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Teaching in the Target Language Within the 21st Century Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This teacher action research study investigated conducting class primarily through the target language in a middle school Spanish I classroom. Eighteen 7th grade non-native Spanish speaking students participated in the study conducted in a rural K-8 elementary school containing approximately 400 students in northwestern New Jersey. Target language competence, student motivation and student anxiety were measured throughout. Methods of gathering data included teacher observation, student surveys, student group interviews, formal and informal assessments, and collection of student work. Findings suggest that conducting class through the medium of the target language increases students’ target language proficiency and communicative competence. Student motivation and cultural competence were also positively impacted throughout. Furthermore, conducting class in the target language seems likely to decrease students’ overall target language anxiety.
Acknowledgements

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ................................................................. 1

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................. 2

LIST OF FIGURES ..................................................... 3

RESEARCHER STANCE ............................................... 7

LITERATURE REVIEW ............................................... 9

- Historical Background ........................................... 10
- Current Context .................................................. 11
- Student Anxiety and Target Language Use .................. 12
- Strategies for Teaching in the Target Language .......... 13
- Teaching Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom ... 14
- Summary .......................................................... 15

METHODOLOGY ..................................................... 16

- Research Goals .................................................. 16
- Setting and Participants ....................................... 17
- Data Gathering Methods ..................................... 18
Field Log…………………………………………………20
Student Journal Entries………………………………...20
Student Interviews…………………………………………21
Student Reflection Surveys………………………………..21
Language Acquisition Assessment………………………22
Research Design…………………………………………..22
Trustworthiness Statement………………………………...23
THIS YEAR’S STORY………………………………………27
Yo Soy El Señor Ramirez……………………………………27
A Judgment Free Zone ……………………………………28
Introducing Our Study……………………………………29
The First Interview…………………………………………30
Commands and Total Physical Response Strategies……34
Visual Aids to Maximize TL Use…………………………35
Español Santillana…………………………………………37
Competition Fosters Fun…………………………………..38
The Rabbit and the Jaguar.................................39
Fun Reinforcements on a Short Week.....................42
Matamoscas.................................................42
Simon Dice..................................................43
Carrera de Charadas........................................44
Giving Power to Foster Student Ownership.............45
Struggling with Power.......................................45
Student-made Rubric.........................................46
The Peer Challenge..........................................49
Showcasing Our Results.....................................50
Disney Empowers Hispanic Culture.....................52
Mid-Study Interview.........................................53
So What Does the Survey Say?....................58
Assessing Target Language Knowledge..................61
Interviewing for Closure....................................61
METHODS OF DATA ANALYSIS............................67
Field Log……………………………………………………………67

Student Journal Entries………………………………………...68

Student Interviews………………………………………………69

Reflection Surveys………………………………………………70

Language Acquisition Assessments…………………………72

Coding and Binning………………………………………………73

THEMES………………………………………………………………75

Student Anxiety………………………………………………..75

Student Confidence………………………………………………76

Negative Past Experience………………………………………77

Strategies for Teaching in the TL………………………………78

Inquiry-Based in the World Language Classroom…………78

Constructive Student Input……………………………………79

Change in Student Effort/ Motivation………………………80

Personal Experience (Teacher)………………………………81

Evidence of Language/ Cultural Knowledge………………81
Growth in Student Achievement.........................81

WHATS NEXT..................................................83

REFERENCES..................................................85

APPENDICES..................................................93
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1 ACTFL’s Levels of Proficiency ......................................................... 12
Figure 2.2 Model of Path to Proficiency and ICC ................................. 19
Figure 3.1 Data Collection Plan ................................................................. 23
Figure 4.1 Sample Rubric from Previous Class ................................. 47
Figure 4.2 New Student Made Rubric ......................................................... 49
Figure 4.3 Classroom Picture of Student Made Desserts ...................... 51
Figure 4.4 Survey Results A ................................................................. 59
Figure 5.1 Survey Results B ................................................................. 71
Figure 5.2 Results of Language Acquisition Assessment ...................... 72
Figure 5.3 Binning Graphic Organizer ......................................................... 74
I was born in the Dominican Republic and lived there the first ten years of my life. In 1995 I moved to the United States and was immediately immersed in an unknown culture. In order to understand the American customs, I needed to learn the English language. My English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers advised me that it was not going to be easy and that I would have to commit to the language acquisition process. I had to overcome the urge to use Spanish and try to use English as much as possible in and outside the classroom. ESL teachers always encouraged me to use English as my method of communication regardless of my comfort level. They themselves used the target language (a foreign language which a person intends to learn) while delivering instruction and therefore exposed us to the English language as much as possible. The supportive encouragement I received from these teachers helped me accept the challenges that come with immersion. I learned that there is no such thing as perfection during the language acquisition process and that imperfection is the actual norm. I developed the courage to take risks while attempting to communicate with my teachers and classmates. I graduated from the ESL program after four years. The ability to speak English eventually allowed me to communicate with classmates and neighbors who didn’t speak the Spanish language. Interactions with native
speakers allowed me to finally understand American norms and therefore embrace the new culture.

Less than one percent of students who complete a four-year foreign language program in schools across the US are considered proficient in that language. Clearly how we’re teaching in the US schools is not working and yet, most language teachers continue teaching using the same ineffective methods that they were taught by, resulting in little to no language acquisition and a very low proficiency level. Let that sink in for a second. There is obviously a problem that needs to be addressed. I believe that my experience as an ESL student has provided me with a blueprint to fix the issues we are currently facing in the foreign language classroom. Teaching is a profession driven by passion. Educators are driven by personal beliefs and seek to make a difference in the world. Participatory Action Research is an avenue we use to study our craft in hopes of attaining knowledge that will get us one step closer to the goal. I strongly believe that immersing students in an environment where the TL is used 100% of the time will yield positive results in the language acquisition process. In order to validate my theory, I came up with the research question: How does teaching in the target language 100% of the time impact the learning environment in a 21st century classroom?
My personal goal as an educator is help all students reach their personal maximum potential. I grew up in a single parent home with younger siblings that required my mother’s attention and therefore had little educational support away from school. Teachers provided me with the necessary support that propelled me to the man I am today. Without them, I could have dropped out and or ended up in jail like some of the kids from the neighborhood I grew up in. I want to give back what they once gave me; an opportunity to become someone by overcoming the potential social reproduction influenced by my environment. I believe that in order truly help students overcome social reproduction educators must expose them to the social inequalities they could potentially face and involve them in the curriculum design process.

“Your research needs to demonstrate a commitment to social justice and a willingness to challenge discrimination and unthinking prejudice in all its forms. This means challenging your own thinking, as well as that of others” (McNiff, 2017, p.112). In the book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire states that educators should approach education by using a problem posing method. He also advises us to create partnerships with our students and to trust their ability to help create change. I agree with Freire’s ontological beliefs and plan to make them vital parts of my research. One of the problems I plan to pose with my students is the fact that historically they receive minimal exposure of foreign cultures. As a team we will discuss the issues in today’s society that can be attributed to lack of foreign
culture knowledge and look for ways to educate ourselves and those who come after.

During my student teaching experience 5 years ago, I ran into the quote “When one teaches, two learn” by Robert Heinlein. I lean back on that quote when faced with the question, what is your understanding of knowledge, and how do you believe it is constructed? As an educator I learn from the experiences of my students. Each lesson helps mold me into a better educator for the proceeding lesson. Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) allows for students to take a deep look at their surroundings, identify a problem, and develop questions through personal inquiry. The result yields knowledge that at the very least takes us one step closer towards the goal (overcoming the identified problem). The process of acquiring knowledge through personal inquiry allows students to have a voice. It is important to remember that most students are not comfortable with the personal inquiry process. Unfortunately, most students are used to traditional methods of education. Methods like the banking system cited by Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Within the banking method, students are nothing but depositories that receive, organize, memorize, and repeat information they acquire from their teachers. Educators must find ways to help students who have only experienced methods similar to the banking system. We must encourage students to overcome these obstacles and embrace inquiry based methods like problem posing. The first step is to open their eyes and make them aware of the problem.
According to McCarthy (as cited in McNiff, 2017) a good rapport with students “could not exist without mutual trust, understanding and respect” (p. 158). After students become aware, build those partnerships. Partnerships like the ones I experienced with my ESL teachers. Partnerships where the student feels like a valuable component of the instructional process and therefore takes full ownership of the learning experience. Partnerships where the teachers are open to learn from their students and therefore acquire fundamental knowledge.

I remember when my ESL teachers made me aware of the social inequalities of today’s society. They told me that the educated man ran this country. They advised me that learning English was essential to going to college and eventually becoming an educated man myself. They also told me that uneducated people are vulnerable to exploitation and that I needed to commit to working hard to become educated. Being aware helped me develop an interest in course work and therefore kept me motivated. I became solely focused on making sure I learned the English language. I believe that it also helped me overcome the insecurities that made me anxious when communicating in the TL. I plan to help my students overcome their insecurities by providing a classroom environment where they feel safe and by keeping them focused on overcoming social inequalities. I will build partnerships that will showcase their importance to the learning process by implementing their feedback while designing the curriculum. By maximizing TL use, building codependent partnerships, and creating
awareness through the problem posing method, I will help my students attain proficiency and intercultural communicative competence.
Literature Review

Thousands of students are engaged in learning a second language in classrooms across the United States. However, the instructional use of the target Language (TL) within these classrooms varies greatly. By definition “target language” is the language that a nonnative speaker uses in the midst of learning. There is an agreement among researchers and teachers where they acknowledge the importance of using the TL as a method of instruction within the classroom (Chambers, 1991; Franklin, 1990; Isabelli-Garcia & Lacorte, 2016; Moeller & Roberts, 2013; Veque, 2006). The obvious differences among classrooms can be seen when analyzing the amount of TL used (Duff & Polio, 1990). There are teachers who believe that the first language (L1) plays a significant role in the language acquisition process and therefore rely upon it within their instruction (Macaro & Lee, 2013). On the other hand, others believe that students must be immersed in classrooms where the target language is used 100 percent of the time during instruction (Isabelli-Garcia & Lacorte, 2016; Veque, 2005). The fact that there isn't a universal approach among educators leads to poor results in language acquisition. A united approach would set clear expectations for TL use and provide the necessary professional development opportunities needed to meet those standards. In fact, less than one percent of students who completed a two to four-year foreign language program in the US are proficient in that language. That’s important because in 2008 93% of all high schools in the country offered
foreign languages, according to a national survey (Caplan, 2018). In the state on New Jersey alone, high school programs continue to produce few students who can function even at a novice level in another language. This can be a product of the fact that many high school world languages programs function in the same manner they have since the early 1900s. As a result, they have looked to reform the world language program across the state. New Jersey’s Model for High School Reform in World Languages (2009).

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) world readiness standards drove the instruction. ACTFL’s goals are centered around the 5 C’s (Communication, Culture, Connections, Comparisons and Communities). Although all of ACTFL’s goals have been addressed, the completed intervention placed a significant emphasis on culture. The United States is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. There are many problems in today’s society that can be attributed to the lack of understanding between people of different cultures. World language teachers can help the country take a step in the right direction by teaching about the characteristics of different cultures and how to understand and interact with them. However, some world language educators do not believe in teaching about culture and or feel uncomfortable teaching in the target language (Cummings Hlas, 2016). Students also fear and therefore are anxious about being immersed in a classroom that uses
the target language 100 percent of the time (Levine, 2003). Although these concerns are valid, both can be successful with the necessary support.

**Historical Background**

The concept of immersion in language education is not new. According to Cummins (2000), the term "immersion education" came to prominence in Canada during the 1960s to describe innovative programs in which the French language was used as a medium of instruction for elementary school students whose home language was English. The success of immersion education in Canada inspired other cultures to create programs of their own. In the United States alone, immersion programs have been used over the last 45 years (Walker & Tedick, 1999). Within immersion programs the goal is for “students to become proficient in the second language and develop increased cultural awareness while reaching a high level of academic achievement” (Fortune & Tedick, 2003, p.1). While most educators can agree on the overall goal for immersion, they tend to implement programs that vary from one another. Swain and Johnson (1997) identified ten variable features that distinguish programs from one another. A sampling of these features include but are not limited to: level within the educational system at which immersion is introduced, extent of immersion (referring to the time of the school day spent in the target language), and commitment on the part of all players, from students to teachers to policymakers. Some of the most common
immersion programs are designed to enhance the education of native speakers by providing all their academic subjects in the second language (Fortune & Tedick, 2003). The intervention I plan to incorporate will primarily be implemented within my foreign language classroom. I also plan to enlist the help of other 7th and 8th grade teachers to support the intervention by creating simple opportunities where the TL is used as a method of communication within the school community.

**Current Context**

Effective language instruction must provide significant levels of meaningful communication and interactive feedback in the target language in order for students to develop language and cultural proficiency (ACTFL, 2010). Yet there is still a constant debate over the use of the TL vs L1 in foreign language classrooms (Crawford, 2004; Duff & Polio, 1990; Ekmekçi, 2018; Littlewood & Yu, 2009; Turnbull, 2001). One thing most can agree on is the common goal of helping students achieve proficiency in the target language. Proficiency is defined as the level of knowledge and expertise a person has when using a given language (Omaggio Hadley, 2000). Although there might be some disparity between what educators consider as proficient, ACTFL sets clear guidelines which are descriptions of students’ ability to speak, write, listen, and read in “real-world situations in a spontaneous and non-rehearsed context”
ACTFL has provided multiple standards in observable terms for different levels (Fig 2.1) of proficiency. For example, speakers of the intermediate level are distinguished by their ability to create with the language when talking about familiar topics related to their daily life. They are able to recombine learned material in order to express personal meaning. Intermediate-level speakers can ask simple questions and can handle a straightforward survival situation. They produce sentence-level language, ranging from discrete sentences to strings of sentences, typically in present time. Intermediate-level speakers are understood by interlocutors who are accustomed to dealing with non-native learners of the language (ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, 2012).

Reaching high levels of proficiency is no easy task and therefore requires a great amount of practice. Teaching in the TL supports this practice. As a result, ACTFL recommends that language educators and their students use the target language as exclusively as possible (90% plus) at all levels of instruction during instructional time and, when feasible, beyond the classroom.
Figure 2.1 ACTFL’s Levels of Proficiency and Descriptors for Language Learner Performance

Courtesy of: ACTFL Performance Descriptors for Language Learners, 2012
Student Anxiety and Target Language Use

Students’ reluctance to use the TL can be a real challenge for educators. Studies have consistently shown that students rarely start TL exchanges on their own and therefore rely on L1 to communicate with their teacher and or peers (Crichton, 2009). This fact begs the question: Is this a product of lack of confidence? Hui-ju & Ting-Han (2014) conducted a study where 212 students were surveyed with an instrument that measured foreign language anxiety. The results of the study showed that students fear negative evaluation by their teachers and or peers. Students also attribute their usage of the L1 to help assist them in learning vocabulary, grammar, and to communicate a need for clarification from the teacher (Rolin-Ianziti & Varshney, 2008). Taken together, these studies show that there are multiple reasons why students may avoid using the TL in certain circumstances. It is the educator’s job to build the confidence of their students and establish routines that encourage the use of the TL. Crichton’s (2009) study observed teachers encouraging the use of the TL by using high levels of simple praise when students made contributions using the TL. Students within the study reported lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes in multiple interviews, although they consistently claimed that their teachers were always positive and encouraged them to keep trying.
Strategies for Teaching in the Target Language

What does a classroom that uses the TL 100 percent of the time look like? ACTFL (2010) stated that instructors that use a variety of strategies to facilitate comprehension and support meaning making are at the forefront of classrooms that feature maximum target-language use. The strategies provided as examples include but are not limited to:

- provide comprehensible input that is directed toward communicative goals
- make meaning clear through body language, gestures, and visual support
- conduct comprehension checks to ensure understanding
- negotiate meaning with students and encourage negotiation among students
- encourage self-expression and spontaneous use of language
- teach students strategies for requesting clarification and assistance when faced with comprehension difficulties and offer feedback to assist and improve students’ ability to interact orally in the target language.

These strategies have been used and observed in other studies. “During activities in class, the teachers repeatedly checked for understanding:

-Teacher 1: Alles OK? Ist es klar?


This is a well-established strategy which is employed generally in classrooms, but
using the TL to do so, combined with the high level of frequency with which these checks were made, meant the pupils were being constantly exposed to the language of negotiation, something useful to them in interaction with native speakers” (Crichton, 2009, p. 27). In the “Discovery Stage” of Romero & Pajaro Manjarres’s (2016) study a strategy was implemented in order to maximize use of the TL (English); where the teacher and the students designed useful phrases to be used in the classroom for instruction and clarification. For instance, if they needed clarification or felt overwhelmed they could ask “Can you please explain? Could you speak slowly, please”. The most commonly used expressions were painted by students on the wall in effort to keep them in mind for future use.

Teacher input of information about themselves in the TL can be a motivating tool in the foreign language classroom. “It is likely that the amount of input from the teachers, linked to the kind of TL they used, which the pupils heard every time they were in the class, gave them the vocabulary and structures they needed to communicate confidently to fulfil their needs” (Crichton, 2009, p. 33). Studies have reinforced the need for visuals and gestures to help students understand and communicate in the TL (Cummins, 2000; Krulatz, Neokleous & Henningsen, 2016; Meiring & Norman, 2002; Moeller & Roberts, 2013). Educators can also incorporate games that make language acquisition fun and spontaneous. Moeller & Roberts (2013) provided an example where students play a version of the TV show $20,000 Pyramid. “The game placed three or more
students to face the classroom audience while one student faces the smartboard (back to the classroom audience) containing a list of six vocabulary words related to a story that was read. The team has 60 seconds to correctly guess the vocabulary words based solely on the description of the student who can see the projected vocabulary words.” (p.27) Together, these studies provide strategies that are vital towards effectively maintaining the use of the TL in a foreign language classroom.

Teachers frequently cited using L1 to maintain discipline in the classroom; however, Crichton (2009) found that students were highly engaged when full immersion was used, thus reducing the need for teachers to focus on student discipline. In their interviews students stated that they have to concentrate more during instruction and have to pay more attention since their teacher speaks in German all the time and they might miss something if they do not.

**Teaching Culture in the Foreign Language Classroom**

Foreign language classrooms have traditionally focused on teaching language skills that include but are not limited to: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. However, as language and the culture where the language is spoken are deeply embedded in each other, there has been added emphasis put on teaching sociocultural competence (Heilala-Rasimov, Taru-Maija, & Vesanen, 1991). In order for successful communication among cultures to take place, the
interactants must have knowledge of the underlying values of each other's culture. Van Houten & Shelton (2018) stated that Intercultural Communication is “demonstrating one’s knowledge of culture through language; while Intercultural Communicative Competence, or ICC, is using language skills, and cultural knowledge and understanding, in authentic contexts to effectively interact with people.” (p.35) Foreign language teachers must prioritize making their classroom an environment that produces ICC. For example, Guerrero Moya, Muñoz Ortiz & Niño Díaz (2016) conducted a study with seventy-five 10th grade students, where storytelling tools like literature circles and narrative texts were used to build ICC. Students were able to successfully use literature circles to read stories from diverse parts of the world and therefore gained awareness of the differences among cultures, importance of being tolerant towards others, and recognition of their own identity. “The process of storytelling among, between, and across cultural groups, social work students and practitioners will be able to better understand varying perspectives, worldviews, and paradigms inherent among divergent cultural contexts” (Carter-Black, 2007, p. 33). The narrative texts yielded results of growth in cultural skills because the participants demonstrated willingness to change and to be more tolerant and empathetic when interacting with members of cultures different from their own.

While creating an environment that fosters students with ICC, educators must keep in mind that the acquisition of cultural awareness is a fluid and
dynamic process. Encouraging students to keep an open mind is vital. “What are needed, it is argued, are individuals who are more aware of their own linguaculture in a much deeper way, and who are open to exploring new identities and perspectives as part of their daily contact with others” (Taylor, 2005, p. 68).

Taylor conducted a study where students had to adapt to a new subculture (millionaires, hip-hoppers, soccer club fans, gym-goers, etc.). The goal of the study was for students to experience firsthand a subculture that they themselves do not identify with and therefore learn from the adaptation process. Using subcultures to develop ICC made it possible to carry out experiential learning without an international experience with a “foreign” culture or with the culture of the target language (English). After its conclusion, all students submitted written responses that stated and demonstrated that they had been successful in adapting to their subcultures. The results of this support Vygotsky’s (1984) idea that students should construct meaning by reflecting on their own experiences.

“Teachers should consciously encourage students to actively experience different cultures while trying to gain linguistic knowledge. As a result, guiding them from an unconscious cultural experience into a conscious one” (Yunlong, 2014, p.101).

Collectively, these studies and reports explain the importance of teaching ICC in the foreign language classroom and provide successful strategies that can be incorporated by educators around the world.
Summary

Several key factors have influenced educators and students alike to avoid using the TL in the foreign language classroom. Most commonly, educators lack confidence in their own ability to teach in the TL, while students fear negative evaluation from the teacher and their peers. These challenges manifest themselves in the foreign language classroom via TL avoidance and therefore reliance on L1 during instruction. Research highlighted within this review support the concepts of teacher self-efficacy and student involvement in order to overcome the aforementioned challenges. Together, with the help of student centered strategies illustrated in this review, educators and students can form an environment where the TL is used 100 percent of the time. In time, this type of environment will help produce students who have achieved proficiency and ICC.
Methodology

Research Goals

This intervention was designed to immerse students in the target language as much as possible in order to increase student interest and proficiency. Although world language programs can be found in most school districts across America, schools are struggling to produce students that are considered proficient in a foreign language. Furthermore, students consistently show a lack of interest in second language acquisition and only take enough classes to meet the high school world language requirement. As educators, it is vital that we find ways to motivate our students to gain an interest in the learning experience and therefore take ownership in making the best of it.

Setting and Participants

The study was implemented at a small, rural elementary school located in central New Jersey. The school has a total population of 401 students who are divided between the grades of K-8. The minority enrollment is just 10.5%, much less than the statewide average of 52%, and the economically disadvantaged percentage is just 9%. The teacher to student ratio is 9:1. The participants in my study were students in one of my three 7th grade Spanish I-A classes. 18 students in total, 10 males and 8 females. Of the 18 students, 6 had an IEP or 504 plan.
Data Gathering Methods

Field Log

Throughout the study I gathered observational data on a weekly basis. Reflecting on student progress weekly allowed me to assess the strategies implemented and make the necessary adjustments. I also used my field log to jot down student survey results as well as percentage increases between student assessments. The field log eventually became the main organizational hub of the data collected during the study. It is organized by date and type of data for quick and easy access.

Student Journal Entries

Students completed multiple journal entries throughout the study. The first journal entry asked them share their thoughts about learning in the target language prior to the commencement of the study. Students also complete a few journal entries that focused on Hispanic culture and asked them to compare the traditions to that of their own. Finally, students completed journal entries that asked them to reflect on their experiences using classroom strategies that aided them while speaking in the TL.
Student Interviews

Students were interviewed three times throughout the study (Appendix D). Each interview was held during class and included all the members of the class who were in attendance. The first interview took place on 9/13/18 before the intervention officially began. The focus of this interview was students’ previous experiences in the world language classroom, as well as the motivation and effort they put into their classes and the anxiety associated with learning in the TL. The second interview (midpoint) took place 11/15/18 and focused on their preliminary experiences learning in the TL and how they compare to their previous experiences. The third and final interview took place on 12/21/18 and focused on their overall experience learning in the TL and suggestions they had moving forward.

Student Reflection Surveys

Students were surveyed multiple times through google forms. The survey (Appendix E) was composed of 10 multiple choice questions and two open ended. The multiple choice questions required students to reflect on several statements about learning in the TL. Student choices included strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree. The open ended questions asked students to provide suggestions for the class and to explain how their feelings
about learning in the TL have changed over time. Many suggestions provided by students through these surveys were incorporated in the class.

**Language Acquisition Assessments**

Student language acquisition was tracked throughout the study. In order to gauge student progress towards proficiency, I used a benchmark assessment provided by Espanol Santillana. Students were assessed on content they were going to learn during the first unit of the text (Mexico). After they completed the unit, students took a post assessment. The results of each assessment were compared in order to measure language acquisition while learning in the TL.

**Research Design**

Figure 3.1 Data Collection Plan

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<tr>
<th><strong>When?</strong></th>
<th><strong>Intervention/ Data Collection</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Start: (Weeks 1-3)</td>
<td>- Explanation of Study</td>
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<td>- Preliminary Interview</td>
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<td>- Benchmark Assessment</td>
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<td>Ongoing: (Weeks 3-16)</td>
<td>- Teaching the TL</td>
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<td>- Interactive Activities</td>
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<td>- Spanish Culture-based lessons</td>
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<td>- Reflection Surveys</td>
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<td>Mid-Point: (Weeks 8-11)</td>
<td>- Inquiry-based Project</td>
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<td>- Student Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>End: (Weeks 14-16)</td>
<td>- Post Assessment</td>
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<td>- Student Interview</td>
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Trustworthiness Statement

To enhance the validity and trustworthiness of this study, I made sure to follow the recommended research guidelines set forth by Moravian College. These guidelines ensure that all practices within the study are ethical and remain confidential. In order to be granted permission for this study, I had to submit documentation to Moravian’s Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB). The documentation included a description of the methods, procedures, tools, and objectives of the study. I also provided the board several forms that included a signed principal consent form, parent consent form, student assent form, and the student feedback/survey forms. “You must negotiate and get formal permission for your research, in writing, from university ethics committee and from your organization. You must also get permission from participants if you wish to involve them” (McNiff, 2017, p.167). In addition to the documentation, I provided means by which I planned to make sure that all student information remained confidential and in a secure location.

Although I strongly believed maximizing TL use was going to yield positive results during the study, I remained open to unexpected research findings. McNiff (2017) states that universities prefer research that remains objective and therefore encourages researchers to stay neutral when analyzing results. The student survey/feedback form was completed weekly in order to gage results of
the study and generate student feedback. The form asked students to make comments about the strategies used in the class and to leave suggestions that could provide improvements. I analyzed and incorporate their suggestions throughout the study. “Reflect on what was happening, check out new understandings with others, and in light of your reflections try a different way that may or may not be more successful” (McNiff, 2017, p.15). In addition to student feedback, I reflected on a weekly basis in effort to improve instruction and therefore provided students all the help they needed while staying in the TL.

Hendricks (2007) encourages researchers to collect multiple sources of data. Hendricks states that researchers who use multiple sources of data tend to be more credible. In order to give further validation to my data and findings, I used multiple methods of collection. In addition to the student feedback/ survey forms, I collected data through student interviews, student work artifacts, student journals, and teacher observation. The student surveys and interviews provided feedback that I incorporated throughout the study in order to make the best of the co-dependent relationship between my students and I. Colleagues and fellow classmates also played key roles in my study. At Moravian, I was grouped with several classmates in an effort to improve the quality of each other’s study. I discussed methods and strategies in order to get constructive feedback from them. I wanted to make sure all procedures were in the best interest of my students.

Hendricks (2007) states that peer debriefing can help point out your biases and the
way your values impact your interpretations. I also wanted to make sure that my expectations stay realistic and unbiased. Seeking feedback during the implementation of the studyed set the president for data and findings validation. “Submit your data and findings to rigorous critique at all stages and ask critical friends to give you stringent feedback. Critical friends can include colleagues, parents, clients, students or anyone else who is going to give you sympathetic but critical hearing” (McNiff, 2017, p.164-165).
I anxiously awaited my first group of 7th grade students to enter the classroom. Since they were scheduled to be with me during first period, I did not have to wait long. For our first day, I planned to introduce myself as I was a new teacher to the school and to go over the classroom guidelines and procedures outlined in the class syllabus. I also planned to not start teaching primarily in the target language the first couple weeks of school. I felt that this was in the best interest of the students as they familiarized themselves with our classroom, the study and me as their teacher. I stood by the door and greeted each student as they walked in. I remember feeling nervous and excited as the late bell rang and it was time to get started. My first period class surprised me right away. The class was only composed of 11 students and contained two students who were Spanish native speakers. Given the school’s overall racial profile, this was unexpected. The small class size helped calm my nerves as I started the class by introducing myself, “Bienvenidos a nuestra clase de Español! Yo soy el Señor Ramírez”.

At the end of the first day of school, I reflected on meeting with all three of my 7th grade Spanish classes. Most students remained quiet throughout each class period as expected on a first day of school with a teacher they had never met before. During my introductions, some students asked how tall I was and where I
lived. As I went over classroom procedures and tools on the syllabus, students showed excitement over Class Dojo and the prizes awarded to the winners of our month-long ongoing competitions. In order to motivate students to use the TL as much as possible while participating in class, I incorporated a participation competition tracked via ClassDojo.com. As the first day came to an end, I advised students that I planned on teaching the class in Spanish and expected them to primarily use the TL when communicating with myself and their peers. I immediately saw the concern displayed on some of their faces as they looked at each other in disbelief. In order to alleviate concerns, I advised them that I realized that they might not be used to learning primarily in the TL and that I would help them every step of the way.

**A Judgment Free Zone**

Relationship building was the primary focus during our first week of school. My 7th grade Spanish classes completed several team building activities to help shed awkwardness and foster an environment where students felt comfortable making mistakes as they learned the Spanish language. Some of the activities included: Get to Know Volleyball, He Is, She Is, and I Mm, and Get to Know Bingo. As expected, the students shared many laughs while participating in the team building activities and started to develop an environment where they were willing to make mistakes without fear: a judgment free zone. Building such
an environment is crucial when fighting against the anxiety foreign language learners experience.

**Introducing Our Study**

Our second week of school was upon us. I planned to start the week by introducing students to my action research project. I briefly mentioned the study during our first day of school and hinted that I would elaborate on the topic the following week. I started by showing them my research question and data gathering methods. I advised them that the study will eventually be published and that I planned to tell some of their stories within it. Some students immediately became defensive and expressed concerns over the potential publication. I alleviated their concerns by advising them that I planned to use pseudonyms in order to keep their identities confidential. Furthermore, I explained the student assent and parental consent forms’ option to opt out. After discussing their options and the safeguards that kept everything confidential, students seemed to embrace the study and showed genuine interest in the results that could come from it.

I also took this opportunity to let my students know about my childhood and how I acquired the English language. I advised them that I was immersed in the language by my English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, that I was expected to speak in English in my classes in order to get as much practice as
possible. I admitted that at first I was reluctant and embarrassed to speak English around my peers, but had to embrace it in order to successfully pick up the language. I warned them that it was not easy and therefore required hard work and dedication on my part. I also advised them that my teachers always supported me and got me through the hard times by always pushing me to give it my best. I assured them that I planned to support them in the same way. My students responded very well to my story. Some verbally compared my past experiences with their roles within the study. Exposing my personal experience helped students to see the success learning in the TL can have and therefore helped them gain confidence in our study.

The First Interview

In order to get a full understanding of my students’ previous experiences with the Spanish language, I decided to conduct our initial class wide interview (Appendix D). The students rearranged the classroom to look like a conference room with a large table at its core. Students were reminded that they would receive a pseudonym if their comments were featured in the final report. I pointed out that I would be recording the interview auditorily for data gathering reasons and that I would be the only one listening to it. Students were encouraged to be completely honest about their feelings when answering the questions. Our initial interview included the following pre-composed questions (Appendix D):
1. Looking back at your experience learning Spanish, what did you enjoy the most? Was there anything you didn't enjoy?

2. Would you say learning Spanish is difficult? Easy? How so?

3. Historically, have you looked forward to Spanish class? How does it compare to other classes?

4. What is an important quality for a Spanish teacher to have? Why? How can this quality motivate you?

5. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, how would you rate the effort you previously gave in your Spanish classes? Any reason behind it?

6. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest, how much do you know about Spanish culture (traditions, lifestyle, etc.)?

7. If you had to explain the reason why it is important to learn Spanish, what would you say?

Most students expressed displeasures with their most recent experiences in the Spanish classroom. When prompted to elaborate about their previous learning experiences students said:

Isaac: I didn’t like when the teacher asked the question: How do you say this in Spanish? And I didn’t raise my hand because I didn’t know the answer, but she still called on me. It made me feel embarrassed.
Norbert: I think my favorite part of Spanish class was when the bell rang at the end of the period. The class was awful.

Kilber: The teacher was not very good. She taught the same thing all the time and it was really boring.

I also asked students what percentage of the time they recall the class being conducted in the TL vs English.

Norbert: 95% English and 5% Spanish.

Valery: 80% English and 20% Spanish.

Narko: I have a compromise, it was 85% English and 15% Spanish.

Most students agreed that learning Spanish could be easy if they have the right teacher.

Norbert: I feel like it is easy, but it depends on the teacher. Like last year it was hard because she really didn’t teach it.

Kilber: I would need a teacher to talk more Spanish so that I can get used to it.
Valery: Last year we didn’t get to talk much in Spanish because she was usually speaking in English.

During the interview, students expressed their collective desire for a teacher that made learning fun and exciting. They stated that these qualities would help them look forward to coming to class and motivate them to give their maximum effort. Students also demonstrated knowledge of why they believe it is useful to learn Spanish.

Valery: It is important to learn Spanish because there are a lot of Hispanic people in America that don't speak English and knowing the language would help you communicate with them.

Nobert: My family travels a lot. I went to Mexico this summer and I only knew how to say hola como estas? I want to learn more so that I can use it on vacation.

Isaac: It is good to know Spanish because there are some jobs that require it.
Commands and Total Physical Response Strategies

In order to help the students better understand me while teaching in the TL, I provided a list of commonly used commands they would hear on a weekly basis. Some of the students said they remembered some of these commands (singular/plural forms) from previous Spanish classes. Students were tasked with writing the English translation of each command as we went through the list. To help students digest each command, I used physical gestures as I said each command and had students mimic the same. I also showed a slideshow presentation with a picture that they could relate to each command. Students shared laughs and commented on the images as we went through the list. I cautioned students that we would have “Simon Dice” competitions for Class Dojo points so they should do their best to learn the commands. In order to reinforce the lesson, for homework, I assigned the students to make videos at home. The videos had to show them practicing the commands with family members. I also reinforced this strategy throughout the study by conducting an array of activities that used the commands including the aforementioned “Simon Dice”, Matamoscas, Command Card Charades, and TPR Relay Races. I observed students’ demeanor change after the conclusion of this lesson. It was like a weight was lifted off their shoulders. Their smiles and excitement screamed confidence. As the weeks passed, I witnessed students becoming more comfortable with the
TL as they responded to and gave commands in the classroom. Some examples that come to mind include:

Sr. Ramirez: Quien puede darme la respuesta de la pregunta numero dos?

Kilber: (calls out answer without raising his hand) Sobrina!

Valery: Levanta la mano Kilber!

During an activity where students were asked to draw what their homes look like,

Norbert: I don’t know where to start…

Narko: Dibuja un triangulo!

Some students even used commands outside our regular scheduled class! One morning after students were asked to stand for the pledge the following dialogue took place:

Russell: (takes his time almost refusing to stand)

Carola: Levantate Russell!

**Visual Aids to Maximize TL Use**

In effort to help students stick to the TL while communicating in the classroom I placed multiple posters and signs around the room with commonly used phrases like: Como se dice, ______ en Español? Que quiere decir _____?
Puede hablar más despacio por favor?, in addition to other general questions students usually ask. During the first few weeks of school, some students had a hard time communicating their needs in the TL. When they struggled to find the proper words to use, I pointed towards the visual aids around the room. After looking at the prescribed aid, students asked in Spanish! There were times when a student forgot to use the TL and a classmate jumped in and reminded them that they must ask in Spanish and directed them to the visual aid that contained the common phrases/questions they needed to use. In one example that comes to mind,

Norbert: Sr. Ramirez, can I get a drink of water?

Sr. Ramirez: Norbert, yo no hablo Ingles.

Norbert appeared confused by my response and didn’t know what to do next.

Carola: Norbert, you have to ask in Spanish (points at the posters on the back wall).

Norbert: (looks at the posters) Puedo ir a tomar agua por favor?

Sr. Ramirez: Si.
Español Santillana

The third week of school started with the introduction of our new textbook series (Español Santillana 1A). Before the school year started, I met with one of my colleagues and our curriculum supervisor to look through multiple Spanish Textbook Series in efforts to choose one that meets the needs of our program. The Santillana series included a great amount of interactive activities with audio and video clips embedded into each lesson. While completing an audio activity as a class some students said, “Wow they speak fast.” I explained that native speakers tend to speak quickly when talking to one another. I advised them to pay close attention and try to pick up on any familiar words. I compared their experience with the audio, to my experience as an ESL learner when I first moved to the U.S. I told them that I remembered watching television in English to listen for words that I recognized. I advised them that those words, along with context and visual clues, helped me to make sense of what was going on. While completing audio activities throughout the rest of our study, I observed students using this strategy to make sense of Spanish dialogue.

One of the lessons in our first unit included using the numbers 1-31. Prior to working on that lesson, I asked students to demonstrate their knowledge of Spanish numbers by counting to 50 aloud. As a class, we went around the room counting from one student to the next. If a student didn’t know the number they
were supposed to say, they could “phone a friend” in an effort to keep the count going. This activity allowed me to assess students’ knowledge of Spanish numbers and therefore make the necessary adjustments for the preceding lesson. As a result, I designed a lesson that focused on using simple math to practice the numbers 1-31 in Spanish. The next day, for our “warmup”, we started the lesson with the activity “BUZZ”. To start, students got in a circle and were tasked with using Spanish numbers as we counted from 1-31. Students were instructed to say the word “BUZZ” when they ran into numbers that contained a “3” or a multiple of the number 3. If a student failed to say “BUZZ” he or she was eliminated until the next round. The students showed a great deal of enthusiasm during the activity and progressively got better from round to round. The class eventually shifted to working on simple math concepts (addition and subtraction.) Most students were able to complete the lesson without hesitation. The students who primarily struggled during the previous day and during the “BUZZ” activity were given a reference sheet with the Spanish translation of the numbers 1-100.

**Competition Fosters Fun**

During the preliminary interview, I asked students to express some of the things they enjoyed in previous Spanish classes. Some students mentioned Kahoot.com and claimed that it made tests “fun,” and that they “enjoyed trying to finish with the top score.” With the fourth week of the study came the first
summative assessment. I used Quizizz.com as the primary tool for the assessment. The tool was very similar to Kahoot.com and therefore became an instant hit with my students. Most students claimed that they loved the fact that they could compete against their peers. In addition, it provided an added incentive to do better. I also awarded Class Dojo points to the top three scores. Quizizz.com provided my students and me with valuable reports that helped to identify areas of growth and struggle. This feature worked particularly well with our class’ “second chance opportunity” policy. The policy allowed students to retake an assessment they performed poorly on. One of the requirements of the policy, was for students to meet with me for a study session prior to retaking the assessment. During the study session, I pulled up reports from Quizizz.com that individually showed the results of the student’s assessment and their primary areas of struggle. This resource allowed me to help the students focus on their areas of need and come up with study plans to ensure growth on their retakes.

The Rabbit and the Jaguar

The fourth week also brought the introduction of the storytelling strategy for cultural knowledge. My 7th graders were a couple weeks into our first unit of study in the Santillana text (Mexico). To supplement student knowledge of Mexican culture, students were assigned to read the Mexican Folklore story “The Rabbit and the Jaguar”. Students were asked to reflect on what they found most
interesting about the story and what it may tell us about Mexican culture. Some of their answers included:

Caroline: I think the story tells us that in Mexican culture, people believe in myths and legends from folktale stories.

Erika: I think what this tells us about Mexican culture is that a lot of their cultural beliefs are based off of fictional stories.

Kacie: I thought this story tells me that in Mexican culture they make up stories to explain natural phenomenon.

Since the focus of this assignment was cultural knowledge acquisition, students were asked to respond to the questions in L1 (English). In doing so, students were able to comfortably reflect and express their genuine thoughts about the story without worrying about their vocabulary or grammar usage. As noted in the examples above, students were able to demonstrate knowledge of Mexican culture through their submissions.

The following day my students and I discussed the story and their submissions. Students were surprised to hear how common their responses were.
Carola: I think the story shows us that Mexican people think like Native Americans.

Sara: Yeah I though the same thing when I read it. Sounded like a story from social studies class.

They also shared a few laughs about the Jaguar falling for the rabbit’s tricks over and over again. Students were also shown videos of extreme sports that are practiced in Mexico. Students were advised to make a list of the activities and take notes about the Mexican terrain in which they were practiced. Most students were amazed at the variety of activities and made comparisons to activities they have or plan to participate in. This assignment helped the students see Mexico in a new light. They were able to make connections between the country and their own home land. For example, Russell said, “Whoa, I didn’t know they parasailed in Mexico! My family and I did that in the Poconos last summer.” The cultural knowledge they gained from these activities helped them familiarize themselves with Mexico and the customs followed by the Mexican people. Furthermore, this assignment shows us that L1 plays a key role in the foreign language classroom. While the TL should still be maximized and used during most aspects of
instruction, students should be allotted time to use L1 when culture takes priority over vocabulary and grammar.

**Fun Reinforcements on a Short Week**

Just like that, we reached the Columbus Day week. Due to our district’s in-service and a curriculum articulation meeting with the high school, our class was only scheduled to meet twice. As a result, I decided to plan multiple activities to reinforce the TL the students had learned to date. Some of the activities included:

**Matamoscas (Flyswatters)**

This activity divided the class into two large teams. Students took turns going up to the board where they competed against a member of the opposing team. Students were instructed to watch me perform a physical gesture related to a Spanish vocabulary word on the board. Next, students had to place their flyswatters on the correct word to win the round. Each winner received one point that was added to their team’s total. We played two to three rounds depending on the size of the class. Students showed a great deal of enthusiasm during the game and wanted to continue playing beyond the end of the period. By correctly placing their flyswatters on the Spanish vocabulary on the board, they demonstrated knowledge of the TL and commonly used gestures. For example, I used a gesture
to mimic drawing a triangle and both students quickly placed their flyswatters on the word “dibuja.”

**Simon Dice (Simon Says)**

For this activity students were placed in a competition bracket. Each round, students face off one versus one in front of the rest of their peers. Students were instructed to listen to me as I communicated in the TL what “Simon Dice.” Students had to follow Simon’s directions in the TL. Students typically lost if they didn’t know what action to take based on not being able to correctly identify the Spanish command given. Students also lose after performing a command without hearing the words “Simon Dice.” Students were only eliminated from the winner’s bracket after losing twice. Those eliminated were placed in the Redención (redemption) bracket for one last chance to get back into the competition. This kept those eliminated engaged in the competition while they awaited their turn. Students looked like they had a great time competing against each other in this activity and asked for it to be used on review days. This activity helped students practice the weekly commands and the vocabulary we had covered to date. For example, I used the location and proximity vocabulary during one of our games when I said “Simon dice siéntate debajo de un escritorio.” The last student to sit under a desk lost.
Carrera de Charadas (Charades Relay Race)

For this activity students were divided into two large teams. Each group was instructed to come up with a “lineup” and were told that all students needed to participate. To start, a representative from each team walked up to me and were shown a word or phrase they had to act out in front of their teammates without talking. As soon as the team guessed the correct word or phrase, the player was free to tag the next student up and he or she came up for a new word or phrase. The winner was the team that went through all members of their lineup first. We played two to three rounds depending on the size of the class. This activity was a big hit with students. They claimed that they enjoyed the running around and the adrenaline rush they got from it. Students demonstrated knowledge of vocabulary through the recognition of gestures used by their peers. For example, Norbert was shown a command card that said “corre a la derecha”, and he quickly began to mimic me when I ask them to hurry (corre) by pumping my arms. His teammates were able to rapidly guess what he was acting out.

While I was out for articulation, students worked on interactive packets from Rockalingua.com. Students were placed in small groups to work on the packets. The packets reinforced the vocabulary and grammar we had covered in class. As I graded the packets, I was happy to see that my students were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the TL on each one of the activities they
completed. One example was an activity that asked them to label the parts of the home without using their notes or textbooks. Students were able to label all parts from what they had learned in class.

**Giving Power to Foster Student Ownership**

The sixth week of school brought the introduction of our Inquiry-Based Student Choice Project. I reminded students that I wanted them to play an important role in helping me design the curriculum for our class and those who will follow them. I challenged them to ask themselves the question, “How can I contribute to the learning process?” That quickly became our essential question during the Inquiry-Based Student Choice Project. After the introduction, for homework, students were tasked with submitting a response on Google Classroom that included a choice topic based on something they were passionate about. Students also had to state how they might incorporate the TL with the chosen topic and a method of presentation they might like to use while showcasing their findings.

**Struggling with Power**

The first week of the Inquiry-Based Student Choice Project was the most challenging for students. Some students admitted that they never had this much say on an assignment before. Therefore, they struggled to select an authentic topic of their choice. Some students even stated that they “prefer being told what to
do”. I immediately thought to myself “this is a product of lack of experience with the inquiry approach” and reassured students that I understood their struggle and was there to guide them every step of the way. After overcoming the hurdle of choosing a topic, some students struggled to create open-ended research questions. Most of the questions they created on their own yielded basic yes or no answers. For example, “Do Hispanic baseball players make as much money as American players?” As a result, I modeled how to create open-ended questions on the board by giving examples of questions and answers they yield. For example, “What are the average salaries of professional baseball players of Hispanic decent and how do they compare to Americans?” Most students were able to start designing proper open-ended questions after my examples while some students still gave pushback after receiving my constructive feedback. I noticed that these students were the ones that voiced the most frustration with the inquiry-based approach. I reminded myself that these students lacked the critical thinking experience demanded by the inquiry-based approach and therefore required more guidance from me as their teacher.

**Student-Made Rubric**

The first week working of the Inquiry-Based Student Choice Project was coming to an end. Most students were making great strides gathering data and were slowly approaching the presentation design phase of the project. I took this
opportunity to show them a student-made rubric (Figure 4.1) from a previous class (geography) I taught.

Figure 4.1 Sample Rubric from Previous Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Topic/link to WDG</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Creativity/Effort</th>
<th>Craftsmanship</th>
<th>Time Input</th>
<th>Visual Aid</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Original Authentic topic with 4 links to world geography themes</td>
<td>All information contained in the project is accurate. The student identifies the big ideas of the topic and demonstrates above grade level understanding of the topic.</td>
<td>The project fully reflects the student's creativity and maximum effort.</td>
<td>Your project is very neat, done and looks like it took time and hard work.</td>
<td>Student has effectively managed their time throughout the project and remained on task each day. This skill is also reflected in the thoroughness of their project.</td>
<td>The visual aid used for the project does not help the audience understand the material. It is visually compelling, interesting, and enhances the material.</td>
<td>The presentation for the project does not help the audience understand the material. It is visually compelling, interesting, and enhances the material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Somewhat Original Authentic topic with 3 links to world geography themes</td>
<td>All information contained in the project is accurate. The student identifies the big ideas of the topic. The topic is relevant to 7th grade.</td>
<td>The project somewhat reflects the student's creativity and maximum effort.</td>
<td>Your project is done and meets the time and effort requirements.</td>
<td>Student has effectively managed their time throughout the project and remained on task each day. This skill is also reflected in the thoroughness of their project.</td>
<td>The visual aid used for the project does not help the audience understand the material. It is visually compelling, interesting, and enhances the material.</td>
<td>The presentation somewhat helps the audience understand the material. It is visually compelling, interesting, and enhances the material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Common topic with 2 links to world geography themes</td>
<td>Some of the information contained in the project is accurate. It is unclear whether the student is aware of or understands the topic.</td>
<td>The project lacks evidence of the student's creativity and maximum effort.</td>
<td>The project lacks evidence of the student's creativity and maximum effort.</td>
<td>Student was not effective in managing their time during the project and had difficulty staying on task. Deficiencies in the skill are reflected in the project.</td>
<td>The visual aid used for the project somewhat helps the audience understand the material. It contains too much information or not enough. The graphics or sound effects used sometimes distract from the material.</td>
<td>The presentation somewhat helps the audience understand the material. It contains too much information or not enough. The graphics or sound effects used sometimes distract from the material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very easy topic with 1 link to world geography themes</td>
<td>Much of the information contained in the project is inaccurate. The student does not appear to have any idea about the topic.</td>
<td>The project has no evidence of the student's creativity and maximum effort.</td>
<td>Your project is very messy or did not take time and cannot be evaluated.</td>
<td>Student did not effectively manage their time throughout the project and did not remain on task. This skill is also reflected in the project.</td>
<td>The visual aid used for the project does not help the audience understand the material. It contains too much information or not enough information. The graphics or sound effects used distract from the material.</td>
<td>The presentation does not help the audience understand the material. It contains too much information or not enough. The graphics or sound effects used distract from the material.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The students in that previous class had to complete an inquiry-based project of their own and were given the opportunity to create the rubric that would eventually determine their grade. As I went over each column of the rubric, most students remained completely quiet and attentive. For homework, I asked the students to continue to review the rubric and to provide constructive feedback. I advised them that I wanted them to make the rubric their own and therefore wanted them to validate if it was fair enough to use for our project. Some students took advantage of the opportunity and provided constructive feedback.
Others claimed that the rubric was good, and they had no suggestions. Some of the student feedback included:

Narko: For three craftsmanship it should be “your project is fairly neatly done”

Valerie: We should be graded on how our voices project around the room when we present.

Russell: The Time Management column is a good concept to grade us on because we need to be able to manage our time effectively.

Erika: I think that Craftsmanship and Visual Aid should be one category because they are both on how it looks.

I was pleased with the amount of constructive feedback I received and incorporated a large amount of it when I revamped the original student-made rubric (Figure 4.2).
Figure 4.2 New Student Made Rubric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Topic/Link to TL</th>
<th>Accuracy</th>
<th>Creativity/Effort</th>
<th>Craftsmanship</th>
<th>Time Mgmt.</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Somewhat Original/Authentic topic with 2 links to the Spanish language/culture and two or more links to your personal life (per person).</td>
<td>Most of the information contained in the project is accurate. It is clear that the student mostly understands their topic and demonstrates knowledge of their topic.</td>
<td>The project mostly reflects the students' creativity and maximum effort.</td>
<td>Your project is mostly done and most of it looks like it took time and hard work.</td>
<td>Student has effectively managed their time throughout the project and remained on task each day. This skill is mostly reflected in the thoroughness of their project.</td>
<td>The presentation mostly helps the audience understand the material. It is visually compelling, interesting, and conveys the material. The student mostly maintained eye contact and appropriate pitch while presenting (slides).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Common topic with 1 link to the Spanish language/culture and two or more links to your personal life (per person).</td>
<td>Some of the information contained in the project is accurate. The student somewhat demonstrates knowledge of their topic.</td>
<td>The project somewhat reflects the students' creativity and maximum effort.</td>
<td>Your project is somewhat done and some of it looks like it took time and hard work.</td>
<td>Student was not effective in managing their time during the project and had difficulty staying on task. Difficulties in this skill are reflected in the project.</td>
<td>The presentation somewhat helps the audience understand the material. It may not contain enough information or is not interesting. The student somewhat maintained eye contact and appropriate pitch while presenting (slides).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Weak topic with 1 link to the Spanish language/culture and one link to your personal life (per person).</td>
<td>Much of the information contained in the project is inaccurate. It is unclear whether the student is aware of or understands the topic.</td>
<td>The project lacks evidence of the student's creativity and maximum effort.</td>
<td>Your project has messy portions. It does not contain much evidence of something that took time and hard work.</td>
<td>Student did not effectively manage their time throughout the project and did not remain on task each day. The lack of this skill is reflected in the project.</td>
<td>The presentation does not help the audience understand the material and it contains too little information or is not interesting. The student did not maintain eye contact and appropriate pitch while presenting (slides).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Weak topic with 0 links to the Spanish language/culture and or your personal life.</td>
<td>Little to no information provided. Student does not appear to have much knowledge about their topic.</td>
<td>The project has no evidence of the student's creativity and maximum effort.</td>
<td>Your project is very messy. It does not look like time and care was put into it. It may also be unfinished.</td>
<td>Student needed to be constantly redirected while working on their project. It or she was a distraction within the classroom.</td>
<td>The student did not present his or her project.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I found most of their suggestions to be fair and useful. The new version of the rubric was posted on Google Classroom after its completion. Students were once again given the opportunity to make suggestions. This time around, no suggestions were given, and students looked pleased with the instrument that would be used to assess them.

The Peer Challenge

One of the components of the Inquiry-Based Student Choice Project gave students the power to either work by themselves or with one partner of their choice. Some of the partnerships worked well while others struggled to stay on
task and avoid socializing. I also observed students struggling to find common
ground with partners who didn’t match their work ethic. During the second week
of the project, I showed students examples which displayed unique ways to
present their research (Videos, Songs, Comic Strips). Some students immediately
said, “I am not doing that” and “That's embarrassing”. There were some students
who said that they wouldn’t mind doing something outside the box, but chose not
to because their partner refused to do the same. I constantly found myself
mediating between partnerships. I remember asking myself “Should I have given
them the power to select a partner of their choice?” and “Would it be a true
Choice Project if I hadn’t?” One thing I knew for sure was that the struggle
students experienced while managing these conflicts provided valuable
background knowledge.

**Showcasing Our Results**

Presentation days were finally here. Students were previously instructed to
select a date that would work best for them out of the three allotted to the class.
Some of the presentations were amazing and truly reflected the amount of hard
work students put in. Most students used props or shared examples of their work
with the rest of their classmates (Figure 4.3).
Hispanic foods and desserts were featured as some students selected different aspects of food as their topic of choice. Some students struggled to present their findings due to a multitude of reasons ranging from poor time management to conflicts with their partners. After the last group presented, I asked students to reflect on their experiences and share with the class. Most students claimed that they enjoyed doing their projects. They stated that “the power to choose their own topics helped them stay interested” and that “linking it to the Spanish language and culture helped them learn things they would have never looked into on their own”. Some of these students included individuals who normally refrained from fully participating in class activities and performed poorly on test and quizzes. Throughout this project, these individuals found a way to make connections
between their personal life and the TL. As a result, they were able to have a meaningful learning experience.

**Disney Empowers Hispanic Culture**

Before students completed their Inquiry-Based Student Choice Project, they took part in a Special Hispanic culture-based lesson that focused on El Dia de Los Muertos (Day of the Dead.) Strategically, the lesson was done during the week of October 29th since the holiday is usually celebrated from October 31st to November 2nd. First, students watched a short video clip and were asked to identify the purpose of the holiday based on the message provided by the video. Students were also asked to compare the holiday to local holidays. Students were surprised that El Dia de Los Muertos is closely related to Veterans Day and not Halloween. After the warmup discussion that followed the video, students researched more information on the holiday in small groups and were later assessed through Quizizz.com The groups competed against each other for Class Dojo points. All teams scored above an 85% on the assessment. To reinforce what they had learned during their web quests, students started to watch the Disney movie Coco. The film did a great job of featuring the holiday. Students reflected and made connections to aspects of culture they learned in the beginning of the lesson and things they recalled from the Mexico unit of their text.
Sara: Sr. Ramirez is that the same Freida Khalo!!! from the book?

Narko: Wow, they like soccer so much that they even play it on the graveyard during the day of the dead.

Students were also tasked with completing a comprehension sheet throughout the movie.

Due to the ongoing project, it took us several weeks to finish the movie. I was able to tell that the students really enjoyed the film from their constant “are we watching Coco today?” remarks. Election week and Thanksgiving week were short weeks and therefore provided ample opportunities to continue watching. At the conclusion of the film, we went over the comprehension sheet as a class. I awarded Class Dojo points for every correct answer. Some students asked if we could watch the film all over again. I advised them that maybe we could watch at the end of the school year with one stipulation. In the event we do, we would have to watch it with Spanish audio.

**Mid-Study Interview**

Midway through November students took part in our second class interview. The focus of the interview was students’ preliminary experience learning in the TL over the first couple months of school. Students were asked to
reflect on their experiences with the following questions that specifically targeted their preferences (Appendix D):

1. Looking back at what we have done this school year, what did you enjoy the most? Was there anything you didn't enjoy?
2. How has your knowledge of the Spanish language changed since you started this class? Why?
3. How has your knowledge of Spanish culture changed? What impact has learning about Spanish culture had on you?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the effort you have given during class so far? Any reason behind it?
5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your motivation to learn Spanish? Any reason behind it?
6. How have you used Spanish outside the classroom since the start of this class?
7. What changes would you like to see moving forward? What would you like to see more of?

To start the interview, I asked students to look back at everything we did to start the year and share what they enjoyed and disliked most. Some of the responses I received included:
Norbert: What I enjoyed most was doing the project because we got to choose what we wanted to learn about while also linking it to Spanish. And what I didn’t like is that… There wasn’t really anything I didn’t like, the only thing I didn’t like is that we didn’t get to finish Coco yet and I want to know what happens.

Carola: I also enjoyed working on the choice project because we got to choose something we really enjoy doing and someone to work with. It was really fun finding ways to relate it to Spanish.

Most answers were similar to the ones above. Despite the initial struggles, students predominantly praised the project and the power of choice that was incorporated. When asked to reflect on how their knowledge of the Spanish language has changed since the start of this class, some students said:

Narko: I think I know a lot more, because you are speaking 100% Spanish, so it’s like exposing me more to Spanish. To help me learn more. Because last year I didn’t know that much.
Kilber: I think I learned a lot more because our previous teacher taught mostly in English and you are speaking a lot more Spanish.

Tory: It’s gotten a lot better because of talking in the target language 100% of the time.

Carola: We speak in Spanish more often than we did previous classes before. We talk about a lot of things related strictly to Spanish and its fun. I’ve learned a lot more.

Most students responded along these lines and therefore cited the use of the TL as a key component of their learning. When asked to rate their effort and motivation on a scale of 1-10 and how that may compare to previous years learning Spanish, some students stated:

Carola: First of all, the fact you can actually speak Spanish has helped me a lot. I would rate my effort a 9 or 10 because I can see myself learning every day and I am excited about it.

Norbet: I think I actually give a lot more effort now to study and prepare for tests. I didn’t care as much last year
because the teacher didn’t make things interactive. I would rate my effort a 7.5 because I can still do more.

Narko: I think I would rate my effort an 8 because last year was really boring and didn’t try as hard as I could. You teaching the class primarily in Spanish has made it more interesting.

Kilber: I would give myself an 8 because I can do more on my end. But its way better than last year. I like Class Dojo. I like competing with everyone.

At the beginning of the school year I was warned about a specific student’s behavioral problem in last year’s Spanish class. As the weeks went by I noticed that the student’s behavior was a non-issue in class as he remained engaged through our lessons. During the interview I took the opportunity to ask the student directly since he didn’t volunteer to explain what he has liked about the class and what worked for him. He replied:

Nile: Well I think it is taught a lot better. I like how it is taught in Spanish 100% of the time. It helps me learn words I never would have learned with the previous teacher because she mostly spoke in
English. Class Dojo competition also motivates me because I want to be first and get a prize.

Together, these responses validated the strategies implemented throughout the first couple months of school. I remember feeling great about the progress and was exited to continue teaching in the TL.

So What Does the Survey Say?

Throughout the study, students completed surveys that had them reflect on their feelings while learning in the TL and asked them to make suggestions for our class (Appendix E). The first ten questions of the survey required students to read a statement and choose whether they somewhat agreed, strongly agreed, somewhat disagreed, or strongly disagreed. In the first survey, while reflecting on the statement (Learning in Spanish 100% of the time makes things interesting), 16 of the 18 students selected that they somewhat or strongly agreed. By the third time they took the survey, 17 of the 18 students agreed with the statement. When asked to reflect on their ability to understand what is being communicated in the classroom (TL), 2 of the 18 students somewhat or strongly disagreed with the statement. By the last time they completed the survey, 17 of the 18 students somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement. When asked to reflect on being able to communicate their needs in the TL, initially 4 of the 18 students somewhat
disagreed with that statement. By the last time they completed the survey, 16 of the 18 students somewhat or strongly agreed with the statement.

The open-ended section of the survey asked students to express how and why their feelings about learning in the TL might have evolved throughout the study. Students were also given an opportunity to provide constructive feedback to improve our classroom procedures and methods of instruction. As expected, students’ feelings about learning in the TL evolved from survey #1 to survey #3. Here are some examples:

Figure 4.4 Survey Results A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student name</th>
<th>Survey # 1</th>
<th>Survey #2</th>
<th>Survey #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norbert</td>
<td>I feel great, it is still a little confusing but it is fun.</td>
<td>I feel that it is a great class. It is fun. I learned more in a month then whole last year. I enjoy this class a lot.</td>
<td>I think Spanish is getting much easier and fun and I like that my teacher talks in 100 percent Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilber</td>
<td>I feel that I'm learning more when you speak in Spanish 100% of the time.</td>
<td>I like learning in all Spanish because I feel like I learn more.</td>
<td>I like to come to Spanish class now because I know I'm actually going to learn something and it helps me. I like learning in only Spanish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>I'm still a little anxious about being taught in 100% Spanish,</td>
<td>I feel that it is not as hard as I anticipated it to be, and is ok.</td>
<td>I feel better a lot about being taught in 100% Spanish. I can</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
but I do feel more comfortable having experiencing it.

now understand more of what is being said, and I can understand enough to follow directions and participate in class.

I was impressed with the amount of useful constructive feedback received throughout the study. Students really embraced the challenge that came with our mutually dependent partnership. Some of their constructive feedback included:

Norbert: One suggestion I would like to make is making you gestures a little more clear.

Valery: Make a study guide for us they are so useful!!!

Billy: I would like group work to be more frequent in this class because it is more fun than independent work.

Carola: Talking a little bit slower while speaking in Spanish.

Isaac: I don't really have a suggestion to make, but I feel like we should do more projects like the first one we did.
Narko: To keep playing interactive games with us about commands.

The student feedback helped me reflect on the methods and tools I used to deliver instruction and therefore improved my ability to stay in the TL.

**Assessing Target Language Knowledge**

Students were assessed the third week of September in order to gauge their preliminary knowledge of the Spanish language prior to our study. The preliminary assessment was composed using materials from the Santillana text. Students were assessed on things they were about to learn in the first unit (Mexico). Students predominantly performed poorly on the benchmark. The majority of students performed very well on the posttest. In fact, students’ overall final grades went up by 17 % when you average the entire class. Their ability to acquire knowledge while learning in the TL was evidenced by the results of this assessment. Furthermore, the results validated the strategies used during the study and inspired me to continue.

**Interviewing for Closure**

To conclude our study, students were asked to take part in one last interview. The focus of the interview was their overall experience learning in the TL and the suggestions they would like to make for the rest of the school year as
they make their way to 8th grade Spanish. Students were asked to reflect on their experiences with the following questions (Appendix D):

1. How do you feel about learning Spanish primarily in the TL? How does that compare to how you felt when I first told you I would be teaching the class in Spanish?

2. What makes this Spanish class different from others you have had in the past? What makes it similar?

3. What part of this class has had the biggest impact on your motivation/effort? Why?

4. How would you say your knowledge of the Spanish language changed over the course of this class? What helped?

5. How would you say your knowledge of Hispanic culture changed over the course of this class? What helped?

6. If you had to rate your anxiety level from 1-10 at the beginning of the year after hearing we will be teaching in the TL what would it be? What would you rate your current level of anxiety?

7. What last suggestions would you like to make for the rest of this school year and next year in 8th grade?
To start the interview, I asked students to compare how they currently felt about learning in the TL to the feeling they had when I first revealed that was how I planned to teach the class. Some of the responses I received included:

Danny: When you first told us we would be learning in the TL 100% of the time I kind of felt uneasy. But now it is not as hard as I thought it would be.

Norbert: In the beginning of the year when you said target language, in my head I was like “oh god”, I am not going to know anything. But now I feel more confident even when I am not completely sure what you are saying.

Kilber: I figured it would be difficult learning in Spanish but it turns out I can.

Sara: When you first told us that you would be speaking in Spanish, I felt kind of anxious because I didn’t feel like I knew it very well. But now, after half the year of you doing it, I feel more comfortable with it because you taught us a lot of the stuff you used. You also use hand signals and you repeat it so that we understand and so it is helpful.
When asked to rate their level of anxiety at the beginning of the study from 1-10 and how it compares to how they felt currently, students stated:

Kilber: The level at the beginning of the year would probably be a 5 out of 10, because I didn’t really comprehend Spanish that well and I didn’t understand. Now it is like a two.

Valery: In the beginning of the year my anxiety level was like a 9 or 10. Because I really didn’t like Spanish, I still don’t. But now it is a 4 out of 10 because I feel alright learning in the TL.

Norbert: In the beginning my anxiety was probably a 10.6 because I don’t know Spanish. I am an American. Now it is probably like a 3 because I can understand it better.

Sara: To start I would say my anxiety was at a 9 out of 10 because my other Spanish classes weren’t challenging. I thought that I wouldn’t be able to follow directions here. Now that I can see myself learning it is down to a 3.
Throughout the first couple of interviews, students commented on their negative experiences in previous Spanish classes. In order to get clarity on what made this class different, I asked students to compare. Some of their responses included:

Carola: I feel like this is a better learning environment because you can and actually speak Spanish. We now do helpful activities to practice the language instead of just watching the same videos over and over.

James: I feel like this is a better learning environment since you primarily teach in the TL. It is much better than our last class where the teacher didn’t. We also get bugged to pronounce things correctly. Asking us to do more helps us learn.

Kilber: One difference is that you actually challenge me in this class. Our last teacher didn’t. She kind of spoke in Spanish, you always speak in Spanish. Because of that I am learning more.

Norbert: This class is more difficult but better at the same time. You are not an easy teacher, but you joke around and have fun with us.
Collectively, students conveyed that the rigor they faced in our classroom transferred to a better learning experience.
Methods of Data Analysis

Throughout the study, I collected various data to document and analyze target language knowledge, cultural knowledge, student motivation, and student anxiety. To begin the study, students completed reflection journals and participated in a preliminary interview that focused on their feelings about learning in the TL and their previous experiences in the world language classroom. Students also took a benchmark assessment prior to starting our first unit. Throughout the study, students reflected on their experiences via journals. In addition, they completed surveys that encouraged them to elaborate on their experiences while learning in the TL and the cultural knowledge they acquired. Midway through our study, students participated in a second interview that focused on their preliminary experiences learning in the TL and how they compared to the ones they had prior. Finally, students were given a post assessment to gage their TL knowledge and participated in a final interview that focused on their overall experiences and suggestions they may have had moving forward.

Field Log

Finding time to reflect was a vital part of the data collection process. I used my field log to record the student experiences I witnessed on a weekly basis. Most of the time, I sat at my desk on a Friday afternoon and documented how
students reacted to challenges that came with learning in the TL. Sometimes, I added to the field log at the end of class in order to make sure I didn’t forget crucial details. For example, on October 2nd after finishing his first quiz, Nobert said, “I love using Quizzes. I would have failed that same test if I had done it like we did last year”. Reflecting on my observations helped me to enhance my ability to teach in TL and therefore improved the classroom experiences of my students. As the weeks went by, students became more comfortable learning in the TL. They responded efficiently to commands in the TL and asked the necessary questions by using the visual aids around the classroom.

**Student Journal Entries**

Students’ feelings on learning in the TL and student anxiety were the focus of this data collection method. After reading student responses, I was able to determine that there was a significant amount of student anxiety early on. The majority of students who expressed concerns about the class being taught in the TL stated that they were worried about not understanding what was being said and therefore feared falling behind in class. Some students claimed that they were not anxious at all and were looking forward to the challenge. As a result, I learned that most of my students were on board with learning in the TL and that I would need to consistently reassure and encourage those who feared falling behind. Throughout the study, I reassured students that I believed in them. I reminded them that our
classroom was a judgment free zone because mistakes are expected. Students who initially were too afraid to participate started to raise their hands and take chances in the TL. These facts validated why it is important for educators to provide an environment where students feel free to take risks. Providing that for my students helped my study prosper.

**Student Interviews**

Conducting three interviews helped me hear how students felt about learning in the TL first hand. Students expressed their feelings about events that took place before, during, and after our study. I was able to compare some of their responses from interview to interview and therefore witness how their feelings evolved. During the first interview, students expressed a lot of negativity associated with their past experiences in the World Language classroom. They cited lack of motivation, teacher knowledge of the TL, and rigor as the primary reasons for their bad experiences. During the second interview, students expressed excitement about learning in the TL and how the rigor motivated them to give it their best. Students also validated the strategies that were implemented in the class including the inquiry-based student choice project. During the third interview, students summed up their experiences learning in the target language. They stated that it has helped them increase their knowledge of the Spanish language and culture. They also compared their anxiety levels learning in the TL
at the time of the interview in comparison to week one. Most if not all students claimed that they had become comfortable learning in the TL and therefore their anxiety levels had dropped dramatically. These interviews helped me understand what the student experience while learning in the TL was really like. The comments students made about their own personal progress and how learning in the TL helped them acquire new knowledge showed me that TL immersion could really be successful.

**Student Reflection Surveys**

The surveys helped me quantify how students’ feelings changed periodically throughout the study. Furthermore, the surveys provided a platform for students to privately provide constructive feedback for our class. Since some students expressed concerns that triggered their anxiety in the first journal response, I planned to keep a close eye on how many still expressed feelings of anxiety on their surveys responses. Since students expressed a great deal of confidence during the interviews, I expected that the percentages of students who stated they felt anxious would drop from survey to survey. To my surprise, the percentage of students who claimed that they felt some sort of anxiety went up! (Figure 8) shows how the percentages increased.
Figure 5.1 Survey Results B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Survey #1</th>
<th>Survey #2</th>
<th>Survey #3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I feel anxious when I have to speak in Spanish</td>
<td>4 of 18 students</td>
<td>7 of 18 students</td>
<td>8 of 18 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel anxious when people in the class (students or teacher) speak to me in Spanish.</td>
<td>1 of 18 students</td>
<td>3 of 18 students</td>
<td>3 of 18 students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the fact that my teacher uses Spanish instead of English to communicate in the classroom.</td>
<td>3 of 18 students</td>
<td>2 of 18 students</td>
<td>2 of 18 students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As I reflected on this information, I came to the conclusion that rigor and expectations might have triggered their anxiety. Figure 5.1 also shows students’ responses to the question (I like the fact that my teacher uses Spanish instead of English to communicate in the classroom.) Since students claimed that they preferred to learn in the TL despite feeling anxious, it showed that this was not the same anxiety they originally experienced at the start of the study. The constructive feedback received through the surveys provided evidence of students
taking ownership of the learning experience and their acceptance of the
codependent partnerships I created within the classroom. One example of this
occurred when students reminded me to stay aware of how fast I spoke when
teaching in the TL. I can honestly say that the feedback provided by my students
helped me become a better teacher.

**Language Acquisition Assessments**

Students were assessed multiple times throughout the study to gauge TL
acquisition. They completed a benchmark assessment in September and a Posttest
in December. The assessment was created with resources provided by Espanol
Santillana. The results showed a great deal of growth. The overall average of
grades from the benchmark to the posttest went up by 17% (Figure 5.2) This
information further validated that learning in the TL can help students increase
their knowledge of the Spanish language and therefore make progress on their
journey to becoming proficient.

Figure 5.2 Results of Language Acquisition Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Benchmark: 9/20/2018</th>
<th>Posttest: 12/19/2018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Norbert</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilber</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carola</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Coding %</td>
<td>Binning %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billy</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valery</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narko</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tory</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danny</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kacie</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erika</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nile</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaac</td>
<td>56%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Coding and Binning**

Towards the end of my study, I began going through all my notes and started the process of coding my field log. While coding, I summarized the principle idea within each data set by developing a code, or keyword, that could represent each idea. At the conclusion of the study, I revisited my codes by adding and removing as needed. I then created bins based on the codes used throughout the field log. The ten bins were labeled: Student Anxiety, Student Confidence, Negative Past Experience, Positive/ Negative Student Feedback, Strategies for
Teaching in the TL, Constructive Student Input, Change in Student Motivation/Effort, Evidence of Language/Cultural Knowledge, Growth in Student Achievement, and Personal Experience (teacher). Each bin contained codes that related to one another. For example, beneath Student Anxiety, the codes perception of peers, fear of poor performance (grades), fear of falling behind and building comfort were listed. The process of organizing by relating the data helped me make sense of my findings and therefore answer my research question.

Figure 5.3 Binning Graphic Organizer
Themes

The process of creating codes and bins helped me to develop thematic statements, or big ideas, from the collected data. For each bin, I created a statement that summarized what I learned from that particular component of the study.

Student Anxiety

Student anxiety predominantly appeared in two forms. The first came at the commencement of the study and was exhibited by students’ comments. They mostly cited fear of receiving low grades and potential negative judgment from their peers. The second form of anxiety became evident as the study went on and can be attributed to rigor of the course. Students began to express feelings of anxiety while completing feedback surveys. Although students reported feeling anxious, the greater majority consistently stated that they prefered learning in the TL. Delpit (2012) states, “Successful instruction is constant, rigorous, integrated across disciplines, connected to students’ lived cultures, connected to their intellectual legacies, engaging, and designed for critical thinking and problem solving that is useful beyond the classroom. Never do the successful teachers of these children believe that students have learned enough or that they cannot learn more (pg. 36).” Since use of the TL was an expectation in our classroom, students had to develop comfort and confidence to overcome their fears. My use of
relationship building activities throughout the study helped most students overcome this challenge. It is essential for educators to help students develop comfort and confidence in order to foster an environment where the TL is used as a primary method of communication, advising students that their effort is all that matters and grades will work themselves out.

**Student Confidence**

Delpit (2012) states, “When students doubt their own competence, they typically respond with two behaviors: they either hide (hoods over faces, heads on desks) and try to become invisible, or they act out to prevent a scenario unfolding in which they will not be able to perform and will once again be proved “less than” (pg. 13).” Student confidence is a key component in a successful world language classroom. Within my study, students demonstrated confidence in a variety of ways. Volunteering in class, embracing competition and pride in their own abilities and successes were some of the ways students exhibited confidence. In most cases, the amount of effort a student was willing to give during the study was directly correlated to their self-confidence while learning in the TL. Learning a foreign language is a very unique concept for young minds. Maintaining their spirits high and building their confidence goes a long way to successfully teaching in the TL.
Negative Past Experience

Dewey (1938) states, “As we have seen, there is some kind of continuity in any case since every experience affects for better or worse the attitudes which help decide the quality of further experiences, by setting up certain preference and aversion, and making it easier or harder to act for this or that end (pg. 37).” Negative past experiences can be challenging. Throughout my study, students made statements about their past experiences and how they negatively shaped their abilities, interest, and confidence in the world language classroom. In most cases, these experiences created hurdles for students when learning and contributing in the TL. I immediately made it a priority to show students that our class was going to be very different from their previous experiences. I successfully accomplished this goal by creating a judgment free environment where students felt comfortable making mistakes. Building positive relationships between students and myself as well as among themselves was one of the ways I accomplished my goal. As we moved from week to week, students were able to see that our class was very different from those they had previously experienced. Most students moved past their previous experiences and embraced the challenges that came with learning in the TL. Educators must expect that the student’s past experiences will vary and therefore must make an effort to show the authenticity of his or her own classroom.
Strategies for Teaching in the TL

In order to successfully teach in the TL, an educator must use specific learning strategies that help him or her communicate effectively with their students. Within my study I used a few different strategies to maintain effective communication in the classroom. These strategies included but were not limited to hand gestures, TPR commands, cognates, visual aids around the classroom, etc. My students responded really well to these strategies. As the weeks passed, they familiarized themselves with the commonly used hand gestures, practiced using context clues to break down cognates, and communicated in the TL with the help of visual aids and commonly used commands. Educators must take a realistic approach to maximizing TL use during instruction. If we are to expect students to use the TL as a method of communication, we must provide the necessary aids and model how to use them effectively.

Inquiry-Based Learning in the World Language Classroom

The study also showed that teaching through an inquiry-based approach can be successfully implemented in the world language classroom. Although there were some hurdles to overcome with students whom were never exposed to inquiry-based learning methods, the project implemented during the study was a success. Students were successfully able to blend aspects of their personal lives with both Spanish language and culture. With the help of the inquiry-based
method, educators can provide opportunities for student agency. As Dewey stated in Experience and Education, there are potential advantages to be had by providing an increase in opportunities for student agency. Without these opportunities, it is impossible for a teacher to gain valuable knowledge of his or her students.

**Constructive Student Input**

Teaching in the twenty first century requires a great deal of innovation. In order to keep students engaged on a daily basis, teachers must stimulate their minds with authentic rigorous instruction. In order to deliver a truly authentic educational experience throughout my study, I decided to encourage my students to provide input during the instructional design process. My goal was to create partnerships between my students and I, partnerships where students can feel valued as co-designers of their own learning experience. Most, if not all, of my students stated that this was a new concept to them, that former and current teachers of theirs do not provide opportunities for student input. As a result, I made sure that I guided them through the process and demonstrated what good constructive input looks like. My students were able to successfully provide constructive student input on multiple classroom activities, assessment strategies, and rubric guidelines. By doing so, they truly took ownership of their own learning experience. In order to provide students the opportunity to give
constructive input, an educator must learn to trust students’ ability to make valuable suggestions. They are suggestions that can potentially help them learn more effectively since they know themselves best. In the book Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Freire states that in order to create revolutionary change, one must trust and believe in those who he or she is trying to help. Genuine human interest is easily observed in those who trust. Trust is the key to understanding the struggle of the people

**Change in Student Effort/ Motivation**

As an educator, I have always looked for different ways to motivate my students to give their maximum effort. In order to successfully teach in the TL, I knew that I needed my students to buy into the process and really make an effort to use the TL at all times. In one of the preliminary interviews I conducted, most of my students stated that they were not motivated to learn in previous Spanish classes. In order to change that and encourage participation, I used multiple strategies that created a competitive environment our classroom. During our mid study interviews, a few students stated that their motivation had increased due to a few different factors, one of those factors being Class Dojo. Class Dojo was used as a point tracker for our month-long competitions. Students enthusiastically raised their hands on a daily basis for the opportunity to earn a point towards the competition. Often at the end of the class period, students asked me to show the
standings on the board. This showed that incorporating competition in the world language classroom could motivate students to give their maximum effort.

**Personal Experience (Teacher)**

Building positive relationships with my students has been one of my strengths as an educator. In order to combat student anxiety while teaching in the TL, I made it a point to use previous personal experiences they could compare to their own. I constantly reminded my students of the challenges I faced as an ESL student trying to acquire the English language. By doing so, I helped my students build confidence and embrace the challenge of learning in the TL.

**Evidence of Language/ Cultural Knowledge**

Throughout my study, students demonstrated knowledge of the Spanish language and/or culture they learned in previous weeks. I made sure to recognize it each time they did in order to continue to build their confidence. Celebrating successes is a great way to reinforce student progress. By doing so, educators can help students appreciate their own abilities and therefore build confidence.

**Growth in Student Achievement**

Dewey (1938) States, “The educator by the very nature of his work is obligated to see his present work in terms of what it accomplishes, or fails to accomplish, for a future whose objects are linked with those of the present (pg.
In order to measure the success of the strategies within my study, I created benchmark assessments my students completed before I started teaching in the TL. The results from these assessments were compared to the results of similar assessments after the material was taught. The growth in student achievement after learning in the TL shows how successful the learning strategies were.
What’s Next

My philosophy of education has always featured teachers as life-long learners. As a result, I see this study as a just a step in the process of becoming the best educator I can be. Although the data collected during this showed success while teaching in the target language, there is always room for improvement. I want to provide my students with the best educational experience. To do so, I will take what I learned from this study and continue to seek successful ways to teach in the TL in efforts to help my students reach proficiency.

Looking back at my students’ experience during the study, I can’t help but to be proud of what we accomplished. My students took a leap of faith and trusted me to guide them through a unique nerve-wracking experience. Some of their accomplishments included, overcoming anxiety, self-doubt, and previous negative experiences all while learning in the TL. As a result of their accomplishments, they learned to communicate their needs in the TL and therefore took a step towards proficiency. As we move forward, I plan to help them grow their knowledge by continuing some of the strategies used during the study and implementing others that reinforce learning in the TL.

During the study, I primarily used competition to motivate students to communicate in the TL. Although most students raved about the competitions and awards associated with this method, some students disagreed. In order to provide
the best educational experience for all students, I plan to research and implement other ways to encourage students to communicate in the world language classroom.

In thinking ahead for next year, I would like to continue to challenge my students with inquiry-based methods that require them to take ownership of the learning experience. I would like to become more consistent at using reassurance and praise to build my students’ confidence. I also plan to create more opportunities for students to give their input and will prioritize implementing it during the instructional design process.

I am genuinely excited to continue my journey as an educator. I recognize that this study was just a step in the process to becoming the best teacher I can be. Like my students, I plan to accept the challenges to come in an effort to provide a great educational experience, an experience that will help them on their journey towards proficiency.
References


Heilala-Rasimov, T., & Vesanen, J. (1991). Teaching Cultural Competence in the


Littlewood, W., & Yu, B. (2009). First language and target language in the foreign language classroom. Language Teaching, 44(01), 64-77. doi:10.1017/s026144480990310


Appendices

Appendix A: Student Assent Letter

Informed Assent Form
Authorization for You (the Student) to be a Research Participant

Dear 7th or 8th Grade Student,

I am currently enrolled in the Principal Certification and M.Ed program at Moravian College. This upcoming fall I will be conducting an action research project for my thesis in which I will investigate my teaching practices. Therefore, I will be conducting a study in our 7th and 8th grade Spanish classes. The goal is to determine the impact on engagement and academic achievement when immersing students in a classroom where the Target Language (Spanish) is used 100% of the time. The research will tell us information about your motivation and effort to take ownership of the learning experience.

In this new initiative, the teacher will verbally conduct the class in the Spanish language at all times with the aid of physical gestures. Directions, essential questions, and objectives will be in English (written form). You will be expected to think critically, collaborate, self-advocate and give your maximum effort during the study.

**During the study I will collect a large amount of data (student surveys, notes on student engagement and motivation, interviews and samples of student work) to determine the success of the immersion initiative.** I am writing to ask for permission to use the data I collect from you during this process. This study will help me to become a better teacher and will take place from September 2018 through December 2018. **Participation in this project is voluntary, and you may withdraw yourself from this study at any time without penalty simply by notifying me.**

Participation in this study will not affect your grade. If you have any questions you may talk with me or Mrs. Pillon, who has approved this study.

Thank You!

Mr. Ramirez

7th and 8th Grade Spanish

Please circle the appropriate option below and sign the form:

- I give permission for my teacher, Mr. Ramirez, to use my data to be in his study. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.

- I do not give permission for my teacher, Mr. Ramirez, to use my data in his project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student's Name</th>
<th>Student Signature</th>
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Date

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93
Appendix B: Parent Consent Letter

Informed Consent form
Authorization for a Minor to Serve as a Research Participant

Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am currently enrolled in the Principal Certification and M.Ed program at Moravian College. This upcoming fall I will be conducting an action research project for my thesis in which I will investigate my teaching practices. Therefore, I will be conducting a study in our 7th and 8th grade Spanish classes. The goal is to determine the impact on engagement and academic achievement when immersing students in a classroom where the Target Language (Spanish) is used 100% of the time. The research will yield information on students’ motivation and effort to take ownership of their learning experience.

I am writing to ask permission to use the data I collect from your child during this process. Participation in this study involves only regular classroom activities. You may contact me at any time regarding your child’s participation by email at kramirez@dtshs.org. Mrs. Pillon, our curriculum supervisor, has approved this study.

The purpose of this study is to measure the effects of immersing students in a classroom where the Target Language (Spanish) is used 100% of the time. In this new initiative, the teacher will verbally conduct the class in the Spanish language at all times with the aid of physical gestures. Directions, essential questions, and objectives will be in English (written form). Students will be expected to think critically, collaborate, self-advocate and give their maximum effort during the study. The study will take place from September 2018 through December 2018. During the study I will collect various forms of data to determine the success of the immersion initiative. The tools that will help me assess the study include: teacher observation notes, samples of student work, surveys/questionnaires, and interviews.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and a parent or guardian may withdraw their child from this study at any time without penalty simply by notifying me. Students can also remove themselves without penalty. The names of students who participate in this project will also be kept confidential. All students will be given a pseudonym. Only my in-class support teacher, supervising professor, and I will have access to the data collected within the study.

Should you have any questions regarding my research you may contact me at or my Moravian College professor Dr. Joseph Stosh at (610) 891-1452 or by email at shoshj@moravian.edu. Thank you for your continued support.

Kalyne Ramirez
7th and 8th Grade Spanish

Please circle the appropriate choice below and sign the form.
-I give permission for my school to participate in this project. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.

-I do not give permission for my school to participate in this project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s Name</th>
<th>Parent/Guardian’s Name</th>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Parents Signature</th>
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</tbody>
</table>

94
Appendix C: Principal Consent Letter

Informed Consent form

Dear Mrs. Pilon,

I am currently enrolled in the Principal Certification and M.E.D. program at Moravian College. This upcoming fall I will be conducting an action research project for my thesis in which I will investigate my teaching practices. Therefore, I will be conducting a study in our 7th and 8th grade Spanish classes. The goal is to determine the impact of engagement and academic achievement when immersing students in a classroom where the Target Language (Spanish) is used 100% of the time. The research will yield information on students’ motivation and effort to take ownership of their learning experience. I am writing to ask permission to use the data I collect from my students during this process. This study will involve only regular classroom activities. Data will be collected using teacher observation notes, samples of student work, surveys/questionnaires, and interviews.

The purpose of this study is to measure the effects of immersing students in a classroom where the Target Language (Spanish) is used 100% of the time. In this new initiative, the teacher will verbally conduct the class in the Spanish language at all times with the aid of physical gestures. Directions, essential questions, and objectives will be in English (written form). Students will be expected to think critically, collaborate, self-advocate and give their maximum effort during the study. The study will take place from September 2018 through December 2019. During the study I will collect various forms of data to determine the success of the immersion initiative. The tools that will help me assess the study include teacher observation notes, samples of student work, surveys/questionnaires, and interviews.

Participation in this research is voluntary, and a parent or guardian may withdraw his/her child from this study at any time without penalty simply by notifying me. Students can also remove themselves without penalty. The names of students who participate in this project will also be kept confidential. All students will be given a pseudonym. Only my in-class support teacher, supervising professor, and I will have access to the data collected within the study.

Should you have any questions regarding my research you may contact me or my Moravian College Professor Dr. Joseph Shosh at (610) 851-1462 or by email at shosh@moravian.edu. Thank you for your continued support.

Kelvin Ramirez
7th and 8th Grade Spanish

Please circle the appropriate choice below and sign the form:

- I give permission for my school to participate in this project. I understand that I will receive a signed copy of this consent form. I have read this form and understand it.

- I do not give permission for my school to participate in this project.

Principal’s Name ____________________________________________________________

Principal’s Signature _______________________________________________________

Date ____________________________
Appendix D: Interview Questions

Preliminary Interview

1. Looking back at your experience learning Spanish, what did you enjoy the most? Was there anything you didn’t enjoy?
2. Would you say learning Spanish is difficult? Easy? How so?
3. Historically, have you looked forward to Spanish class? How does it compare to other classes?
4. What is an important quality for a Spanish teacher to have? Why? How can that quality motivate you?
5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the effort you previously gave in your Spanish classes? Any reason behind it?
6. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you know about Spanish culture (traditions, lifestyle, etc.)?
7. If you had to explain the reason why it is important to learn Spanish, what would you say?

Midpoint Interview

1. Looking back at what we have done this school year, what did you enjoy the most? Was there anything you didn’t enjoy?
2. How has your knowledge of the Spanish language changed since you started this class? Why?
3. How has your knowledge of Spanish culture changed? What impact has learning about Spanish culture had on you?
4. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the effort you have given during class so far? Any reason behind it?
5. On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your motivation to learn Spanish? Any reason behind it?
6. How have you used Spanish outside the classroom since the start of this class?
7. What changes would you like to see moving forward? What would you like to see more of?

Final Interview

1. How do you feel about learning Spanish primarily in the TL? How does that compare to how you felt when I first told you I would be teaching the class in Spanish?
2. What makes this Spanish class different from others you have had in the past? What makes it similar?
3. What part of this class has had the biggest impact on your motivation/effort? Why?
4. How would you say your knowledge of the Spanish language changed over the course of this class? What helped?
5. How would you say your knowledge of Hispanic culture changed over the course of this class? What helped?
6. If you had to rate your anxiety level from 1-10 at the beginning of the year after hearing we will be teaching in the TL what would it be? What would you rate your current level of anxiety?
7. What last suggestions would you like to make for the rest of this school year and next year in 8th grade?
Appendix E: Student Feedback Form

Student Feedback Exit Ticket

* Required

Select an answer for each row based on how you TRULY feel. *

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree</th>
<th>Somewhat agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can understand most of what is said in Spanish class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehension strategies like gestures, cognates, and pictures help me understand what is being said in Spanish.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can communicate my classroom needs in Spanish.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel anxious when I have to speak in Spanish.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel anxious when people in the class (students or teacher) speak to me in Spanish.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I always ask for help when I don’t understand what is being covered in class.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When I talk to my teacher, I try my hardest to speak in Spanish and avoid switching to English.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When I talk to my classmates, I try my hardest to speak in Spanish and avoid switching to English.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learning in Spanish 100% of the time makes things interesting.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I like the fact that my teacher uses Spanish instead of English to communicate in the classroom.</td>
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Complete the following by restating the prompt

How have your feelings about learning Spanish changed? How do you currently feel about learning in the Target Language 100% of the time? *

Your answer

One suggestion I want to make is... *

Your answer