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## The Globalized Classroom: Integrating Technology to Improve Communicative and Cultural Proficiency

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## The Globalized Classroom: Integrating Technology to Improve Communicative and Cultural Proficiency

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The Globalized Classroom: Integrating  
Technology to Improve Communicative and Cultural Proficiency

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## The Globalized Classroom: Integrating Technology to Improve Communicative and Cultural Proficiency

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this project was to explore how the integration of technology affects students' communicative and cultural proficiency in a second language when connecting two world language classrooms ~~from~~ across the globe. Through a series of weekly emails between partner schools, students practiced their interpretive reading and presentational writing skills while gaining knowledge of their partners' cultures and colloquial language in a meaningful and individualized manner. The participants were U.S. high school students learning Spanish and Spanish high school students learning English. This created an authentic and organic environment for language acquisition, showing improvement in both communicative and cultural proficiency. Data collected was qualitative and quantitative to capture adequately student improvement. Through analysis of the feedback, both stated by students and observed, an updated curriculum guide was created to help the project improve in future implementation.

## **Introduction**

Bilingualism is an increasingly important skill for people in our globalized society, whether for business or leisure. Opportunities to learn world languages vary greatly between schools, states, and countries. While about 93% of high schools in the United States offer world language classes, only about 58% of middle schools offer them and for elementary school it is an abysmal 25% (Thompson). And these statistics represent the percentage of schools that offer world language classes, not the number of students taking them. Since learning a world language is often not required by the school or state, the percentage of students learning a language at all is far lower.

Students in Spain begin learning English at a very early age, as educational law mandates that students begin studying their first world language, usually English, by the time they are six years old (Devlin). Often they even have the opportunity to learn other languages later in middle and high school. While this is a major difference between the U.S. and Spain's educational systems, I have observed in both contexts that little student-to-student interaction may occur during classroom lessons. Furthermore, language being produced can often be inorganic and, when faced with authentic materials or native speakers, I have observed that students lack the proficiency to properly communicate or do not understand the culture cues that come with the language. Luckily, the plethora of available technology offers new opportunities to take language learning beyond the classroom in a more meaningful and immersive way.

This project was created with two specific questions in mind:

- How can I use technology in the classroom to create a cultural exchange with students of another country successfully?
- What effect, if any, does this cultural exchange have on students' communicative and cultural proficiency?

The project thus took the form of an electronic pen pal program between students of Spain and students of the United States. Both classes had opportunities to communicate through personal experiences and utilize the target language with other native speaking students seeking to improve communicative and cultural proficiency in English or Spanish, creating a symbiotic exchange.

### **Literature Review**

When teaching and learning a foreign language, communication should be the primary focus of the course, as defined by the pedagogical model of communicative language teaching (CLT) ("Theory Meets Practice" 148; Savignon 1). The CLT teacher encourages students to communicate in the world language during class time, and holds students responsible for utilizing this time effectively to gain substantial improvement in the language ("Theory Meets Practice" 150). However, even if a teacher prioritizes communication, students may not learn culture in a meaningful way ("Rituals and Beliefs" 8). Socio-cultural competence, or the understanding of a culture's way of interacting, helps enhance learners' social and learning skills, and language teachers need to give up their traditional isolation and

take the initiative to create a culture of teacher collaboration beyond the typical curriculum (“Rituals and Beliefs” 9; Kohonen et al. 56; Savignon 10). Technology has become a gateway to cross-cultural interaction both inside and outside the classroom. Not only does technology provide numerous tools for differentiation but it also offers multiple unique and interactive means for students to improve their second language acquisition (ACTFL). Blake specifically discusses how technology can be used to help learners of a world language, which he refers to as L2.

Technology, if used wisely, could play a major role in the enhancing L2 learners’ contact with the target language, especially in the absence of study abroad. Whether technology fulfills this promise depends on how it is used in the curriculum. [T]echnology can best be employed in the foreign language curriculum in order to enhance and enrich the learner’s contact with the target language, and thereby assist the SLA process (Blake 2).

When Blake mentions the SLA process, he is referring to second language acquisition, which is gaining proficiency in the language through means other than direct instruction. These means include interaction in the language via conversation or writing, reading in the language, or just being exposed to it by being present amongst fluent speakers (Blake 1).

ACTFL, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, also takes a stance on the use of technology in learning a language. Their position statement explains that ACTFL “acknowledges and encourages using the potential of technology as a tool to support and enhance classroom-based language instruction” (ACTFL). This U.S. national teacher organization also states, “the effectiveness of any

technological tool depends on the knowledge and expertise of the qualified teacher who manages and facilitates the language learning environment.” Integration of technology is also valued by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). AACTE discusses how technology can and should be utilized in a wide range of classrooms, including in a world language setting. AACTE describes technological content knowledge as what teachers know about how their content area can integrate and utilize technology. Specifically, “Technological content knowledge for foreign language teachers is defined as the body of knowledge that teachers have about their target language and its culture and how technology is used to represent this knowledge” (AACTE 113).

John and Wheeler add another view of utilizing technology in the classroom. They specifically focus on information and communication technology and provide specific insight into its collaborative benefits, which will be explored in this project as well. They propose that “encouraging children to collaborate can lead to very positive results. It is commonplace to ask students to work together, and utilizing information and communication technology can make these occurrences even more meaningful, such as providing additional scaffolding and promoting creative thinking” (John 38). The authors discuss introducing interactive technology, providing insightful suggestions on what may be utilized within different settings, and how best to incorporate it for the benefit of all students. Similarly, Chickering and Ehrmann provide what they believe to be the seven principles for effective distance education technology programs:

1. Encourage contact between students and faculty;



2. Develop reciprocity and cooperation among students;
3. Use active learning techniques;
4. Give prompt feedback;
5. Emphasize time on task;
6. Communicate high expectations;
7. Respect diverse talents and ways of learning.

By using these principles, teachers can promote students' communicative and cultural proficiency through distance learning and integrative technology (Chickering and Erhmann pp. 1-6).

## **Methodology**

### **Context**

This project followed the weekly interactions of students between Sra. Martinez's high school English class in a small city in Spain about an hour outside of Madrid and Ms. Marks' high school Spanish IV class in a small city in northwest Ohio. There were about 55 students participating in each country, totaling about 110 students.

### **Surveys**

Three surveys were provided throughout the duration of the project: one for students at the start of the project (the entry survey, Appendix A); one for students at the end of the project (the exit survey, Appendix B); and one for the coordinating teachers at the end of the project (Appendix C). One hundred and four students

completed the first survey, 90 completed the second, and both teachers completed the third. While not all students completed the surveys, the sample size was a large enough percentage of the population to find statistically accurate results. However, a source of error could come from the fact that participation varied greatly, and the students who were unreliable in responding to emails are most likely the ones that did not complete the surveys, thus skewing the information in a presumably more positive manner, as these were the students clearly less interested and less motivated to participate. With this in mind, the results were still overwhelmingly positive and fulfilled many of my expectations.

The first day, February 11, began with the entry survey asking students what they believed their level of proficiency was on the ACTFL scale, as well as what they believed their strengths and weaknesses were in the language, and their preferred means of communication (Appendix A). The project ended with the exit survey that the students in Spain completed on April 21 and the U.S. students completed on April 22. While some questions were the same as the entry survey to see the difference in opinion from the start of the project to the end, many questions focused on how they personally felt they improved, if at all, and what suggestions they could offer for improving the project in the future (see Appendix B). The two coordinating teachers also were given surveys for their opinions and suggestions from an educator's standpoint (see Appendix C). Students were given the opportunity to connect via social media and other means to stay in contact beyond the end of the project, if they chose to do so.

### **Technology Integration**

Students were asked to compose emails once a week, though teachers were generally given the choice whether or not the writings would occur in class or outside of class as homework. Occasionally, students were given prompts such as sports, music, and vacation plans, but also were allowed considerable freedom to ask whatever interested them, to keep the conversations organic while encouraging cultural and personal discussion. All emails were sent to me to be read and processed, as requested by the participating teachers as a security precaution. I randomly paired up students based on the order they appeared on the spreadsheet after they took their entrance survey, with the exception of a few students who either volunteered or were asked to take on a second partner. From there, I sent the emails to their partners, always acting as the “middleman” to track responses. On a week-by-week basis, students at Guadalajara generally wrote on Thursdays; that was the day I was scheduled to assist in their classrooms as designated by my advisor, Susana Juarez, who solicited my placement in that school. Their emails were then sent to their partners over the weekend so the students of Ohio could write their responses, often falling on a Monday or Tuesday or occasionally being assigned as an out-of-class assignment. Their responses were then sent on Wednesdays, and the process began again.

All students sent me their primary emails that were to be used throughout the project. To begin, students in Spain were asked to send emails in English to practice

their writing. The students in the United States could then make suggestions and correct errors to assist their partners learning English. The American students then did the opposite and responded in Spanish, practicing their writing and allowing the Spanish students to make corrections in a friendly manner. The students in Spain wrote for the first time on February 18 and the students in the United States wrote for the first time on February 22. Thereafter, both groups wrote about once a week for the next 6 weeks, with breaks in between for Spring Break and *Semana Santa* (Easter/Holy Week). Halfway through the project, students were then asked to switch languages, so Spanish students began writing in Spanish to show the colloquial use of their primary language, and the American students responded in English to exemplify English vernacular and everyday slang.

### **Data Analysis**

Emails were organized into two folders and color-coded to make tracking emails easier, and the subject line of each email was formatted as “*receiving student’s name*” first and “*sending student’s name*” second. Therefore, an email named “Tyler and Brittany” would mean that Tyler is the receiving student and Brittany is the sending student. This kept the 100 emails somewhat more organized when processing them.

### **Results**

While implementing the program to create a cultural exchange and research its effects on students’ communicative and cultural proficiency, a number of themes that showed positive growth and improvement in the target language became

evident. After analyzing students' backgrounds and usage of the target language, personal goals, impressions of the cultural exchange, and perceptions of communicative and cultural development, data showed students' views of their proficiency in the language and culture of study shifted between the start and end of the program.

### **Language Background and Target Language Use Beyond the Classroom**

The students' background in language study was rather divided: about 60% of students had studied the target language for about four years, while the other, approximately 40%, had studied for nine years or more (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of Years Learning the Target Language

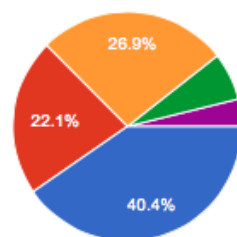
U.S.		Spain	
Number of Years of Language Study	Number of Students	Number of Years of Language Study	Number of Students
1 year	-	1 year	1
2 years	-	2 years	-
3 years	7	3 years	1
4 years	47	4 years	-
5 years	-	5 years	4
6 years	-	6 years	1
7 years	-	7 years	-

8 years	-	8 years	1
9 years	-	9 years	8
10 years	-	10 years	2
More than 10 years	2	More than 10 years	29

The clear difference was that the U.S. students did not have the opportunity to begin foreign language study earlier than middle school, whereas the Spanish students were required to begin by the age of six. Yet their average use of the target language outside of class showed similarities between both sets of students. On average per week, the students believed they used the target language less than one hour per week 40% of the time, one to two hours 22% of the time, and two to five hours 27% of the time (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Weekly Target Language Use Beyond Classroom (Entry)

**How often do you use the target language outside of the classroom per week?**

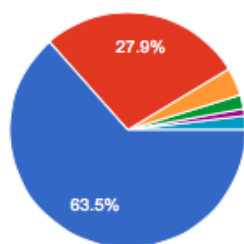


Less than 1 hour	<b>42</b>	40.4%
1-2 hours	<b>23</b>	22.1%
2-5 hours	<b>28</b>	26.9%
5-10 hours	<b>7</b>	6.7%
More than 10 hours	<b>4</b>	3.8%

On a daily basis, 63% of students said they used the language less than one hour and 28% said they use it one to two hours (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Daily Target Language Use Beyond Classroom (Entry)

**How often do you use the target language outside of the classroom per day?**

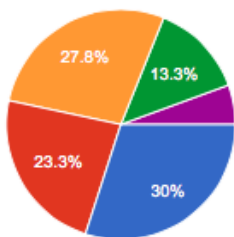


Less than 1 hour	<b>66</b>	63.5%
1-2 hours	<b>29</b>	27.9%
2-3 hours	<b>4</b>	3.8%
3-4 hours	<b>2</b>	1.9%
4-5 hours	<b>1</b>	1%
More than 5 hours	<b>2</b>	1.9%

The data showed that initiative to use the language outside of class was rather limited. However, students showed some small improvement in the exit survey. Per week, only 30% said they used the language less than one hour, 10% less than originally, whereas there was a 10% increase in students that used it 5 hours or more every week (Figure 3). Per day, there was little change, except for a slight increase overall (Figure 4).

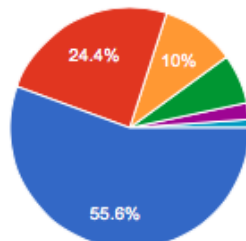
Figure 3: Weekly Target Language Use Beyond Classroom (Exit)

**How often do you use the target language outside of the classroom per week?**



Less than 1 hour	<b>27</b>	30%
1-2 Hours	<b>21</b>	23.3%
2-5 Hours	<b>25</b>	27.8%
5-10 Hours	<b>12</b>	13.3%
10 or more Hours	<b>5</b>	5.6%

Figure 4: Daily Target Language Use Beyond Classroom (Exit)

**How often do you use the target language outside of the classroom per day?**

Less than 1 hour	<b>50</b>	55.6%
1-2 Hours	<b>22</b>	24.4%
2-3 Hours	<b>9</b>	10%
3-4 Hours	<b>6</b>	6.7%
4-5 Hours	<b>2</b>	2.2%
5 or more Hours	<b>1</b>	1.1%

**Student Goals**

While the goals of this project overlapped greatly with the expectations of the students, this program was also tailored to accommodate their needs and interests more effectively. When asked in the entry survey what they hoped to gain from this experience, many of the responses were rather similar. Some students sought “a better understanding of Spanish culture and language (slang, casual conversation, etc.),” and others were looking forward to “making new friends and learning more about the USA’s culture.” Therefore, there was a legitimate interest in learning about cultures, making it seem less forced and more organic. In short, the mix of personal and cultural themes discussed in the emails were received positively. In the exit survey one student said, “I liked being able to talk to someone my age in a different country. It’s neat to know the culture of another teenager.” Another student responded that they preferred “learning the culture of a country from someone who actually lives there, rather than reading about it in a book.” Students also enjoyed the language switch partway through the project. A student from the United States said, “I liked when we got to email them in English because it was interesting to see how they speak their own language, as well as us showing them how we speak our



language.” Other responses echoed this sentiment. “It was interesting to witness first hand how a native uses the language and to get to know someone even though we don’t have the same first language.”

### **Impressions of Cultural Exchange**

The feedback about the cultural exchange was positive and showed that the project was successful in many ways. When asked to rate the project from one to ten and explain their response, the vast majority of students (84.4%) rated the project as an eight or higher. Some positive comments were: “I think this is a good way to learn English and improve it.” A second response: “This project helped me learn about culture in Spain and improved my Spanish. I also made a very good friend;” and, “I really enjoyed the cultural experience of actually communicating with someone from Spain! It allowed me to test my Spanish skills and get feedback from a fluent speaker. I also got to see how their Spanish is different from ours. I liked the opportunity very much!”

However, certain students (2.2%) rated the project with a five or below. These students noted: “It really didn’t help me at all but it was fun,” and “I just wasn’t comfortable with writing to other people. I’m sure this wasn’t a problem for other people.”

### **Student Perceptions of Communicative and Cultural Proficiency Development**

At the beginning of the project, more than half of the students believed they were in the Intermediate range of proficiency, according to the ACTFL proficiency scale. However, there was a large number of students who believed they were at the Advanced Low level, which seemed rather high for their level of experience (Table 2).

Table 2: Self-Assessment of Proficiency Level (Entry)

U.S.		Spain	
ACTFL Proficiency Level	Number of Students	ACTFL Proficiency Level	Number of Students
Novice Low	-	Novice Low	2
Novice Mid	-	Novice Mid	2
Novice High	1	Novice High	-
Intermediate Low	7	Intermediate Low	3
Intermediate Mid	19	Intermediate Mid	17
Intermediate High	7	Intermediate High	15
Advanced Low	16	Advanced Low	3
Advanced Mid	4	Advanced Mid	5
Advanced High	1	Advanced High	-
Superior	1	Superior	-
Distinguished	1	Distinguished	-

This resolved itself in the exit survey, as students appeared to have found that they either knew the language more or less than they believed initially, or they solidified

their proficiency in one area as the vast majority of students later rated their proficiency as Intermediate Mid or Intermediate High (Table 3); a far more appropriate average.

Table 3: Self-Assessment of Proficiency Level (Exit)

U.S.		Spain	
ACTFL Proficiency Level	Number of Students	ACTFL Proficiency Level	Number of Students
Novice Low	-	Novice Low	-
Novice Mid	-	Novice Mid	1
Novice High	2	Novice High	-
Intermediate Low	2	Intermediate Low	5
Intermediate Mid	11	Intermediate Mid	17
Intermediate High	9	Intermediate High	15
Advanced Low	8	Advanced Low	1
Advanced Mid	-	Advanced Mid	1
Advanced High	1	Advanced High	2
Superior	2	Superior	-
Distinguished	-	Distinguished	3

While there was not a drastic change in proficiency levels, a student finding their personal level of achievement is a success in itself.

Students entered the project feeling fairly confident in almost all areas. U.S. and Spanish students believed they excelled the most with reading (64.4%) and writing (51.9%), while they rated lower confidence for their listening and speaking skills, with 36.5% reporting weakness in listening and 34.6% reporting weakness in speaking. In the exit survey, students claimed they improved their reading (71.1%) and writing (80%) skills, and a very small percentage said they improved in listening (5.6%) and speaking (11.1%). Overall, only about 3% of students felt they did not improve at all. The other 97% said they improved to some extent, with many saying they improved quite a bit.

There was also an increase in students' perceived cultural knowledge (Table 4).

Table 4: Students' Perceived Development of Cultural Proficiency

Entry Survey		Exit Survey	
Knowledge Level	Percent of Students (%)	Knowledge Level	Percent of Students (%)
1 Very Unknowledgeable	2.9	1 Very Unknowledgeable	2.2
2 Somewhat Unknowledgeable	24	2 Somewhat Unknowledgeable	8.9
3 Average Knowledge	52.9	3 Average Knowledge	48.9
4 Somewhat Knowledgeable	17.3	4 Somewhat Knowledgeable	28.9

5 Very Knowledgeable	2.9	5 Very Knowledgeable	11.1
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While there is room for improvement, most students showed an enhanced cultural knowledge after the project, showing a positive correlation between participation and cultural competence. In the exit survey, each student was asked to name several facts they learned about their partner's country. Some discussed school: "I have learned that [school] subjects are the same," and "Spain [sic] starts learning English earlier than the U.S. [learns Spanish]." Others discussed holidays: "They have an entire week off for Holy Week," and "Easter, known as Pascua, is also celebrated in Spain." Responses varied but showed a large spread of knowledge in regards to numerous cultural aspects.

### **Student Motivation to Learn a Language and Study Abroad**

There was an evident increase in students' interest to continue learning the target language and study abroad. The percentage of students who planned to continue learning the language increased from 56% to 70%, and the percentage of students planning to study abroad increased from 36% to 50%, with a large percentage still considering it. Furthermore, 52% of students wished to keep in contact with their partners, another 40% were still undecided, and 94% of students would take part in a project like this again.

### **Discussion**

This project was created with two specific questions in mind:

- How can I use technology in the classroom to create a cultural exchange with students of another country successfully?
- What effect, if any, does this cultural exchange have on students' communicative and cultural proficiency?

This project was tailored to the participating students, and the results found through surveys provided useful insight that reinforces the positive outcomes sought by this project.

In creating the cultural exchange, students were asked for their goals for the project. Answers tended to focus on several specific themes: improving in the target language; making friends; and learning more about culture. These goals overlapped with the objectives of the project, thus communication became the focus as suggested by Burke ("Theory Meets Practice" 150). Students were held responsible for their own learning, meaning they had to be self-sufficient and self-led to improve in the language, which corroborated Savignon's findings in the context of the English language learning activities. The project followed Chickering and Ehrmann's seven principles for effective distance technology programs, and met all seven requirements to some extent (pp. 1-6). In the end, most students felt they met their goals and had improved while having fun, with minimal criticism. Some of these criticisms included the lack of communicative options, but Beldarrain's research offers ways to expand this project. For instance, a number of different interactive

technologies can be used to improve the project in the classroom during the next cycle, such as blogs, vlogs, podcasts, and wikis (Beldarrain 140).

In regards to the effect the project had on proficiency, there were a number of changes in various areas. While not exceptionally large, there was some increase in the usage of the target language outside of class, which is a positive outcome of the project. The increased interest in continuing the language and studying abroad is very positive as well, showing students' enhanced sense of multiculturalism and interest in global citizenship. The use of technology was not the main component, but rather the vehicle for communication as acknowledged by ACTFL. This offered students the best chance to interact with native speakers in the absence of study abroad (Blake 2). The results of students' perceived increase in cultural knowledge can be called global competence; students grow and prepare for the world beyond (Reimers).

### **Reflection**

Overall this project went very well, and I received very positive feedback from students and teachers alike. Personally, I was pleased with the email setup and organization within the project. As the researcher, I received over 50 emails every time a class wrote, which I then had to prepare and send to their respective partners. This process often occurred twice a week and would have been far more time-consuming if the format had been less streamlined. The coordinating teachers also appreciated having me in the middle to ensure that the emails were well-

regulated, thereby assuring the safety and appropriate behavior between students. Additionally, when students were absent or forgot to write, I often wrote in their place, supplementing my own experiences so the partner would still have something to read in class.

However, there were quite a few areas for improvement. The first problem occurred before the project even began with my original placement in another school. Finding a school willing to make the project a priority was crucial to the project's success. While the first teacher was interested in the project, she did not feel that she could devote the necessary class time to it. Ultimately the placement did not work out, but I was able to make the necessary switch with another student teacher, so that I could be placed instead in the new school where the project ended up taking place.

The next problem that caught my attention during the project was the inconsistent participation. There were several causes for this, but the most pressing issue was that the writings were not always done in class, nor were they always enforced by the teacher. In response to having the writings as homework, one student said, "There were many times when I had a lot of work to do added to writing the letters." It wasn't until halfway through the project that the coordinating teachers made it clear to their students that they would be receiving a grade for their participation, and then writings increased exponentially.



Though I was able to monitor the Spanish students during their writing days, I had to rely on Ms. Marks in the U.S. to ensure writing was accomplished on her end. With me not being present in Ms. Marks' classroom, it made guiding students much more difficult. In retrospect I realized that my instructions were rather unclear from the start, and were often overlooked in the process. Therefore, confusion caused tension, which then took away from the enjoyment of the project. One student critiqued, "I didn't like how my teacher made everything seem so stressful with this... it's supposed to be fun and learning not a stressor."

While one source of dwindling participation came from the location of the writings, another came from disparity of resources. I had originally proposed mixing different areas of proficiency throughout the project, utilizing other means of communication such as Skype and Facetime. However, resources varied greatly between the two participating schools. The U.S. students were provided with one up-to-date laptop each for academic purposes, while the Spanish students had to share computers in an outdated computer lab. Therefore, communication was limited to email, and the Spanish students were limited in writing time due to resource constraints which sometimes resulted in shorter, insufficient answers.

Along with inconsistent participation, the biggest subject of criticism was the process. I personally found that, while organized, the process was inefficient. This is due to the fact that I was an unnecessary component. I acted as the middleman because it was my project, but in realistic practice the teachers would be able to take this responsibility. Students brought other issues to my attention, such as the weekly timeline being too spread apart. "My least favorite part of the project was

the time between responses” was a sentiment shared by many students who took the survey.

The language switch halfway through the project was also met with hesitation. Two Spanish students reacted similarly: One said, “I didn’t like when I had to talk in Spanish. That is too easy for me.” The other echoed this, saying their least favorite part was “when I had to talk in Spanish because I didn’t learn anything.” A student from the U.S. also added interesting input, saying, “I’m not very good at Spanish, so I felt dumb speaking to [my partner] in Spanish!” This showed the varied proficiency between the classes and the possible need for a better partnering system.

Furthermore, the question also arises about how students should be paired when there is an uneven number of students between classes. Should only volunteers be used when doubling up on partners, should it be randomly decided, or should proficiency influence who has one partner and who has two? Finally, there was the problem that the project had a very clear and rigid place in the curriculum, but never moved from there. This is to say that the project did not extend into the classroom beyond the writings. Students were never asked to apply what they had learned nor discuss their partners with others. This was a missed opportunity to enhance presentational competence.

### **Suggestions for Improvement and Future Implementation**

After reflecting on what went poorly, as well as asking for students’ suggestions in the exit survey, I have determined a number ways to improve the project. The most

necessary change would require clear instructions and expectations from the very first moment. Important points to clarify would be:

- Whether the writings and/or activities will be completed in or out of class
- Whether or not students receive a grade for their participation or fluency
- If there is a length requirement when writing
- What information is appropriate to share and when
- How to format and respond to the emails

Providing updates throughout the project will also be an important and necessary measure to ensure consistent communication between the teacher and the students, as well as between coordinating teachers. Without a middleman, teachers would be able to stay in contact directly with each other, assisting in keeping expectations the same on both ends. While removing the middleman might cause some hesitation from a security standpoint, students could instead email their partner directly while attaching the teacher's email as well. A request made by several students in the exit survey, this would also streamline the process.

In my proposal, I discussed the intention of using various different means of communication to enhance all areas of communicative competence. However, due to technological restraints, I was not able to do so. In the future I would like to utilize more technology, both synchronous and asynchronous, to provide a varied and differentiated experience. This differentiated experience would be more possible

with a longer timeline, so a full year project would be much more ideal than just one semester. It would give students more subjects to discuss, such as current events and holidays, while they share more typical aspects about their life. Furthermore, there should be at least one presentation or creative assignment tied to this project. Students could be encouraged to present their foreign partners to their fellow classmates or relate something they've learned about the other country. While clearly a difficult task, some students even suggested a physical exchange where the U.S. students would visit Spain at the end of the program, or vice versa.

Students also gave input towards other loose ends of the project. A few mentioned that they would prefer more direction in the emails by giving them specific topics from week to week. Others referenced the problems with partner pairings, as some students didn't have a permanent partner until the second or third week, and some students had to have two partners due to the uneven number of each class. At first students were asked to volunteer for a second partner, but as time progressed several students were assigned a second partner because of extenuating circumstances that required immediate attention. While some were okay with the change, others preferred only having one partner. This called attention to the partnering process and raises the question whether students should be matched by proficiency or simply randomly. Many of the above ideas would be better tested through hands-on experience by doing the project again in the near future.

In conclusion, I would propose the following considerations and strategies if this strategy of intercultural learning be implemented in the future. I suggest that a class of English learning students in Spain be paired with a class of Spanish learning students in the United States with the purpose of enhancing students communicative and cultural competence through language acquisition with a partner student. The advantages are clear:

- Teachers would be in contact to set equal expectations for both classes in regards to:
  - How participation will be graded;
  - How to format and respond to emails;
  - What presentations or activities would be required throughout the semester;
  - When language changes may occur;
  - How writings should be processed;
  - What other means of communication may be used, depending on resources;
  - What is appropriate information for students to share and if/when they are allowed to connect via social media;
- Students would be paired either randomly or by level of proficiency.
- Writings and communication should begin as early in the year as possible and should continue as late into the year as possible. Two semesters will yield better results than just one.

Furthermore, instructors should provide basic cultural background and make note of certain differences of which students should be aware and enter the program with an open mind.

The following writing strategies would enhance the learning process:

- Teachers would coordinate a schedule for writings to be done in class. The writings would happen at least once a week on each end.
- Writings would generally have a theme or broad topic each week while still allowing freedom for students to ask and respond to their own personal questions.
- Writings should have a length requirement such as a sentence or word count.
- Writings may either be sent to the teacher who will then pass on the email to the student's partner, or students may email their partners directly, with the teacher(s) added as recipient as well.
- Encourage students to provide feedback and politely comment on their partners' use of the second language to ensure that students are learning from their mistakes

Other possible communication methods are available online:

- Typewith.me: An online document that updates in real time as users type, allowing synchronous collaboration of written work.

- Edmodo.com: A social learning network that connects students and teachers to easily and efficiently collaborate and link to assignments. This would be useful for discussion boards and may allow for the uploading of recorded video for listening and speaking acquisition.
- Skype: A popular video-streaming service that allows for face-to-face video chatting in real time to build oral communication.
- Blogs: Numerous websites offer free blogging services for individuals to post and share their opinions and experiences. Some websites, such as Edmodo, have discussion board capabilities included as well. This would allow students to practice writing skills, comment on each other's work, and also allow them to upload photos.

Useful projects, presentations, and activities include:

- Students present on their partners and share what they've learned about them;
- Students choose an aspect of the opposite culture and work with their partner to learn about it;
- Students create a small dictionary of new vocabulary and slang they learn from their partner throughout the year;

There are additional optional components that might be explored as well:

- Send small gifts between classes (must be light as international shipping is outrageously expensive);
- Coordinate a class trip during a break/vacation to visit the partnering school

By integrating technology in meaningful ways with a mutual intent to gain cultural and linguistic proficiency, learning moved beyond the four walls of the classroom.

The Internet offers limitless opportunities to better understand people like us from across the globe, making the benefits of knowing another language much more clear and making the ability to learn from authentic resources far more accessible.

Projects like these make learning a language more fun and relatable to students, preparing them for the globalized world by bringing the globalized world to the classroom.



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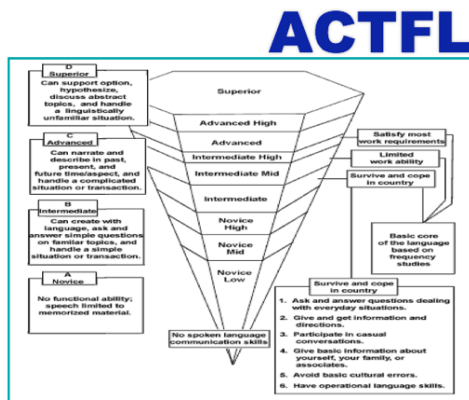
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## Appendix A

### Entry Survey for Students



How would you rate your fluency in the language right now?  
Use the ACTFL image above to help.

- Novice Low
- Novice Mid
- Novice High
- Intermediate Low
- Intermediate Mid
- Intermediate High
- Advanced Low
- Advanced Mid
- Advanced High
- Superior
- Distinguished

In what area(s) do you feel you excel in the target language?  
You may choose more than one.

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking
- None

What area(s) do you feel is a weakness in the target language?  
You may choose more than one.

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

- None

Do you plan to continue learning the target language after this year?

- Yes
- No
- Don't yet know

Do you plan to study abroad in a country that speaks the language you are learning?

- Yes
- No
- Don't yet know

How long have you studied the target language?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 year
- 2 years
- 3 years
- 4 years
- 5 years
- 6 years
- 7 years
- 8 years
- 9 years
- 10 years
- More than 10 years

How often do you use the target language outside of the classroom per week?

- Less than 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-5 hours
- 5-10 hours
- 10 or more hours

How often do you use the target language outside of the classroom per day?

- Less than 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- 3-4 hours
- 4-5 hours
- 5 or more hours

What are your preferred modes of communication?

- Text message/Whatsapp
- Facebook

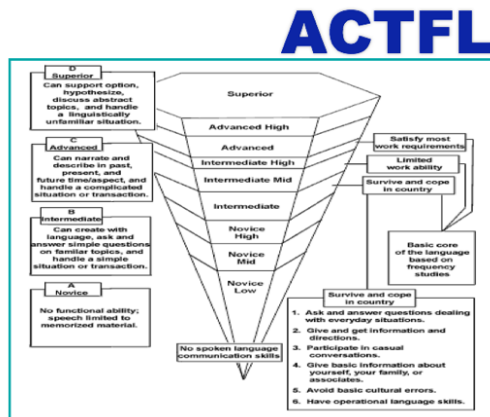
- Email
- Twitter
- Facetime/Skype
- Calling
- Written letters
- Other

How knowledgeable do you feel about the culture you are studying?  
If in Spain, knowledge of U.S. culture. If in the U.S., knowledge of Spanish culture.  
(1 being very unknowledgeable, 5 being very knowledgeable)

What do you hope to gain from this experience?

## Appendix B

## Exit Survey for Students



After this project, how would you rate your fluency in the language?  
Use the ACTFL image above to help.

- Novice Low
- Novice Mid
- Novice High
- Intermediate Low
- Intermediate Mid
- Intermediate High
- Advanced Low
- Advanced Mid
- Advanced High
- Superior
- Distinguished

Do you feel you improved because of this project? If so, how much? (1 being no improvement, 5 being much improvement)

In what areas, if any, do you feel have improved?

- Reading
- Writing
- Listening
- Speaking

Do you plan to continue learning the target language after this year?

- Yes
- No
- Don't yet know

Do you plan to study abroad in a country that speaks the language you are learning?

- Yes
- No
- Don't yet know

How often do you use the target language outside of the classroom per week?

- Less than 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-5 hours
- 5-10 hours
- 10 or more hours

How often do you use the target language outside the classroom per day?

- Less than 1 hour
- 1-2 hours
- 2-3 hours
- 3-4 hours
- 4-5 hours
- 5 or more hours

What are your preferred modes of communication?

- Text message/Whatsapp
- Facebook
- Email
- Twitter
- Facetime/Skype
- Calling
- Written letters
- Other

How knowledgeable do you feel about the culture you are studying?

If in Spain, knowledge of U.S. culture. If in the U.S., knowledge of Spanish culture.  
(1 being very unknowledgeable, 5 being very knowledgeable)

Please write 1 fact you have learned about:

Your partner

The culture of the USA or Spain

Do you plan to stay in contact with your partner after the project is complete?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

What was your favorite part/What do you feel went well?

What was your least favorite part/What do you feel did not go well?

How could this project be improved?

If given the opportunity, would you take part in a pen pal project like this again in the future?

- Yes
- No

Considering all factors and your answers above, rate this project on a scale of 1 to 10 and briefly explain why.



## **Appendix C**

### Exit Survey for Teachers

How did you feel about your involvement in this project? Did you feel too involved, not involved enough, etc.?

What was your favorite part/What aspects of the project do you feel went well?

What was your least favorite part/What aspects of the project do you feel did not go well?

How could this project be improved? What suggestions do you have?

If given the opportunity, would you take part in a pen pal project like this again in the future?

Considering all factors and your answers above, rate this project on a scale of 1 to 10 and briefly explain why.