Dan spoke up.

**Sr. Jacoby:** *¿Nadie conoce a una persona famosa?*

**Dan:** *Yeah, Queen Latifah.*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *¿Sí? Dan, ¿tú conoces a Queen Latifah?*  
**Dan:** *Yeah. Sí. I mean...she's my aunt...Or my mom's, my mom's cousin or something.*

Immediately the audience began to render its judgment of Dan's claim. Soon he was deflecting "yeah, right" and other accusations that he was not being truthful. I could tell he was annoyed, and after a minute had passed we had moved on to other questions. But there remained an ugly feeling (Did anyone else feel it, besides me—and possibly Dan?) that a student's attempt to participate in the lesson had been snuffed out by cynicism and peer disdain for the participant himself.

A bit later, when students had time to practice their scripted dialogs for the following day's presentations, Dan asked if he and Adam could go last. I asked why they would want to do that, and looking away with a frown and a half-smirk that indicated self-doubt more than it did amusement, Dan said "I don't know Spanish".

Ewald (2007) and Young (1990) found that students experienced decreased anxiety when teachers made it clear that errors were not only common but were expected in language learning. I had made a point of telling students on a near-daily basis that I did not expect perfection but rather imperfection, that mistakes had to be made in order to learn, and that they could not be made (and therefore learning could not occur) if

students were unwilling to try to communicate. Here was one instance where that message failed to reach its intended receiver.

### **Oral Self-Evaluation in September**

Students turned in a total of 258 self-evaluation slips in September. There were 13 days on which the slips were handed out, and 14 of 21 participants responded on every one of those days. The average oral language self-evaluation score for the month was 5.0/10. The highest average rating (5.8/10) came from the class on September 18th, when we read and discussed José Martí's poem *Versos sencillos*. Surprisingly, students gave themselves the second-highest set of ratings (5.6/10) on the 23rd, which was the first day of instruction on stem-changing verbs and involved a mix of direct instruction and time to practice with partners. The lowest ratings came in the very next day (3.7/10), when they continued working with these verbs in conjunction with affirmative and negative words.

### **Dialog Day**

Dan got right to work when I told students, just after the bell, that they had a few minutes to practice their dialogs—i.e., to warm up—before the presentation phase began. It was a welcome sight, given his request from the previous day. Adam did not match his enthusiasm but cooperated.

All in all, the scripted dialog presentations went well. Despite my request to the contrary, few students maintained any sustained eye contact with their partners, instead relying heavily on their scripts despite the generous time provided for rehearsal in the days before. In fact only four students (Karen, Nick, Nuria, and Sasha) would end up scoring “4” on the preparedness criterion of the rubric. I was pleased with the overall performance of the class. Nobody showed any outward indications of being under extreme duress. Although Kelly and Brooke were barely audible, they did not seem rattled. Dan made a valiant effort despite the pronunciation difficulties he had. A few students even managed a level of, dare I say, acting. Bridgette, Sasha, and Ashley (who I later found out was to be in the school musical) seemed to play the part of their characters, rather than simply reading their lines. Finally, all students were respectful and attentive during their classmates’ readings.

I believe the attentiveness of the students to their classmates was due to the rubric’s attentiveness criterion. The idea worked, for there was nary an interruption or distraction throughout. Student self-evaluation scores were generally lower than normal on this day. Ironically, the day I had been waiting for, when I would hear students make their best, well-rehearsed efforts, was also a day when one requirement of the presentations had probably stifled their communicative impulses.

### A New Month, A New Unit

In Unit 1B students would learn about extracurricular activities. In the first few days the class discussions and group interactions (and lack thereof) continued to shed light on the oral communication tendencies of some of the participants. Kelly at first opted not to participate on Day 3, when I directed students to rove around the room and speak to as many others as time would allow. While they did that, they were to fill out a chart they had created about how various people chose to spend their free time. Kelly sat at her desk, literally glaring at the other students as they wandered around with their notebooks, looking for new people to talk to.

At one point I heard this volley from along the back wall:

**Bridgette:**                    *(to Adam) I'm asking you, and you're not answering.*

Adam did not answer. He grinned at Bridgette but said nothing.

Immediately to his left there was more discord.

**Paula:**                    *(to Dan, who had interrupted her twice as she tried to ask him a question) Can't you stop talking?*

**Dan:**                    *You gotta talk English to me!*

Just then I noticed that Ashley and Nicole had sat down and were working with Kelly, who seemed nonplussed. Meanwhile, Paula was again losing patience.

**Paula:**                    *(almost shouting) What do you do there!?*

Also, Bridgette seemed to have given up on Adam.

**Bridgette:** *Nuria, ¡ven aquí ahora! (Come here now!)*

The participants had produced quite a bit of awkward, syntactically-challenged Spanish discourse during the roaming interview time. There was also quite a bit of interlanguage communication, where English and Spanish words were mixing to communicate what students were unable to say strictly in Spanish. I was happy to hear this because in a few weeks students would be responsible for conducting their own in-depth interviews with a single partner. I also felt that if I were to rate my own use of Spanish today, I would not have been able to give myself anything over a 3 out of 10. Class management and activity clarification had sapped away many minutes during which I would have preferred to be operating in *español*.

The following day the class discussed Antoni Berni's painting *Club atlético Nueva Chicago*. There was enough familiar visual content in the painting to sustain some discussion in Spanish, and I asked all knowledge- and comprehension-level questions to try to keep our talk in the target language. Many students volunteered, including Vanessa. I wondered later if her participation was linked to the fact that the painting depicted an old-time soccer club, since she was on the girls team at the high school. Donald also had some input on the painting's style. I noted

that early in the discussion he had asked if there would be bonus (participation) points available that day.

There was a palpable drop-off in the enthusiasm of the group when we turned to the unit-specific vocabulary and began to practice pronunciation. A few students made repeated contributions in interpreting the words, many of which were cognates and almost all of which had a picture that accompanied them. Still, something had definitely been lost in the transition.

The next day, as students watched a video component to the textbook chapter in which young actors engaged in various extracurricular activities, I noticed Todd reacting to the video. Some minutes later I discovered why.

<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>Repitan, clase. Las artes marciales.</i>
<b>Class:</b>	<i>Las artes marciales.</i>
<b>Todd:</b>	<i>That's not a sport.</i>
<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>¿No es un deporte? ¿Por qué?</i>
<b>Todd:</b>	<i>Because I don't like it. I don't like that stuff.</i>

I asked students about other activities that I knew some of them enjoyed, drawing pictures on the board to convey meaning when needed, although most times those who were seated within earshot of Paula had no doubt about the meaning of my words since she was in the habit of translating what I said as I went along. Nuria was a vocal participant on this day as well, which was a nice change of pace because I had formed the opinion

that her typical behavior, that of a quiet observer, was a sign of boredom with work that was basic and unchallenging for her. At the same time, I would have to admit that I often appreciated her attentive but subdued demeanor because it provided the other learners with at least a chance to respond if Paula did not beat them to it.

### Thinking Aloud

As the novelty of October faded, days began to grow shorter and students' approach to Spanish class seemed to change. School was no longer an annoying, seven-hour intrusion into their days of sun and fun. Suddenly we were passing the midway point in the first marking period, and all things academic were growing in importance.

**Donald:** *What? Are you going to fail?*

**Todd:** *Yeah, probably! This is like my worst class!*

Todd actually had a "C" average on October 14th, but I understood his preoccupation with the grade. His performance and daily involvement in language learning were uneven. Things were going to get more difficult and complex, so he was right to be concerned.

In another week I would assign students to cooperative groups. It was a bit later than I had planned originally. Due to class roster changes, fall schedule irregularities, and my own workload, I had not managed to organize these groups by the start of Unit 1B. I told myself that it would not

really matter, and would actually give me a bit more time to observe students in order to arrange the best combinations that I could. Furthermore, I reasoned that if students spent roughly half of the intervention period working in pairs or small groups of their own design, and the other two months in a group selected by me, we might have a better distribution of experiences to draw on when reflecting on the impact of the groups.

One benefit of cooperative learning that I hoped to see was students working through language difficulties in a collaborative way, drawing on the different perspectives of their partners when they got stuck. On October 9th I witnessed a brief cognitive collaboration when Karen was confused by a cloze exercise answer that required an infinitive verb form. After weeks of hearing me extol the virtues of verb endings and agreement, she was failing to notice the “*va a*” that preceded the blank line. She asked “So how do you know when to do that, instead of conjugating the verb?”, to which I responded by calling her attention to the “going to” construction. Then, unprompted, Nick pointed out a similar situation.

**Nick:** *Yeah, It's like that in number two, where it says ¿Quieres...*

**Sr. Jacoby:** *Ah, es verdad. Exactamente, Nick. So you know that back at number two you use *asistir*, because...?*

**Nick:** *Uh, it just fits.*

Very well, it was probably unrealistic for me to hope he would say, “Well, clearly this is yet another example of a verb-plus-infinitive structure, Sr. Jacoby”. I was still proud, and very hopeful.

A few days later Donald was scrutinizing the word *juegas* (you play). He asked, “Why would it be *juegas*? Why wouldn’t it be *juegos* because it’s ‘he’”? Here Donald was again confusing verb conjugation with noun-adjective agreement, a misunderstanding of his that had been exposed before. Despite the confusion, it was good to hear how students were thinking about the language. These moments helped to germinate the idea that student metacognitive talk demanded more of my attention in the study. I would reflect more on this notion as I wrote my mid-study data assessment a week later.

### **New Groups**

On October 22nd I placed participants in their cooperative groups. Their first assignment in these groups was to read and write about an article on Celia Cruz. At first I was concerned. Bridgette rolled her eyes when she realized that she would be working with Dan. My inclusion of Nuria in her group, which I thought would please her, did little to soften the blow. Gina was less than thrilled to learn that Todd was in her group, and

this was a disappointment that she would continue to express whenever she had the chance in the next two months.

I had grouped Donald with Sasha, and had seated him next to her, hoping that the mix of abilities might benefit him. Unfortunately I would have to wait to see anything happen, because he left the room as soon as the reading activity began. Most students were productive from the start. For example, at least part of my strategy to place Todd seemed to be working.

**Todd:** *Does this say she's recorded over 70 CDs?*  
**Nick:** *Yeah . . .*  
**Todd:** *Well, put that, too.*  
**Nick:** *She's actress and cantante.*  
**Todd:** *(finishing Nick's thought) . . . for 50 años.*

Across the room, Troy said "Is that 1970?" Todd somehow heard him and answered "Yeah, that's when she got her first Grammy". A minute later, Nicole asked "What's *Astas Unidos*"? Unfortunately, nobody in her group answered. I wondered if she would have figured it out herself if she had properly decoded the word *Estados*, but I also wondered how it was that none of the others in her group were able to identify the Spanish term for "United States", or why they would have chosen not to.

Other indicators in the following days confirmed to me that my cooperative groups might work out after all, despite my second guessing on the first day. Noelle seemed to be enjoying her placement with Ashley,

and the latter appeared to be drawing Kelly out of her solitude at times. For the most part Paula was not very social with these three girls, but they appeared to cobble together a working relationship.

Group 3 had not really come together as a unit. Adam and Dan showed the ability to stay focused roughly half of the time. When they did, Dan was clearly not grasping the oral practice activities. He often repeated the model phrases or questions verbatim, not changing anything, and I detected a note of frustration from Adam, who for his part could not seem to break into the Bridgette-Nuria partnership. When he succeeded, Dan would withdraw and shut down, putting his head down or staring at the others, or sometimes off into space. Bridgette and Nuria were always on top of things and the degree to which Bridgette was able to keep pace, maintaining Spanish or interlanguage discourse, was satisfying to me.

### **Mi Vida Loca (Part I)**

Technology is a wonderful thing, but I believe that for many teachers there is some uncertainty about how to use it, and how often. In my career to date these questions have usually been trumped by the larger problem of availability. This year the World Languages department was able to acquire six new LCD projectors that connect to our laptop computers. This made it possible to plan to use online tools that could be displayed to the whole class on a more frequent basis.

At the end of the last school year I discovered the online Spanish learning tool *Mi vida loca* (My crazy life), a series of downloadable, interactive episodes on the British Broadcasting Corporation's website. The series was a first-person chronicle of a tourist's trip to stay at a friend's apartment in Madrid. It quickly turned into a mystery story, while allowing the user to 'meet' a number of people in different social contexts, grapple with a variety of cultural immersion situations, learn new vocabulary and expressions including many 'survival' phrases, and see different parts of Madrid and other locations. As I took stock of what I had learned so far before writing my methodological memo, I decided to add periodic use of *Mi vida loca* to my instruction. Despite the fact that the user had to follow a set order of experiences, its many situations were very authentic. Authenticity is a strived-for element in the language classroom, and in any subject area. Dewey recognized this, wondering how many students "found what they did learn so foreign to the situations of life outside the school as to give them no power of control over the latter?" (p. 26). Whether or not any of the participants ever visited Spain, the series was so well designed that the questions and scenarios could play out anywhere.

I connected the computer to the projector and some external speakers, and then guided students through the first episode, in which the

story unfolded and the user became acclimated to the interface with its subtitles and control options. I had a hunch that students would enjoy the change of pace, but I did not know whether they would buy into it (practice pronunciation when directed to, etc.) or merely enjoy the fact that the classroom was darker and that they were not conjugating verbs for once.

It turned out that I had guessed correctly. A few students offered to 'run' the next episode whenever we got to it, and with a bit of encouragement most of the class repeated the words and phrases that were stressed for pronunciation practice during the first episode. I heard Gina remark "This is how I learn", and noted that I would like to investigate the meaning behind that comment another day. Did she mean that she thought she learned best in an interactive environment, or with the aid of a computer simulation? Delpit said that "acquiring an additional code comes from identifying with the people who speak it, from connecting the language form with all that is self-affirming and esteem-building, inviting and fun" (p. 39). I thought the activity had been fun, engaging, and worthwhile. My decision was easy to make: we would do this again.

### **3-Step Interviews**

The day after cooperative groups were assigned, I reviewed interrogative words and the structure of questions with the class. They worked on a paired activity that required them to ask questions about their

partners' preferred leisure activities, using the words *Qué*, *Cuándo*, *Dónde*, and *Con qué frecuencia* (What, When, Where, and How often).

This activity, taken from their textbook, helped me prepare the students for the more involved 3-step interviews that would become their second oral presentation assessment. Everyone would have to interview a group member to learn about what the other person did in his or her free time. Students had to use a variety of interrogatives to get a complete picture of their partners' pastimes. I modeled the process of interviewing with a colleague who was willing to let me interview her, and who gracefully answered each question at a speed that was comprehensible for most of the participants. I paused after each response to write down what she had said, and I relayed my thoughts aloud for all to hear.

“Okay, she just told me ‘*prefiero leer por la noche*’. Now, that answered my question ‘*¿Cuándo te gusta leer?*’ It could end right there, but why not add a simple ‘*¿Por qué?*’ to find out why she prefers to read at night? Do you see how doing this requires little effort from the person asking the question, but will open up a whole new body of information from her?”

Students then had the rest of the class period to interview one or two of their cooperative partners. They would have a week or more of practice time and then would present the information in the form of a short

oral report. Unlike the scripted dialogs, little class time would be provided for this rehearsal. The students were expected to present the information with little or no reliance on any written material. In the end though, most relied heavily or entirely on 3" by 5" index cards, and a few simply clutched full-size sheets of notebook paper, despite my request that they not do so.

Anxiety ran high during the presentations. All students had a stack of listener slips on which they were instructed to write (a) the name of the presenter, (b) the name of the person who had been interviewed, (c) something they learned about the interviewee from the report, and (d) a commendation and/or recommendation for improving the report. These slips were anonymous, and before I gave each student the slips that classmates had filled out for him/her, I checked them for rude or inappropriate remarks. Thankfully there were none, but most of the comments focused on one of two things: the speaker having talked too softly to be heard, or over-reliance on the written material / insufficient memorization of the material.

The dirty word—memorization—is a sticky subject for me, and one that I have not yet resolved in my practice. I have conflicting feelings about it because on one hand, I always hated the onus of memorizing material for classes. Freire (2003/1997) wrote that the oppressed student (and memorization is viewed by many students as a form of oppression)

repeats and memorizes things “without perceiving what four times four really means, or realizing the true significance of ‘capital’ in the affirmation ‘the capital of Pará is Belém’, that is, what Belém means for Pará and what Pará means for Brazil” (p. 71). Is this not a different sort of memorization, though, from what I am asking my students to do? The students, collaboratively, created the information in the interviews. Part of me believes that memorization indicates a certain internalization of the language. Each student was there during the interview, so each was fully half of the endeavor. During the interviews themselves I had observed so much more English than Spanish in what was reported from the interviewees, although granted—most of the participants did not have Nuria or Paula for a partner.

Had this entire activity then been converted to no more than an exercise in translation? I began to doubt the interview’s usefulness as a method of putting students in an authentic communicative situation. Sitting down later with my notes and rubric to begin scoring the reports, I was uncertain what had been accomplished. I had wanted to see confident students sharing information with classmates about what they had learned. Instead, I felt that I had witnessed reluctant students reading what they had translated. I knew there was a big difference, and I think the students did too.

### Oral Self-Evaluation in October

In October the average rating students' gave for their use of Spanish to communicate in class was 4.3/10. This was a significant drop from September, and I had to wonder what all of the factors were that played into it. There were several grammar concepts introduced via direct instruction this month, but I thought that with the interview activity, discussions about artwork and Celia Cruz, and especially the beginning of formal cooperative group work, the participants might have at least paralleled their performance from September.

The cooperative groups did provide a spark; in the next seven class periods students completed six self-evaluations, two of which were the highest of the month. These days (both of which averaged 4.8/10) were Monday and Thursday of the reflexive verbs week. The lowest average rating for October (and second-lowest for the entire study) was for Tuesday the 14<sup>th</sup>, when students were working with comparisons using *tan* and *como*.

## Jigsaw: Possessive Adjectives

***Señor Jacoby:***

I'm going to use the Jigsaw activity today to get students involved in some reciprocal learning within their cooperative groups. Let's see . . . I've got this easy concept, possessive adjectives in their long forms, broken down as much as I possibly can. There are four sheets for the initial four groups to gather around and discuss, and then they will head back to their cooperative groups and have a solid twenty minutes for each person to share what they learned in the first focus group. Is twenty minutes too long? I guess if it is, I can use this extra practice activity in the workbook. Let's see what happens.

***Donald:***

So we were supposed to get into groups to learn something that Mr. Jacoby had printed out for us on a handout. I didn't realize at first that each of the four groups around the room had different stuff to learn. I didn't get why we had to be in these other groups – didn't we just get assigned cooperative groups? Anyway, there wasn't much on our paper, just some explanation about adjectives. Looked easy enough. Todd was in my group, which was cool, because I lost money on some of the football games this weekend and I wanted to see how he did. Then, all of a sudden, we had to get up and go back to our original group. Whoa, wait. To do what? I asked Mr. Jacoby and he seemed mad.

***Dan:***

I didn't get this at all. I don't know Spanish, so how did he expect me to know what's goin' on? I couldn't see that paper from where I was, I guess I was supposed to read it, but ain't nobody even talkin' to me. I just put my head down, I was tired. I don't know Spanish! So when they finally gave me the paper I didn't know what I was readin'. I mean it kind of looked like what I was workin' on with Mr. Jacoby last week when I went for help in fourth period. Yeah anyway Bridgette said I didn't do anything, but I didn't even get what I was supposed to do. I said, "Just give me a zero for today". That's what I learned—zero.

***Figure 2. Layered story about our Jigsaw experience.***

***Karen:***

Dan was in our group, which I know now. He didn't say anything when we were reading the paper, so I don't even know if he really understood what was there. It's just more adjectives, so it wasn't that hard. Dan wasn't even sitting in our group, exactly. He was off to the side. Then I realized he was with us, and I said "Oh, you're in our group?" because I really didn't know, but then somebody laughed and he put his head back down, and I felt bad. How was I supposed to know? He was just sitting there. Anyway, this was easy, and I think I understand what Gina and Nick said was on the paper from their first group. I guess we figured it out okay, even if Todd didn't know what he was talking about.

***Bridgette:***

I can't remember nothin'! I dunno, I guess I got my part right. Nuria explained it all to us anyway; well, to me and Adam. Dan ain't listened to none of it! He didn't do nothin'! I remembered most of my stuff, but not maybe what was in the parentheses. We usually just ignore the parentheses things. Why we gotta do so much memorizing now? First the interview things and now this. Well, Spanish was fun for a couple months, at least.

***Sr. Jacoby:***

Alright, what did they write on these feedback slips about the activity? Hmm...lots of them say they needed more time. Seriously? They had like fifteen minutes to talk over information that could be read in about thirty seconds! And a couple of them say that it would have helped to write things down. Now, I know I didn't say they couldn't copy the information from the handout in the first group session. Maybe they need to be told explicitly that they could, or should. And Nicole, Bridgette and Gina all seem to have identified weak links in their groups. I hope it didn't do more harm than good. Well, there are a few kinks to work out before I use Jigsaw again, that's for sure.

### **Sentence Strips**

On November 12th, I returned to a strategy that I think is useful in getting students to think and act collaboratively while working with grammar and syntax. I first learned about sentence strips in one of the courses I took en route to completing my ESL program specialist's certificate. For my version of the activity, I printed statements and questions ranging in length from short (fewer than ten words) to longer (upwards of 15 to 18 words) in a large font, with at least a triple space between each word, on card stock. I then used a different color of marker to underline each sentence from beginning to end, in order to keep the words grouped correctly. Then I cut out the individual words, reducing each sentence to a small pile of color-coded paper rectangles. In class, students received the paper-clipped stack of rectangles and were to cooperate in arranging them in an order that was agreed to by all. Then they were to write down the sentence they had formed before disassembling it and moving to the next stack of rectangles.

To make this activity more dependent on the ability of students to work collaboratively, I instituted two rules. First, only one student (by turns) was permitted to physically manipulate the words. Second, the other members of the group were to tell that person, using only Spanish, how they thought he or she should move the words around.

Almost everyone seemed excited to try this. Soon I was fielding questions on word meanings. I dodged many of these by suggesting, then insisting, that the questioners direct their queries to the member of their group who was the designated dictionary/glossary searcher for that turn.

Group 1 seemed to be communicating very little, and more than once I saw strips of paper sitting motionless in front of somebody as Vanessa neither spoke with her partners nor looked at the word strips and Brooke and Nicole stared at her, or Jared, or each other. Once, as I walked by, Jared asked me, “Does *pero de* go together”? I was discouraged by this question, but I was also annoyed—for two reasons. One was that, while the two words in question can appear together in various circumstances, such an arrangement made no sense in the context of the sentence being worked on. I felt that Jared should have been able to figure that out. The second reason was that Jared seemed to be on his own during this struggle, with no help forthcoming from anyone. Perhaps Brooke was also puzzled, but Nicole’s reticence to offer any help and Vanessa’s complete avoidance of the task at hand did little to mitigate the problem.

A bit later Donald asked, as I passed by, “Why don’t we just write down the definition for each word”? This question reflects his approach to language learning; it is also echoes something he wrote in Journal 2. He

said that homework takes him a long time, since he first translates everything word for word. Obviously this is an inefficient way to go about things, but in some ways it seemed in keeping with what I knew about his academic strengths. Donald was a math guy. He liked concrete operations, formulas, and equations that yielded results. In this activity student participation was uneven, collaboration was probably awkward at times, and students had to be content with some level of ambiguity in their answers until we reviewed them. Only Paula's and Nuria's groups were more or less assured of correct answers every time. I told Donald that translating each word would not necessarily give him the same meaning as what was required to make the sentence work in Spanish. In some cases it would have rendered the sentence impossible to be assembled coherently. I tried to explain this in Spanish, and then in English. He seemed to understand, but was unsatisfied.

Other than revealing group dysfunction and weaknesses in the grammar or syntax knowledge of some participants, this activity provided me with scant recordable oral communication. I seemed always to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, although it is possible that the students sensed my presence and that of my clipboard and were thus less likely to venture forth into uncertain utterances directed to their partners.

**Instructional Conversations: We go to *comer* at my *abuela's casa***

At the end of Unit 2A, the students read a somewhat challenging article on the Teatro Colón, a somewhat famous opera house in Buenos Aires. The reading itself and the vocabulary and comprehension activities were to be done in cooperative groups. This gave me a chance to engage students in the instructional conversations I had been trying to integrate more often, but in a more fluid way and with fewer time constraints. I decided to visit Groups 4 and 1 in order to talk to them about the upcoming Thanksgiving vacation. I planned to engage these eight students, four at a time, because among them were several who had not responded often or at all to my recent shorter attempts at these conversations on Monday or Friday mornings. I reasoned that approaching them this way, while only a few others listened, would lower their anxiety and perhaps let them take some more risks.

As it happened, Noelle was out on this day, and Paula left the room for a period of time, so when I opted to start with group 4 it was just Kelly, Ashley, and I. The idea was to introduce a topic and have conversation among the group, not to have students take turns addressing me. After some initial reluctance, Kelly spoke first and much more often.

**Sr. Jacoby:**            *¿Así que vas a comer en tu casa?*  
**Kelly:**                    *Sí.*  
**Sr. Jacoby:**            *¿Y qué van a comer?*

**Kelly:** *(frowning) What? Oh.*  
**Sr. Jacoby** *¿Qué comen? ¿Pavo? ¿Maíz, verduras?*  
**Kelly:** *Is pavo turkey? Well yeah, pavo, sal- . . . ensalada. Mi mamá . . . mucha comida.*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *Ella prepara muchas cosas, ¿eh?*

Ashley was not as forthcoming, nor as adventurous. I had hoped she would see how the instructional conversation was progressing and jump in if she had something to offer, no matter how much of it was in English that I would recast for her. She did not seem reassured, and did not understand many of my questions at first.

**Sr. Jacoby:** *¿Y qué comen? (pantomiming eating) ¿Qué comen ustedes?*  
**Ashley:** *I don't know! I don't know what you're asking!*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *What do you eat? ¿Qué comen?*  
**Ashley:** *Turkey. Y . . . sweet potatoes.*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *Bueno. Comemos pavo. (waiting)*  
**Ashley:** *. . .*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *Ahora tú repites: Comemos pavo.*  
**Ashley:** *Come . . . comemos pavo.*

Next I went to try this strategy with Group 1. Troy had been absent for over a week (and would not return until December) for surgery and recovery. In this group there was also hesitation at first, but then Jared and Nicole began attempting to say where they were going to have dinner and who would be there. Vanessa did not attempt a single word in Spanish, nor did she speak any English without being prompted directly. Brooke wore her deer-in-headlights expression for most of the activity, and though she dutifully repeated my Spanish recasts, they issued forth in a

voice that was so diminutive that her own partners were unlikely to hear her. This was the second time I noticed how well Brooke handled the Spanish phonics system. She would never be mistaken for a native or heritage speaker, as she experienced real and persistent problems with almost every aspect of Spanish acquisition. Her journal responses also showed that her language issues transcended Spanish. But her pronunciation was so natural. This was usually the most de-emphasized piece in the world languages puzzle, but in Brooke's case I wished I had been able to find a way to build on it.

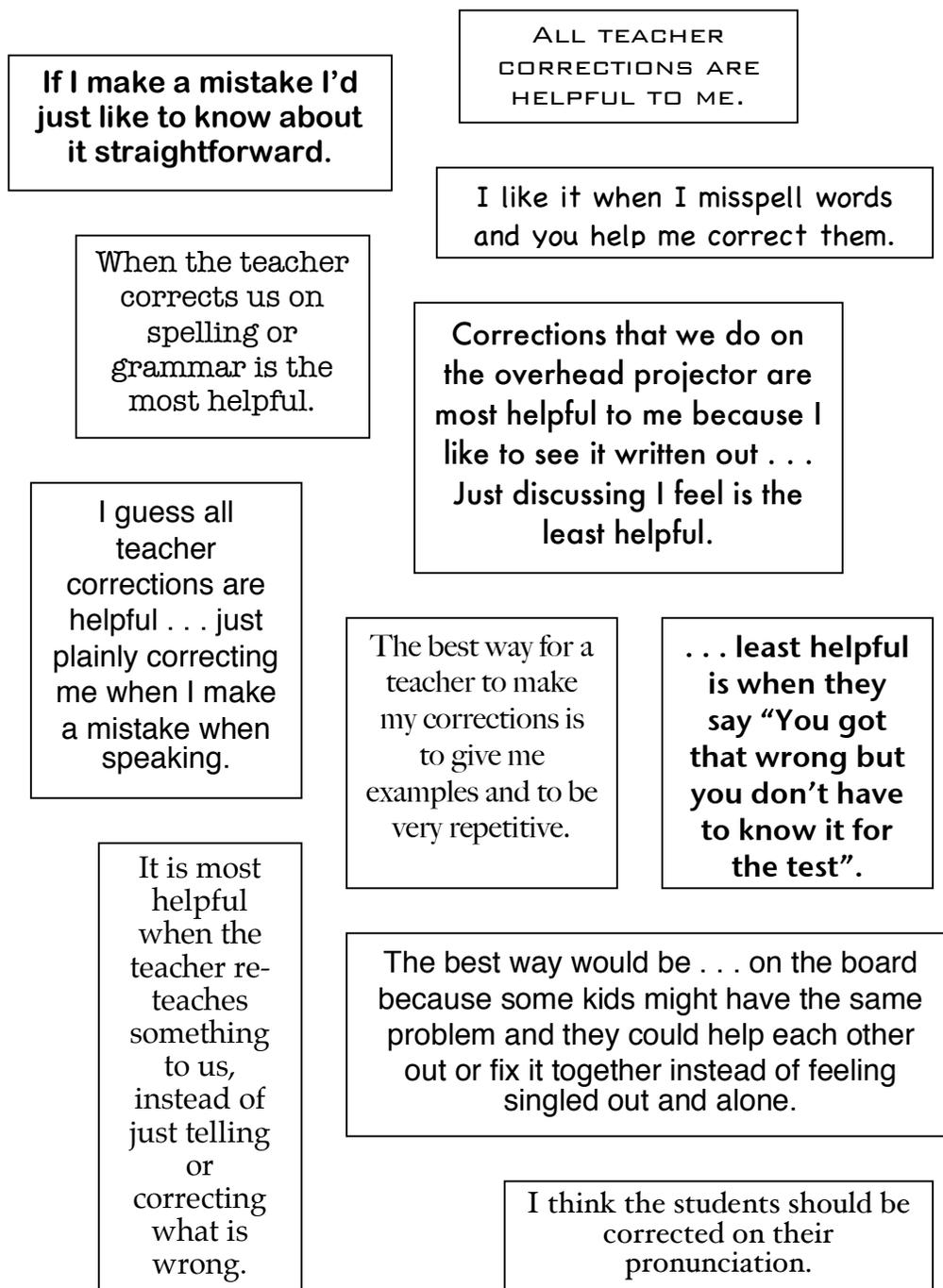
After finishing with these four students I passed by Group 2, whose members I had noticed were practically ignoring one another.

**Sr. Jacoby:** *You all aren't really interacting much, are you?*  
**Carissa:** *I was working with her (gesturing toward Sasha).*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *¿Y ahora?*  
**Donald:** *(also nodding toward Sasha but without looking at her) She likes to take control.*

That much I believed. Sasha was the strongest language learner and Spanish speaker in the group, and in the class, after Nuria and Paula. I suspected that she had become frustrated and decided to forge ahead and just get the work done.

Sasha was not the only one. As previously noted, the Teatro Colón article was not the easiest. Though it was a somewhat superficial

measure, I asked that the groups divide the task of writing out answers to the comprehension questions among their members. But as I walked by Nuria and then Paula, I saw only those girls' handwriting on their respective papers. Later I reflected on this and it occurred to me that for some students, being assigned to a group with one of the two precious native speakers in the class is akin to winning a small lottery jackpot. They gain a terrific resource for quick translations and definitions, and somebody who can practically guarantee correct responses in group activities. Only the most dedicated and independent learners will resist taking advantage. From what I could see, the members of Groups 3 and 4 could not resist the temptation to do so.



**Figure 3.** Pastiche showing participants' opinions on error correction.

## Revelations

The last full week before fall break held a few more surprises. On Wednesday we prepared to enter Unit 2B, in which shopping and prices would come into play. We began our review of numbers (up to six digits) as Vanessa continued to read her novel. I had to make discreet eye contact twice before she got the message and put the book down. Kelly and Ashley, whose cooperative group relationship had begun with some trepidation, were now devolving to juvenile and rather unfocused behavior. Today as on other days, I had to reel them in more than once.

In our review of numbers, some interesting and worrisome things happened. For numbers of three digits and fewer, I posed some general knowledge questions to students, one of which was *¿Cuántos días hay en un año?* (How many days are in a year?). The next would have been *¿Cuántos días en un año escolar?* (How many in a school year?). I didn't even get that far before the trouble started.

<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>¿Cuántos días hay en el año?</i>
<b>Karen:</b>	<i>So that's, how many in a year?</i>
<b>Paula:</b>	<i>(from the back of the room) I don't know how many days are in a year.</i>

Oh no. Did she just say that for everyone to hear? I was truly caught off-guard, and did not know how to react. Since my first year in the classroom I have seen a disturbing increase in students who feign a lack of

knowledge in order to, I assume, not stand out as a “brain” in class. I can honestly say that I do not understand the psychology behind this, but at any rate that could not be what was happening here, could it?

A few minutes later, working with four-digit numbers, I gave the prompt *El año de la independencia de los Estados Unidos*. It was only the second question about four-digit numbers, so I allowed extra wait time. There were blank stares, and lots of them. I tried not to panic, and repeated. *El año . . . de la INDEPENDENCIA* (stressing the cognate) . . . *de los ESTADOS UNIDOS* (as I said this last part, I walked over to touch the corner of the American flag, to drive the point home). Some of them looked at the listing of numbers in Spanish in their textbook. Others spoke softly to somebody else in their group, but I still sensed a degree of uncertainty. In the end Gina pieced it together.

Then, I sprinkled in some basic math problems to elicit some larger-number answers. I even got a little tricky and added a decimal problem, which may have been a bad move because it moved Paula to speak up again. “I don’t know how to multiply decimals”. Here we go again, I thought. Another awkward moment, followed closely by the embarrassed teacher once again trying to casually downplay the comment and talking through the math problem to get to the answer. Later, I checked Paula’s

math grade. She had a “B” in geometry. And she said she couldn’t multiply decimals? I was confused.

Near the end of class I went to speak to Noelle about a question she had asked, and as I approached her group Kelly blurted out “I hate games. My kindergarten report card said I didn’t play well with others”. I was certain she did this to get some reaction from me, but what was she looking for? It was totally decontextualized, and I wondered for a moment if I had been selected for some kind of bizarre Spanish class candid camera special. Mercifully, the class ended a few minutes later.

The following day’s warm-up, which actually lasted nearly ten minutes, was for students to devise a way to spend one million dollars in one day. They had to list their purchases and the estimated money each would cost, and I would help them by recasting whatever they were unable to say by themselves. Noelle’s idea was charming and revealing.

<b>Noelle:</b>	<i>Yo compro un rancho en Wyoming</i>
<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>¿Cuánto cuesta?</i>
<b>Noelle:</b>	<i>Uh . . . ¿cinco cien?</i>
<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>Repite: quinientos mil dólares.</i>
<b>Noelle:</b>	<i>Quinientos mil dólares. Y un caballo, o dos.</i>
<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>¡Buena idea! Pero, ¿en Wyoming? Tú vives en Pennsylvania.</i>
<b>Noelle:</b>	<i>Sí. Necesito . . .</i>
<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>¿Quieres volar? (imitating plane taking off)</i>
<b>Noelle:</b>	<i>Sí, volar.</i>
<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>Bueno. Todavía tienes más dinero. ¿Qué más compras?</i>

**Noelle:** *What else would I buy? I don't know. I'd probably just give the rest to the Cloud Foundation*

Noelle went on to explain that the Cloud Foundation was a charity that rescued former racehorses. I was glad that Noelle's spending plan ended on an altruistic note, and pleased that her classmates had heard it.

After perusing the objectives for the next unit, we discussed the featured artwork, a portrait of Felipe IV of Spain's daughter, Margarita. I shared a few facts about the painter, Diego Velázquez, and talked briefly about how Margarita was promised by her parents to a second cousin living in Austria. As anticipated, that tidbit got their attention.

**Paula:** *¿Con su primo?*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *Más o menos, sí. Fue una relación.*  
**Bridgette:** *Wait, wait, hold on. Who'd she marry?*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *Basically it was her father's cousin.*  
**Carissa:** *Oh, gross. Why did she do that?*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *She had no choice. Eso era muy común.*  
**Paula:** *That's messed up though.*

For comparison I showed them Velázquez' most famous painting, *Las Meninas*, which is another portrait of Margarita.

**Karen:** *She looks younger.*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *Sí, aquí ella es más joven.*  
**Todd:** *So what, he had a thing for her?*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *¿Quién, Velázquez?*  
**Todd:** *The painter.*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *No, he was the court painter. He was basically contracted to do all of their portraits.*

Sometimes shock value is a nice tool to have available in order to generate conversation. Some would argue that it is a gimmick, and I guess I agree, but if a gimmick gets teenagers talking about 350 year-old Spanish paintings, then I am willing to use it from time to time.

### **Mi Vida Loca (Part II)**

On Friday students navigated their way through Episodes 2, 3, and 4 of *Mi vida loca*. Volunteers to click their way through the episodes were Noelle, Karen, and Sasha. By this point in the semester these girls had demonstrated themselves to be Spanish learners and users, as opposed to students in a Spanish class.

During Ingrid's time at the helm, others needed to be reminded that I expected them to practice pronunciation when prompted. By the time Karen took over, they were getting better at repeating key words and phrases. Some students were urging Karen to move faster, but she did not speed up because she and a number of other students were pausing to write new terms in their workbooks. Todd loudly repeated each word and phrase, and I thought I saw agitation register on Sasha's face when she was in charge for Episode 4. Vanessa paid little attention to the activity, and by the middle of Episode 3, Donald appeared to be asleep.

This mode of learning was not for everyone. I was still optimistic, however. Easily 15 of the 20 participants in class this morning were

engaged from beginning to end, and after the second day, there was still obvious enthusiasm for the activity. There was potential here.

### **Student Self-Evaluation in November**

The month of November, with fewer days of instruction due to my own absence because of illness and the fall break, had far fewer self-evaluation days than either of the two preceding months. After October's dismal average rating, it was refreshing when I calculated November's average self-evaluation score to be 4.6/10. Of note were the results from the sentence strip day (4.7/10) and the next lesson, when I visited two groups to have instructional conversations about Thanksgiving (4.6/10). I thought both could have been higher. After all, eight days in September – with very mixed activities – yielded results above 5.0/10. However, due to the hectic and unpredictable nature of class, a few lessons in which I would like to have had students fill out their slips ended before I could do so, including the second *Mi vida loca* day, the Jigsaw lesson, and the lively conversation about Velázquez' paintings of princess Margarita.

### **Diciembre**

This month arrived before any of us were ready for it, as I would later reflect. I had been sick the weekend before Thanksgiving through Tuesday, leaving only a useless half-day of abbreviated classes on Wednesday. Suddenly it was December 2nd and I was looking at the

faces of all my participants (Troy had finally returned), who looked less than thrilled to be back in school.

**Sr. Jacoby:** *Bueno, ¿Qué hicieron en las vacaciones?*  
**All:** *(collective silence)*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *¿Comieron mucho? ¿Fueron de compras?*  
**Nuria:** *Yo fui al centro comercial.*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *Ah, ¿y qué compraste?*  
**Nuria:** *Different things. Gifts for my family.*

It was as if Nuria had felt bad for me, floundering in the front of the room while I asked questions that nobody was in any mood to answer, and decided to throw me a bone. And then, realizing what she had gotten herself into, she decided to back out, making her conversational exit in English as if to say, “Well, this was fun. Good luck with the rest of the class”.

A third of the students had not brought their books today, and—perhaps as a consequence—participation was abysmal when it came time for a speaking practice activity. Three weeks, a whole unit, and two projects remained between this day and the end of the study. December was when the snow would start to fall. A long holiday break was on the horizon, and who knew what other distractions or unforeseen events would play havoc with our schedule? I hoped for things to improve the next day.

### How Do You Spell 'Camiseta'? D-I-C-C-I-O-N-A-R-I-O

After a brief review of unit vocabulary, students got to work on a project that required them to select a picture of a person in a magazine and then analyze the apparel the person was wearing. They created descriptions analyzing the clothing's colors, style or fit, price, and material. All of the participants either brought their own picture or took one from a stack of magazines in the room. Five minutes into the class period almost everyone was working, and I observed some student interactions.

**Ashley:** *Do you know how to say 'silver'?*  
**Paula:** *Mmm . . . plata.*  
**Ashley:** *(spelling) P-L-A-T-A ?*  
**Paula:** *(nods slowly)*

**Carissa:** *(to nobody specific) How do you say 'shirt'?*  
**Bridgette:** *Uh, camisa. Camiseta.*  
**Carissa:** *How do you spell it?*  
**Sasha:** *It's in the book.*

A few minutes later I saw that Carissa had succeeded in eliciting further help from Sasha, who was leaning over to look at what Carissa was writing.

**Sasha:** *Well, it's the shirt of him, not 'his shirt'. So . . . 'la camisa de él'.*

The exchanges above were similar in form and function to a point. Paula was agreeable to helping Ashley when she must have known that Ashley could have—and probably should have—simply looked up the word

“silver” in her glossary or in a dictionary. She even passively affirmed the spelling. Although Bridgette was not asked directly about the word for shirt, she freely offered what she knew to Carissa. Then Sasha interjected, possibly having decided that Carissa should be doing some of her own work. Yet just afterward there she was, giving Carissa advice and offering a grammatical explanation for it.

At first glance this sort of student discourse offers little in the way of observing anxiety’s effect on communication. What is plain to see are the dynamics and personalities that ebb and flow in every class, in every cooperative group (or between groups), every day. When simple interactions like these can be so revealing in the context of student social perceptions, their careful consideration can provide important insight.

The next day there was a brief discussion that came about because of a question about the word *almacén* (department store). I mentioned that I avoided shopping at a certain store whenever possible, and when asked why, I replied that I preferred to support small businesses.

**Donald:** *Would that be like madre y padre stores?*

There really was a surprise every day during this study. It was December 4th and there was not a soul left in the room that mistook Donald for a strong and committed language learner. But even in this marginally on-

topic conversation, here he was using his best interlanguage to convey the idea of “mom and pop stores”.

I had the following exchange with Gina in the same class period, as she was working on her clothing and shopping project:

<b>Gina:</b>	<i>How do you say ‘each one’?</i>
<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>Each one what?</i>
<b>Gina:</b>	<i>Shoe. Each shoe.</i>
<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>Cada uno. Now, why is it cada ‘uno’?</i>
<b>Gina:</b>	<i>Because ‘shoes’ is like that.</i>
<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>Like what?</i>
<b>Gina:</b>	<i>Masculine.</i>

I felt this was a small success. I don’t mind feeding words to students when it happens in a give-and-take scenario, and in this one there was the potential to review a grammar concept. Gina was able to produce the correct rationale for using *uno*, and I believed that she would remember as much if it came up again.

### **Instructional Conversation to Introduce Preterit Verbs**

Even in September, my Monday morning question used the preterit tense, although nobody seemed too curious about the word *hicieron* (the ‘did you all do’ part of the question ¿*Qué hicieron ustedes?*). The majority of the participants would answer with infinitives or, rarely, present tense verbs. The native speakers answered in the past tense without even giving it a thought. On December 8th I hoped things would change.

Using the same old question, I got students talking about their weekends. Donald had played in a basketball tournament, Noelle had spent all day Saturday at a friend's house, and Ashley had gone shopping. Since the class had done this several times before, I did not need to say *Repite . . .* before I recast their speech in the target language. A subtle beckoning with my hand was the only cue that was required in order for each student to repeat what I had translated for them.

When no more students volunteered, I related details of my own weekend activities, including watching football games, doing a variety of schoolwork, and taking care of the baby. I mentioned eight different activities, and for each one I used a regular preterit tense verb (said slowly and with emphasis) and pantomimed when possible. Then I checked their understanding by asking them what I had just said. Collectively they recalled all that I had told them. My reason for doing this was not to test their short-term memory, but to see whether anyone would attempt to recall one of my activities using the verb form they had heard, or at least indicate that they had heard something different. Since many students will revert to mimicking a new word that they hear instead of trying to modify it, I thought it might be possible that I would hear a first-person singular verb relayed back to me.

That did not happen, and in fact only Nuria attempted a response using a conjugated verb. To illustrate: I had said *El domingo vi un partido de fútbol norteamericano* (On Sunday I watched a football game). Todd's recollection of the event was "You watched football", using no Spanish whatsoever. I had also said *Yo leí un libro para mi clase de Moravian*. Nicole got halfway there by recalling "*Leer un libro*" which expressed the concept but left out the agent (*yo*) of the action.

We then plunged headlong into the nuts and bolts of the lesson, which is to say the notes on conjugation and verb endings. These were as brief as I could make them. On an overhead were the regular 'AR' endings, the regular 'ER/IR' endings, one verb of each category conjugated in the standard six forms, and two model sentences using each verb. I asked if students saw any patterns in the sets of endings. Sasha noted that there were only written accent marks in the singular endings. She was correct. I hoped that somebody might point out that the endings for the two groups of verbs were identical except for the first vowel, but nobody did.

After a practice exercise and a detailed explanation of that night's assignment, Dan came over to tell me that he had understood today's lesson. It was a nice change of pace, but I couldn't help but think to myself "Great . . . this is the first time he has said something like this. Does that

mean it is the first lesson that has really sunk in?” Nonetheless it was meaningful and appreciated. I try to make direct instruction grammar lessons clear and simply stated, and I was glad it had worked for Dan.

### **Building Skits: Laborers and Observers**

The participants received the project description and rubrics for the skit presentation a day earlier, but Friday, December 12th was the official first workday provided for students to develop the presentation. We were on a tight schedule, with only seven more days remaining before the winter break. It seemed that most of the groups were off and running, Todd had an idea and was eager to get started.

<b>Todd:</b>	<i>Mr. Jacoby, can it take place in a pet store?</i>
<b>Sr. Jacoby:</b>	<i>En cualquier lugar. Anywhere you want it to.</i>
<b>Todd:</b>	<i>(turning back to Gina, Karen, and Nick) We could build a little cage with a dog in it.</i>

There was a distinct lack of enthusiasm for his suggestion. Gina made a face, Nick just looked down at his notebook, and Karen said something to Gina that I could not hear. Todd’s next words were, “What do *you* want to do, then?”. I felt badly because he seemed genuinely excited, but the spark was quickly extinguished.

I heard Bridgette exclaim, “Oh my God, I don’t want to work with him!” but did not look over to Group 3 immediately; after all, she was talking about one of two people, and it didn’t matter which one—there

would be no last-minute personnel changes in the cooperative groups.

Besides, Donald was trying to ask me a question.

**Donald:** *So we can't use the present tense at all?*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *No, that's not true. Where did you get that?*  
**Donald:** *It says it right here.*  
**Sr. Jacoby:** *That says that there must be at least ten different preterit verbs. It doesn't mean you are limited to using the preterit.*

The following Tuesday I was seeing progress in terms of collaboration in the writing of some of the scripts.

**Noelle:** *(to Paula) Does that make sense?*  
**Paula:** *(shaking her head slowly)*  
**Ashley:** *That doesn't sound right.*  
**Kelly:** *Yeah, like it shouldn't be . . .*  
**Ashley:** *(interrupting) It just doesn't sound right. Like, "What kind of bargain", and then she says "For a party". That doesn't make sense.*

**Karen:** *Do we want to say that when we walk in? I mean do we address him that way? Or should we say later as we're walking away, "Oh, I have to go back to the cashier"?*

In both cases students were grappling with the requirement that a certain number of terms from Unit 2B's vocabulary were used in the skit. I was encouraged, but there were troubling signs as well. Todd was absent for the second day in a row, and not only was he missing out on the collaboration that was part of the graded assignment, but also the skit as it had evolved in his absence would be foreign to him when he returned. Not all students—Kelly and Vanessa were the two I noticed on this day—had a

working copy of their group's skit, a daily requirement for this project.

There were other disconnects.

**Bridgette:** *(to Dan, who was sitting decidedly apart from the rest of his group) You could write down what you're gonna say in English, if you want to, if it's hard for you to do in Spanish.*

What seemed like compassion for Dan's struggles in Spanish class actually served to reinforce his isolation. Also, it undermined the collaborative nature of the skit writing process.

Vanessa was sitting back in her chair and seemed decidedly uninvolved in the proceedings. I tried to prod her a bit.

**Sr. Jacoby:** *Are they letting you have any say in this?*  
**Vanessa:** *(laughing) Sometimes.*  
**Brooke:** *(to Vanessa) What if you . . . (trailing off; inaudible to me)*  
**Vanessa:** *It doesn't matter, that's fine.*

My suspicion that the work in Group 1 was not being evenly distributed was corroborated by a desperate email sent to me by Brooke later that week, in which she indicated her frustration that she and Nicole had done all the work, and her fear that her group would not be ready to go when it was time to perform the following week. And then there was Group 4. Earlier they had been engaged in the project and seemed to be working productively, but somehow they had gotten derailed. It was becoming epidemic. Would Vanessa even know what her lines were

before she tried to perform? Would Dan know what was going on? Would anyone?

### **Lights, Camera . . . Wait, Who's Supposed to Say "Action"?**

What one can say, definitively, about the skits is that they were about shopping, as the directions had specified. Performance day was by turns funny, awkward, embarrassing, boring, disjointed, and confusing. Of these qualities the only one I had hoped to witness was the first. The rest, it seemed, came along in a sort of package deal.

One constant that I observed among all the groups during their writing and rehearsal time was a lack of focus, or tendency toward distraction. The most glaring result of this manifested in Group 4's final product, a skit that lasted only 1 minute 20 seconds, contained no preterit tense verbs, and featured only seven vocabulary terms from Unit 2B. In the first scene, Noelle and Ashley spoke a total of seven lines, but somehow managed to lose their place among them. Their 35 seconds ended with Noelle walking off camera as she covered her face and laughed, and Ashley uttering a final *De nada* between giggles. Both girls read from index cards. In Act II, Paula only glanced at her index card twice, and Kelly once, during their slightly-longer exchange. The four girls used no props and turned in a handwritten script with the English lines in

one color ink, and the Spanish translation below, in another color, and all in Paula's distinctive handwriting.

Adam, Bridgette, Nuria, and Dan turned in a typed script from which Bridgette and Adam read directly during the skit. Dan craned his neck and looked up at the ceiling to recite his lines, most of which he did successfully from memory. Nuria had 192 spoken words in the skit; more than half of these came in one long monologue at the end which was so loaded with unit vocabulary and preterit verbs that it seemed to have been added when students neared the end and realized they still lacked many words to fulfill the requirements for the project. Her speaking load exceeded the other students' word counts combined (161 words), and the sophistication and precision of the script left little doubt that she had done all or most of the writing.

Group 2 was the only one to use props. They set various folded articles of clothing on a few desks and positioned Donald, in his role as cashier in the clothing store, at a table across the room. Sasha used no written material and Carissa looked at her index card perhaps twice, but Donald and Liz read practically every word from their cards. The group fulfilled the vocabulary and grammar requirements, all of which were highlighted or underlined in the typed script they submitted to me. Like Group 3 before them, they had only minor miscues during the

performance, and what rhythm they were able to establish held throughout the approximately 3-minute skit.

Coming in at just under two minutes, the skit put on by Group 1 had numerous grammatical, orthographic, and syntactic errors that each student dutifully read from the script. Each of the four scenes consisted of one of the students approaching Troy, who was seated and played the part of a sporting goods store employee. The timidness of Brooke, cavalier monotone of Vanessa, and embarrassed hesitation of Nicole and Jared made this an awkward experience for all who witnessed it. The problematic nature of the skit was punctuated by Troy's overt rolling of his eyes when it ended.

As noted earlier, Brooke had sent me an email to express her frustration with the group and her apprehension about performing the skit. This, and my own observations of the group dynamics during their allotted work time in the preceding week, affected the 'Group Support' criterion for the participants' scores more than for any other group. The script's serious problems were indicative of the overall weakness in Spanish not just of the two probable authors but of all five members. Even more disappointing was the straightforward reading by each student of language that was obviously incorrect or illogical, and words that were at times rendered unpronounceable by their misspellings.

Karen, Nick, Gina, and Todd were last to present. Their skit (at 2 minutes 49 seconds) was closer to the ideal length of one minute per person that had been specified for the assignment. Each student related a different shopping experience they had had, and the script contained enough vocabulary and preterit verbs to meet the requirements. Todd succeeded in using his pet store idea, and although he glanced at his lines a few times, he alone used body language and intonation to convey his message, rather than just reading (in the case of Nick) or reciting from memory (Karen). Todd was also the only student who made the audience laugh, and for a change it was not at his expense.

### **Working Together**

The participants in this study responded to a third and final reflective journal prompt just before winter break. The prompt was multi-faceted, but at its core it sought students' views on the importance of knowing their classmates. Students provided information on (a) what had fostered their familiarity with their classmates, (b) what could have been done differently to enhance this familiarity, (c) what obstacles students perceived as hampering their efforts to get to know one another, and (d) what kinds of peer behaviors affected their level of comfort with speaking Spanish in class.

By far the most important conclusion to draw from the journal entries had to do with the social dimension of the class. As I read the responses, I wrote students' names along a continuum that represented how important they thought it was to know their classmates, from 'not at all' to 'very'. Of 21 participants, three made no mention of the relationship between knowing their classmates and comfort with speaking Spanish in class. Five students commented that it was not very important, four thought that it was somewhat important, and nine students' comments indicated that they thought it was important or very important.

Some reasons students gave for the importance of knowing their classmates were pragmatic. Brooke said it was helpful to know who she "could count on", while Gina found it useful to know who among her classmates were "the responsible, hard-working people". Many students also indicated that they found value in being able to consult with fellow group members if they missed or did not understand something. This way, they could get the information they needed without having to ask the teacher.

Most students agreed that the cooperative learning groups had been the primary impetus to meet others in their class, including Troy who said that the group was the reason he ended up "talking to people I normally wouldn't". Vanessa related that she only talked to her friends,

and therefore the group assignment (with 'non-friends', presumably) "helps me get my work done faster because I stay on task a little better". Adam, Carissa, Gina, Jared, Karen, and Liz all suggested changing the make-up of the groups more often.

The perceived obstacles and behaviors of others that made communication in Spanish less comfortable were mostly predictable, although a few were unforeseen. Eight students mentioned pronunciation as an obstacle to effective communication. Included in their comments were references to their own pronunciation difficulties as well as confusion that arose when they listened to others' attempts at speaking. In other written sources or interviews, Carissa, Nicole, and Nuria also mentioned pronunciation as a source of insecurity. Thus, pronunciation of Spanish words was a concern for more than half of the participants.

Pronunciation was one thing, but what if students did not even know the words they needed to communicate their ideas? Brooke, Carissa, Dan, Donald, and Vanessa cited lack of content knowledge as a problem they experienced, and expressed frustration with having a functional Spanish vocabulary that was too limited for them to say what they wanted to. Paula had a different problem. Her native vocabulary was more than sufficient to communicate, but she confessed to feeling "weird" at times when she spoke "too fast" for those around her to understand.

It was curious to note that the four students who mentioned the laughter of classmates as a factor in one's comfort level in speaking in class, were the members of Group 5. Gina said she thought it really did not happen, yet Karen (who sat next to her) admitted "but I laugh sometimes, so I don't have much room to talk". Nick simply listed laughter as something that made him less comfortable, and Todd weighed with this troubling remark: "I don't care if they laugh, because I know I'm an idiot".

Other students also had unique concerns. Adam was annoyed by "other students interrupting the class, slowing down the speed that you would learn", while Liz complained that "everybody talks too loud". Carissa said that teacher directions in Spanish made it harder to participate confidently, and Liz said that when neither she nor her partner knew what they were supposed to do, nobody even tried. Sasha indicated that her anxiety actually rose when she spoke but "people couldn't care less. It's like, why do I bother?".

This idea of the need for other students attending to spoken Spanish was echoed in different ways by other participants. Troy provided some insight: "When other people speak Spanish it gets more comfortable to try. Freely". Adam agreed: "When others get involved in the assignment it boosts you to try to talk and participate more". It would seem that the importance of hearing one's peers speaking the target language cannot be

understated. Included in such speech are errors, which can serve a purpose if students are convinced that they are expected and necessary steps in learning. Kelly said that she felt more comfortable when others made mistakes in spoken Spanish. Nicole agreed, as did Donald, who felt that since they were “all in the same boat, so to say, unless you are a native speaker”, the playing field was level for speaking Spanish.

## **METHODS OF ANALYSIS**

### **Analysis of Participant Observations**

Since my lunch period began about 45 minutes after period five ended, most days I was able to begin typing my observations while they were still fresh in my mind. I did so in a split-page format, reserving the right column for my reflections, which I typed only after filling the left column with the salient observations recorded in an objective manner. On some occasions, scheduling and my obligations as department chair prevented me from doing so until the weekend, though I avoided this whenever possible.

In the header of each classroom observation document I included the date, day of the week, and lesson content/activities that made up that class meeting. This was helpful as a quick index for looking back in the log in order to correlate observations of certain discourse or behaviors with the kinds of activities that may have precipitated them.

### **Analysis of Student Questionnaire (FLCAS)**

As noted previously, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale instrument was used at the beginning and the conclusion of the research study. The first implementation was anonymous, since I did not want students to be afraid to answer honestly. I tabulated the results and noted the items that showed the most significant indicators of anxiety.

Later, I used that information to tailor regular classroom instructional practices in an effort to address those specific anxiety sources.

The FLCAS was administered again in December with two different purposes in mind. First, the measurement of anxiety among the entire body of 21 participants in September would be compared to the measurement at the end to see if there were any notable changes. Second, individual student responses could be used in conjunction with observer notes and other sources to triangulate research data in an effort to form more trustworthy conclusions.

### **Analysis of Reflective Journal Entries**

Participants responded to three journal prompts during the study. Each consisted of open-ended questions and asked students to give their perspective on different social and communicative aspects of Spanish class. The journal responses were reviewed soon after they were written and were coded in the same manner as the field log. The students' thoughts, put into writing, aided me in making sense of my class observations and have helped in triangulation.

### **Analysis of Participant Self-Evaluations**

Often in September and October, but less frequently in November and December, students completed a simple self-assessment of their oral use of Spanish during the class period. At the conclusion of the study the

results were tabulated by student and by day to show (a) a class average for each day and month, (b) an average for each student by month, and (c) an average for each student from the September/October (pre-cooperative groups) and November/December (cooperative groups) periods. Along with triangulation of data, this information was of value when assessing the communicative potential of lessons or activities.

### **Analysis of Participant Interviews**

Eight participants were interviewed voluntarily at the close of the research study. The interviews sought their opinions on and reactions to speaking Spanish in class during the autumn months, cooperative group work, and their experience in Spanish II as a whole. The interviews helped me to form a more three-dimensional picture of the participants in my study.

### **Methodological Memos**

In early November I prepared a mid-study data assessment to evaluate what data I had and what they said about the direction in which the study was progressing. Careful review of my log entries, student self-evaluations, the two student journal entries that had been completed, and other student work, indicated that some adjustments might be in order for the second half of the intervention period. Writing this memo helped me to take a step back from the process of observation and reflection and

allowed me to see where I may have been missing opportunities to collect data.

I also searched for figurative language in my collective writings. Identifying metaphor, simile, and other descriptive phrasings subject to different interpretations, can be useful in uncovering bias in one's work. Preparing the figurative language memo gave me a way of seeing myself as an actor in this process and not just somebody who took notes, reflected, and passed judgment.

### **Coding**

By early October I felt that I had amassed enough observation and reflection documents in order to go back over the things I had seen, heard, and thought, with the aim of brainstorming some codes that seemed to apply to what had transpired and how I had recorded it. This was one of the more daunting parts of the research process for me, since I often felt unsure about whether I was being too general or too specific with the codes I created. Conceiving of the codes as meaning units (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Aznul, 1997, p. 162) helped me to see the codes as being indicative of topics, rather than specific details. I wrote the codes (typically acronyms or shortened forms of single words, for this study) in the margins of the two-column observation and reflection documents that were prepared for each observed class. When I began coding the student

reflective journals I found that additional codes were required to signify some new types of information that students had provided, and which I had not anticipated.

Every code was eventually organized in an alphabetical coding index, along with its related codes and the field log page numbers on which it appeared. This index would be updated as the study progressed, and it became one of many useful tools that helped me to organize my thoughts and reference my data.

### **Participant Profile Sheets**

An additional step I took before I began writing this year's story was to create a sheet for each of the participants, at the top of which I wrote their names and, in much larger letters, the pseudonyms I had chosen for them. I cycled back through the field log again, this time extracting and condensing my observations and reflections for each of them, as well as relevant excerpts from their journal entries and work, and combined all of this participant-specific information on students' pages. Doing this gave me another way to cross-reference my data as I wrote, and provided a sort of chronological chart of developments for each student.

### **Bins and Themes**

After the list of codes had grown to its final length, I reviewed the codes for what they meant to me and started to consider connections that

existed between one code and those that I had decided were related to it. Slowly, six categories, or bins, emerged. Eventually, after more review of the field log and other coded materials, I eliminated one of the bins and reorganized a few codes to yield five bins that seemed to encompass the major experiences from the study. These experiences led to hunches about what I had learned in four months with the participants. I asked myself questions about each bin, such as how it related to what I had seen, heard, and reflected upon, and how each of these chunks of information came to bear on my original question. From this time of reflection came the themes that would guide me toward writing my findings.

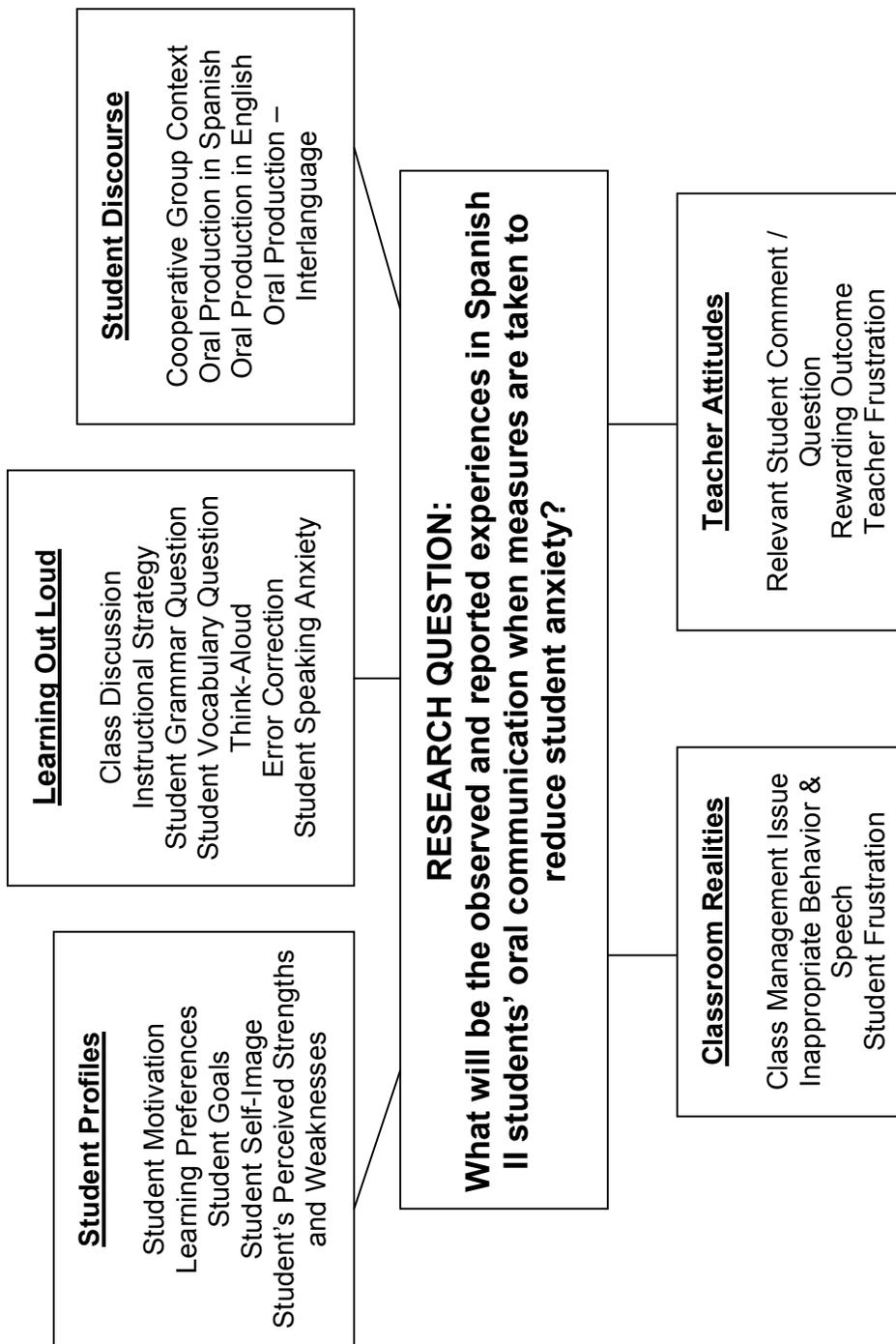


Figure 4. Bins and themes.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of my research was to examine students' oral production in Spanish and the many variables that induced or precluded it. The observed interactions, written journal responses, oral self-evaluations, questionnaire results, student work, and interviews provided bountiful data from four months of research. As I looked back over those months, which basically comprised the first semester, the picture became clearer and took on detail. What had been a sketch during the research design, and then had taken on crisper outlines as the new school year began, had developed throughout the fall. The story unfolded slowly, developing much like the fall foliage that appeared during the same time. Colors started to appear in the images, haphazardly at first. Then the hues became more organized, giving life to the participants and revealing different aspects of their personalities, just as the different colors of leaves identify the kinds of trees in a panoramic photo of a fall landscape. Gradually, depth and texture evolved in the image, and by the end of December—even though the leaves outside were long gone—I found myself looking at a complete portrait of my study. Like some of the masterpieces of Diego Velázquez or Pablo Picasso that students would see this year, it was subject to

interpretation, and it had more than one message to offer for those willing to take the time to examine it.

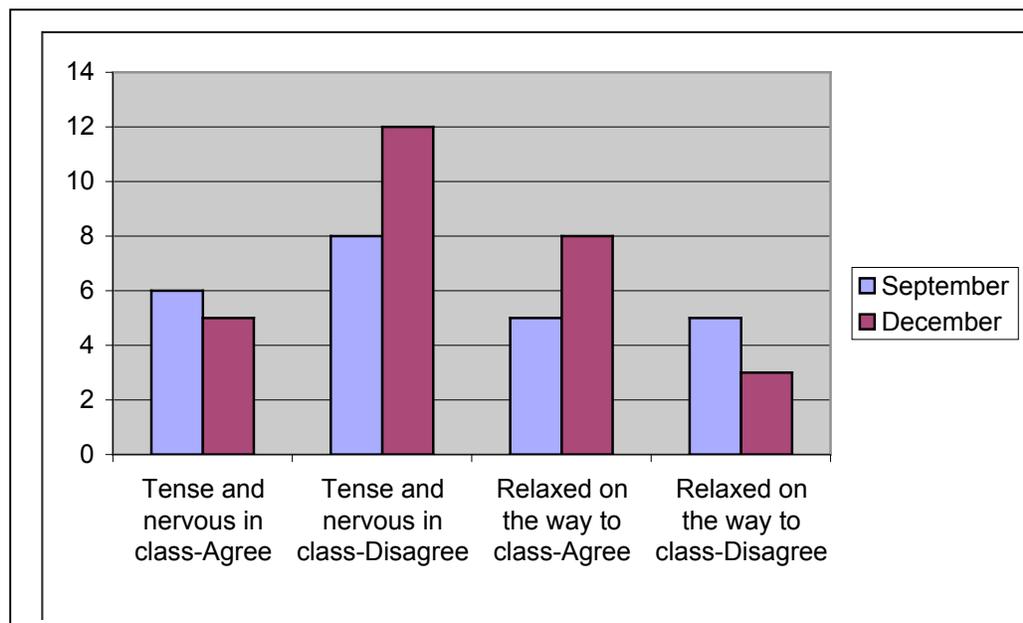
***Learning Out Loud: Speaking anxiety is a determining factor in the participation levels of many students within class discussions or other interactions in which the whole class is an audience, but instructional conversations, careful attention to error correction practices, and encouraging students to use think-alouds to answer their own questions fosters a climate of learning.***

*Student Speaking Anxiety*

As noted by Ewald (2007); Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley (1999); and Young (1990), there are myriad sources of anxiety for language students, and these range from the common to the very particular. Among the participants in my study, the most common stressors surfaced again and again. The students did not like speaking in front of others, were unlikely to volunteer when they were uncertain how to say something, seldom wished to be called upon when they had no prepared response, and—more often than I suspected—worried that their classmates knew more Spanish, or spoke it better, than they did. Students revealed other unforeseen causes of anxiety as well, and some of these would be difficult or impossible to counteract. Some of these unpredicted sources of discomfort with speaking Spanish were interruptions in lessons that were

caused by classmates, the high volume of voices in the room, and the inattentiveness of others to what they had to say.

The results of the FLCAS completed by the participants in December show that while many indicators of anxiety lessened by the end of the study, there were others that remained unchanged, or even increased. With regard to going to or being in Spanish class, more students said they were relaxed on the way to class in December than in September. Also, fewer participants reported feeling tense and nervous in class (see Figure 5).

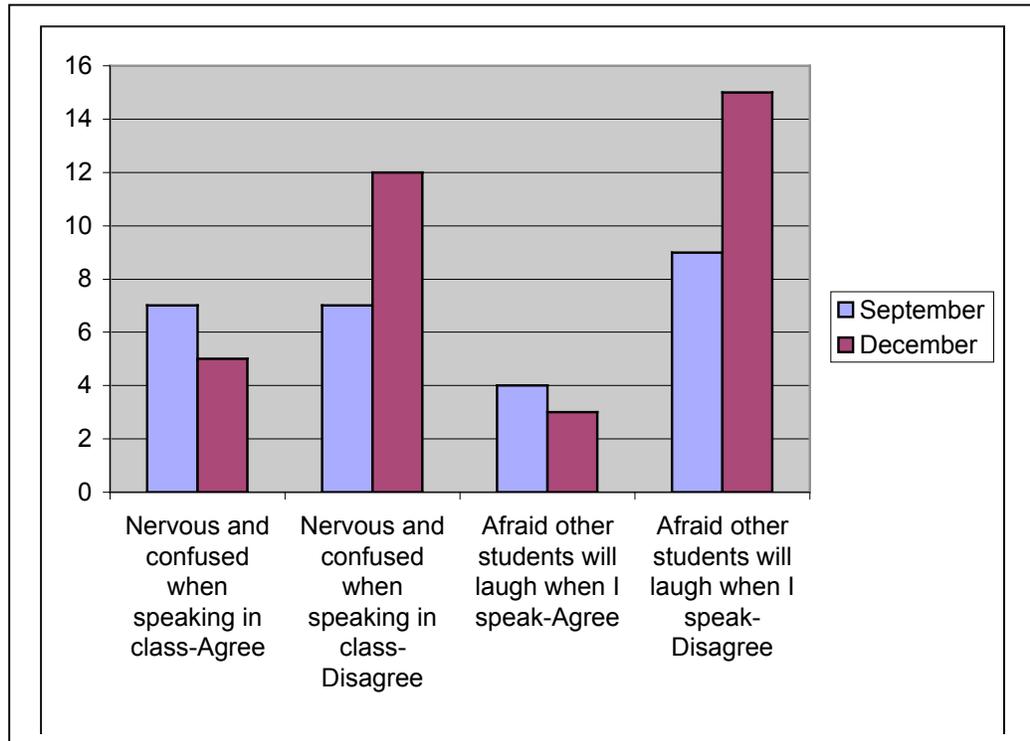


**Figure 5. Anxiety with going to/being in Spanish class.**

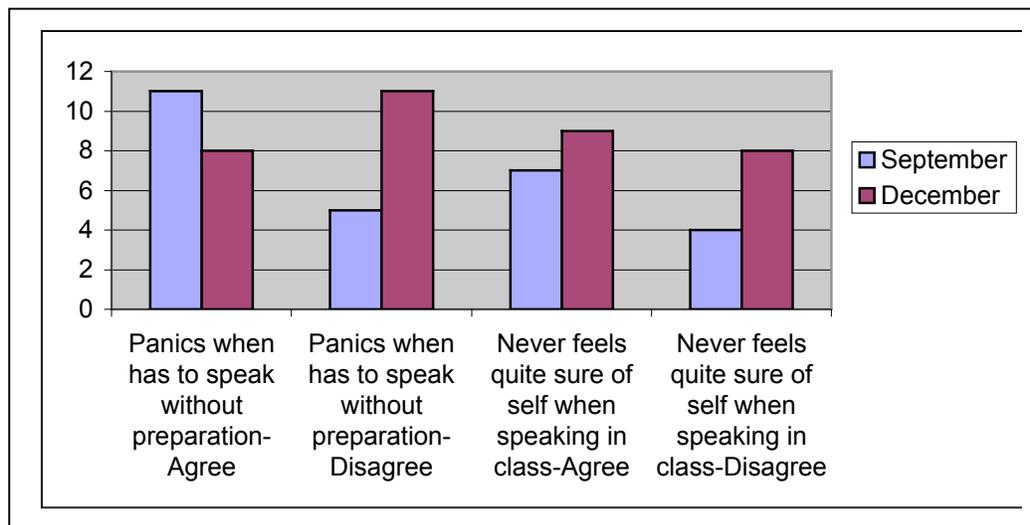
Unfortunately, the number of students who disagreed with the statement, “It wouldn’t bother me at all to take more Spanish classes” doubled between September (4) and December (8). Perhaps this was because there were a certain number of participants who were en route to completing their second, and thus final, year of foreign language study as a means to fulfilling college entrance requirements. Even so, this was a disheartening piece of information since any teacher of any subject would hope that a student’s experience in their class would inspire students to continue study, not deter them from doing so.

Students’ feelings on speaking Spanish in class improved overall, according to FLCAS results. Fewer students reported that they felt nervous and confused when speaking in class, and fewer were afraid that classmates would laugh at them when they spoke (see Figure 6). Also, more participants reported feeling confident when they spoke in class.

By December, fewer students indicated that they were embarrassed to volunteer answers in class. Both of the FLCAS prompts that addressed speaking in situations where the response has not been prepared in advance reflected decreases in anxiety from September to December. However Item 1—“I never feel quite sure of myself when speaking in class”—was another that, by December, had polarized the responses, for better or worse (see Figure 7).

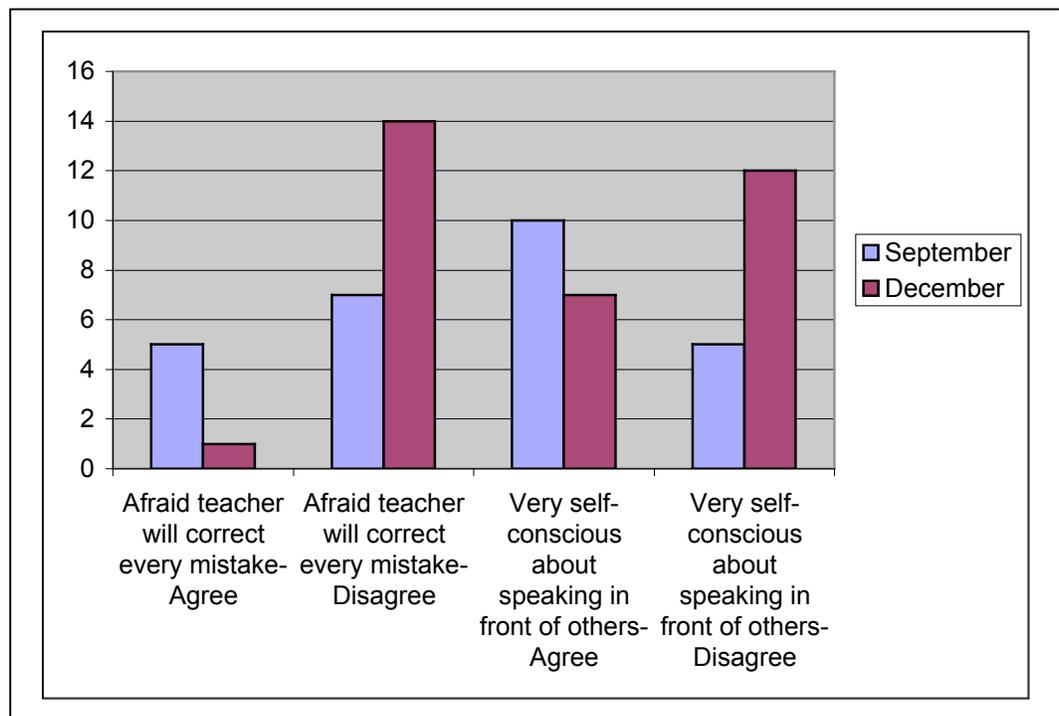


**Figure 6. Anxiety and worries tied to speaking in class.**



**Figure 7. Speaking without preparation; uncertainty in speaking.**

Other than the fact that fewer students feared being laughed at when they spoke in class, the most progress toward reducing anxiety in Spanish class as indicated by FLCAS responses was shown in Items 19 (dealing with teacher corrections) and 24 (feeling self-conscious about speaking target language in front of other students). Figure 8 illustrates these changes.



**Figure 8. Error correction worries and self-consciousness.**

*Instructional Strategy: Think-alouds*

Sasha complained that other students did not listen when she spoke. Teachers are familiar with this frustration, as we explain concepts to an audience that is not always receptive to our message. A different approach, and one context in which it is especially desirable for students to listen to one another speak, is the think-aloud. As often as a situation presented itself in which I could do so, I encouraged students to use metacognition to talk themselves through a concept that they did not understand. Examples of this occurred with Karen, Gina, and Andrew, but overall I found that it was very hard to plan for these conversations to take place, despite my original intentions.

Unfortunately, there was no way for me to systematically collect data on the efficacy of these think-alouds. Most of them ended when I had guided a student to think through a situation up to the point where their logic failed them, at which point they were open to explanation. This strategy, if it can be called that, requires agility and creativity on the part of the teacher, who has to interpret a student's thought process and provide guiding questions in order to arrive at a resolution that the students finds both satisfactory and logical.

### *Class Discussion*

The students participated actively in most open discussions during the semester. Whether the subject was art, cultural idiosyncrasies, weekend activities, or something else entirely that emerged spontaneously, almost everyone had something to offer at one point or another. And when they had something to say, almost everyone spoke English. The primary reason for this was a lack of content knowledge. It was clear that most students simply had not assimilated enough Spanish vocabulary to allow them to say what they wanted to say. Some admitted as much in their journals. Others indicated that their nervousness at the moment of speaking trumped what words they did know, effectively stealing the language from the tip of their tongues.

### *Students' Grammar and Vocabulary Questions*

The predominant form of question in any world languages classroom begins with the words "How do you say . . . ". It is direct and to the point, but it is also inefficient. Much like reading an unfamiliar text and using a dictionary to look up each new word as one comes to it, by the time one finishes the end of a passage, one no longer remembers what he has read, or in this case, said. It was a struggle trying to convince students to use the phrasing *¿Cómo se dice . . . ?*, and though some students now use it, even they are inconsistent.

*Strategy: Instructional Conversations*

Recognizing that most students could not say what they wanted to, I realized that I would need to find a way to address the gaps in their vocabulary. After the mid-study data assessment I began to focus on implementing the instructional conversation technique in my lesson planning and execution. Training myself to do this was perhaps half of the challenge, since I have grown accustomed to taking whatever students are willing to tell me in English, perhaps commenting in Spanish, and then moving on. Toward the end of the study the instructional conversation strategy began to bear fruit, as some participants seemed to expect me to recast what they said, and when I did, most would repeat what I had translated for them without being prompted to do so.

Instructional conversations required students to buy into the notion that communication was goal number one, and that 'staying inside linguistic bounds' was secondary, and could wait for when they were more experienced. I believe I stumbled upon something important when I reflected that if students were unwilling to try, then they would avoid mistakes; but in doing so they would prevent learning from occurring.

*Error Correction*

Recasting student speech in the instructional conversation format addressed one of my chief concerns in the effort to lower classroom

anxiety. Results of the December FLCAS show that fewer students felt that I was waiting to pounce on errors that they made in speaking. There was no improvement, however, in the number of students who said that they worried about making such mistakes. To complicate matters, those students who commented on error correction in their reflective journals indicated that having their errors corrected would be preferable to not knowing they had made them in the first place. This did not apply to *all* error correction, however. Bridgette stated quite plainly that she did not appreciate when classmates corrected her. Others, notably Jared and Nick, said they were happy to accept help from others who knew better.

***Student Discourse: Observation of student interactions, especially within cooperative group learning situations, reveals a colorful landscape of student discourse including all-English talk, use of interlanguage, and limited use of Spanish for communication.***

Student discourse was observed, recorded, and analyzed throughout the study. It came from one-on-one interactions with the teacher, conversations between students and in cooperative groups, open class discussions, and situations in which students communicated outside of a class discussion *per se*, but in which all could hear (and react to) what the speaker said.

*Oral Production in English and Interlanguage*

The majority of authentic student discourse during this study, in any context, was in English. It seems that at this level of instruction, with the huge range of abilities among the learners, expecting anything else would be folly. Students' participation in class discussions was almost exclusively in English; even Nuria and Paula conformed to the classroom vernacular. If I posed a question to one of them in Spanish, I would typically get an answer in Spanish. But in an informal chat about José Martí's Cuba, the underground streets of Guanajuato, or shoe sizes in other countries, the two native Spanish speakers typically used English because they knew their classmates would understand them.

There were many instances when students used interlanguage—a mix of English and Spanish in the same utterance. Interlanguage is sometimes uncharitably referred to as 'Spanglish'. Mixing idioms is an attempt to communicate what a student knows, and for the non-native speakers it demonstrated a willingness to take risks, and to try. Donald did this more than once, as did Todd. I found this interesting because these young men lagged behind many of their classmates in terms of proficiency, and if anyone were to sit in on more than one class they would see that these two struggled with the language on a daily basis. Perhaps as a response to their struggles, when Donald or Todd could turn a phrase

using some known Spanish terms, they would do so. In fact, I believe Donald, Todd, and Dan probably used more interlanguage than all other students combined.

#### *Oral Production in Spanish*

The reality is that for the 19 non-native speakers in this group, there was just not very much authentic, non-forced use of Spanish for interpersonal communication, at least from what I was able to hear. There were rare exceptions. Bridgette occasionally spoke Spanish with Nuria or, less frequently, with Paula. She did not have enough to sustain conversation-length discourse, however, and when she responded to me she did so in English. Now and again I picked up on students 'playing' with Spanish, making off-handed comments to one another for comedic effect. This was especially true after cooperative groups were formed and students had settled into their new arrangements. Although this sort of student talk may have been considered off-task at times, the fact that students were using Spanish to communicate at all (unless it was a deliberate mockery of the language) was still a welcome development.

#### *Student Discourse in Cooperative Group Contexts*

The most common student interactions between members of cooperative groups were the various practice activities that accompanied direct instruction within the units of study. These were usually exercises in

which students worked in pairs, although I often asked them to modify them on days when only three members of a group were present. Many of these structured practices involve two students taking on the roles of *Estudiante A* and *Estudiante B* in order to manipulate vocabulary or new grammar constructions such as temporal expressions, reflexive verbs, comparisons, and so on. They are not authentic because there is a set format that students should follow, and most allow for only limited creativity in student speech. Add to these factors the limitations in most students' working vocabularies and the frequent initial confusion stemming from instructions printed in Spanish, and it was easy to see why some participants showed little enthusiasm for these activities. Still, on most days they would attempt to work through the speaking practice, and I made my best efforts to hear at least one exchange from each group, offering help or clarification where I could.

Given the difficulties that this sort of oral practice engendered, it is not surprising that little of the specific focus material actually carried over into genuine interaction during other phases of class. For the most motivated learners this transfer could and did happen. But those students are the clear minority, and application of new information in authentic contexts was the exception rather than the rule.

***Student Profiles:* The Spanish II classroom is a complex collection of individuals who have distinct learning preferences, goals, sources of motivation for language learning, perceived strengths and weaknesses, and self-image that is at times in conflict with what the teacher sees or assumes.**

From the beginning it was clear that the 21 participants in the study arrived at Spanish II with very different stages of readiness for speaking Spanish in class, and in this sense the group was not atypical. Understanding what students want from their language class is just as important as having a clear picture of what we want them to take from it. Knowing how they see themselves in the language-learning process can and should inform the way we see them in our classrooms. Uncovering these details takes time and effort, and negotiating the range of perspectives, abilities, and forces at work among a diverse body of learners is no easy task.

### ***Student Goals***

The participants articulated specific goals for learning Spanish, or becoming more proficient with it, in Journal 1. The prompt included the open-ended statement “One aspect of my spoken Spanish that I need/want to improve is . . .”. The following are some of the responses:

- *Knowing what I’m saying/how to say it* – Noelle

- *my accent (sic)* – Karen
- *expanding my sentences past “Hola, ¿Cómo está?”* – Kelly
- *my pronoucation (sic) of words* – Liz
- *some of my spelling* – Paula
- *learning more vocabulary* – Dan
- *remembering the words* – Gina
- *rolling my r’s* – Sasha

Their goals reveal their priorities for becoming better at speaking Spanish, or at least becoming more successful Spanish students, since some goals (including Paula’s, above) did not relate to speaking at all. It would have been interesting to follow up with students at the end of the year to see how many of them felt that they had met their goals, and why or why not.

#### *Student Motivation*

Student motivation refers to the reason(s) students gave for learning Spanish. From their responses to Journal 1, motivation was categorized as either instrumental or integrative, as explained by Haskin, Smith, and Racine (2003). Responses that indicated college admission as a reason for taking Spanish (instrumental) numbered 14, while 11 responses gave other reasons, like being able to talk to friends or family (integrative). Five student journal entries included instrumental *and* integrative reasons for learning Spanish. Of the six students who indicated

only integrative sources of motivation, Noelle, Nuria, Paula, and Sasha were the strongest performers in the class. Ashley and Kelly were the other two. Ashley had previously taken French, and more than once expressed her desire to get extra help with Spanish, yet did not take advantage of the opportunities to do so that I offered. Kelly gave signs of a strong desire to learn the language, but seemed to be so challenged by social issues in class that a higher degree of success eluded her.

### *Learning Preferences*

The participants were never more similar than when they disclosed their preferences for language learning. In Journal 1, Adam, Carissa, Jared, Nick, and Vanessa all made a point of saying that they appreciated group work. It should be noted that this was before any formal cooperative groups had been assigned. In their interviews at the end of the study the three boys reiterated this preference, as did Karen and Sasha. In general, participants preferred group speaking, reading, and writing activities to individual ones.

In a whole class setting, discussions were often lively and the dominance of some students in oral participation was balanced by contributions of others who spoke up less frequently in other situations. A favorite activity of many students, and one in which the choral response format seemed to occur almost naturally, was the interactive *Mi vida loca*

series. Noelle and Gina were the most vocal about this being a preferred method of discovering and practicing new words and phrases. It is a fairly reliable index of student interest in a topic or activity when there are students who are off-task or who attempt to put their heads down.

Although *Mi vida loca* involved turning off the lights in the room, only Donald and Liz ever took advantage of this by slumping forward onto their desks. At first I suspected that the novelty of the activity was what kept students involved, but by the end of the third day that I used it I was convinced that students were interested because the story was well-crafted, the interactive components were varied and thoughtfully designed, and the entire experience was more learner-centered than when I was in front of the class.

#### *Students' Perceived Strengths and Weaknesses, and Self-Image*

*I am not a good Spanish speaker. It's not that I can't read it or say it, I just can't memorize everything. And it takes me longer to get stuff than most of the class. – Vanessa, Journal 2.*

Pronunciation, functional vocabulary, and conjugating verbs do not make for a proficient Spanish speaker, but they go a long way toward that goal. That the participants realized this was evident in their responses to journal prompts, interview questions, and everywhere else they provided clues to what they felt they did well or poorly. Other concerns included

how their accents were, the “control” they thought they had in speaking or writing.

The most common sentiment that revealed the participants’ visions of themselves in Spanish class was that they “couldn’t speak Spanish”. Dan was unquestionably the biggest proponent of this statement, or variations of it.

*I don’t know Spanish (see Story, p. 76)*

*You gotta talk English to me! (see Story, p. 79)*

He had a lot of company in his lack of confidence. The idea of being a language learner should imply a slow but steady march to proficiency, with some legs of the journey being easier or quicker than others, but always moving, always progressing.

So many of the participants seemed to view the Spanish classroom dichotomously. There were those who could speak and understand Spanish, and read and write it; and there were those who could not. It was almost as if they had their minds made up, before we began, whether they could attain success this year. I was discouraged to see this disposition among teenagers who were only in their second year of Spanish, and yet in a way I understood it. What had their school system told them when, by the end of the seventh grade, some had not reached a certain level of performance in reading? “Don’t worry, you can start Spanish in the ninth

grade. Oh, and by the way, you will also be taking remediation classes—whether you want to or not—so you don’t continue to drag down our statewide assessment results”. Despite the different reasons they had for being there, the sophomores and juniors generally had more trouble with concepts and scored lower on assessments than did the freshmen. There was some evidence of a relationship of performance to age or class separation in the results of the oral self-evaluations. In September and October, the average score for the freshmen was 4.8/10, while for sophomores and juniors it was 4.5/10. In November and December, the freshmen average moved up slightly to 4.9/10, but the upper-classmen average decreased to 4.4. The differences are not huge, nor are the changes between the first and second halves of the study. Still, these numbers mirror a separation I sensed as the weeks went by, for which my best descriptive name would be confidence in oral communication.

The way in which Todd personified such a lack of confidence was the saddest part of the semester. Gina’s reaction to being assigned to a group with him was the first clue that he was unpopular with his classmates, though at the time I wrote it off as a simple conflict of personalities. As time passed, however, I sensed the rift was deeper, and not just between those two, but between Todd and many others, especially females. Whether others’ disdain for him was the sole reason, I

will never know, but Todd's self-image was very negative. On three occasions he used the word "idiot" to describe himself. The first was when I spoke with him in the hall after persistent and distracting behavior on his part, and the second came when I asked why he was laughing during class. His response was "Cuz I'm an idiot!". I think I might have forgotten about either comment had I not recorded them in my log, but the idea became more concrete, and more poignant, when I read his third reflective journal response, concluding with "I don't care if they laugh at me, because I'm an idiot. So it doesn't really matter to me".

This is the sort of self-image that can have negative implications for everything a person does in his life, Spanish class being the least of his worries. Freire said

Self-deprecation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalization of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, know nothing and are incapable of learning anything . . . that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. (2003/1970, p.63)

If Todd truly believed he was an idiot, perhaps he also thought that it gave him an excuse to behave foolishly. This, in turn, would reinforce negative impressions of him held by his classmates. It would be a vicious cycle.

***Teacher Attitudes:* During the different phases of action research—including instruction, observation of student behaviors, and later reflection—the teacher experiences an internal monologue in which student comments and questions take on meaning and significance that may be unexpected, and during which the teacher experiences both rewards and frustration with the proceedings in the classroom and within the research study.**

*Teacher Frustration*

There were incidences of frustration, impatience, exasperation, and even sadness, between late August and December. Student behaviors, comments, and—occasionally—silence could test my limits at times. In the 8 preceding years I had taught plenty of other sections of Spanish II, and although there was some dysfunction on the part of individual participants and in the group context, this was not what I would consider a “nightmare” class. An important lesson learned during this study was that getting to know students does not happen automatically through daily exposure to them. Even knowing all the students in one’s class will not prevent the odd flare-up or discipline issue. It is important to take an interest in their lives, and thus to see them as other *people* and not the receptacles for information that Dewey (1997/1938) describes. This is a level of knowing students that does not come from having them fill out index cards on the

first day of school. Once I realized this, it became easier to see some participants' points of view when they were not having their best days. And when I was able to do that, it was easier to avoid carrying anger or frustration over from one day to the next.

### *Relevant Student Questions and Comments*

This section might have never existed, because the code by the same name was on the chopping block when I organized my bins and theme statements in preparation for writing the thesis. It did not seem to fit neatly anywhere. Now I think it has found a good home.

Comments that students make, and may forget by the end of the school day or even that very class period, can influence my perceptions of them, and by extension my attitude toward how I operate as a teacher. Though they may not be memorable to the people who make them, these remarks stay with me for much longer.

**Noelle:** *You just guess.*

**Todd:** *Yeah, probably. This is like my worst class!*

**Jared:** *Kind of a big jump from Spanish I to this year.*

**Gina:** *This is how I can learn a language.*

**Karen:** *Oh, you're in our group?*

**Paula:** *I don't know how many days are in a year.*

Each of the comments was spontaneous, honest, and revealing. They were unrehearsed, unrefined glimpses of students' reactions to the class and their classmates. It was not always pretty, but it was definitely real.

There were several concerns that went unresolved. What were all of the sources of Todd's low self-esteem? Was Paula's general knowledge deficient in the ways she hinted? Could students be as oblivious to their classmates as their comments suggest, or as uncaring? These are questions that emerged within the research, and they reflect real problems, social and otherwise. Discovering, recording, and reflecting upon them day after day was bound to influence how I saw my participants, and how I reacted to them.

### *Rewarding Outcomes*

Sometimes it is harder to focus on the positives in an experience than it is to obsess on its flawed irregularities. During the research study, I encountered several times when I was proud to be a teacher, and excited about being a teacher-researcher. They did not come every day, however. The school year can be a long one if one does not stop to recognize the beauty of learning; not only that done by students, but also that which we do by observing them and ourselves.

The metacognitive conversations I was able to foster were especially rewarding. I enjoyed gaining a window into students' thought

processes, and discovering why they arrived at the conclusions and questions that they did. I took pleasure when I heard them use interlanguage, evidence that they were trying, even with mixed success. Other rewarding moments included the students' palpable enthusiasm for *Mi vida loca*; Dan's epiphany that, yes, he did know some Spanish; and others' favorable opinions of the class or particular learning events that they expressed in my interviews with them. These are the things that can sustain a teacher during the times when nothing seems to go as planned.

***Classroom Realities: Factors including class management issues, discipline issues arising from student behavior and speech, and content weakness contributed to student anxiety and frustration and limited my ability to use the target language for all dimensions of instruction.***

Like any other class of 21 students, this one had its share of unique personalities. Students' experiences in life, school, and previous language classes were diverse. They brought different levels of academic readiness to the class, handled adversity in different ways, and did not all function or interact according to the same social norms.

#### *Class Management Issues*

Originally my research design called for Spanish to be the language of all class discourse. That was not a realistic plan. Beginning with Dan's

dizzy spell, I suspected that the potential for at least minor chaos was always lying just below the surface in this class. Nothing else during the study reached such surreal or distracting proportions, but I knew I could not let my guard down. Explanations of directions and procedural matters, unique student problems, and other situations that demanded immediate and decisive action were almost always handled in English, even if I first relayed information in Spanish. Part of the reason for this was for students to receive clear messages. In most cases, when I could not afford ambiguity, I could not rely entirely on Spanish. And the honest truth is that despite having taught Spanish for almost a decade, I am still—and will always be—a native speaker (and thinker) of English.

#### *Inappropriate Behaviors and Speech*

Experienced teachers often witness less of these things due to advanced classroom management strategies and well-understood expectations. I like to think that my students typically learn rather quickly what they can get away with in my classroom, which is to say, very little. And yet most teachers would agree that the Forest Gump “box of chocolates” analogy is very applicable to the class rosters we receive anew each year.

The participants at times displayed very disappointing interpersonal skills in the cooperative group context. We can tell adolescents that as

adults they will have to work with others who they may not like, but this guarantees neither cordial interaction nor productivity in group work scenarios. Particularly challenging were the dynamics of the groups to which Dan and Todd were assigned. Both boys had a number of detractors in the class, and these being teenagers, they were not as discreet about sharing their opinions as I might have liked. Another unresolved question for me, then, is what to do in situations where there is a genuine class “pariah”, but the learning objectives call for work in cooperative groups. I found no easy solution to this problem.

### *Student Frustration*

The participants experienced different kinds of frustration during the study. These feelings stemmed from their own struggles and anxiety, the actions of their classmates, the rigors of language study, and institutional realities of life in a Spanish II class in our school.

Overall every student was forthcoming about his or her weaknesses in Spanish, and it was generally easy to see how these caused frustration. As previously noted, many of the participants were aware of their own limitations in vocabulary, pronunciation, and reading. The frustration was sometimes overt, as in Todd’s expressed self-image, or Dan’s insistence that he knew no Spanish. Other times it was discovered when it was too late. Donald sometimes complained—the next

day—that his efforts to do homework were thwarted by the directions for the assignments, printed in Spanish.

Students' frustration with one another was common. Todd was shut out of Jeopardy for answering incorrectly one too many times. Classmates who interrupted lessons annoyed Adam, and Liz was offended by the volume of others' voices. The comments of Karen and Sasha showed dedicated students who were annoyed by the laziness of their peers, and Nicole and Brooke suffered the direct consequences of that defect when their group's skit suffered its meltdown. Nuria and Paula tolerated the worst abuses of the division of work in cooperative groups, which leads to one last bit of commentary.

*Native speakers of Spanish in Spanish II*

“When they're Spanish speakers it's less comfortable”.

This was Nicole's comment, from Journal 3, about what factors made her less comfortable with attempting to speak Spanish in class. There are native or heritage speakers of Spanish at every level of Spanish that is taught at our school. That some have differing opinions on whether they “should” be there is irrelevant; all students have the same right to enroll in the classes. Often goals of native speakers do not match those of their *angloparlante* classmates. Frequently they have needs related to reading and writing a language that they may have spoken since their first

years, but in which their literacy is weak. Non-Hispanic students are sometimes unaware of this, or unsympathetic. Donald's comment from Journal 2 is illustrative: ". . . the native speakers know everything and it's easy for them to do it and I have to study and I do worse".

Nuria and Paula were both born abroad (in Mexico and Peru, respectively) and did not have much trouble academically during the study. Not that anyone would instinctively expect them to, but the unseen problem that affects students like them is that many native/heritage speakers, particularly those enrolled in lower levels of the language, become bored and so lapse in their diligence with classwork. This did not happen to either of these girls. What did happen was that they were by turns taken advantage of by classmates (especially in cooperative group situations) and singled out, or stigmatized, for their linguistic expertise.

It only took a week for Bridgette to complain about Paula's participation in Jeopardy. So early in the year, when students were just learning each other's names, it must have been hurtful for Paula to hear this. She would later write in her journal that "the kids need to be more social and not only talk to the people they only know". In the next entry, she wrote, "I like when I need to help other kids out with there (sic) Spanish but not when they all just want to use me". To me, these comments reveal a young lady who was not only willing to help but who

was open to the idea of new friendships. I hoped that by grouping her with Kelly, she might access the Spanish heritage speaker inside Kelly. That did not happen, and Paula was often ignored by Noelle and Ashley; except, of course, when it was time for group work and nobody wanted to give any wrong answers, or use a dictionary.

Nuria's experience may have been slightly better since she was a friend of Bridgette's, but she too was saddled with almost all of the writing or recording responsibilities of her group. In my interview with her, she mentioned this, indicating that her partners did almost none of the work, and that she felt added pressure any time she heard me say "*a trabajar en grupos, por favor*". She also described an unappreciated feeling she had experienced in class: "And like, some people are mean, cuz they're like 'Oh, you know Spanish,' like, they think I'm cheating or something".

Like others I have described, this problem has no simple solution, and the parameters of the problem are unique to each class in which it surfaces. It is neither fair nor ethical to ask or expect these students to act as "teacher's helpers" (something I witnessed in my own high school Spanish class), nor does it seem right to ask them to defer their class participation. Even if a compromise can be found, there is no guarantee that other students will see them the way most want to be seen. Not as "class resources" or "special cases", just as . . . classmates.

### **Summary**

The participants in this action research study experienced anxiety with regard to speaking Spanish, and this came from sources that are common among foreign language students. Speaking in front of their classmates, preoccupation with not knowing enough vocabulary or with pronunciation, worry that others in the room were better at speaking Spanish than they were, and alarm at being required to speak in unrehearsed contexts were all factors that negatively affected the students' willingness to communicate in the target language. Other unforeseen sources of anxiety and/or frustration included difficulties or conflicts with classmates' behavior, lack of participation of cooperative group members or collective unwillingness to speak Spanish, and the presence of native speakers of Spanish in the classroom. The participants rated their oral communication in Spanish at variable levels throughout the semester but tended toward the middle range on their ten-point rating scale. In informal discourse between participants, English was dominant almost to the exclusion of Spanish.

Effective strategies for increasing students' use of Spanish to communicate included instructional conversations and some cooperative group activities. Class discussions were lively but contributing to them in Spanish was rare, although by the end of the study students had adapted

to the teacher's recasts in Spanish and the expectation that they repeat his translations. Metacognitive talk was fostered to seek the roots of student misunderstanding, and *Mi vida loca* was used to practice useful vocabulary and expressions in realistic (but virtual) speaking situations. However, the think-alouds and the online learning tool did not constitute truly authentic speaking contexts, since the former involved English conversations with the teacher, and the latter required students to recall survival-type words and phrases in response to computer prompts. The teacher's primary difficulty with maintaining Spanish during all types of classroom interaction was content weakness on the part of students.

## **THE NEXT STEP**

Each high school World Languages classroom is a unique selection of learners who enter a new year with variable content knowledge, diverse reasons for enrollment, and different expectations, preferences, and learning needs. Meeting the needs of all students is a monumental task, and one for which a teacher needs ample experience, resources, curiosity, and patience.

The research study I have completed began to answer questions I have had about my practice, but it also unveiled new ones that might be addressed in future inquiry. A few of the new questions are pedagogical, but the evidence I have found indicates that there are many social issues that must be addressed in a room of students who differ in age, ethnicity, native language, content knowledge, and behavioral or emotional needs.

### **Instructional Conversations and Error Correction**

Although the participants in this study were found to be less concerned with the teacher's correction of their speaking miscues by the end of the intervention period, several FLCAS items still indicated a lack of confidence with regard to oral participation in class. The instructional conversation technique as describe by Ewald (2007) provides immediate feedback and correction of errors for students at any level of proficiency, and allows them to use English words where needed without stigmatizing

them for lack of knowledge. My systematic use of this tool did not begin until more than halfway through this study, but I now have a better idea of how valuable and easy to implement these conversations are. In the future I will make it a point to use the strategy from the beginning of the year, thereby acclimating the students to its format and their role within.

### **Participant Feedback**

In some ways I did not fully anticipate the rich source of insight that the reflective journals would turn out to be. The comments that students made in their responses were revealing and sometimes surprising. In several cases they shared things in writing that I doubt they would have been willing to disclose in other modes of communication, and my visions of them—as well as my thesis—became better because of it. The journals were a bit long, and looking back it seems to me that each of the three prompts had so many sub-questions that I believe many students wrote briefly on each of them instead of expounding more on a few key points. I plan to use more of these in the future, but I would like to use them every two to three weeks, or perhaps on a unit-by-unit basis. At the same time, I think it would be prudent to reduce the length and complexity of each journal prompt to encourage students to produce deeper responses. Participant self-evaluations of oral communication in Spanish were another data collection tool that produced a wealth of information. As I

calculated averages for individuals and class averages for days and months, I began to realize just how much analysis could (and should) be applied to the vast set of numbers I had collected. In the future, I would like to continue using these self-evaluations on at least a weekly basis to chart progress during a year or a semester. Trying to collect this information on a daily basis was overwhelming and sometimes not worthwhile, since there were occasions when interpersonal communication was limited by the design and objectives of the lessons. Still, I feel there is much to be gained by collecting and analyzing these numbers in a timely fashion as one plans the experiences that the students will have.

### **Cooperative Learning**

Working in groups was an oft-cited source of satisfaction and security for the participants. Several mentioned that they would like to have had the opportunity to work with another group, which was not part of my plan from the outset. I now realize that one difficulty I encountered, that of not knowing how to place certain less-accepted students, may have been mitigated to some extent had I changed group assignments at some mid-way point in the study. At the very least, this would have given everyone a fresh start, and at least temporarily eliminated the frustration

experienced by some participants with regard to partners who were less than productive.

### **Social Needs of Learners**

Although I recognized that it was one of several pieces of the anxiety puzzle, I underestimated the importance that my students put on knowing their classmates in Spanish II. In their journals, interviews, and elsewhere, more than half of the participants emphasized the need to know their classmates before they felt at all comfortable speaking a new language in front of them. A priority for me in the future will be to create fun or low-stress “ice-breaker” activities for the beginning of the school year so everyone has the chance to learn the names and begin to see personalities, rather than simply seeing faces—often faces that show as much worry as their own. The tapestry of different sources of motivation and goals for language learning that I took from Journal 1 already give me some ideas for the kind of information exchange that would benefit students early in the school year.

The native speakers in my research group represent an interesting and unforeseen challenge that I uncovered during the study. Although their classmates’ attitudes toward them was never overtly negative (as far as I knew), but the comments some students were willing to share in writing reveals a bias or mistrust that could only have been a source of

negativity in what was ideally to be a collaborative learning enterprise. Native speakers have different goals and needs than most of their non-native counterparts. Making sure everyone is aware of this seems essential, but should be done sensitively and only when those needs are actually understood, and not assumed. There is also a need for greater differentiation of instruction in order to best serve these students, but this too should be done collaboratively, using their input to create goals and explore the learning opportunities that will help to fulfill them, while still running parallel to the learning of others in the classroom.

One last clue to solving the anxiety riddle appeared only in a few journal entries and a comment or two made during interviews, but I find it to be exciting and mysterious, if not fantastically challenging. Dan, Liz, Nick, Troy, and Sasha all hinted, in one way or another, that there is one elusive element in class that can make or break one's will to speak Spanish in class. It seems that there may be something like a critical mass of willing communicators that can propel others, who might otherwise be unwilling, to try to speak Spanish as well. Figuring out who these individuals are in a classroom would therefore be the top priority early in the school year, and distributing them around the room, or in different cooperative groups, would be a key maneuver in fostering student discourse in the target language. Call it a constructive form of peer

pressure, if you like. Not every class is created equal, and perhaps there are simply not enough of these individuals in all sections of Spanish (or French, German, Latin, Japanese, etc.) to make a roomful of L2 speakers appear. But only by creating an environment in which they feel comfortable enough to show their true colors will we ever find out.

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## Appendix A



1200 Main Street  
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania 18018-6650  
TEL 610-861-1300  
WEB [www.moravian.edu](http://www.moravian.edu)

September 3, 2008

Jeffrey D. Jacoby  
1406 Wood Street  
Bethlehem, PA 18017

Dear Jeffrey D. Jacoby:

The Moravian College Human Subjects Internal Review Board has accepted your proposal: "Reducing Spanish II students' anxiety to facilitate oral production in the target language?" Given the materials submitted, your proposal received an expedited review. A copy of your proposal will remain with the HSIRB Chair.

Please note that if you intend on venturing into other topics than the ones indicated in your proposal, you must inform the HSIRB about what those topics will be.

Should any other aspect of your research change or extend past one year of the date of this letter, you must file those changes or extensions with the HSIRB before implementation.

This letter has been sent to you through U.S. Mail and e-mail. Please do not hesitate to contact me by telephone (610-861-1415) or through e-mail ([medwh02@moravian.edu](mailto:medwh02@moravian.edu)) should you have any questions about the committee's requests.

Debra Wetcher-Hendricks  
Chair, Human Subjects Internal Review Board  
Moravian College  
610-861-1415

## Appendix B

26 August 2008

Dear M [REDACTED]

I am currently enrolled in the Master's program at Moravian College. This semester is my eleventh course, MEDU 702, titled Reflective Practice Seminar. As several of my colleagues have done in past years when they were taking the course, I have designed a research study to conduct this fall, with Spanish II students as subjects in the study. I am writing this letter to seek your permission to do so.

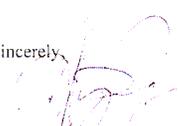
The study I intend to conduct will focus on the observable behaviors and outcomes produced when steps are taken to reduce student anxiety associated with learning (and especially speaking) a foreign language. Students will receive explicit instruction on learning strategies, participate in cooperative learning activities, give oral presentation in Spanish, and complete questionnaires related to their anxiety and the learning strategies they use. Since this research is qualitative in nature, the focus of the project shall not be the grades that students will earn but rather the affective data that can be gleaned from observation, student work, and student disclosure in questionnaires, and possibly interviews. Additional participant data will be collected via daily observations and students' self-assessment on their use of Spanish in class.

All students will participate in the full range of activities implemented in class while I conduct my study. Of course student participation in the actual research study will be strictly voluntary. The decision of a student and/or his/her parents or guardians will have no bearing on the grades the student receives.

Only those students who return their informed consent forms, with signatures indicating that their parents/guardians accept their participation in the project, will be included in the data analysis and presentation. Any students who opt not to participate in the study, or withdraw from the study while it is being conducted, will not have their data used in any way in the final report of findings. All participants will be protected from identification, as pseudonyms will be used for all participants. The only real names to be used in the final report on my study will be my own, and that of my professors at Moravian. All information collected during this study will be stored in a secure location and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project.

Please contact me with any questions you have about this research study. I am, of course, available at the high school and by email at [REDACTED]. My professor is Dr. Charlotte Zales, who may be reached by phone at 610.6257958, or at [czales@moravian.edu](mailto:czales@moravian.edu). If you have no questions, please sign and return the bottom portion of this letter. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

  
Jeffrey D. Jacoby

---

I attest that I am the principal of the teacher conducting this research study, I have read and understood this consent form, and I have received a copy. Jeffrey Jacoby has my permission to conduct this study at Easton Area High School.

  
Signature

  
Date

## Appendix C

### CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent/Guardian:

I am completing a Master of Education degree at Moravian College. My courses have enabled me to learn about the most effective teaching methods. One of the requirements of the program is that I conduct a systematic study of my own teaching practices. This semester, I am focusing my research on student anxiety and its effects on oral communication. The title of my research is *Reducing Spanish II students' anxiety to facilitate oral production in the target language*. My students will benefit from this study by learning about strategies that help in the acquisition of a foreign language, working in cooperative learning groups in class, recognizing sources of anxiety or stress that they experience in Spanish class and working to reduce those feelings, and reflecting on how they use Spanish in class on a daily basis. There are no anticipated risks involved for students in this study.

As part of this study, students will be asked to participate in all normal class activities including cooperative learning activities, oral language presentations, reflective journal writing, instruction in strategies for language learners, questionnaires, and possibly interviews at the end of the study. Participants will be observed on a daily basis in class, by their regular classroom teacher. The study will begin on September 1, 2008 and will officially conclude on December 24, 2008.

The data will be collected and coded, and held in the strictest confidence. No one except me will have access to the data. My research results will be presented using pseudonyms - no one's identity will be used. Participants' corresponding pseudonyms will never be known by anyone other than I, the researcher. I will store all research data in a locked cabinet at all times. At the conclusion of the research, the data will be destroyed.

A student may choose at any time to withdraw from this study, without penalty. However, students must participate in all regular class activities. In other words, all students will be required to complete the same assignments throughout the fall semester. The only difference is that the data collected on participants will be analyzed and presented in the final report, whereas non-participants will not be represented in the report. In no way will participation, non-participation, or withdrawal during this study have any influence on any aspect of this class.

If any participant in this study should experience unanticipated psychological distress as a result of the study's proceedings, he or she is encouraged to contact either the head principal at [REDACTED], or the school crisis counselor, [REDACTED]. Both can be reached by phone at [REDACTED]. [REDACTED] can be reached via the main office line.

We welcome questions about this research at any time. Your child's participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty or consequence. Any questions you have about the research or about the process for withdrawing can be directed to me, [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] Any questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to [REDACTED].

Sincerely,

I agree to allow my son/daughter to take part in this project. I understand that my son/daughter can choose not to participate at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix D

**Instructions: For the following statements, please indicate whether you strongly agree (SA), agree (A), have no opinion (N), disagree (D) or strongly disagree (SD), by circling the letter or letters.**

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

2. I *don't* worry about making mistakes in Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in Spanish.

SA    A    N    D    SD

5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more Spanish classes.

SA    A    N    D    SD

6. During Spanish class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.

SA    A    N    D    SD

7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at Spanish than I am.

SA    A    N    D    SD

8. I am usually at ease during tests in my Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

10. I worry about the consequences of failing my Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.

SA    A    N    D    SD

12. In Spanish class, I get so nervous I forget things I know.

SA    A    N    D    SD

13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

14. I would *not* be nervous speaking Spanish with native speakers.

SA    A    N    D    SD

15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.

SA    A    N    D    SD

16. Even if I am well prepared for Spanish class, I feel anxious about it.

SA    A    N    D    SD

17. I often feel like not going to my Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

18. I feel confident when I speak in Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

19. I am afraid that my Spanish teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.

SA    A    N    D    SD

20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

21. The more I study for a Spanish test, the more confused I get.

SA    A    N    D    SD

22. I *don't* feel any pressure to prepare very well for Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

23. I always feel that the other students speak Spanish better than I do.

SA    A    N    D    SD

24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking Spanish in front of other students.

SA    A    N    D    SD

25. Spanish class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.

SA    A    N    D    SD

26. I feel more tense and nervous in my Spanish class than in my other classes.

SA    A    N    D    SD

27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my Spanish class.

SA    A    N    D    SD

28. When I'm on my way to Spanish class, I feel very sure and relaxed.

SA    A    N    D    SD

29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the Spanish teacher says.

SA    A    N    D    SD

30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.

SA    A    N    D    SD

31. I am afraid the other students will laugh at me when I speak Spanish.

SA    A    N    D    SD

32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of Spanish.

SA    A    N    D    SD

33. I get nervous when the Spanish teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

SA    A    N    D    SD

**Appendix E****AUTOEVALUACIÓN**

**A mi uso del español hoy en clase, yo le doy un:**

**1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10**

**(no hablé español)**

**(sólo hablé español)**

## Appendix F

### *frases y Expresiones para la clase de Español*

**To get the teacher's attention:**

Perdone, señor... or Disculpe, señor...

**To say you need help:**

Necesito ayuda or Ayúdeme, por favor.

**To ask how to say something in Spanish:**

¿Cómo se dice \_\_\_\_\_ en español?

**To ask for the meaning of a Spanish word or phrase:**

¿Qué quiere decir \_\_\_\_\_? or ¿Qué significa \_\_\_\_\_?

**To say you don't understand:**

No entiendo. or No comprendo.

**To ask somebody to repeat him/herself:**

Repita, por favor. or ¿Cómo?

**To ask to use the restroom:**

Perdone señor, ¿me permite ir al baño por favor?

**Other useful expressions:**

por favor	Gracias	De nada
lo siento	No sé.	¿Por qué?
¿Cuándo?	¿Dónde está...?	

## Appendix G

**Español 2 / Jacoby**  
**Práctica: diálogos**

**nombre:**

**fecha:**

**Direcciones:** El diálogo es para dos personas. Con un compañero de clase, practica esta conversación entre dos amigos. Si tú eres una chica, usa los sustantivos y los adjetivos en forma femenina. Si eres chico, usa las formas masculinas. Elimina las formas que no vas a usar.

***Ejemplo (para chica):*** Sí, estoy muy contento/a porque hoy es sábado.

**Practica el diálogo varias veces con tu compañero de clase. Después, practícala delante de otros compañeros de clase para que ellos les puedan dar consejos.**

**Estudiante 1:** Hola nombre. ¿Cómo estás?

**Estudiante 2:** Hola, nombre. Estoy bien, gracias. ¿Y tú?

**Estudiante 1:** Bien. Pero, también estoy muy ocupado/a. Tengo mucha tarea de matemáticas esta noche.

**Estudiante 2:** ¿Ah sí? ¿Es difícil? Yo te puedo ayudar.

**Estudiante 1:** Bueno, no es muy difícil. Es que tengo otras cosas que hacer.

**Estudiante 2:** Sí, como todo el mundo. En mi clase de ciencias sociales tenemos que entregar los proyectos mañana.

**Estudiante 1:** ¿Cuándo tienes ciencias sociales?

**Estudiante 2:** Yo tengo esa clase en la tercera hora. Es interesante pero no es fácil.

**Estudiante 1:** A mí me gustan más las clases de arte y educación física. Son fáciles, ¡y nunca tenemos tarea!

**Estudiante 2:** Es verdad. Y no son aburridas, como las ciencias naturales.

**Estudiante 1:** ¿Tú crees que ciencias naturales es una clase aburrida?

**Estudiante 2:** Sí. Bueno, por lo menos el profesor es muy aburrido. Y tengo la clase en novena hora, cuando estoy muy cansado.

**Estudiante 1:** De acuerdo. Bueno, nombre, nos vemos mañana. Hasta luego.

**Estudiante 2:** Hasta luego. Adios.

## Appendix H

### RUBRIC: Dialog (prepared script)

<b>Preparedness</b>	<b>4</b> – There is much evidence that speakers practiced the whole dialog several times. Little reliance on printed script.	<b>3</b> – Speakers use printed script but it does not affect the overall presentation very much. A few glitches here and there.	<b>2</b> – Dialog shows signs of insufficient practice. Speaker gets lost one or more times. Disjointed.	<b>1</b> – Dialog is extremely rough. Seems as though it is being read for first time. Speakers show little knowledge of where dialog is going.
<b>Flow and Pausing</b>	<b>4</b> – The dialog sounds natural, like a real conversation. Speakers do not interrupt each other	<b>3</b> – Speaker pauses at most commas, stops at most periods. Almost no overlap or interruption.	<b>2</b> – Not enough attention paid to punctuation or the way people speak to one another.	<b>1</b> – Speakers do not show awareness of flow of dialog; there are many interruptions and overlaps.
<b>Volume</b>	<b>4</b> – Volume is very suitable; all in classroom can hear speaker	<b>3</b> – Volume is mostly adequate but there are some dips	<b>2</b> – Volume is inconsistent. Many parts of speech are not heard by all	<b>1</b> – None or almost none of speech can be heard by most of the class
<b>Pronunciation and enunciation</b>	<b>4</b> – Shows evidence of having worked on pronunciation and enunciates; does not mumble	<b>3</b> – Nearly all words are intelligible and pronunciation shows some knowledge of Spanish inflection	<b>2</b> – Insufficient care taken to pronounce words; somewhat difficult to understand	<b>1</b> – Garbled lines and poor pronunciation make it very hard to understand most or all lines.
<b>Attentiveness to other dialogs</b>	<b>4</b> – Listens intently. Does not cause distractions or disruptions	<b>3</b> – Listens but produces some minor distracting behavior/sound.	<b>2</b> – Sometimes does not appear to be listening, but is not distracting	<b>1</b> – Sometimes does not appear to be listening and causes some distraction

## Appendix I

### REFLECTIVE JOURNAL 1

Friday, September 26, 2008

Today you will write a journal entry in which you reflect on your learning process in Spanish. You may write your entry in English or Spanish – whichever is better for you – but please be expressive and share your thoughts. This assignment will receive a grade only of COMPLETE or INCOMPLETE, so please feel free to express your opinions.

Why are you studying a second language? What made you choose Spanish? What aspects of Spanish class do you particularly enjoy? If you could use Spanish to speak to one or more people in the world, who would they be? What would you like to say or ask?

Also, separately, please finish these statements:

One thing I am proud of in *speaking* Spanish is...

One aspect of my *spoken* Spanish that I need/want to improve is...

## Appendix J

**Español 5 / Jacoby**  
**Entrevista en tres pasos**

**nombre:**

**fecha:**

**Direcciones:** Hoy vas a participar en una entrevista con otra persona en tu grupo cooperativo. Ustedes van a hablar de las actividades extracurriculares en las que participan. Primero, uno de Uds. va a hacerle preguntas a la otra persona. Entonces la otra persona va a hacerle preguntas. Las dos personas deben hacer entre 8-10 preguntas. Necesitas usar preguntas de clarificación. Puedes usar preguntas que empiezan con:

¿Dónde...? ¿Cuándo...? ¿Por qué? ¿Con quién/es? ¿Cuánto tiempo hace que...?

...y otras palabras interrogativas.

**Ejemplo:**

Tú dices: “¿Qué haces después de clases?”

Tu compañero dice: “Me gusta jugar al baloncesto”.

¿Qué puedes decir entonces? ¡Hay muchas posibilidades!

“¿Dónde juegas al baloncesto?”

“¿Con quiénes juegas al baloncesto?”

“¿Cuánto tiempo hace que juegas al baloncesto?”

Después de la entrevista entre tú y tu compañero, tienen que compartir la información con las otras personas en tu grupo. Ellos también van a compartir cosas con Uds. Luego, todos los estudiantes van a compartir la información con la clase.

## Appendix K

### RUBRIC: Individual oral presentation

<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>4</b> – Generally accurate and appropriate to task. Minor errors may occur.	<b>3</b> – Usually accurate; errors or inaccuracies may be frequent.	<b>2</b> – Not extensive enough for task. Inaccuracies or repetition may be frequent. English words used.	<b>1</b> – Vocabulary is inadequate for the basic requirements of the task.
<b>Grammar</b>	<b>4</b> – May contain one or two inaccuracies, but speaker is still comprehensible.	<b>3</b> – Some inaccuracies but still is comprehensible. Some control of structures.	<b>2</b> – Many inaccuracies and little control of structures; hard to understand.	<b>1</b> – All or almost all grammar is inaccurate, save for a few memorized patterns.
<b>Pronunciation</b>	<b>4</b> – Shows evidence of rehearsal. Sounds are clear and accurate.	<b>3</b> – Shows some knowledge of Spanish sound system.	<b>2</b> – Inaccuracy makes words and phrases difficult to understand.	<b>1</b> – Garbled or poor pronunciation detracts severely from presentation.
<b>Preparedness</b>	<b>4</b> – Presentation was obviously rehearsed many times. Little or no reliance on cue cards.	<b>3</b> – Cue cards used but this does not affect overall presentation. A few glitches.	<b>2</b> – Speaker gets lost or is unsure about what he/she is saying. Disjointed.	<b>1</b> – Very rough. Little or no practice is evident by reliance on cards. Speaker is lost or extremely unfamiliar with speech.
<b>Content</b>	<b>4</b> – Completely understands topic and meets all requirements for content.	<b>3</b> – Speaker misses one or more elements of required content, maybe by accident.	<b>2</b> – Speaker misses multiple components of the required content of the task.	<b>1</b> – Speaker is completely off topic or has not prepared a presentation in advance.

## Appendix L

Español 2 / Jacoby  
actividad interactiva  
Jigsaw

nombre:

fecha:

**Direcciones:** Hoy vamos a hacer una actividad cooperativa que se llama Jigsaw. Cada persona en el grupo va a tener un número: 1, 2, 3 o 4. Entonces los grupos van a separarse por número – todos los “1s” juntos, todos los “2s” juntos, etc.

Los nuevos grupos “especialistas” tienen que aprender un poco de información nueva. Tienen que ser expertos en la información, ¡porque van a enseñarles a sus otros compañeros en el grupo original!

Vamos a pasar 10 minutos en los nuevos grupos, y luego volvemos a los grupos originales. Presta mucha atención en el nuevo grupo. Si tú no comprendes algo, ¡tienes que hacer preguntas!

¡Buena suerte!

## **Adjetivos posesivos - Grupo 1**

- POSSESSIVE adjectives indicate ownership (for things), or relationships (between people)
- Like all adjectives, they must agree with the noun they modify
- Agreement in NUMBER and GENDER (M/F)

## **Adjetivos posesivos – Grupo 2**

- The LONG forms of possessive adjectives are:

MÍO (*mine*)

NUESTRO (*ours*)

TUYO (*yours*)

VUESTRO (*yours*)

SUYO (*his/hers/yours*) SUYO (*theirs/yours*)

### Adjetivos posesivos - Grupo 3

- The different forms of the possessive adjectives are:

MÍO / MÍA  
MÍOS / MÍAS

NUESTRO / NUESTRA  
NUESTROS / NUESTRAS

TUYO / TUYA  
TUYOS / TUYAS

VUESTRO / VUESTRA  
VUESTROS / VUESTRAS

SUYO / SUYA  
SUYOS / SUYAS

SUYO / SUYA  
SUYOS / SUYAS

## **Adjetivos posesivos – Grupo 4**

- the long forms of POSSESSIVE adjectives are often used for emphasis
- long forms of POSSESSIVE adjectives can come immediately after the noun they modify...

ex - **Pablo es un amigo mío**

*Pablo is a friend of mine*

- ...but they can also appear separate from the noun:

ex – **La camisa azul no es mía**

*The blue shirt is not mine*



## Appendix N

Después de bañarme, me seco y me pongo agua de colonia.

La audición para la orquesta es en veinte minutos y Manuel tiene que prepararse rápidamente.

En el salón de belleza hay muchos cepillos y peines, diez toallas blancas, y un secador viejo.

La Srta. Velez se levanta a las cinco y cuarto, pero sus hijos se levantan antes, a las cinco.

Yo tengo que pedir prestado un traje formal para la boda de mi tía.

¿Por qué te maquillas y te arreglas el pelo?

¿Tienes una cita?

Las bailarinas se pintan los labios y se ponen vestidos para el baile.

A Raúl le gusta acostarse pronto todas las noches, pero depende de cuánta tarea tiene.

Gisela prefiere levantarse tarde porque su cama es muy cómoda.

Rafael y Antonio están cansados, pero normalmente son chicos muy energéticos.





## Appendix Q

### INDIVIDUAL ORAL PRESENTATION RUBRIC: Unit 2A Skit

<b>Vocabulary</b>	<b>4</b> – Generally accurate and appropriate to task. Minor errors may occur.	<b>3</b> – Usually accurate; errors or inaccuracies may be frequent.	<b>2</b> – Not extensive enough for task. Inaccuracies or repetition may be frequent. English words used.	<b>1</b> – Vocabulary is inadequate for the basic requirements of the task.
<b>Grammar</b>	<b>4</b> – May contain some inaccuracies, but speaker is still comprehensible.	<b>3</b> – Some inaccuracies but still is comprehensible. Some control of structures.	<b>2</b> – Many inaccuracies and little control of structures; hard to understand.	<b>1</b> – All or almost all grammar is inaccurate, save for a few memorized patterns.
<b>Pronunciation</b>	<b>4</b> – Shows evidence of rehearsal. Sounds are clear and accurate.	<b>3</b> – Shows some knowledge of Spanish sound system.	<b>2</b> – Inaccuracy makes words and phrases difficult to understand.	<b>1</b> – Garbled or poor pronunciation detracts severely from presentation.
<b>Preparedness</b>	<b>4</b> – Presentation was obviously rehearsed many times. No reliance on cue cards.	<b>3</b> – Cue cards used but this does not affect overall presentation. A few glitches.	<b>2</b> – Speaker gets lost or is unsure about what he/she is saying. Disjointed.	<b>1</b> – Very rough. Little/no practice is evident. Speaker is lost or extremely unfamiliar with speech.
<b>Group support</b>	<b>4</b> – Individual supports partners and shares labor on skit development	<b>3</b> – Labor on skit development is mostly evenly distributed and members work together in a mostly positive and supportive way.	<b>2</b> – There are more than 2 instances when group is observed to not work constructively. Members do not support one another	<b>1</b> – Group members are not at all supportive of one another.

**GROUP ORAL PRESENTATION RUBRIC: Unit 2A Skit**

<b>Group Cohesion</b>	<b>10</b> – Group works together at all appointed times	<b>7</b> – Group is usually on-task when time is provided to work on skit	<b>4</b> – Group is not consistently on-task when time is provided to work on skit	<b>1</b> – Group is rarely on-task during class time provided for work/practice with skit
<b>Content</b>	<b>10</b> – Skit meets all requirements for content.	<b>7</b> – Skit lacks one or more elements of required content, maybe by accident.	<b>4</b> – Skit lacks multiple components of the required content of the task.	<b>1</b> – Skit contains few to none of the required elements as indicated on the project spec. sheet.
<b>Working Script</b>	<b>10</b> – Each group member maintains an updated script throughout development of skit	<b>7</b> – There are 1 or 2 occasions on which a group member does not have his/her own copy of the script	<b>4</b> – On several occasions one or more group members do not have their own copies of the script when time is provided to work/practice.	<b>1</b> – One person is forced to maintain the script, causing unfamiliarity with lines and a lack of preparedness for the group as a whole
<b>Final Script</b>	<b>10</b> – A complete and correct copy of the script, typed and double-spaced, is provided to teacher at time of performance.	<b>7</b> – Script is provided late, is incomplete / incorrect, or is handwritten / not double-spaced.	<b>4</b> – More than one of the aforementioned problems affects final script.	<b>1</b> – No final script is provided to teacher.

## APPENDIX R

### Participant Interview Questions

1. Tell me about how the first semester has gone? What are your impressions?
2. What kinds of things made it easier or harder to speak in Spanish class?
3. What is your goal with the Spanish language?
4. What was it like working in your cooperative group?
5. What has it been like being a native speaker in class? What are your impressions so far?
6. Does being a native speaker in a class full of non-native speakers affect your motivation to participate in class? How?
7. Talk for a minute about the oral practice activities – The dialog practice, the interview presentation, the skit. What were your experiences with these like?
8. How do you think you have changed, if at all, as a Spanish speaker during the last 4 months?
9. What are some advantages that you experienced with working in groups? What about disadvantages?
10. What were the challenges of creating and performing the skit in cooperative groups?
11. Do you notice any changes in the way you feel about speaking Spanish in class between the beginning of the year and now?
12. What are your impressions of learning and reviewing Spanish by using *Mi vida loca*?
13. What is the most important thing, for you personally, if you are going to feel comfortable speaking Spanish in class?