Virtual Communities of Practice for Non-Native K-12 Spanish Educators as Professional Development

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VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE FOR NON-NATIVE K-12 SPANISH

EDUCATORS AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by

Javier Gerardo Gómez

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School
and the Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2016
ABSTRACT

VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE FOR NON-NATIVE K-12 SPANISH EDUCATORS AS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

by Javier Gerardo Gómez

May 2016

Many world language and culture educators are non-native speakers of the language they teach. Although the current face-to-face professional development sessions do a good job in helping educators acquire technology tools to implement in their world language classrooms, professional development lacks in target language enrichment and providing ongoing collaboration among world language educators who are geographically dispersed. Additionally, the cost of attending state-wide, regional, and national world language professional development is very expensive and thus many world language educators cannot take part in these trainings. Consequently, many world language educators do not have the professional training they need to improve their teaching of language and culture.

Because of the shortage of professional development opportunities for world language educators, the researcher created a virtual community of practice for non-native Spanish educators. This online community provided a platform for non-native educators from Mississippi and Iowa, where they accessed various technology tools tutorials created by the researcher and posted to the virtual community to show how they would use these technology tools in their Spanish classes. Participants also connected their teaching ideas to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) guidelines. This virtual sharing of teaching with technology ideas aligned by the national
standards created an ongoing professional relationship among Spanish educators from two different states.

The research study lasted seven weeks where there were two groups of participants: a Spanish group and an English group. The Spanish group communicated only in Spanish whereas the English group communicated in English. After the seven weeks of online collaboration, both the Spanish group’s participants and the English group’s participants showed an increase in the three areas of language acquisition: writing, speaking, and listening comprehension.

During and after the study, participants provided unsolicited comments about the virtual community of practice. In the participants’ comments, educators mentioned that they would like to see more online professional development that is ongoing similar to this research study. Other participants also stated that they used their participation in the virtual community of practice study for teacher recertification and appraisal at their schools and districts.

Even after the study had ended, there were still some educators who posted work created with the technology tools and using the target language into the virtual community of practice for peer feedback.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am and will always be forever grateful to The University of Southern Mississippi’s Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Special Education. From my first Instructional Technology and Design (ITD) class to my dissertation, the following professors have always challenged me and provided continued guidance: Dr. Jonathan Beedle, Dr. Taralynn Hartsell, Dr. Shuyan Wang, and Dr. Kyna Shelley. Because of these phenomenal instructors at Southern Miss, I have experienced continued professional growth: as a high school teacher and technology presenter in Japan, as a Spanish and Japanese college instructor in Mississippi, sharing technology knowledge at state and regional conferences, and now building language courses for Ingalls Shipbuilding. Because of their continued guidance, I am confident that I will continue imparting world language and culture teaching through the use of technology across borders. ¡Muchas gracias! Thank you! Merci! ありがとうございます！
DEDICATION

First and foremost, I would like to thank God for always guiding me and blessing me with wonderful people in my life—above all, for honoring me with Gerardo Gómez and Olga I. Gómez as my parents. The conversations that my parents and I have had throughout the years and still do are filled with language, culture, and historical information that I would not have acquired otherwise. These two individuals are my encyclopedia. My dissertation is just one step closer in reaching the intelligence level of these two beautiful human beings.

Another important person who deserves credit is Chris Chesser who has encouraged me during these five years of my doctoral journey. I dedicate Proverbs 27:17 to him for inspiring and motivating me to reach the highest: “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.”

Second, my love for world languages and cultures stems from The Miss Universe contests, specifically the Bob Barker years from 1967-1987. As a very young boy, my family and I would watch these shows, and I would tape record the interviews between Bob Barker and these ladies from around the globe. Then, I would transcribe phonetically what they would say, and although I did not understand anything, I would practice these foreign sounds, accents, and words until I sounded like these native participants. Little did I know that I was training myself to be a linguist. Mr. Bob Barker seemed to have so much fun speaking with different people from all over the world that I too wanted a career where I would use languages and cultures. Even though I have never met this man and will probably not meet this man, part of my dedication goes to Mr. Bob Barker and
his work in the Miss Universe Organization for instilling in me the love of world languages and cultures at an early age.

Finally, but not in the least, as a world language educator and student, I would like to dedicate this work to every world language student and teacher that I have met in my twenty-one years as an educator in Florida, Japan, Mississippi, and everywhere in between. The love of languages and cultures unites us, and together we will continue to improve the field of language and culture teaching and learning and instill in others the desire to appreciate the diversity of the world in which we live.
**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. ii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................................................... iv

DEDICATION ............................................................................................................... v

LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................................ xii

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ........................................................................................ xiii

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ......................................................................................... xiv

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION .................................................................................. 1

Overview ...................................................................................................................... 1

Statement of the Problem .......................................................................................... 2

Problem Statement ................................................................................................... 5

Purpose of Study ......................................................................................................... 6

Research Questions ................................................................................................... 11

Research Question 1 .................................................................................................. 11

Research Question 2 .................................................................................................. 11

Research Question 3 .................................................................................................. 11

Research Question 4 .................................................................................................. 11

Significance and Justification ..................................................................................... 12

Delimitations and Assumptions ............................................................................... 15

Definition of Terms ................................................................................................... 17
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Summary</strong></td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE</strong></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Organizations for World Language Educators</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA)</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Current State of Professional Development</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Virtual Community of Practice</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY</strong></td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Question 1</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Question 2</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Question 3</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Question 4</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research Setting</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Research Instruments ............................................................................................................. 62
Rubrics ................................................................................................................................. 62
Procedures for Conducting the Study .................................................................................. 64
Data Analysis Procedures ................................................................................................. 72
Summary ............................................................................................................................... 73

CHAPTER IV – DATA ANALYSIS ...................................................................................... 75

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 75
Demographics ...................................................................................................................... 75
Statistical Analysis ............................................................................................................. 78
Answers to Research Questions ......................................................................................... 86
Additional Findings ............................................................................................................ 91
Summary ............................................................................................................................... 92

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION ............................................................................................... 95

Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 95
Summary of Study ................................................................................................................. 96
Conclusions and Discussions ............................................................................................ 97

Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall
written production? ............................................................................................................. 98

Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall
speaking interaction? ......................................................................................................... 99
Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall listening comprehension?................................................................................................................. 100

Does the language in which the virtual community of practice is conducted make a difference in the outcome?................................................................................................................. 101

Technology conclusions............................................................................................................... 103

Personal development conclusions .............................................................................................. 104

Implications and Recommendations.............................................................................................. 107

Limitations .................................................................................................................................. 111

Future Research ........................................................................................................................... 113

APPENDIX A – VCoP Consent Form .......................................................................................... 115

APPENDIX B – VCoP Opening Page............................................................................................ 117

APPENDIX C - Letter to the MSFLA ......................................................................................... 118

APPENDIX D – Letter to the IWLA ............................................................................................ 119

APPENDIX E – Letter from the MSFLA ...................................................................................... 120

APPENDIX F – Letter from the IWLA ......................................................................................... 121

APPENDIX G – Institutional Review Board................................................................................ 122

APPENDIX H – Letter to the MDE............................................................................................ 123

APPENDIX I – Letter from the MDE.......................................................................................... 124

APPENDIX J – Permission to Use Rubrics.................................................................................. 125

APPENDIX K – Scoring Rubric for Writing Assignments............................................................ 126

x
APPENDIX L – Scoring Rubric for Speaking Assignments........................................ 127
APPENDIX M – VCoP Participants’ Survey.................................................................... 128
APPENDIX N – Invitation Letter from the IWLA......................................................... 130
REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 131
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 University degrees ............................................................................................................. 77
Table 2 Number of Years Teaching .................................................................................................. 78
Table 3 Spanish participants’ weekly writing scores following the pre-test .............................. 80
Table 4 Spanish and English participants’ writing pre and post-test scores .......................... 80
Table 5 Spanish participants’ weekly speaking scores following the pre-test week ............ 82
Table 6 Spanish and English participants’ speaking pre and post test scores ..................... 83
Table 7 Spanish and English participants’ listening pre and post test scores ....................... 84
Table 8 Participants’ unsolicited comments .................................................................................. 91
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1. Pie chart showing expenses incurred by a world language educator who attends a state world language professional development workshop ........................................ 30

Figure 2. Pie chart showing expenses incurred by a world language educator who attends a regional world language professional development workshop .......................... 32

Figure 3. VCoP landing page with ACTFL standards and technology tools .................. 59

Figure 4. VCoP Spanish page with ACTFL standards .................................................. 59

Figure 5. VCoP English page with ACTFL standards .................................................... 59

Figure 6. Participants’ pre-test and post-test writing means ........................................ 87

Figure 7. Spanish participant’s pre-test writing sample ................................................ 87

Figure 8. Spanish participant’s post-test writing sample ............................................. 87

Figure 9. English participant’s pre-test writing sample .............................................. 88

Figure 10. English participant’s post-test writing sample .......................................... 88

Figure 11. Participants’ pre-test and post-test speaking means ..................................... 88

Figure 12. Participants’ pre-test and post-test listening comprehension means ............ 89

Figure 13. Writing means of the five in between weeks of the Spanish group ............... 90

Figure 14. Speaking means of the five in between weeks for the Spanish group ........... 90
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

**ACTFL**  The American Council on the Teaching of Languages

**CoP**  Communities of Practice

**IWLA**  Iowa World Language Association

**MDE**  Mississippi Department of Education

**MSFLA**  Mississippi Foreign Language Association

**L1**  Native language

**L2**  Second and third language

**SCOLT**  Southern Conference on Language Teaching

**USM**  The University of Southern Mississippi

**VCoP**  Virtual Community of Practice
CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Overview

Professional development for world language educators in Mississippi translated to convening once a year at a predetermined location. Sometimes, being physically present at a meeting was not feasible for some instructors who lived very far from the meeting site. Furthermore, administrators were not financially capable to support world language educators to attend these professional development opportunities due to district budget constraints. Moreover, with the inception of Common Core’s “leading proficiency in English-language arts and mathematics for grades K-12” (MDE 2012a, para. 8), world language education was not given the necessary attention to bring the field to the technology era. In promoting the use of virtual communities of practice, Hsu, Ju, Yen, and Chang (2007) mentioned that “Virtual communities (VCs) enable knowledge sharing without ever meeting the participants. Today, more and more individuals participate in VCs to acquire knowledge and to solve problems” (para. 2). In order to study how a virtual world language community could benefit language instructors, considering the most populous set of world language educators, the Spanish language and culture teacher, was necessary. Although K-12 schools in the state of Mississippi offer other world languages such as French, German, and Latin, the results of this research could serve as a springboard for other foreign languages to create virtual communities of practice that are tailored to those specific world languages. Because a great number of world language educators were not native speakers, targeting a virtual community of practice for professional development to non-native Spanish educators could shed light on the special
needs of the non-native world language educators as they strive for near to near-native status.

Because of the aforementioned lack of accessible professional development for world language educators, a VCoP (Virtual Community of Practice) for WL instructors served to provide teachers across the state with affordable, linguistic, and technology-oriented professional development.

Statement of the Problem

Although university programs were doing a great job in preparing pre-service world language educators, Kessler (2006) argued that “Language teachers who wish to learn more about the use of technology in language learning are not able to locate the appropriate formal courses or programs to help them” (p. 22). Kessler also mentioned that one of the two alternatives is to attend a quick course on using a technology tool while the other avenue is to ask colleagues what they are using. Additionally, Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, and Box (2014) portended that “in a traditional teacher preparation program, most candidates receive the majority of their professional knowledge from textbooks and lectures.” (p. 525). Concomitant with the previous two facts was that many of today’s world language educators were non-native speakers of the target language they taught and have learned the language during their four to five years at the university.

When coming to technology in the world language classroom, the lack of technology preparation in university world language teaching preparation programs was palpable. Lord and Lomicka (2011) reported that “technology is often approached as an afterthought in many methodology courses” (pp. 442-443). Because technology was simply treated as a second thought, teachers went into their first classroom without a
technology toolbox from which to select appropriate technology tools to include in their classes. Although teachers searched online for technology tools, they still needed assistance in where to look for them and how to tweak them to best fit each class.

Another major dilemma facing today’s world language educators entering the teaching ranks was finding professional development opportunities to help educators ameliorate their linguistic competence. The current state of professional development has not been conducive to today’s non-native Spanish language instructors due to the fact that these professional development opportunities did not occur often, were very expensive, and were not conducted in the target language.

In exploring world language and teaching degrees from two major universities in the south, neither of these two universities provided robust courses where world languages and technology merged. In one major university, the only computer course required is a sophomore-level computer applications course for the Bachelor of Arts in Spanish. At the same university, but in the department of curriculum and instruction for second language education, there were no courses that fused technology with language and culture acquisition.

Another university in the south that awards a master’s degree in language teaching required no courses concerning the use of technology for the acquisition of world languages and cultures. The program’s requirement was divided into two sections: a core/linguistic track taught in English and language/culture credits. A participant in the 2014 research on using technology to acquire language and culture by Williams, Abraham, and Bostelmann (2014) stated that “teacher training programs at universities just need to teach the flexibility” (p. 621) on how to implement technology in the
classroom. The authors commented that technology was always changing and educators needed to know how to maintain abreast of these constant changes so they would know how and where to look for the latest technologies to incorporate in their teaching.

The point was not to saturate universities’ world language teacher programs with the latest technology, but require courses where students would create technology-rich lessons to use in their world language classes. These practices could help educators incorporate emerging technologies throughout their teaching careers.

To this end, world language educators, namely non-native speakers of the target language who already felt “that their abilities and qualifications as language teachers were diminished if they were non-native speakers of the target language” (Ortega-Cebreros, 2007, para. 1), were not well-equipped to take on today’s technology-driven K-12 world language classroom. This study proposed that Mississippi world language educators could benefit from a language-specific VCoP that aimed at improving their linguistic and technology skills. In support of a virtual platform to increase knowledge, in an article about how educators teach to and learn from other educators using Twitter, Schulten (2011) mentioned that “teachers are turning to online platforms to collaborate, share resources and offer each other support. Many, in fact, are using it to take professional development into their own hands” (paras. 1 & 2). Although his article was about using the Twitter platform, a virtual community of practice could be created using any technology platform that provided the flexibility for instructors to access a limitless online pool of technology-rich lesson plans to diversify instructional techniques for the acquisition of language.
Creating a language-specific VCoP for the state’s world language educators as an ongoing, professional development that was free from the restrictions of time and space could transform today’s world language educator into one who teaches the non-native target language with confidence in employing the best technology tools. For this to occur statewide, this online professional development community was based on a strong linguistic theory.

Problem Statement

“It’s costly, diffuse, and often poorly implemented. Professional development has long been a source of both teacher and administration frustration” (Sawchuk, 2015, para. 1), which is an issue that warranted concern especially in the field of world languages. Professional development for world language educators translated to a one or two day workshop that was very expensive for many language educators to attend. These workshops were conducted in English and not concentrated in any one particular target language to provide the linguistic professional development that the world language educators desire. Additionally, many professional development sessions were one-size-fits all with little to no follow-up professional activities that stimulated professional growth.

Although world language professional development workshops were held at different locations yearly, there were many educators who could attend due to the cost of the sessions and inaccessibility to the location. In order to provide world language professional development that was cost effective and accessible to every world language educator, a virtual community of practice VCoP was created to improve professional development for world language educators in this study. Establishing a VCoP for world
language educators closed the gap among those who attended the face-to-face sessions and those who could not be present. Whether the VCoP could replace or become an extension of the face-to-face professional development, the VCoP promised to connect more educators who engage in professional growth using the target language.

**Purpose of Study**

Referring to the importance of Virtual Communities of Practice as an original and knowledge-sharing group of individuals who are interested in developing their trade, Wenger-Trayner (2015) wrote that “Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor” (para. 4). The authors also mentioned that the concept of communities of practice has gained momentum among groups who shared the same professional goals as a method of enhancing their trade (para. 5).

Wenger-Trayner (2015) also identified three components of a successful virtual community of practice: (1) the domain, (2) the community, and (3) the practice. The authors explained that the domain is the interest that each member of the community has in increasing his/her knowledge, “a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people” (para. 7). Each community member participated in this type of collective learning by sharing his/her unique level of knowledge and expanded this knowledge through contact with other members. The second component, the community, was characterized as “building relationships that enable them to learn from each other” (para. 8) as they collaborated in sharing knowledge with other community members and learning from others. The ongoing interactions among members of the community empowered members to become proficient as possible in their trade. Finally, the practice
was described as the toolbox into which everyone contributed as “they develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems” (para. 9) from which members obtained assistance for the many situations they encountered in their jobs.

Because there was very little research on using virtual communities of practice in education, namely in the world language classroom, the purpose of this study was to investigate the effectiveness of virtual communities of practice for improving Mississippi’s non-native Spanish language educators’ linguistic competence in writing, speaking, and listening through technology intervention. Prevalent in the business world where “people in a community of practice share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing, creative ways that foster new approaches to problems and where its primary output is knowledge” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p.140.), world language educators could also learn from other language educators to increase their linguistic and technology knowledge as they spread their expertise and insights. Through the three major elements of a community of practice (the domain, the community, and the practice), language educators connected with others in “providing support, getting acquainted, establishing communication, building trust, and getting organized” (Hasler-Waters & Napier, 2002, p. 347).

For these aforementioned reasons, a virtual community of practice for non-native Spanish language educators entailed sharing teaching ideas about language acquisition with educators across the state with the potential to connect with other educators across time zones. This translated to language educators having a catalog of ideas with which to teach using proficient language and technology tools. What was more beneficial to
language educators was that using virtual communities of practice for professional development educators did not need to wait for the biannual professional development sessions or take time tweaking ideas from other curricular professional developments to fit their language instruction. Instead, educators had training at their fingertips anytime. As such, virtual communities of practice were a type of social networking. Lever-Duffy and McDonald (2011) defined social networking as “virtual communities that evolve from the use of free and widely available online software that enables communications and connections” (p. 284).

In promoting the advantages of social networking in education, which is what a virtual community of practice for world language teachers is, Yang and Yuen (2010) cited Childnet International who advocated for online communities by defining them as spaces “providing a casual place of learning; developing literacy and communication skills; providing effective communication and collaboration; offering immersion in a foreign language environment; and being where learners are” (p. 289). In summarizing the article on professional development by Dillon (2015), this type of social networking in education, virtual communities of practice, provided the platform for educators to share and increase their knowledge through asynchronous collaboration, reflecting on teaching ideas, and redistribution of knowledge. Through social networking in education language teachers hoped to transform themselves into high caliber educators who teach with the latest technology tools and have a support group that transcends physical boarders.

By analyzing the above descriptions of an online community, a VCoP could provide an environment to acquire linguistic and technology skills. Additionally,
participants could increase their overall written, speaking, and listening communication skills that translate to better teaching using the target language in the classroom. Furthermore, because educators find difficult to team up and share best teaching practices with other instructors face-to-face, an online community afforded them the opportunity to collaborate with geographically dispersed language educators. Above all, educators engaged in an online platform for professional development and collaboration were perennial learners of the language and technology they imparted. As lifelong learners, they were constantly improving their trade, and thus, producing better language and technology knowledgeable students.

Online professional development was not commonplace. A major university in the northeast central area of a southern state promoted its face-to-face professional development courses for continuing education units (CEU’s) by advertising them as a method to “document learning that differs from the traditional academic learning experience” (MSU, 2013, para 1.). Having a dynamic learning experience was what made professional education appealing. A world language VCoP could provide the same to its members by documenting their linguistic and technology growth via an online platform, which differs from the face-to-face instruction and promotes collaboration and ongoing knowledge exchange.

In addressing the vitality aspect of the face-to-face professional development sessions offered at the aforementioned institution of higher learning, this online platform that used only the target language could be more dynamic as participants must only communicate in the target language as they learned to use a variety of technology tools such as: (a) Fotobabble for creating talking pictures and images; (b) ThingLink, a site to
make images interactive; (c) Storybird for creating original stories, (d) Cueprompter, an online teleprompter that helped with reading comprehension and pronunciation; (e) Animoto for creating short, powerful videos; (f) Plickers, a site that brought gamification to the classroom to assess students; (g) Videonot.es that helped teachers and students take notes as they watched language and cultural videos; (h) FluentU for accessing original resources videos with subtitles to enhance language and culture learning; and (i) two types of electronic portfolio creating sites/applications: Blogger/Google Sites and Canvas.

Learning about a variety of technology tools while using the target language was what face-to-face professional development lacked; however, a VCoP provided ongoing target language learning. In support of professional development that aimed at improving non-native Spanish teachers’ linguistic competence, on April 2015, that same major university in the northeast part of a southern state sent out a Facebook message to the world language educators of that state. The university asked what educators liked to see in the summer face-to-face professional development. Among the replies were “simple and easy technology tips to use in the foreign language classroom” from an MSLFA member and ways to improve non-native Spanish teachers’ linguistic competence as seen in another MSFLA member’s post “Tips for non-native speakers to be most effective in the L2 while teaching.” A summer workshop provided only a day or two of technology with very little linguistic training using the target language. Soon after the workshop ended, there was hardly any ongoing professional dialogue or immediate feedback to enhance what was learned. A virtual community of practice could address both technology integration support and constant input and output in the target language.
Research Questions

Based upon the purpose of this study, research questions had been developed to guide the researcher into examining the effectiveness of using virtual communities as a form of professional development to increase participants’ linguistic competence. The population for the study included non-native Spanish language educators from the states of Mississippi and Iowa who participated in a virtual community created by the researcher. These questions were:

*Research Question 1*

1. Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall written production?

*Research Question 2*

2. Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall speaking interaction?

*Research Question 3*

3. Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall listening comprehension?

*Research Question 4*

4. Does the language in which the virtual community of practice is conducted make a difference in the outcome?
Significance and Justification

Most of the literature on VCoP focused on how the business world used them to train employees and reach the company’s goals. There was limited research on initiating and maintaining a VCoP for professional development in the area of world language education. For this reason, this dissertation research concentrated on developing a virtual community of practice for non-native Spanish language educators who were geographically dispersed in the states of Mississippi and Iowa with the purpose of enhancing their linguistic and technology skills. The success of the first world language VCoP for professional development in these states could translate to (a) more professional dialogue among language educators, (b) connecting educators across borders, (c) receiving immediate feedback on teaching ideas, (d) development of an online resource toolbox for educators to access when developing technology-rich lessons, and (e) helping educators meet their continuing education units (CEU’s) online at their convenience.

The VCoP prototype had many potential benefits for world language educators from Mississippi, Iowa, and other states that were looking to improve the way professional development is conducted. First, professional development through a VCoP was solely conducted using the target language. Because most non-native educators’ concern was to improve their linguistic competence during professional development, a VCoP tackled the issue of providing more linguistic training for world language teachers. Second, the obstacle that many face-to-face professional development organizers encounter was not being able to reach most of the language educators. By creating a VCoP, almost every language educator could access the medium and connect with others.
to grow professionally. Local, regional, state, and national organizers benefited from a VCoP due to a larger pool of participants who shared best teaching practices with educators who were geographically dispersed. This ongoing peer collaboration and feedback among educators equated to successful collaborative learning as opposed to reaching a few educators in a one or two day face-to-face sessions.

Another reason for conducting this study was to help educators merge various technology tools to help meet the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) 5C’s guidelines. World language educators engaging in a VCoP could better understand how to create technology-rich lessons that fulfilled each of ACTFL’s guidelines and standards for language acquisition. Take for example the Communication guidelines and its Standard 1.1 that states: “Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions” (ACTFL 2012a, p. 4). As participants of the VCoP read over this guideline and its standard, they searched for technology tools that could best yield the salient points of this standard. Also, because a VCoP was guided by constant communication and feedback, the building of a toolbox for educators allowed members of the VCoP to simply access a teaching idea that had been submitted to the electronic storehouse and learn how another educator had used a certain technology tool to meet the guidelines and standards.

Most importantly, this research served as a guide to local, state, and regional professional development organizers and departments of education to compare how professional development was being conducted and how this can be improved. In comparing this innovative world language professional development to the status quo,
professional development organizers could observe that the most salient attribute of a VCoP is that the target language is being used. For non-native educators, improving their linguistic competence ranked high on their professional development needs. Even if the VCoP platform did not replace the face-to-face sessions, organizers of professional development could improve the status quo by arranging some professional development sessions to be conducted in the target language. Another possibility was that a VCoP in the target language could be created as an extension of the face-to-face professional development.

Finally, the template of the first Spanish virtual community of practice was malleable enough for professional development coordinators to create other online professional development opportunities that target the unique guidelines and standards of the other world languages taught within the state and region. In addition to stressing the importance of the guidelines and standards, other languages could use their own VCoP to highlight the specific characteristics and cultures that are integral parts of each language. Furthermore, professional development organizers were then encouraged to research what issues were most important for the different world languages; what was considered imperative for one language was not necessarily the most important for another language. Subsequently, the roll out of the first VCoP that merged technology tools with teaching ideas aligned with the ACTFL guidelines and standards supplied the framework for other language professional development organizers to tweak the prototype to best meet the other world languages.
Delimitations and Assumptions

This research study had some delimitations in the procedures that affected the results and findings. First, the research only focused on the overall written production, overall speaking production, and overall listening comprehension improvement of K-12 non-native Spanish language teachers from Mississippi and Iowa. The results could not be generalized to instructors who teach other world languages, those who were native Spanish educators, or those who worked as college and university instructors because this research study was limited to only K-12 non-native Spanish instructors.

The virtual community of practice (VCoP) for professional development for non-native Spanish language educators lasted seven weeks. During this seven-week period, educators communicated and shared technology-rich teaching ideas with other non-native Spanish instructors. Because the study took place over a seven-week span, this time frame delimited the amount of language and technology covered in the study as the discussions that took place only focused around a few topics or ideas relevant to the educators. Otherwise, the content being addressed was not holistic.

Another delimitation of the study could be who among the world language educators would participate in the VCoP. Because the researcher did not select the participants but rather asked for volunteers, the study did not reach all world language educators in the state. For the VCoP to be an effective tool for all world language educators, the first VCoP has to prove successful among the participants. Surmising that the first online platform for professional development is effective, subsequent online communities could see more participants as teachers promote and recruit others.
In relation to this time span, a major assumption was that after the study ended the study participants would continue the meaningful communication to enhance the teaching and learning of Spanish with the use of technology. A second assumption was that the first virtual community of practice for non-native Spanish educators would pave the way for other languages to follow. Also, the VCoP could possibly lead to a virtual professional development for world language instructors that was supported by both the state’s departments of education and adopted by professional development organizers. A final assumption was that a virtual community of practice would not replace face-to-face professional development, but instead become an extension of the face-to-face sessions.

There are several assumptions concerning the participants. To begin, the researcher assumed that because participants were non-native Spanish speakers, members of the VCoP possessed a high level of motivation to improve their linguistic abilities. Another assumption concerning the participants was that none had extensive training in Spanish in a Spanish speaking country; every member’s Spanish language skills had been acquired at an American institution of higher learning. When referring to technology, the researcher assumed that because these individuals were currently employed as language educators, they had access to a computer connected to the Internet at their workplace to participate weekly in the VCoP. Concerning participation in the VCoP, the researcher assumed that the participants devoted at least three hours each week submitting original written and oral posts plus commenting on others’ submissions. Finally, the researcher assumed that every participant was motivated to finish the seven week study because at the end of the study they received two continuing education units (CEU’s) at no cost plus a certificate of participation that could be used for recertification.
The researcher was aware that during the seven week study participants were cognizant that the moderator, who was also the researcher, was a native Spanish speaker who assessed their written and spoken contributions in the language. In order to help them participate as genuinely as possible, the researcher appeased their concerns by emphasizing that any written and oral submission entries and comments made about the study were solely for the purpose of improving language teaching and learning with technology. Moreover, the researcher underscored that their VCoP submissions and feedback from peers and from the researcher himself, who acted as the moderator, served to make their instruction more varied and rich. Likewise, their post-study rubric scores could help improve the current state of professional development by analyzing if a VCoP was conducive to an increase in linguistic competence.

In emphasizing the importance of the study, every participant was informed that all scores to their rubrics collectively played an imperative role in creating the first and subsequent virtual communities of practice to enhance world language instructors’ linguistic and technology skills.

**Definition of Terms**

In order to understand the significance of the research, defining a few terms could make this document easier to understand. The following terms were used in the study that related to the ideas, concepts, and variables examined.

*Foreign vs. World:* There was a difference between the terms “foreign languages” and “world languages.” In referring to the study of different languages and cultures the term “world languages” is more commonly used now. The term “foreign” has developed a negative connotation with its meaning of separation and not wanting to belong to that
group. In a 2011 blog, Scott Jaschik enumerated several colleges in the United States that have changed the word “foreign” to “international” or “world” because “many educators also do not like the way “foreign” suggests a division of the world into the United States and everyone else” (para. 6). More recently, in an email trail about dropping the use of “foreign” and replacing it with “world,” Marty Abbott, former executive director of ACTFL, concurred with “world” being the proper name when referring to language teaching. In the email, Ms. Abbott stated that many people prefer “world” over “foreign” and that the word “world” is being used more often than “foreign.” She continued to say that “My guess is that we will move to keep the acronym keep the acronym because it is recognizable not only in this country but also abroad, but we will change the actual title of the organization” (M. Abbott, personal communication, July 14, 2014).

Additionally, classifying this field as “world languages” incorporated this subject area with the other global-oriented courses and topics that carry the word “world” such as “world literature,” “world history,” “world view,” “world news,” “world traveler,” and “world economy” to name a few. Furthermore, the term “world languages” encompassed all the languages of the world and promoted one world without labeling any one language or group of people as foreigners or outsiders.

**Target Language:** When referring to world languages, the term “target language” was used to refer to the language used for any communication in class, “ACTFL therefore recommended 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, where feasible, beyond the classroom” (ACTFL, 2010, para. 1).
L2: Another terminology used for expressing other acquired languages was the acronym “L2” that stood for “Second Language.” The term “second language” referred to any language the learner acquired, regardless of how many, after his/her mother tongue.

The American Council on the Teaching of Languages (ACTFL): Guiding the teaching and learning of world languages and cultures was the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). This national organization provided language educators in the K-16 classroom with standards and sample teaching scenarios to help educators provide the best language and culture instruction at each learning stage of the acquisition process.

Native, Heritage, and Non-native Speakers: There were three types of educators: native speakers, heritage speakers, and non-native speakers. Native speakers were individuals who were born in the country in which the target language was spoken and the target culture was practiced. On the other hand, heritage speakers were born outside the target region, but used the language and practice the culture at home. Finally, non-native individuals acquired the language at an institution of learning and might have had some contact with native speakers in the region in which the language was spoken.

Communities of Practice (CoP): These were groups of people who were united by the same interest of improving their trade. Members of a CoP met physically at a predetermined place and time where they thought, paired, and shared. CoP members were also composed of individuals who casually discussed ways of enhancing their work production without calling for a set place and time. Any group of people connected by a common interest and engaged in conversations about enhancing ways of doing something was considered a CoP.
**Virtual communities of practice (VCoP):** These communities were composed of individuals who shared a common interest and have moved from the physical to the online milieu. These VCoP were not randomly formed, but rather created by an individual or individuals whose goals were the advancement of the profession, company, or organization. In *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (2002), Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder enumerated some key points that defined a community of practice such as, “sharing information and advice, helping to solve problems, creation of tools and designs, and learning together by the accumulation of knowledge” (pp. 4-5).

*The moderator:* This person served as the leader of the virtual community who informed its members about research findings and novel ideas to explore and put into practice. The moderator was also responsible for engaging members with stimulating online communication and for providing feedback to the participants’ input. Members of a community were also required to report back to the community their experiences and results from the innovations proposed by the moderator. In a world language VCoP, all communication was conducted in the target language, thus, was expected that all members of a world language VCoP augmented their linguistic and cultural fluency as well as their technology knowledge.

Virtual Communities of Practice engaged members who were located in the same region. VCoP also had the potential of connecting with geographically dispersed world language educators who contributed constantly to the community without limitations of time and space. These virtual communities offered its members with “supportive, friendly, knowledgeable, and ever present-network” (Wesley, 2013, p. 311) that the
infrequent and sometimes expensive, face-to-face professional developments could provide

Summary

There was a great number of non-native Spanish educators who did not possess the linguistic prowess that the native Spanish teacher brings to the classroom. One of the reasons was that university teacher education programs were not requiring more pedagogy courses in the target language. Similar to university teacher programs lacking more classes in the target language especially at the master’s level, colleges and universities were not requiring more technology in education courses.

For these reasons enumerated above, an innovative method of conducting professional development where training was ongoing, promoted collaboration among educators, used the target language, embedded the use of technology for teaching and learning, and connected teaching ideas to the ACTFL guidelines and standards was created to supplant or even expand today’s professional development. Consequently, the purpose of this study was to investigate the use of a virtual community of practice (VCoP) for non-native Spanish educators. The study proposed to improve non-native Spanish educators’ linguistic competence and use of technology in their world language classrooms.

There were four research questions that guided the study. The first question was aimed toward discovering if participation in a VCoP increased non-native Spanish teachers’ overall written production. The second question asked if engagement in a VCoP increased members’ overall speaking interaction. As for the third, it was asked whether partaking in a VCoP had the potential to increase educators’ overall listening
comprehension. Finally, question four set to find out if the language in which the VCoP is conducted made a difference in the outcomes.

The following chapter, the literature review, explained the current opportunities for professional development with their pros and cons. The literature review also explicated why teachers were not benefitting from the current professional development sessions. Finally, the literature review supported that professional development practices through the use of a VCoP created a climate where educators “share their experiences and knowledge in free-flowing creative ways that foster new approaches to problems and where its primary output is knowledge” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, paras. 1-2).
CHAPTER II – REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter provided an overview of the literature on professional development for world language educators, teachers’ attitude towards in-house professional development, and the latest research on communities of practice that have evolved into virtual communities of practice. The chapter opened with an explanation of Stephen D. Krashen’s $i+1$ Input Hypothesis which served as the theoretical foundation for this research study on a VCoP to enhance educators’ linguistic and technology implementation. Next, a comprehensive literature review followed on the benefits and drawbacks of the several organizations for professional development for world language instructors such as membership in the Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA), the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTLF), and a major state university for educators to obtain Continuing Education Units (CEU’s). The literature review then continued to present evidence as to why world language educators were not prone to sharing in face-to-face professional development when occurring in-house or at their brick and mortal schools. The aforementioned variables served as the incentives for a complete literature review of the communities of practice (CoP) phenomenon that has become virtual communities of practice (VCoP) where “language is learned by using it for communicative purposes” (Edlesky, 1997, p. 3).

Much of the CoP literature came from Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger who espoused communities of practice as people connecting with other individuals with whom to share and from whom to learn. Because much of today’s learning occurs online or in a hybrid fashion, the study concentrated on the addition of the “$V$” for “virtual” in
the title Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP). The literature investigated this new concept of VCoP as professional development for world language educators, namely non-native Spanish teachers because as Fillmore noted in her 1997 article “language learning is probably the most social kind of learning there is. No one, I came to realize, learns a language without support from people who already know and speak it” (p. 35). Finally, for this VCoP to be successful, the study was supported by a strong theoretical framework.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation on which this study was based was Stephen D. Krashen’s $i+1$ Input Hypothesis. The $i+1$ postulated that in order for the language learner to acquire language, input must be slightly above the learner’s level of understanding. The letter “$i$” was the input and the “$+1$” was the additional language, and in the case of a virtual community of practice the “$i$” also represented the technology skills. Some of the language and technology tools in a VCoP were unknown to the learner, but not completely undecipherable.

In the world language virtual community of practice, each world language instructor came to the community with a different level of knowledge of the target language and technology. As participants engaged with the online community’s moderator and its members, there were participants who did not know certain vocabulary terms or technology applications communicated by other members; the input “$i$” being received was a little above the readers’ levels, or the “$+1$”, thereby acquisition of new language and technology skills occurred. In highlighting the importance of sharing with and learning from others regardless of the member’s level of knowledge in a virtual
community of practice, Barnett, Jones, Bennett, Iverson, and Bonney (2012) endorsed communities of practice as prolonged online communication among teachers who teach to and learn from each other through a positive relationship where both the very knowledgeable and less learned person benefit from each other. Furthermore, the authors commented that communities of practice “also incrementally builds a stock of knowledge resources for the community over time” (p. 2).

The main role of supporting ongoing online collaboration among a community where everyone benefits required the guidance of a moderator. Barnett et al. (2012) mentioned that the tasks of the moderator were “to improve collaboration, but can also include making sure the rules of engagement are clear, keeping discussions focused” (p. 4). Discussions were based around language and implementing technology tools to enhance learning. In order for participants to adhere to the rules of the virtual community of practice, the VCoP was created around a set of standards such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) National Standards.

Having a virtual community of practice for world language instructors where the language of communication was the language used in the classroom, a moderator, who was a native speaker and stimulated Krashen’s i+1 and who also established the rules of the community, disseminated technology tools and ideas for implementation and discussion. The moderator also provided feedback to its members in the target language and encouraged the ongoing linguistic and technology communication needed for a robust professional development. A virtual community for world language educators in the target language mimicked the face-to-face professional development sessions that were well organized and provided educational enrichment. Similar to a face-to-face
learning experience, an online community had to “become vital as a means of
determining the value of a continuing learning experience” (MSU, 2013, paras. 1-2).

There was a strong relationship between Krashen’s $i+1$ theory and the dissertation study on a virtual community of practice for non-native Spanish educators. In a virtual community, members received all the input in the target language and provided their output in the target language as well; this $i+1$ variable, crucial in language acquisition, lacked in the face-to-face professional development sessions. Additionally, a virtual community was also more effective than a brick-and-mortar one because a virtual professional development was ongoing and independent of time and space plus had the potential for educators to connect with and receive feedback from other teachers beyond physical boarders.

**Professional Organizations for World Language Educators**

World language educators who were interested in improving their overall written production, speaking interaction, listening comprehension, and technology usage sought professional organizations within the state, region, and nation. Although these organizations have done a great job in helping language educators connect with other teachers, these language associations were strong in providing technology lessons but lacked the linguistic input that non-native language educators needed to improve their linguistic output. In the state of Mississippi the three organizations that members joined were the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), the Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA), and the Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT).
The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)

In searching the Internet for face-to-face or online professional development opportunities for world language teachers, hardly any professional development opportunities were ongoing and online with educators across borders that stimulated language acquisition with technology in the target language. The most widely recognized professional development for elementary, middle and high school and college world language educators in the United States and overseas was the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). In reading ACTFL’s website section on proficiency and assessment workshops, the organization’s professional development opportunities were face-to-face and took place yearly at different locations in the country.

In addition, ACTFL advertised workshops for individual schools or districts that “are led by nationally recognized experts who specialize in the specific content areas” (ACTFL, 2012b, para. 2). These workshops provided proficiency and assessment instruments such as the oral proficiency interview (OPI) that “determines how well a person speaks a language” (ACTFL, 2012b, para. 1), and writing proficiency test (WPT) workshops “that measure how well a person spontaneously writes in a language (without access to revisions and/or editing tools)” (ACTFL, 2012b, para. 1). These workshops were held between one to four days at prices that ranged between $1,200 to $5,250 dollars paid for by the school with the number of participants for most of these professional development ranging from ten to twenty-five. Aside from the ACTFL national organization, world language educators obtained professional development through their state’s or regional organization.
Apart from these costly face-to-face workshops, ACTFL also offered webinars for language professionals. The ACTFL Webinars website published tutorials on teaching grammar, reflection through practice, literacy, world readiness standards, measuring language, and the three modes of communication. The aforementioned webinars were free; however, there were webinar series that “are available for purchase at $75/webinar with 1 year of unlimited access (or as a complete three-webinar series at the 2014 price of $180 for ACTFL members or $250 for non-members)” (ACTFL, 2012b, para. 17).

**Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA)**

Similar to ACTFL, state organizations have also held yearly meetings that turned out costly. In the Mississippi Department of Education’s Website under “Foreign Language” and Professional Development, there were two sources that provided professional development opportunities for language educators: the Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA) and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP). The MSFLA, which had been approved by the Mississippi Department of Education to help Mississippi world language educators, fell under the guidance of the Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT), a regional language organization that promoted language teaching and learning in fourteen southern states and also conducted annual conferences at different locations throughout the south.

In an interview with Dr. Vernon LaCour, former MSFLA Executive Director and professor of French and Spanish at a community college in South Mississippi, the language and technology advocate defined the role and importance of the organization’s commitment to providing professional development for language educators while at the same time promoted a type of virtual community for ongoing professional development.
He explained that a combination of both face-to-face and online professional development could reach all the states’ educators and connect them to the world. In promoting excellent professional development, Dr. Lacour continued to say that “language teachers need constant interaction with their colleagues to enhance their linguistic, cultural, and technology knowledge to teach in today’s world language classroom” (V. LaCour, personal communication, April 23, 2015).

As the state’s organization for providing K-16 world language educators professional development, MSFLA’s two-day conference proved costly for the novice K-12 world language educator with a bachelor’s degree. According to the 2014 Mississippi Department of Education Mississippi Adequate Education Program (MAEP) Salary Schedule, the annual salary for a first year teacher was $33,390. In itemizing the conference’s fees, a new world language educator who attended an MSFLA conference paid an annual membership fee of twenty dollars, on top of that there was the conference fee of another twenty dollars, gas expense, one or two night’s lodging that totaled to approximately two-hundred dollars. Moreover, educators added an additional twenty dollars for a post-conference workshop on embedding technology in the world language classroom, plus payed for continuing education units (CEU’s) for the professional development.

Through a community college located on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, K-12 world language teachers paid between fifteen dollars for up to twenty hours and thirty-five dollars for anything above twenty hours of CEUs. In order to take advantage of this relatively lower cost of CEU’s, the language educator took professional development classes at their schools where there were hardly any world language professional
developments. A second option was to attend the expensive, yearly language association conferences. Third, if there were no professional development opportunities at the teacher’s school that were specifically created for world language educators, and aside from attending the annual conferences, language instructors had another expensive option for online professional development courses through www.ed2go.com/mgccc/. Through this online platform, enrollees received twenty-four hours of professional development after six weeks of class at the price of eighty-nine dollars.

In totaling all the expenses of a one and a half or two-day conference for the new world language teacher, professional development became very expensive (see Figure 1). By taking a beginning teacher’s yearly salary and calculating the educator’s biweekly pay, then withdrawing the various expenses towards the MFLA conference, approximately twenty percent of an educator’s paycheck went toward professional development.

*Figure 1.* Pie chart showing expenses incurred by a world language educator who attends a state world language professional development workshop.
The high cost situation was not only seen in the state of Mississippi but in other states as well. For example, the Foreign Language Association of Virginia (FLAVA), a member of SCOLT, had a conference-only fee of one-hundred and twenty-five dollars. Furthermore, if an educator chose to be a lifetime member, the instructor added a one-time fee of four-hundred dollars plus sixty-five dollars every year to attend the conference. Finally, a new/renewing membership plus conference plus conference fee priced at one-hundred dollars (FLAVA, 2015, para.3).

The expenses were much higher for the language educator who attended a SCOLT conference. Keeping the same annual income of $33,390 with a biweekly salary of $1,284, expenses increased by twenty-seven percent. Although SCOLT participants did not have to pay an annual fee, attendees had to pay a substantial registration fee. Additionally, because SCOLT conferences were held outside the state of Mississippi, a participant’s travel and lodging fees increased exponentially. In summary, a language educator who had the desire to boost his/her knowledge of a target language and create a technology-rich world language classroom had to spend almost half of his/her paycheck on a one-time training.
Figure 2. Pie chart showing expenses incurred by a world language educator who attends a regional world language professional development workshop.

Not only were face-to-face professional development conferences expensive, but they were also not capable of reaching all the K-12 world language educators in Mississippi. During the 2014 MSFLA conference in Louisville, MS there were approximately one hundred participants; unquestionably, this number was not at all representative of the one hundred fifty-five school districts in the state and their many world language instructors in their K-12 schools. Although these yearly trainings did not help world language educators improve world language teaching and learning with technology, research showed that engaging educators in constant training in their subject areas was more beneficial than sporadic training according to Fertig and Garland (2012).

With this knowledge of three popular professional organizations, replacing these face-to-face sessions or even enhancing them with a virtual community of practice proved significant for many reasons. First, educators did not have to pay exorbitant annual or conference fees to attend organization meetings or travel outside of their region or state for two-day conferences where the target language was hardly used. Second, in large rural states like Mississippi not every educator could attend due to conferences
taking place too far from their districts. Third, the number of educators with whom teachers could connect was limited to space and time. A virtual community of practice eliminated the financial burden placed on educators. Furthermore, a virtual community as a professional organization allowed for educators to connect with other instructors across borders and in the target language.

The Current State of Professional Development

According to Hoaglund et al. (2014) “With the increasing complexity of today’s technological society, it is important that students have well-prepared teachers who know their subjects and understand how to each effectively” (p. 523). This was one important reason why world language educators required ongoing professional development in order to become highly qualified educators who integrated technology into their world language classrooms. The benefits of engaging in continuing professional development for educators were many: (a) world language educators acquired a plethora of target language and dialects that were useful to communicate with different groups of people who shared the same language, (b) learned to embed technology tools that facilitated the teaching and learning of languages, and (c) connected with other educators who were geographically dispersed and with whom they could not have connected otherwise to share and redistribute knowledge. In promoting real, constant professional development where educators contributed knowledge and learned from ongoing collaboration and feedback McGill (2013) expressed “I always have something new to learn, something else to share with others or another strategy or resource to create, disseminate and evaluate” (para. 7).
Engaging in professional development activities where participants disseminated, learned, and reflected on the information being exchanged was essentially valuable especially when technology formed an integral part of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning became uninteresting when only one or two technology tools were used throughout a world language course. Hill (2012) pointed out that technology was constantly changing and new tools were surfacing regularly, “therefore, we must immerse ourselves in what is new and current to better the lives and education of our students” (para. 4). Immersion in new technologies was never-ending; therefore, with the acquisition of new technology, language educators acquired other technology tools as fast as they emerged. With each updated or new technology came creative ways of integrating the technology into the world language classroom, and thus, “A set of skills learned 1 year may serve teachers well for 1 or 2 years, but those skills can quickly become outdated as little as 3 or 4 years” (Kolvoord, Charles, & Purcell, 2014, p. 303).

Ongoing professional development provided the language educator the support needed to keep abreast the ever-changing world of technology and its uses in world language pedagogy. Moreover, exchanging tools and ideas with other educators helped the language instructor create his/her own personal library of technology tools and how these could be applied to various language courses and units. Ultimately, the language instructor was constantly empowering himself/herself with the linguistic skills and technology tools needed to be the best educator he/she can become, thereby assisting students in the acquisition of world languages and the use of technology.

In a 2013 study conducted by Sardegna and Dugartsyrenova (2014) concerning world language educators’ view on using various technology tools in the world language
classroom, the researchers discovered several positive qualities about technology in the world language classroom: “Technology-based activities provided increased opportunities for varied and richer interactions, peer-feedback, and reflection; helped develop their learner autonomy and sense of belonging to a community of learners; modeled effective technology uses; and fostered a deeper appreciation of technology-enriched practices” (p. 147). For professional world language educators who have had a desire to learn how to use these technologies for professional growth and consequently embed in their classroom, current face-to-face professional development has been archaic and incapable of providing the technology training that language educators needed.

Kolvoord et al. (2014) defined the state of computer literacy for educators as “one-shot interventions that focus more on mouse clicks, keystrokes, and menus than on substantive considerations of how to teach with technology” (p. 304).

This quick-fix technology to check off a district’s or school’s technology training was not what world language educators needed if school systems were to have teachers who could use a myriad of technologies to its fullest. With the yearly high number of technology tools, world language instructors desired training on how to use them effectively, not just a one-size-fits-all training that superficially covered a new technology, but rather content-specific professional development that targeted how these tools could help them teach language. In making a case for professional development on technology, Willen (2014) reported that in “a new nationwide survey of more than 600 K-12 teachers, 50 percent reported inadequate assistance when using technology in the classroom” (para. 6). This inadequacy on the part of ongoing professional development for educators caused “many teachers [to] worry about managing computers because they
were not secure in their own knowledge of them” (Hopkins, 2016, para.16). If teachers, who take so much care in developing lesson plans, felt uncomfortable when working with technology, they would not use computers in the class so as not to look incompetent in front of students and peers. Due to lack of ongoing professional development and fear of technology, with only half of our teachers embedding technology in their classroom, today’s educators have not been supplementing their lessons with tools that could have the capacity to reach all types of learners. In other words, a large percentage of educators were providing their learners with an incomplete education.

There were two very common types of professional development for educators. However, before elaborating on these two types of professional development, Abbott (2013) provided the most current definition of professional development in The Glossary of Education Reform as “a wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help administrators, teachers, and other educators improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness” (para. 1).

With Abbott’s (2013) definition in mind, one type of professional development for educators was the monthly after-school faculty meeting. On general, each department at the school was assigned a month in which its members presented on how they were using technology in the classroom. These monthly content-specific, ten to fifteen minutes in-house sessions were typically held towards the end of the faculty meeting when all the bullets in the minutes had been covered. Content-area presenters demonstrated a technology tool that they used in their courses and often showcased student work that was created with this specific tool. These sessions were created with good intentions; however
Brophy-Hilton (2014) argued that one professional development session could not merge perfectly every subject field taught in a school. Educators needed to see how the professional development information could be applied to their specific curricular area. Professional development “needs to meet the needs of individual teachers, to pertain to their own classroom challenges, and to address how to overcome these challenges to improve student learning” (para. 4).

The short time allotted for this in-house professional development was not sufficient for departments to think-pair-share on how they implemented these tools into their curriculum. Not only was there no time to ponder on how to use specific technology tools across the curriculum, most educators were too tired at the end of these monthly faculty meetings to devote the attention needed to the short, follow-up quick think-pair-share activities to practice the new tools to implement in the classroom. Furthermore, if educators did not understand how the new information being presented in these quick professional development sessions benefited them in their classrooms, then most educators probably did not revisit these tools once the meeting was over.

Beyond the school setting there were district-wide professional developments. Usually these face-to-face professional development sessions were scheduled in the district’s calendar as a training day for teachers. If planned correctly, these full day sessions had volunteer educators from the district who also represented different curricular areas to benefit most teachers in the district. A step above the monthly faculty meeting sessions, Pelochino (2014) saw them as granting educators, who could not otherwise meet, the chance to connect and possibly begin building their resources list. Furthermore, “these larger efforts will often warrant guest speakers from the outside to
present or lead” (para. 2) with ideas that otherwise would remain unknown to the educators.

One major goal of the district-wide professional development was that educators continued their rapport throughout the school year after the full day sessions ended. Unfortunately, once educators returned to their schools maintaining the relationship with other instructors across the district became a difficult task due to all the other responsibilities educators carried.

Adding to the disappointment that educators felt about face-to-face professional development was that most educators were disillusioned with school-wide or district-wide professional developments because they were thrown together quickly to simply check off the professional development requirement. Sawchuk (2010b) reported that educators felt dismayed towards face-to-face professional development sessions and viewed them as “mediocre, scattershot training, apart from doing little to help students, [and] is a burden for teachers” (para. 4). When educators viewed these training sessions as another load to carry on top of everything else they were required to do, the trainings did not stimulate educators to improve their teaching. This common sentiment shared by most educators who attended school and district-wide professional development sessions stemmed from the fact that the current method of conducting professional development was only one-way.

A one-way professional development simply meant that instructors attended these weak and unproductive sessions where educators only received superficial assistance on how to improve their teaching for the ultimate goal of student success. Furthermore, most professional development activities did not account for a report back session where...
teachers were given the opportunity to communicate how the training was implemented in their classrooms and the degree of teacher and student success. If there was no clear understanding as to why the need of scheduling professional development had arisen or what the professional development aimed at correcting, professional development fell by the wayside. Sawchuk (2010b) quoted Jennifer King Rice who asserted that professional development was significant only when conducted to improve a teacher’s role as an educator. Accordingly, professional development sessions had to be ongoing to answer questions that educators had about teaching and learning as well as providing follow ups on previous sessions. Not doing so “opens the floodgates for just about anything to be called professional development” (para. 14).

From the school and district-wide general professional development meetings without a definite correlation to specific learning outcomes, a new type of professional development called professional learning communities (PLC) emerged to solve content-specific pedagogical problems shared by educators who teach the same subject area.

Studying the importance of a community of practice assisted in creating professional development opportunities that were content-specific and up-to-date with the latest technology tools. Another important point in researching communities of practice was to have data on how participants engaged in ongoing collaboration in the target language. Ultimately, these aforementioned points lead to student success in the world language classroom, which was the most important goal of studying a community of practice.
Professional Learning Communities

Because the former two types of professional development opportunities, school and district-wide, did not typically provide educators with content-specific, ongoing training with feedback that was connected to the everyday life of the educator, professional learning communities (PLC) began to take on this challenge. In another article about professional development, Sawchuk (2010a) touted the benefits of PLC’s by expressing that “many professional-development advocates say one way to ensure that teachers both have enough time for professional development and work to improve their own practice is through site-based professional learning communities” (para. 15).

Furthermore, Abbott (2014) described a professional learning community, or PLC, as “a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students” (para. 1). Professional development communities of approximately five or six members could be found at the school level or at the district level with a much larger number of participants. Whether at the school or district level, professional learning communities have convened approximately once a month for a few hours to discuss topics of teaching and learning that were context and content specific and supported and improve student achievement. These PLC members also brought samples of student work to analyze and because the PLCs were formed by educators who taught the same subject area and were “fueled by [the] collective desire to learn from [the] varied expertise” (D’Ardenne, 2013, p. 149) members of the PLCs were equipped to provide best teaching practices that supported teachers’ professional growth and student learning.
Aside from discussing student work and how to differentiate instruction so that everyone learns, PLC members also collaborated on creating lesson plans on a variety of topics specific to their content area. These learning-oriented lesson plans were permeated with activities and technology tools to improve each educator’s craft, thereby promoting student achievement.

Unlike the general professional developments, members of a PLC focused their attention on their subject matters and opportunities abounded for members to present in front of their peers on what they had done in their classrooms for the purpose of receiving immediate feedback for improvement. DuFour (2014) put forward that conflating think-pair-share opportunities must “function as a powerful source of professional development, they must reflect what we know about best teaching practices” (p. 6) with an openness to receive advice to strengthen one’s teaching; this is the key to professional development.

This joint effort among subject area experts in an inclusive PLC provided an unlimited resource tool kit for members of the community from other members who collectively had many years of teaching and research practice; all this without the constant complaining in which many educators engaged during meetings. While these PLCs sounded very effective in theory, in reality there were many roadblocks that impeded collaboration among teachers in a brick and mortar setting.

In a study conducted by Lujan and Day (2010), the authors discovered three barriers that were ever-present in a typical PLC. Lujan and Day reported that lack of time, not wanting to share, and the feeling of isolation to which most teachers had grown accustomed all contributed toward not having a successful PLC. As for the variable of
time, educators were already inundated with class work plus other obligatory meetings, in addition to the many extracurricular activities. “A teacher grey with fatigue and stress, stuck at school for 10 hours or more a day, wandering from duty to duty in playground, classroom or after-school club” (Benn, 2014, para.2) did not need yet another gathering to attend. When adding all the hours given to the school, there was hardly any extra time for anything else. One educator in the Lujan and Day (2010) study commented “that if [PLC] meetings were not required, they would not keep happening” (p. 13).

Hoarding, or not wanting to share information, was also one of the reasons educators felt apprehensive about participating in a PLC at their school. In a school setting there was always the feeling of jealousy or competition among educators who taught the same subject area. In a 2008 dissertation study by Fraga-Canadas about Spanish educators’ language practices inside and outside of school, she discovered the feeling of separation among educators who taught the same language and culture. Her study discovered that competition among teachers was the culprit for not wanting to share. Everyone was in a race to become the best non-native educator with the greatest command of the target language. As a result, this environment was not conducive to collaborative language and culture teaching and learning. The researcher expressed her desire for world language educators to enjoy “working together more and speaking/writing in Spanish when we do collaborate because I think that it will benefit everyone and it will help everyone to improve” (pp. 130-31).

For these reasons, some educators did not want to contribute their best teaching practices in a community even if it was for the ultimate goal of increased student achievement. As such, only educators who were friends in and outside of school shared
best teaching practices between them, but not with members of the their schools or a PLC. In the Lujan and Day (2010) study, the authors found that sadly during most PLC meetings hardly any of the conversations were about language teaching and learning. Interestingly, the authors reported that “it was only outside of PLC meetings that two of the members of one PLC reported that they would share teaching ideas regularly outside of their regular meeting time” (p. 14).

Teachers’ selfishness was not the only reason for not sharing best teaching practices. As identified in Scholten’s (2013) thesis, she postulated that “A climate of trust also implies that employees can openly discuss things without the fear of repercussions, and that knowledge sharing occurs for improvement purposes” (p. 13). Many educators kept their best pedagogical ideas secret because they thought they were not good enough for others to adopt. To eradicate this climate, a feeling of trust had to be created and nurtured by an administration that built collegiality by promoting members to “share their knowledge based on the belief that this knowledge could be used to improve the school in terms of enhancing data use or solving the educational problem” (Scholten, 2013, p. 13).

Finally, the field of education has been a profession where its members spend most of their time in isolation. Buchanan et al. (2013) defined isolation in teachers as “the feeling of being alone in the classroom, without the support of another teacher, or being in the company of colleagues who may be withholding their encouragement, or who may have none to give” (p. 122). The contact that educators had with other humans was during class time and in the mandatory weekly or monthly meetings supervised by the school administrators. Because most teacher education preparation programs did not cover collaboration and a mission of sharing as part of their curriculum, most teachers did
not feel comfortable in a think-pair-share environment. The authors of the Lujan and Day (2010) study suggested the intervention that “training new staff members needs to be provided so that everyone is on the same page about how PLCs operate within a particular school environment” (p. 16).

This study on a community for educators could eliminate the aforementioned concerns by showing collaboration among participants. Because most of the community’s participants were geographically dispersed, the feelings of competition and jealousy were eliminated because many of the educators did not work in the same school or district. Also, in this study on communities of practice, participants could access the community at any time convenient to them. As a result, they were not pressed for time or rushed to provide comments as they were in a traditional professional session. Further, educators in a content-specific community knew that all communication was related to their content area.

Virtual Community of Practice

In the previous sections, arguments against the traditional methods of providing educators with professional development were established. The research ascertained that monthly or yearly face-to-face professional developments were not providing educators with the ongoing professional developments needed. Some of the reasons that were supported by current research were that many of the professional development sessions were (a) limited to the school or district, (b) they were too general and not content specific, (c) were costly and sometimes required traveling away from one’s district, and (d) after the sessions ended there were no support groups to whom to report successes and failures and receive ongoing support of new teaching strategies implemented.
As for the PLCs, the research validated that PLCs provided some good, content-specific professional development. Yet, educators’ lack of time during the day to attend these PLCs meetings proved to be a problem. Additionally, as was seen in the research, some educators did not feel very comfortable sharing their best teaching ideas with others who were viewed as their competitor. Because of these deficiencies in the school and district professional development sessions and PLCs, a new and broader type of professional development emerged: the Communities of Practice (CoP), and subsequently the Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP). Cooper, Grover, and Simon (2014) described these new CoP or “social learning systems” as having “actionable elements of events, leadership, connectivity, membership, learning projects, and artifacts” (p. 39).

In a 2015 Web log by Wenger-Trayner (2015), the author mentioned the coinage of the term Community of Practice (CoP) to refer to the act of sharing knowledge and learning from others. Although this human practice had been around forever, Wenger-Trayner (2015) articulated three important attributes of a community of practice. He said that whether the CoP was conducted face-to-face, was set up as a hybrid community, or was completely virtual, CoPs were guided by “the domain, the community, and the practice” (paras. 7, 8 & 9). Wenger-Trayner (2015) introduced the domain as having “an identity defined by a shared domain of interest” (para. 7). Additionally, the author explained that the idea of a community was to have its “members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information” (para. 8). Nistor et al. (2014) characterized members of a CoP as having “expertise and expert status” (p.340), thus giving the CoP the authority to be a strong, content-specific, professional learning milieu. Finally, the essential action verb “practice” was the key word in a community of
practice, as Wenger explained that members in a CoP “develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice” (para. 9).

To add even more importance of these social learning systems, Nistor et al. (2014) cited Hakkarainen, Paavola and Lippoen (2004) by contributing that “participation in a CoP leaded to the accumulation of experience, stimulated the social construction of knowledge and the development of expertise” (p. 340). In order for educators to harvest the most benefits from the communities of practice attributes of domain, community, and practice, these CoPs evolved from local to global connection by becoming virtual learning networks through the use of technology.

Recently, communities of practice (CoPs) developed more universally by turning into virtual communities of practice or VCoP. In the previous section, the benefits of face-to-face communities of practice were enumerated. After comparing the CoPs to the goals behind online sharing communities, the similarities between the two were numerous with the only exception that growing professional development opportunities were becoming virtual. Closely related to how Wenger-Trayner (2015) and Nistor et al. (2014) defined communities of practice in the previous segment, Cheung, Lee, and Lee (2013) characterized virtual communities of practice as online groups composed of individuals in search of other people with similar interests looking to improve their productivity in a particular area. Furthermore, “members in an online community of practice can share their knowledge by helping each other to solve problems, telling stories of personal incidents, and debating issues based on shared interests” (p. 1358).
Professional education has ceased from being restricted to the knowledge acquired in the confines of textbooks, lectures, or connecting with peers from the same area; professional growth has become inclusive of a myriad of views and ideas from people across the world. In a study of virtual communities of practice (VCoP) that supported participants’ shared learning and constant professional development, Hou (2015) published that “perceptions of learning to teach must change from a personal, private view to one of professional practice which can be improved if it is made public, discussed openly, and reflected upon collectively” (p. 6). This new type of professional development allowed educators to go outside their school’s or district’s network and connect with anyone beyond their geographical boarders on whom to rely for (a) support and encouragement, (b) exchange new teaching ideas with emerging technologies, and (c) discuss problems that are common to all in their face-to-face or online classrooms.

Additionally, because the feelings of jealousy, competition, and hoarding of knowledge that were evident among educators of the same subject at a brick and mortar school, a VCoP provided a more comfortable environment in which to grow professionally. In promoting the benefits of VCoPs in education, Tseng and Kuo (2014) encouraged the implementation of VCoPs by claiming that these communities helped solve problems that groups who shared the same interests have had and thereby learned from each other. Research showed that time has played an important role in developing a good rapport and a feeling comfort with members of a VCoP. Thus, communication at first could be short and sporadically, but in time the relationships could solidify and everyone in the community could strive for what Tseng and Kuo (2014) defined as developing “mutual benefits and a sense of responsibility within the group, mutual trust,
and obligation awareness” (p. 39). Tseng and Kuo (2014) continued to identify this obligation to the community as making sure that everyone felt comfortable posting to the community and accepting constructive feedback without fear of repercussions. Relying on others, reciprocity, and wanting to advance the group’s interests were the key denominators that made online professional development purposeful for the ongoing improvement of teaching.

In a study published by the Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology in 2013, Cheung and colleagues investigated the significance of the aforementioned variables, collectively referred to as sharing resources, in the successful maintenance of an ongoing virtual community of practice. One of the most salient characteristics that the study found about online communities of practice was that people who engaged in VCoP felt gratified to know that their contributions helped others. Furthermore, “when members found that their contributions, could successfully help other members in the community, their knowledge self-efficacy was enhanced” (p. 1363). Consequently, their experience in a VCoP remained positive and more than likely promoted this type of intelligence exchange with others.

All the literature pointed to a new type of professional development for world language educators, one that connects language teachers from across the state and beyond state and national borders to engage in language and technology learning networks. Participating in virtual communities of practice was full of benefits such as learning to share, improving language skills, and accumulating technology resources. A VCoP was akin to having a virtual toolbox from which to access novel teaching ideas, to ultimately reach the world language learner. In stressing the importance of sharing, Karen Melhuish-
Spencer (2014) pointed out in a blog by Steve Mouldey (2014) that “as educators, we are morally obliged to share our practice for the benefit of our students” (para. 4).

This study on a virtual community of practice for non-native educators promised to connect teachers at different language levels from across borders who collaborated using the target language. These educators’ collaborations in the virtual community research led to the creation of an online toolbox with innumerable teaching ideas with the latest technology tools for the acquisition of language and culture with technology. Additionally, this study incorporated the national standards on language learning that every educator followed. Also, because members in the virtual community came from a wider geographical area, the ideas were more diverse that allowed exposure to countless teaching ideas.

Summary

The literature review chapter opened by establishing the theoretical foundation that supported virtual communities of practice (VCoP) for world language educators: Stephen Krashen’s $i+1$ Input Hypothesis. Krashen (1985) defined the $i+1$ Input Hypotheses where “a learner’s current state of knowledge was the ‘$i$’ and the next stage was the ‘$i+1$’. Thus, the input a learner was exposed to must be at the ‘$i+1$’ level in order for it to be of use in terms of acquisition” (p. 2).

In this chapter, the researcher also enumerated several opportunities for world language educators to obtain professional development. These face-to-face professional development sessions occurred once or twice a year, in locations that were not accessible to every world language educator in a rural state such as Mississippi, and were costly. Thus, these professional growth meetings were not accessible to the maximum number of
potential participants. Furthermore, the status quo of today’s world language professional development was not tailored to the particular needs of the specific languages such as only using the target language to conduct training.

Even more, once these face-to-face, one to two-day professional development conferences end, educators did not have continual support to maintain collaboration and learning. Consequently, in order to establish a professional development for world language educators with the potential to (a) reach every language instructor, (b) connect with others across time zones, and (c) provide sustained training and feedback in the target language, the researcher proposed creating a new type of professional development: a virtual community of practice (VCoP).

Social anthropologist Jean Lave and theorist Etienne Wenger (2016) contended that the concept of communities of practice (CoP) has been around since the beginning of time for “people who engage in a process of collective learning in a shared domain of human endeavor” (para. 6). For this reason, the researcher combined Krashen’s (1985) “i+1” theory with Lave and Wenger’s (2016) concept of CoP plus added the “V” for virtual to investigate how a VCoP provided the best platform for professional development. In the literature review, the researcher also ascertained that a VCoP had the potential to provide sustained training and feedback for world language educators with the aid of a moderator who was also a native speaker. Furthermore, a VCoP also showed the capacity to reach instructors regardless of where they lived and connected them with other teachers across time zones using only the target language. Last, the literature review revealed that a VCoP was more flexible to instructors as these contributed to the community on their own time.
Based on the literature review, the following methodology chapter explains the research method and design to examine the effectiveness of using a VCoP for world language teachers. The participants for the study included non-native Spanish instructors from Mississippi and Iowa. Prior to participation in and after the study, the VCoP participants’ linguistic competence (writing, speaking, and listening) was assessed. Both sets of the participants’ rubric scores were used to evaluate the effectiveness of the VCoP and its likelihood to continue as a viable virtual platform for professional training or an extension of the current face-to-face professional development.
CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

Introduction

In this study, the researcher described the methodology used in the Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP) for a professional development study. A VCoP for professional development for world language educators was analyzed to demonstrate an effective way of enhancing linguistic competence of non-native Spanish educators. In this study linguistic competence referred to the participants’ overall written production, overall speaking interaction, and overall listening comprehension.

The four research questions that guided this study on VCoP for world language educators were:

Research Question 1

1. Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall written production?

Research Question 2

2. Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall speaking interaction?

Research Question 3

3. Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ listening comprehension?

Research Question 4

52
4. Does the language in which the virtual community of practice is conducted make a difference in the outcomes?

In this chapter, the researcher has used a mixed method design (one between group factor and one repeated measures factor) in which participants have been selected using the convenience sample method. This chapter explicated the online platform used for the VCoP into which the written and oral technology tutorials, submitted by the moderator, helped advanced linguistic responses from the participants.

Finally, the methodology chapter provided a detailed description of the two rubrics from Harrison High School-Cobb County School District-Georgia, and how these have been used to score the educators’ pre linguistic competence from both the English and Spanish groups, the five in between weeks of writing and oral entries by the Spanish group, and the post linguistic competence from both the English and Spanish groups. With any research, data analysis was required to document relationships. This chapter ended with an explanation of data analyses procedures.

The current research began by gauging where non-native Spanish educators were in their linguistic (writing, speaking, and listening) levels. As a result, the researcher created two Virtual Communities of Practice: both communities of practice mirrored the Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA) and the Southern Conference on Language Teaching (SCOLT) face-to-face professional development opportunities with regard to content however, one was conducted in Spanish while the other one was conducted in English. Participants were then randomly assigned into the Spanish group, or treatment group, where all communication was conducted in Spanish or into the
English group, or the control group, where participants communicated in English. In the Spanish group, educators posted in Spanish their ideas about implementing the two weekly technology tools in the classroom and commented on other participants’ submissions. The moderator also provided feedback in Spanish to every member of the Spanish VCoP. Communication in English only occurred among the members of the English group. Similar to the Spanish group, members in the English group input their language and technology teaching ideas in English as well as commented on other participants’ posts in English. Like the Spanish group also, the moderator provided language acquisition with technology feedback in English to the control group.

As for grading the participants’ entries, a native Spanish speaker, who did not know any of the participants, served as the grader. After the seven weeks of data collection, the native speaker scored both groups’ writing, speaking, and listening pre-tests, the Spanish group’s five weeks of in between entries, then every member’s linguistic post-tests. The scores of the treatment group were compared to the scores of the control group to determine if a VCoP conducted in the target language increased non-native Spanish educators' linguistic competence.

Research Design

This research study followed a quantitative method to collect data from Mississippi and Iowa non-native Spanish educators’ regarding their linguistic competence. Field (2013a) defined a quantitative method approach as one where “numbers are involved” (p. 3) and in this study the numeric units or discrete variables only “took on certain values” (p. 874) that represented the linguistic levels from the writing, speaking, and listening rubrics of both groups before and after the study. The
researcher used a mixed-measures design in the form of a one between-groups factor and one repeated factors tests to measure the participants’ pre-test and post-test scores.

Privitera (2012a) defined a repeated-measures design as “a research design in which the same participants are observed in each treatment” (p. 295).

Applying a repeated-measures design to this study, data was first collected from every participant, (non-native Spanish educator), before the treatment or participation in the VCoP. The pre-treatment data collected were all the participants’ rubric scores on their overall writing, overall speaking, and overall listening. These scores came from the native speaker grader’s, also referred to as a blind grader, analyses of their writing, and speaking abilities after participants described a technology tool used in their classrooms. As for the listening scores, the researcher, whose role in a VCoP was also referred to as a moderator, shared verbally a language learning activity with a technology tool about which participants commented. Then, after participation in the seven weeks study, data was again collected from the Spanish group participants to see whether or not participation in a target language VCoP resulted in a change in the non-natives’ writing, speaking, and listening competence compared to the English group that participated in the English VCoP and only used Spanish for the pre-test and post-test. As for the post-test data, every participant regardless of group was analyzed. For this pre-post design study, the treatment was participation in the seven weeks VCoP using only the target language among the researcher and the non-native Spanish educators.

Research Setting

Before accessing the researcher’s websites, potential participants accessed the consent form (see Appendix A) by clicking on its link found on the opening page of the
virtual community (see Appendix B). Potential members carefully read and signed the required consent form that contained seven major sections with pertinent information about the study. Section one explained that the purpose of the study was to investigate a virtual community of practice as professional development for Spanish educators. For the description of the study, section two, the researcher explained that the virtual community was created using a website platform into which the researcher introduced two technology tools each week of the study. Participants described two teaching ideas with these technology tools and connected their ideas to the 5C’s or guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Languages (ACTFL). In order to gain the highest possible number of participants, the researcher fully described the benefits of participating in the virtual community under section three. These incentives included the awarding of two CEU’s by a local community college in the state, connecting with other world language educators in and outside the state, adding a number of technology tools to their teacher toolbox, and increasing their linguistic abilities.

As with any research, participants wanted to know if there would be any potential risks or hazards for participating in the study. Section four of the consent form pacified any doubts by stating that there would be no physical, psychological, social, or financial research-related risks, inconveniences, or side effects from participating in the virtual community of practice study. When participating in any research especially via an online platform, reassuring all participants that no private information would be exchanged between the researcher and other participants or people outside the study was of utmost importance; thus, section five stressed the confidentiality of the study. In the alternative procedures section on the consent form, the researcher informed potential members of the
community that there would be no substitution for the study; in order to gain the full benefits of the study, the potential members had to complete all seven weeks of the study. In order to assure participants that this would be a voluntary participation and that they could withdraw from the study at any time, section seven reassured the participants of these rights, as well as providing them with the phone number and address of The University of Southern Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) office. Finally, after carefully reading the consent form the participants signed and dated the form that had already been signed and dated by the researcher; the participants then returned the form to the researcher via electronic mail.

The research setting of the study was conducted through a Google Sites website that served as the virtual community of practice (VCoP) for non-native Spanish language educators. The VCoP website contained links in English and Spanish for each of the two groups to access. This virtual professional development platform was created by the researcher of the study who was also a native Spanish speaker, and as result also served as the moderator of the VCoP. The online platform for professional development provided extensive linguistic and technology exchanges among the non-native Spanish educators and the moderator.

To facilitate participation in the VCoP study, the non-native Spanish teachers had to have an active Gmail account to gain access into the VCoP; a Gmail also granted them easy access to many of the technology tools the participants explored. The VCoP welcome or landing page had general instructions for the participants, a link to the consent form that had to be signed and turned in to the researcher before beginning the study, and a calendar with the start and end dates of the seven weeks. Below the calendar,
there was a section for general comments from all members; these comments could be submitted in English or Spanish.

On the left hand side of the opening page of the Google Sites platform, there were the five guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in both English and Spanish: C1:Communication, C2:Cultures, C3:Connections; C4:Comparisons; C5:Communities; Objetivo C1; Objetivo C2; Objetivo C3; Objetivo C4; and Objetivo C5. These five guidelines were linked to their own pages where participants found the descriptions of the guidelines or “C’s”, their standards, and a comments section into which participants submitted their teaching with technology written and oral ideas connected to the 5C’s for use in the world language classroom. All the information under the “C’s” was given in English whereas the “Objetivo” descriptions and standards were in Spanish.

The online platform’s opening page also contained links to the pre-test, the technology information for the five in between weeks, and the post-test. These weekly links housed the two technology tools for that week (see Appendix A). In order to keep everyone’s communication centered on the two technology tools for that week, the researcher added technology information to the subsequent weeks only after the previous week had ended. Once a week had ended, the researcher maintained that week opened for educators to return to and review any information. All communication with the Spanish group was in the target language whereas communication with the English group was in English. The following figures show (a) the VCoP landing page, (b) a sample Spanish page with ACTFL standards and technology tools, and (c) a sample English page with ACTFL standards and technology tools.
Virtual Community of Practice for Non-Native K-12 Spanish Educators

Welcome to the first Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP) for non-native K-12 Spanish teachers.

To access the technology tutorials, please click on the "Technology Tools" on the left navigation: the number next to "Technology Tools" refers to the week. There, you find links to written and oral tutorials: all tutorials are in Spanish. As you review the tutorials, think about ideas on using these tools in your classroom.

On the left navigation, please find the links in Spanish and English to ACTFL’s SCs. Each “C” also contains a comments box where you submit your brief written and spoken teaching ideas. Because your two ideas go under one or two of the ACTFL’s SCs, please also provide a brief reason why you connect the teaching idea(s) to that standard(s).

If you are in the Spanish only group, please click and add your comments to the SCs in Spanish (Objectives). If you are in the English group, please click the SC’s in English.

Although not required, if you see comments from other participants that you enjoy, please feel free to comment on their submissions.

Please read, sign, and send the researcher the VCoP Consent Form.

Muchas gracias por su participación!

Figure 3. VCoP landing page with ACTFL standards and technology tools

Figure 4. VCoP Spanish page with ACTFL standards

Figure 5. VCoP English page with ACTFL standards

59
Participants

The researcher was an active member of the Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA) so the participants of this study came from the list of members of the MSFLA. As an officer of the MSFLA, the researcher had access to other state organization officers and members. The researcher contacted an officer of the Iowa World Language Association (IWLA) who had attended an MSFLA language event and asked him to help recruit members for the VCoP study. As such, the study used a convenience sample that made it easy to reach the study’s participants.

In order to reach only the non-native Spanish educators, an email message with the description of the study requesting non-native Spanish teacher participants from K-12 was sent out to the presidents of the Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA) (see Appendix C) and the Iowa World Language Association (IWLA) (see Appendix D). In turn, the presidents of the MSFLA (see Appendix E) and IWLA (see Appendix F) replied on letterhead their willingness to assist in recruiting members for the study once IRB approval was received (see Appendix G).

Because not every Spanish instructor in Mississippi belongs to the MSFLA, the researcher also contacted the Mississippi Department of Education’s (MDE) Foreign Language/Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator, Mr. Leimuel Eubanks, through a formal letter requesting participation of non-native Spanish educators (see Appendix H). Mr. Eubanks replied on letterhead from the MDE (see Appendix I) that the MDE was willing to help recruit non-native Spanish educators, who were not members of the MSFLA, through the MDE’s listserv.
Once IRB approval was received, the researcher asked the MSFLA, IWLA, and the MDE to help recruit non-native Spanish educators via an invitation that included IRB information. Non-native Spanish educators who were willing to take part in the study sent the researcher an email confirming participation.

The majority of the sample population for the Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP) research came from The Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MFLA), a non-profit organization whose purpose was for the advancement of the study and teaching of languages other than English in schools, colleges, and universities in Mississippi. The other participants were from the Iowa World Language Association (IWLA), plus other world language educators from MS who were reached via the listserv and were not part of the MSFLA.

After these organizations sent their requests for volunteers only fifty-seven educators replied with intent to participate. The researcher then sent each potential participant a consent form; after a little over two weeks a total of thirty participants returned the signed and dated consent form. However, only twenty-two educators completed the seven week study.

In breaking down the twenty-two non-native Spanish educators who completed the study, there were eighteen females and four males. Among the females, there were seventeen white females out of whom nine had received a Bachelor’s degree while the other eight had completed their master’s degree. The educational level of the white males was evenly distributed with two possessing a Bachelor’s degree and two having attained the master’s degree. There was one African American female with a bachelor’s of arts degree and no African-American males.
For the VCoP study, these participants were randomly divided into two groups, the Spanish group who engaged in the VCoP in the target language and the English group who participated in the English-only VCoP. As a result, eleven participants were in the Spanish group and eleven in the English group.

Research Instruments

The study used two research instruments with permission from Harrison High School, located in the Cobb County School System in Georgia. Both rubrics were used after obtaining written permission from Kristin King, World Language Department Chair and AP Spanish Teacher at Harrison High School in the Cobb County School System, Georgia (see Appendix J). In writing about the effectiveness of the rubrics as a holistic method of analyzing written and spoken language, Ms. King communicated, “At Harrison High School, we use the A.P. rubric as a guide for holistically grading assessments for speaking and writing. We used these rubrics consistently throughout the semester to grade speaking and written production”. (K. King, personal communication, January 8, 2016).

Rubrics

For the purpose of gauging all the participants’ pre-test proficiency, the scores for the Spanish group’s five in between weeks of entries, and the post-test for both groups the researcher contacted a native Spanish speaker to serve as the grader. In addition to being a native speaker from Spain, the grader studied bilingual education at Columbia University in New York and Educational Science in Spain. Adding to the grader’s qualifications to assess the VCoP’s participants’ entries, this person has attained the Master’s degree in the teaching and learning of Spanish from a university in the southern
region of the United States. Moreover, the grader has been employed as a bilingual and Spanish teacher in Spain and the United States for thirty-two years. The grader, who was also referred to as a blind grader due to not having any knowledge of the participants, scored all seven weeks of entries into the virtual community of practice.

Because the research on a VCoP as professional development for non-native K-12 Spanish educators proposed that participants’ overall linguistic competence increased, the Harrison High School rubric encompassed all the criteria for a thorough written and oral assessment.

In recapping the participants’ duties, each VCoP world language teacher submitted two assignments per week one written, and one spoken, on using the two technology tools of the week and connected these teaching ideas to the ACTFL guidelines. Rubric one, scoring rubric for world language writing assignments (see Appendix K), contained six ratings where a rating of zero was the lowest while a rating of 5 was the highest. A score of zero simply meant that the person did not write anything at all. If the person received a one, the individual demonstrated incompetence or not understandable. A score of two signified that although the written submission was comprehensible, the reader had difficulties understanding the meaning of the writing sample due to grammatical errors and a weak lexicon. Managing to receive a three implied competence through the use of basic grammar and adequate vocabulary. Moving towards an upper score, a number four on a writing assignment showed good competence and organized writing that read smoothly and contained very little grammatical errors. Finally, attaining the top score of five showed great command of the written language with creative sentences and the use of idiomatic expressions.
Similar to the writing rubric, the scoring rubric for world language speaking assignments was also based on a six level scale (see Appendix L). A value of zero referred to an entry that was not understandable or that the person did not answer the question. Receiving a one showed incompleteness and many grammatical errors with limited vocabulary as well as using English in the verbal assignments. If an entry was given a score of two the participant was rated as having limited vocabulary and difficulty with pronunciation skills. Half way through the rubric, a score of three marked the participant as having satisfactory communication skills, but still needed to develop the ideas provided. Entries that showed good communication skills that included good syntax, higher vocabulary, and ideas that easily merged received a score of four. Finally, a number five on an assignment indicated that the person had excellent listening and oral skills. Additionally, a top score suggested that the participant had a great target language vocabulary, almost near-native pronunciation, and managed to have ideas flow smoothly.

Because both groups, the Spanish group and the English group, were composed of only non-native Spanish educators who had not received any treatment when the researcher administered the pre-test before participating in the VCoP, both groups were considered equal. Further, the validity of this instrument was suggested by its continued widespread use in the Cobb County School System. Validity would also be suggested if the post-test scores of the Spanish group indicated higher scores than the pre-test scores.

Procedures for Conducting the Study

After the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval had been granted, the researcher emailed the MSFLA and the IWLA non-native Spanish educators an invitation to participate in the study. Because the researcher did not have non-MSFLA non-native
Spanish educators’ contact information, the researcher sent out an invitation letter to the Foreign Language Coordinator at the Office of Curriculum and Instruction in the Mississippi Department of Education who was asked to forward the invitation via the listserv. Members who intended to participate in the study then contacted the researcher via email or phone number. These potential participants then confirmed participation in the VCoP by sending in the signed and dated consent form to the researcher.

Once educators accepted the invitation to participate in the study and before they were randomly assigned to one of the two VCoP, participants were asked to (1) write in the target language about a language teaching idea using technology, (2) describe orally in the target language about a teaching idea using technology, and (3) reply to the moderator’s sample teaching idea using technology. For the listening part of the pre-test, or number three, the researcher recorded a teaching idea about using electronic portfolios in the world language classes. Then, the participants accessed and listened to the audio file and commented on that teaching idea. The replies to the listening comprehension could be about the idea’s positives and negatives or how the participants could implement the researcher’s idea in their Spanish classes. The researcher allocated two weeks to receive the writing, speaking, and listening comprehension samples, collectively referred to as the pre-test. If at that time the samples had not been returned to the researcher, the researcher contacted the potential participants and allowed a few more days for participants to send in their writing, speaking, and listening comprehension pre-test samples. After the extra few days, the researcher began the VCoP with the number of participants who had both sent in their consent forms and had submitted their pre-test entries.
After the pre-test, the VCoP members participated only in their language community: the Spanish community or the English community. For the study, the researcher developed a weekly objective for the seven weeks study that included two technology tools for each week with a written tutorial for one tool and an oral tutorial for the second tool both in the target language. The researcher was aware that due to time constraints, educators could not possibly experiment with two tools weekly with their students and still meet the submission deadline. For this reason, the researcher highly encouraged all participants to do their best at implementing the tools in their classes in order for educators to submit very comprehensive written and oral entries.

There were five weeks in between the pre-test and the posted. Each week, the participants accessed the VCoP website and clicked on the technology tools week number link that coincided with the week we were studying. During week one, the foobabble and ThingLink tools were introduced. Fotobabble was a free application into which users could upload photos and add a voice message that coincided with the photo. Similar to fotobabble, ThingLink was another free tool where users created information dots on the uploaded image to bring cultural items to the viewer. Both fotobabble and ThinkLink could be shared with others by sending the link.

During this week, educators accessed the VCoP written and oral tutorials by clicking on Technology Tools 1. Educators also accessed each of the ACTFL’s 5C’s comment’s page that the researcher created for the VCoP. After reading and listening to the tutorials and reviewing the 5C’s, teachers submitted their two teaching ideas into the comments section of the appropriate ACTFL standard to which they wanted to connect their teaching ideas. Participants decided which of the two teaching ideas they wanted to
submit by writing in the comment’s page and which idea they wanted to submit orally by recording it using vocaroo.com and submit its link to the VCoP comments area. Each VCoP entry contained a teaching idea with the week’s technology tool and a reason for connecting it to that ACTFL guideline. Additionally, participants commented on other members’ submission. Finally, the researcher provided comments to every participant’s written and oral entry.

For week two, the virtual communities explored the Storybird and CuePromoter tools. Storybird was a tool to create short or long stories and or poems with images provided by the application. Users could then add captions in Spanish to these images to create their own stories and share their links with others. CuePromoter was a free online teleprompter site that could be used to upload any written work or type onto the website’s canvas then select the desired speed to practice reading and pronunciation in the target language.

During the second week, educators accessed the VCoP written and oral tutorials by clicking on Technology Tools 2. Educators also accessed each of the ACTFL’s 5C’s comment’s page that the researcher created for the VCoP. After reading and listening to the tutorials and reviewing the 5C’s, teachers submitted their two teaching ideas into the comments section of the appropriate ACTFL standard to which they wanted to connect their teaching ideas. Participants decided which of the two teaching ideas they wanted to submit by writing in the comment’s page and which idea they wanted to submit orally by recording it using vocaroo.com and submit its link to the VCoP comments area. Each VCoP entry contained a teaching idea with the week’s technology tool and a reason for connecting it to that ACTFL guideline. Additionally, participants commented on other
members’ submission. Finally, the researcher provided comments to every participant’s written and oral entry.

Week three introduced the VCoP participants to video creation and gamification. Animoto was a free application that allowed its users to create a one minute video using uploaded photos. The application also allowed users to add captions to their videos and provided users with choices for background music. After creating a short movie with Animoto, users could share with anyone by sending its link. Gamification has been in the forefront of educational technology and thus Plickers presented gamification to the VCoP members. To use Plickers, educators first had to download the application to their handheld device, then create quiz online using the application’s site. Educators also needed to print answer sheets on cardstock; each answer sheet was different from the others. In order to use Plickers, educators accessed the online quiz, and displayed each question on the SmartBoard. As students would hold up their cards with the correct answers facing the ceiling, the educator would use his/her handheld device to scan the cards. As the educator scanned the classroom, the results of that assessment question would should up on the screen. This was used for immediate assessment.

The third week, educators accessed the VCoP written and oral tutorials by clicking on Technology Tools 3. Educators also accessed each of the ACTFL’s 5C’s comment’s page that the researcher created for the VCoP. After reading and listening to the tutorials and reviewing the 5C’s, teachers submitted their two teaching ideas into the comments section of the appropriate ACTFL standard to which they wanted to connect their teaching ideas. Participants decided which of the two teaching ideas they wanted to submit by writing in the comment’s page and which idea they wanted to submit orally by
recording it using vocaroo.com and submit its link to the VCoP comments area. Each VCoP entry contained a teaching idea with the week’s technology tool and a reason for connecting it to that ACTFL guideline. Additionally, participants commented on other members’ submission. Finally, the researcher provided comments to every participant’s written and oral entry.

Videos was the theme for week four where educators dabbled with VideoNot.es and FluentU. VideoNot.es was a free application connected to Google into which users could upload a video from YouTube, Coursera, Udacity, Khan, or Vimeo. As users watched videos, they could pause and take notes on a canvas to the right of the video. For educators who wanted more authentic materials, FluentU provided them with TV shows, commercials and music from the countries where the target language was spoken. A great advantage about FluentU was that educators could sift through the many levels of authentic programs in FluentU to fit their level or challenge themselves to a higher level. The only drawback to FluentU was that it only worked with Apple products and its free subscription only lasted two weeks.

For week four, educators accessed the VCoP written and oral tutorials by clicking on Technology Tools 4. Educators also accessed each of the ACTFL’s 5C’s comment’s page that the researcher created for the VCoP. After reading and listening to the tutorials and reviewing the 5C’s, teachers submitted their two teaching ideas into the comments section of the appropriate ACTFL standard to which they wanted to connect their teaching ideas. Participants decided which of the two teaching ideas they wanted to submit by writing in the comment’s page and which idea they wanted to submit orally by recording it using vocaroo.com and submit its link to the VCoP comments area. Each
VCoP entry contained a teaching idea with the week’s technology tool and a reason for connecting it to that ACTFL guideline. Additionally, participants commented on other members’ submission. Finally, the researcher provided comments to every participant’s written and oral entry.

The final week of the five in between weeks provided educators with ample information about electronic portfolios. The researcher uploaded written and oral tutorials on how to use Google Sites and Canvas to create electronic portfolios. Because the VCoP website was created through Google Sites, having added another Google tool informed educators of yet another Google tool they can incorporate in their teaching and learning of Spanish. Additionally, the researcher included a link to a presentation he did titled “Making Global Connections with Canvas Computing”. This video was filmed as part of his Mississippi Humanities Council Award recipient presentation on technology across the curriculum and because some world language educators use Canvas, they could benefit from the presentation. Finally, the researcher added an image of the book “How to Develop a Professional Portfolio: A Manual for Teachers” as a resource for all educators to have if considering.

Similar to the previous four weeks, educators accessed the VCoP written and oral tutorials by clicking on Technology Tools 5. Educators also accessed each of the ACTFL’s 5C’s comment’s page that the researcher created for the VCoP. After listening to, reading, and viewing the tutorials on electronic portfolios and reviewing the 5C’s, teachers submitted their two teaching ideas into the comments section of the appropriate ACTFL standard to which they wanted to connect their teaching ideas. Participants decided which of the two teaching ideas they wanted to submit by writing on the
comments page and which idea they wanted to submit orally by recording it using vocaroo.com and submit its link to the VCoP comments area. Each VCoP entry contained a teaching idea with the week’s technology tool and a reason for connecting it to that ACTFL guideline. Additionally, participants commented on other members’ submission. Finally, the researcher provided comments to every participant’s written and oral entry.

For each of the five weeks above, the Spanish VCoP participants submitted every written and oral entry in Spanish whereas the English VCoP members submitted their entries in English. Similarly, the researcher communicated in Spanish with the Spanish VCoP members and in English with the participants in the English VCoP. Additionally, participants followed the comments’ guidelines that included (a) using that week’s technology tools with the teaching ideas and (b) explaining the reason behind placing those teaching ideas under a specific “C.” There was no limit to the number of words or lines for the written and oral entries; these entries were graded holistically using the Harrison High School world language assessments.

In order to ensure that participants did not work ahead or skip lessons, the researcher used the method that schools use for online classes. Each module opened on Monday morning and closed the following Sunday night. Only the two technology tool tutorials for that week were available and no future ones. Of course, once a week had been completed the tutorials from previous weeks remained available in the VCoP.

Every Monday morning the researcher sent out a welcome email to both groups, one Spanish email to the Spanish group and an English version to the English group. The message informed the participants that the two new technology tools had been added and
also reminded them to submit one written and one oral teaching idea connected to the ACTFL guidelines.

The final section of the procedures for conducting the study was the participants’ demographic survey. At the end of the study, the researcher created a survey that was disseminated to every educator who finished the seven weeks of the VCoP study. The survey that the participants took at the end of the study inquired about their ethnicity, education, years teaching, and professional organizations to name a few. In depth information about the demographic survey and its results is found in Chapter IV and a copy of it in the appendixes.

Data Analysis Procedures

In analyzing the data at the end of the study, both groups, the Spanish group and the English group, again submitted a written and an oral technology-rich language teaching idea that the blind grader scored using the same rubrics as the pre-test rubrics. Also, the participants listened to a technology teaching idea submitted by the moderator to which they answered and commented.

The blind grader, a person who did not know any of the participants, was a native Spanish speaker to whom the moderator gave all written and spoken entries. Each participant’s written entries were placed into an envelope coded by the moderator; the code was only known to the researcher. As for the listening entries, the moderator created a spreadsheet on which the participants’ vocaroo recording links were submitted. These submissions were coded and randomized for each participant before giving the spreadsheet to the blind grader.
The pre-test scores of both the Spanish and English groups, the five weeks scores for the Spanish group, and post-test scores for the Spanish and English groups were analyzed using the IBM® SPSS® Statistics Version 23.0 program to determine if the Spanish participants’ written, oral, and listening comprehension levels showed a statistical improvement when compared to the scores of the educators who participated in the English group.

Summary

The methodology chapter provided a detailed description of the VCoP research design, research setting, research participants, research instruments, procedures for conducting the study, and data analysis procedures. The researcher chose a quantitative approach to the study due to the fact that the “variables are measured in numeric units” (Privatera, 2012b, p. 17).

The collection of data for conducting the quantitative study included both the Spanish and English groups’ written, oral, and listening scores for the pre-test and post-test as well as the Spanish group’s five in between weeks of written and oral entries.

A repeated-measures one-group pre-test-post-test design was used in this study to measure the three dependent linguistic variables (writing, speaking, and listening comprehension) before and after taking part in an online professional development. The two reliable and reputable instruments created by the Harrison High School in the Cobb County School System to measure world language writing and speaking assignments were employed for the repeated-measures design study. Before using these language assessment rubrics, the researcher contacted the authors and received permission to use them in the VCoP study.
The researcher began the next chapter, Data Analysis, with the participants’ demographic information. Then, the researcher displayed the means of all three linguistic variables for the Spanish and English pre-test and post-test as well as the Spanish group’s five in between weeks of submissions. Moving forward, the researcher provided the statistical analyses to answer the four research questions about how the treatment, or participation in a target language VCoP, increased non-native participants’ three linguistic variables. The interpretation of these scores provided valuable information concerning the implementation of a VCoP as professional development for non-native educators of a world language.
CHAPTER IV – DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher presented the results of the participants’ seven weeks of engagement in the virtual community of practice for non-native Spanish teachers. The researcher used tables and graphs to illustrate participants’ demographics and the pre-test and post-test scores for both the Spanish and English groups. Also, the researcher provided tables showing the linguistic growth of both groups represented by means. Further, the researcher discussed the results of the ANOVA tests and informs if there was a statistical significant difference between the Spanish and the English group.

Demographics

A total of twenty-four educators began the study on a Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP) as professional development for non-native K-12 Spanish educators. However, only twenty-two participants finished all seven weeks of the study. Because two participants, one from each group, discontinued their involvement with the VCoP midway through the study, there were no demographics data collected on them. Further, because the demographics data were collected during the last week of the study, all data represented in the tables reflected the twenty-two participants, eleven from each group, who completed the seven weeks study.

These twenty-two non-native Spanish participants represented two state language associations: the Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA) and the Iowa World Language Association (IWLA). More than half of the participants $n=15$ or 68.2% were from Mississippi. The remaining $n=7$ or 31.8% of the VCoP teachers came from Iowa through online recruitment and assistance from the IWLA vice-president.
Among these twenty-two participants, the majority were eighteen females \( n=18 \) who represented 81.8% of the total participants. Only four males \( n=4 \) or 18.2% of the total number of participants took part in the study.

Continuing with the participants’ demographics, 95.5% or \( n=21 \) of the participants were Caucasian whereas only one participant or \( n=1 \) was African American representing 4.5% of the population \( N=22 \).

As for the educational level of the VCoP participants, more than half of the VCoP members \( n=13 \) had their bachelor’s degree, or 59.1% whereas a little less than half of the educators \( n=9 \) had attained their Master’s degree, or 40.9%.

Because the study targeted non-native Spanish educators’ linguistic competence, the researcher also asked their university degrees. When creating the demographic survey, the researcher added three degree categories from which participants could choose—Spanish, education, Spanish education and also included an “other” box in case there were participants who did not major in any of the three degrees provided by the researcher.

Almost half of the participants had majored in Spanish education whereas a degree in Spanish came in second among the participants of the study. In the “other” box of the survey participants included their college concentrations that were not part of the three choices in the survey; three participants submitted into the box the majors of English, ESL, and a Spanish minor. Finally, among the total number of participants a strictly education degree ranked last among the VCoP members. Table 5 below summarizes the university degrees of the non-native Spanish educators.
Table 1

*University degrees*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish education</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aligned with the question about the educators’ university degrees, the researcher also included a question in the demographics’ survey related to the participants’ contact with technology while in college. The survey answers to this question corresponds with Lord and Lomicka’s (2011) statement that “technology is often approached as an afterthought” (p.2) in many teacher preparation programs. Among the twenty two participants most N=22 or 68.2% did not take any technology courses or these courses were not required by their program during their university career. Only a small percentage 31.8% or just n=7 educators replied that they had taken computer classes or that their university included technology in list of methodology courses.

Question number seven asked the participants to indicate the number of years teaching. Among the five choices, the first choice, zero to five years, and the middle choice, eleven to fifteen years, ranked equally with the same number of educators. The second most populous group was the twenty-one years plus of teaching experience. Finally, the six to ten years and the sixteen to twenty years of teaching experience ranked last among the years of teaching experience. Table 2 below shows the frequency and percentage of years teaching among the total population N=22.
Table 2

*Number of Years Teaching*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years teaching</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 +</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Affiliation with a world language association represented most of the non-native Spanish teachers. More than half of the participants (63.6%) belonged to a language association whereas less than half of the educators (36.4%) were not members of a language association. Because the researcher recruited from two language organizations, \( n=14 \) represented the MSFLA and the IWLA.

Finally, the last question of the survey inquired about participants’ experiences with any type of online professional development during their career before engaging in the VCoP study. According to the responses, 90.9% of the participants had never taken part in an online professional development whereas only 9.1% had some online experience.

**Statistical Analysis**

Participants of the VCoP study engaged with other non-native Spanish educators and the native Spanish researcher, or moderator, for a total of seven weeks. Before beginning the study, the twenty four participants who began the study submitted a writing sample in Spanish about technology implementation in their Spanish classrooms. Following the pre-test, only those educators in the Spanish group submitted their five weeks’ writing samples in Spanish about embedding technology tools in their classrooms.
As for the participants in the English group, they were not analyzed during the five in between weeks because their writing contributions about technology in the Spanish classroom were in English during the five weeks. The English group was only analyzed in the Spanish writing pre-test and post-test.

Each writing sample was scored by the native Spanish speaker who was blind to the identities of the participants. This grader used the adopted rubric in which a score of five indicated a strong control and a score of zero denoted that the participant did not provide a coherent answer or did not answer at all. After receiving the grader’s scores, the researcher then inputted the Spanish participants’ weekly writing scores into the IBM® SPSS® Statistics Version 23.0 program to determine if there was an increase in their Spanish writing samples during participation in the VCoP in the target language with other educators and the researcher. The SPSS® output showed that the weekly mean scores increased slightly from week one to week three. Week four showed a lower mean than the first week and week five had the highest mean score. Table 3 below shows the weekly mean and standard deviation scores for the Spanish group’s five weeks of writing samples.
Table 3

*Spanish participants’ weekly writing scores following the pre-test*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>.718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.669</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.831</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the five weeks of writing samples by the Spanish group, participants in both groups then submitted a final writing sample as their post-test. Comparing both groups’ pre-test and post-test scores, both sets of participants showed an increase in their Spanish writing; as seen in the output, the Spanish participants showed greater improvement in writing Spanish than the English participants. Table 4 below displays the Spanish and English pre-test and post-tests means and standard deviations.

Table 4

*Spanish and English participants’ writing pre and post-test scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.155</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>.674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The second linguistic component that was analyzed was speaking. Similar to the writing rubric, the speaking rubric also had five categories where a score of five indicated “superior” communication skills and a rating of zero meant that the entry was incomprehensible or that there was no response. Before week one, all twenty-four educators sent their pre-test verbal recordings about technology implementation in the Spanish classroom. After the pre-test, only the Spanish group’s members submitted weekly oral entries about using a specific technology in the classroom for language acquisition. At the end of the study, every member of both groups of the VCoP voice recorded their ideas about merging technology with language learning. Because one member from the Spanish group and the English group had discontinued the study, there were an even number of participants in both groups during the post-test. The drop in number facilitated the statistical analysis because both groups contained the same number of participants.

To analyze the participants’ speaking, the researcher gave the unmarked recording links to the grader. The grader, who was a native Spanish speaker and had no knowledge of the participants’ individual or group identities nor did the grader know which samples came from which week, listened to all oral samples and assigned them a score from the adopted rubric.

In order to analyze the educators’ speaking fluency, their weekly speaking scores were entered into the IBM® SPSS® Statistics Version 23.0 program to determine if there was an increase in their Spanish oral proficiency after participation in the VCoP for non-native educators. The SPSS® output indicated that there was a steady rise in speaking fluency during engagement in the VCoP. Week one showed the lowest mean of (M =
3.25, SD = .622). The following week the mean score increased by .17 (M = 3.42, SD = .793). The largest increase was seen between week two (M = 3.42, SD = .793) and week three (M = 3.83, SD = .937) by an increase of .41. During the final two weeks of the study, there were eleven participants after one educator discontinued the study. The means for the speaking scores for these two weeks also showed an increase at week four (M = 3.91, SD = .944) and week five (M = 4.18, SD = .751). Table 5 displays each week with the number of participants, the week’s means and standard deviations.

Table 5

*Spanish participants’ weekly speaking scores following the pre-test week*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>.622</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>.793</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>.937</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>.751</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the last week of the study, members of both the Spanish and English groups submitted their final speaking samples as part of their post-tests. In comparing the Spanish group’s pre-test and post-test scores to the English group’s pre-test and post-test scores, both sets of participants showed an increase in their Spanish speaking fluency. Although both groups showed improvement in their speaking fluency, the Spanish participants’ post-test mean scores were higher than the English participants’ post-test scores, as predicted. Table 6 below displays the Spanish and English pre-test and post-tests means and standard deviations.
Table 6

*Spanish and English participants’ speaking pre and post test scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>1.165</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>.900</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>.647</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unlike the VCoP writing and speaking components where participants in the Spanish group submitted weekly samples, for the listening comprehension section participants submitted only a pre-test and post-test. The participants’ pre-test and post-test entries were replies to the researcher’s ideas on the use of some technology tools for the world language classroom.

Every participant n=22 completed the listening comprehension pre-test and post-test. Comparable to the writing and speaking scores, both groups showed an increase in their listening comprehension. However, in looking at the Spanish group’s pre-test and post-test scores and then comparing them to the English group’s pre-test and post-test scores, the Spanish participants showed a greater increase in their listening comprehension. Table 7 below shows the Spanish and English participants’ listening pre-test and post-test scores. These were taken before participation in the VCoP and once again after participation in the VCoP.
Table 7

Spanish and English participants’ listening pre and post test scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-test</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Post-test</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>1.215</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>.905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>.505</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>.701</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To determine whether a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test of the Spanish participants’ writing, speaking, and listening scores existed, a one way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for each linguistic variable. The significance level was set to <.05 with a confidence level of 95.0%. First, in evaluating the Spanish participants’ writing scores, there was a statistically significant difference between their pre-test and post-test scores, \( F = (1, 10) = 26.667, p = \leq .001 \). The analysis confirmed that writing in Spanish for a period of seven weeks increased a non-native Spanish educator’s Spanish writing ability.

Second, the Spanish educators’ pre-test and post-test scores for the speaking variable were analyzed to determine if there was an improvement after participation in an online professional development using the target language. Based on the analysis, there was a statistically significant difference between their pre-test and post-test listening scores, \( F = (1, 10) = 93.889, p = \leq .001 \).
The third variable that was analyzed was the participants’ listening comprehension. After engagement in a Spanish-only virtual community of practice, participants’ pre-test and post-test listening comprehension scores showed a statistically significant difference, $F= (1, 10) = 13.913$, $p = .004$.

In order to analyze if the Spanish group was different from the English group, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted for each variable using both groups’ pre-test and post-test scores. The significance level was set to $<.05$ with a confidence level of 95.0%. Comparing both group’s writing scores, it was determined that the groups were not significantly different, $F= (1, 20) = .313$, $p = .582$. Similar to the writing, the results showed that both groups were not significantly different in speaking as well, $F= (1, 20) = .237$, $p = .632$. In the listening variable also, both groups showed that they were not significantly different, $F= (1, 20) = .027$, $p = .871$. This data revealed that participants increased in all three linguistic components regardless of the group to which they belonged.

To evaluate if the change from pre-test to post-test was different for the Spanish group when compared to the English group, a repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. The significance level was set to $<.05$ with a confidence level of 95.0%. The results for the writing indicated that the change from pre-test to post-test was not significantly different for the Spanish group when compared to the English group, $F= (1, 20) = 3.077$, $p = .095$. However, the change from the speaking pre-test to post-test was different for the Spanish group when compared to the English group, $F= (1, 20) = 11.912$, $p = .003$. As for the listening variable, the change from pre-test to post-test was not different for the Spanish group when compared to the English group, $F= (1, 20) = 1.184$, $p = .289$. 

85
Answers to Research Questions

As seen in the findings explained above, participation in the VCoP increased non-native Spanish educators’ linguistic competence of written production, speaking production, and listening comprehension. Additionally, the findings revealed that participation in a professional development conducted in the target made a difference in the linguistic outcome of the participants. To this end, the four research questions of the study were answered affirmatively by observing the clustered graphs that represent the answers to the research questions.

The first research question dealt with participants’ overall written production: “Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall written production?” By looking at the clustered graph below (see Figure 6) and a writing sample of one Spanish participant’s pre-test (see Figure 7) and the same Spanish participant’s post-test (see Figure 8), and an English participant’s pre-test (See Figure 9) and the same English participant’s post-test (see Figure 10) it was determined that both sets of participants increased their written production from the first writing sample during the pre-test to the final assessment on the post-test. Because the Spanish group was engaged only in Spanish during the five in between weeks, their final means were higher than the English group; however, the English group also increased their writing production.
**Figure 6.** Participants’ pre-test and post-test writing means

**Figure 7.** Spanish participant’s pre-test writing sample

**Figure 8.** Spanish participant’s post-test writing sample
Research question two asked “Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall speaking interaction?” The clustered bar graph below showed that both groups increased their speaking production; nevertheless, due to the Spanish groups’ five weeks of interaction in Spanish, these participants showed a greater increase (see Figure 11).

Figure 9. English participant’s pre-test writing sample

Figure 10. English participant’s post-test writing sample

Figure 11. Participants’ pre-test and post-test speaking means.
The third research question inquired about the participants’ listening comprehension by asking “Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall listening comprehension?” Similar to the other two linguistic components, there was an increase in both groups’ listening comprehension (see Figure 12). Also as observed with the other two linguistic components, the increase was larger in the Spanish group compared to the English group.

Figure 12. Participants’ pre-test and post-test listening comprehension means

Question four of the research questions looked at the VCoP conducted in Spanish as a viable conduit for increasing linguistic competence: “Does the language in which the VCoP is conducted make a difference in the outcome?” The researcher answered this question by looking at the Spanish group’s five in between weeks. In studying the graph below, Spanish participants showed a steady rise up to week three, then there was a dropped in week four, but increased again the last week of the study (see Figure 13). The clustered graph below shows the five weeks of Spanish writing.
Contrary to the in between weeks of writing, the five in between weeks of speaking scores showed a steady increase from week one to week five. The graph below proves that conducting an online professional development in the target language made a difference in the speaking outcome of the participants (see Figure 14).

*Figure 13.* Writing means of the five in between weeks of the Spanish group

*Figure 14.* Speaking means of the five in between weeks for the Spanish group
Additional Findings

Throughout the seven seeks of the VCoP study, participants provided unsolicited comments about several aspects of the online professional development. Some of these comments centered on the practicality of the online environment, the use of technology tools, creating a second part to this study, and targeting language improvement to name a few. These unsolicited comments supported the concept of establishing a VCoP as professional development for world language educators. To share some of the unsolicited comments that came in during and at the end of the research study, the researcher consolidated the comments into seven recurring themes: collaboration, feedback, flexibility, language acquisition, the need for more online professional development, practicality, and technology tools. Among the seven themes, practicality, technology tools, and collaboration were the most mentioned about this online professional development for world language educators. The following table shows the seven recurring themes from the participants’ unsolicited comments (see Table 8).

Table 8

Participants' unsolicited comments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Collaboration</th>
<th>Feedback</th>
<th>Flexibility</th>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Online</th>
<th>Practicality</th>
<th>Tools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For each of the seven themes listed in the above table, the researcher included one comment representative of each theme. In stressing the collaboration that the VCoP promoted, one participant commented “I would like this available as an ongoing or periodic professional development. Collaboration among teachers was promoted” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 6, 2016). Concerning feedback, an educator
wrote “Loved getting feedback almost immediately and loved the apps shared” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 6, 2016). Being able to participate regardless of time and space, a non-native Spanish teacher mentioned “I liked that it was online so I could work anywhere that had Internet access” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 5, 2016). Improving non-native Spanish teachers’ linguistic competence was achieved during the seven weeks as was expressed by a participant of the study: “My Spanish has improved! I’m the only Spanish teacher in my school and my family doesn’t speak Spanish. This platform help me develop a lot!” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January, 5, 2016). The study also promoted professional development via an online milieu. Most of the participants’ comments about online professional development were encapsulated in one educator’s experience about the VCoP: “I love online instruction” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 8, 2016). Finally, the last two themes concerned technology implementation in the Spanish classroom. Regarding the practicality of the VCoP, one teacher commented, “I like that the technology was something ‘usable’ for my classes that they would like” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 7, 2016). Similarly, another educator wrote “The program offered a variety of new technology methods to use in classrooms” (VCoP participant, January 8, 2016)

Summary

A Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP) for non-native Spanish educators was created to provide non-native Spanish teachers with online professional development. The participants were randomly divided into two groups: Spanish group and English group. At the beginning of the study, each participant submitted a writing, speaking, and
listening comprehension sample in the target language about their technology implementation in the Spanish classroom. During the five weeks after the pre-test, the Spanish group’s participants provided teaching ideas in the target language as replies to the moderator’s technology tools’ tutorials and connected them to the standards of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The English group members communicated their ideas in English. As the final assessment, every participant once again replied in Spanish to the moderator’s writing, speaking, and listening prompts.

After analyzing all data using the rubrics, the data showed that the Spanish group began with lower mean scores than the English group in all three linguistic categories: writing, speaking, and listening comprehension. Although both groups showed a linguistic increase in all three linguistic categories at the end of the study, the Spanish group’s participants’ language grew even higher than the English group’s participants. The Spanish group’s linguistic increase was attributed to the ongoing communication in Spanish with the other Spanish group’s participants and the moderator.

During and after the study, participants from both groups provided unsolicited comments about the VCoP. These voluntary comments indicated that an online professional development in the target language where participants shared, collaborated, received feedback, and were engaged in an ongoing conversation was a viable method of conducting professional development. Additionally, the comments pointed to the creation of more opportunities for language VCoP.

In the next section, Chapter V, the researcher began by summarizing the research results, followed by a discussion of what the data meant for non-native Spanish educators. Extending the significance of the data from its implications for non-native K-
12 Spanish educators, the researcher proposed changes to state, regional, and national world language associations on revamping how world language professional development should be provided.
CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

Introduction

The research investigated a new type of professional development for non-native Spanish educators: a Virtual Community of Practice. Today’s world language educators have very limited professional development opportunities. These are scarce professional development events typically held once or twice a year, costly to attend, occur at distant places, and are conducted in English and not in the target language. Professional development needs to be readily available to every world language educator to connect with other language educators that they may otherwise not meet, engage in ongoing collaboration with other language teachers, share and learn about new teaching ideas with technology, and above all, conduct communication in the target language. Because today’s professional development lacks all of the above, this study proposed the following four research questions about a Virtual Community of Practice for professional development:

1. Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall written production?
2. Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall speaking interaction?
3. Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall listening comprehension?
4. Does the language in which the virtual community of practice is conducted make a difference in the outcome?
This chapter opens with a summary of the VCoP study for Mississippi and Iowa non-native Spanish educators. Following the review of the study, this chapter discusses the study’s conclusions and connects the literature supporting an online community as professional development to the many unsolicited comments provided by the VCoP participants. Next, the researcher conveys the recommendations for future VCoP to provide ongoing professional development for every world language educator. For a VCoP to be successful the researcher exposes some limitations that have to be explored before distributing online communities for departments of education to use as professional development. Finally, the researcher describes how future research could lead to more VCoP for every world language educator.

Summary of Study

For the study on a Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP) for non-native Spanish educators, the researcher solicited the participation of non-native Spanish teachers from Mississippi and Iowa. The platform for the VCoP was a website created by the researcher that contained a separate page for each of the five teaching guidelines of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The ACFL guidelines were a necessary part of the VCoP as participants had to provide a reason as to why their teaching ideas were placed under a particular guideline. The guidelines were in both languages; in Spanish for the participants in the Spanish group and in English for the educators in the English group. The VCoP website also included seven links to the seven weeks of written and oral tutorials. The technology tools tutorials were uploaded to the website as PDFs for the written tutorials and as voice recordings for the oral tutorials.
The study began with a pre-test where all participants communicated in Spanish their teaching ideas in writing and speaking about two technology tools the researcher provided in the website. Additionally, the participants replied in Spanish to a teaching idea submitted by the researcher. This first part of the study collected the participants’ linguistic levels before participation in one of the two groups: the Spanish group and the English group.

After participants were randomly divided into two groups, both groups accessed the weekly technology tools’ tutorials each week. The Spanish group’s members provided their teaching ideas about that week’s technology tools in the target language into the VCoP’s ACTFL guidelines’ pages (translated into Spanish by the researcher) that best connected their teaching ideas with that technology tool. Conversely, the English group’s teachers submitted their postings in English into the English-language ACTFL guidelines that best connected with their technology-rich teaching idea.

At the end of the study, all participants used the target language to share their teaching ideas, one written and one spoken, about two technology tools provided by the researcher. Similar to the pre-test, the post-test also had members listen to a “teaching with technology idea” submitted by the researcher and then replied in Spanish to the researcher’s idea.

Conclusions and Discussions

There were four research questions that guided this study. Question one investigated if participants’ written production increased. Question two asked about the participants’ improvement in speaking production. For question three, the participants’ listening comprehension was analyzed to determine if it showed an increase. Finally,
question four encompassed all three questions by inquiring if the language of the VCoP made a difference in the linguistic outcome. Each research question was answered based on the study’s findings and supported by unsolicited, affirmative comments by the participants.

Although not research questions, this section ends with a discussion about the educators’ feedback and attitudes of the technology tools that were used in an online platform as professional development.

*Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall written production?*

The Virtual Community of Practice for non-native Spanish educators from Mississippi and Iowa lasted seven weeks. During these seven weeks, there were two groups: the Spanish group and the English group. The participants in the Spanish group contributed their written entries in Spanish whereas the members of the English group submitted their writings in English. As for the English group’s educators, only their pre-test and post-test entries were in Spanish. The weekly written entries that the participants submitted to the online platform were their teaching ideas about using the two new technology tools presented that week. In addition, participants wrote how they connected the two technology tools to ACTFL’s 5C’s. Each week contained technology tools’ tutorials presented in written Spanish to provide target language written input to the participants.

Consistent with Krashen’s *i+1* theory, participants of the VCoP received even more target language written input as they also had to read postings from other members of the online community before replying in writing to another participant. These ongoing
written conversations in Spanish among the participants was the most salient feature of the online platform that contributed to the participants’ overall increase of their written production. One of the participants praised the ongoing discussions with her comment “Tengo el tiempo necesario para reflexionar, pensar, organizar mis pensamientos y responder. Con los comentarios todavía puedo mirar las ideas de otros, explorarlas, y compartirles las mías con ellos.” (VCoP participant, personal communication, November, 30, 2015). Her comment translates to “I have the necessary time to reflect, think, organize my thoughts, and reply. With other’s comments I can always look at the others’ ideas, explore them, and share my own with them.” Both the Spanish and English participants were “focused on comprehending meaning rather than on the explicit goal of learning new words. In other words, learning is a by-product of something else such as reading a passage” (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 379). This type of holistic learning, labeled as incidental vocabulary learning by Gass & Selinker, and acquired during participation in the VCoP, contributed to both groups of participants showing improvement in their overall written production. Of course, because the Spanish group read and wrote in Spanish for all seven weeks, their overall written production was higher than the English group that only read and wrote in Spanish for the pre-test and post-test.

*Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall speaking interaction?*

Consistent with Yang and Yuen (2010) who cited Childnet International, the current study on a VCoP for non-native Spanish educators provided a “casual place of learning; developing literacy and communication skills” (p.289) as seen in both groups’ linguistic improvements in speaking interaction. To help increase participants’ overall
speaking interaction, each week the researcher included a technology tool tutorial in spoken Spanish. Participants then voice recorded a teaching idea that included the use of that specific technology tool. Additionally, participants listened to other members’ recorded entries and replied to one member’s submission by voice recording their replies. In touting the benefits of the speaking interactions in the VCoP, one of the participants provided an unsolicited comment by writing “Mi español ha mejorado” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 5, 2016) which translates to “My Spanish has improved.” Only the Spanish group’s participants used spoken Spanish throughout the seven weeks whereas the English group’s participants used spoken Spanish for the pre-test and post-test. Similar to what Brown noted in 2000 that “speech will emerge once the acquirer has built up enough comprehensible input (i+1)” (p.278), participation in the VCoP provided both groups with plenty of input that resulted in an increase in their overall Spanish speaking interaction with the Spanish group demonstrating a higher achievement than the English group. 

*Does a virtual community of practice increase non-native Spanish teachers’ overall listening comprehension?*

Both the Spanish and the English group of the VCoP participated in Spanish in the listening comprehension portions that made up the pre-test and the post-test. For both the pre-test and the post-test, the researcher voice recorded his teaching with technology ideas for the participants to reply. Similar to the previous two research questions, the both groups showed an increase in their overall listening comprehension. As with the previous two linguistic components, the Spanish group’s increase was higher than the English group’s increase. Because every participant had to listen to the researcher’s recordings
several times in order to understand what the researcher was saying before replying appropriately, participants improved their listening comprehension and thus their vocabulary. In reference to learning by listening and speaking, Gass and Selinker (2001) mentioned that “learning the meaning and use of the word requires us to listen to how it is used in different contexts and perhaps even to consult a dictionary before being brave enough to attempt to use it ourselves” (p. 381). Thus, not only did the participants listen to the researcher’s use of words but also how VCoP members used words to communicate. This is turn provided the VCoP members with different meanings of the same words to use in their listening comprehension activities.

*Does the language in which the virtual community of practice is conducted make a difference in the outcome?*

During the seven weeks study, the researcher communicated solely in Spanish with the Spanish group’s members and required that they too used Spanish to communicate with the other Spanish members. Communication with the English group’s members was conducted in English except during the pre-test and post-test. Thus, question four investigated if the online platform’s language of use make a difference in the overall outcome. The answer to this question is a powerful yes!

The researcher initiated the study proposing that the Spanish group would show a large increase in their linguistic competence whereas the English group would not show a substantial increase. It was clear that the Spanish group showed a significant increase in their linguistic output. But, the English group also showed an increase even though communication with them was in English during the five weeks between the pre-test and post-test which were in Spanish. The researcher posited that because all technology
tutorials were provided in written and spoken Spanish in the online community, the English group’s participants were exposed to some input in Spanish.

Furthermore, the researcher did not hide any of the Spanish participant’s written and voiced entries from the English group’s participants. Consequently, the English group’s participants could read or listen to the Spanish group’s entries if they wanted to. For these reasons, the researcher concluded that because the technology information was provided in Spanish, and the English group’s participants had access to all of the Spanish entries, the English group’s Spanish also increased somewhat. As a result, having a community of practice in the target language made a difference in the linguistic outcome of its participants. In reflecting the literature review with question four, both groups experienced a difference in the outcome because every participant was “looking to improve their productivity in a particular area” as Cheung et al. (2013, p. 1358) commented about a community of practice. The particular area in this VCoP was the participants’ overall linguistic competence.

In promoting the many positive outcomes of a community conducted in the target language, a VCoP educator shared the linguistic power that the community had on her by voluntarily posting that “Yo he desarrollado definitivamente. Ha sido una buena manera de no sólo practicar mi español con otros profesores, pero de recibir herramientas excelentes para usar en mis clases” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 20, 2016). Her comment translates to “I have definitely grown. It’s been a good way to not only practice my Spanish with other teachers, but also receive excellent tools to use in my classes.”
Technology conclusions

The online professional development was created using Google Sites, a webpage developer feature supported by Google. Referring back to what Lord and Lomicka (2011) reported that “technology is often approached as an afterthought in many methodology courses” (pp. 442-443), for several of the educators this online platform was their introduction to the many features of Google and as such their technology knowledge began to grow.

The results of the technology component of the VCoP study revealed that educators desire more technology tools to include in their teaching and learning of Spanish. Harkening back to what Hill (2012) disclosed about the need for educators to “immerse ourselves in what is new and current to better the lives and education of our students” (para. 4), some of the VCoP participants shared the same sentiments as Hill’s research. In recommending the necessity for more technology, a VCoP participant commented in Spanish that “En mi escuela, los estudiantes no son muy buenos con la tecnología por eso quisiera usar más tecnología en mis clases” (VCoP participant, personal communication, December 1, 2015). This participant’s comment translates to “In my school, students are not very tech savvy, that’s why I’d like to use more technology in my classes.” Another VCoP participant expressed that the only thing that can help teachers and more importantly student achievement was more technology implementation: “This is the first and main thing that holds their attention in the classroom. Trust me, finding tech tools like this is a God send for teachers like myself” (VCoP participant, unsolicited comment, November 2, 2015).
The VCoP technology element not only helped non-native Spanish educators implement technology tools in their lessons, but educators were also sharing the newly acquired technology with other school personnel. “I am very appreciative of this opportunity to learn of new ways to teach. The lab tech here at my school is also eager for me to use these and has offered support in any way possible” as one participant commented (VCoP participant, personal communication, December 9, 2015). In promoting technology across curricular areas one educator commented that “Any teacher can benefit from this program, because it taught about practical applications that helped to differentiate learning styles in the classroom, with easy to use and master tools that made learning fun and engaging” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 20, 2016). The VCoP research results revealed that educators desired more technology to use in their classrooms and to share with other colleagues in order to promote diffusion of technology at their schools.

*Personal development conclusions*

In addition to the results showing an increase in every participant’s overall written production, overall speaking interaction, overall listening comprehension, and overall positive outcome in using the target language, the data also revealed that world language educators wanted ongoing professional development that connected them to other “participants whose passion for the topic energizes the community and who provide intellectual and social leadership” (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, para. 8). As was mentioned in Chapter II, many of the individuals who become Spanish K-12 educators were non-native speakers of the target language. Although university programs did a very good job in preparing these future educators to teach Spanish, university programs were somewhat
deficient in providing extensive language and technology training. Additionally, once these educators entered the teaching ranks, finding opportunities for professional development to enhance their teaching was an arduous task.

For all twenty-two participants this was their first time taking part in an online virtual community of practice as professional development where they accessed the platform at their convenience, exchanged ideas with others, and received immediate feedback. Based on the comments that participants provided during the study, their reflections about the VCoP indicated that an online platform for language professional development was innovative, and thus, attractive to all. In supporting online language collaboration, a VCoP member commented that “Collaboration among teachers was promoted. I would like to see continuous professional development promoted via Blog or similar platform” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 20, 2016). In reflecting on the literature review, this participant’s unsolicited comment concurred with the description of a community from Wenger-Trayner (2015) that was mentioned in Chapter II where it was stated that “members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information” (para. 8).

Ongoing professional development was also classified as inspirational. The fact that educators knew that there was an ever-present group of teachers that they could contact or simply retrieve previous information at any time from the community provided a pedagogical safety net for these participants. This feeling of belonging was new to the world language educators because “many teachers report a sense of isolation from other colleagues and alienation from the larger professional community” (Casanave & Schecter, 1997, p. 113). Being part of a group also entailed taking care of others as noted
in an unsolicited comment by a participant: “I loved getting feedback almost immediately” (VCoP participant, personal communication, December, 17, 2015). The constant engagement among the VCoP participants was a key factor for the data showing an increase in participants’ linguistic competence and technology implementation which were critical to teaching and learning Spanish. Consistent with Hou (2015) who was mentioned in Chapter II, this ongoing communication in a VCoP moved private conversations about teaching and learning to the public sphere where diverse pedagogical themes were “discussed openly, and reflected upon collectively” (p. 6).

Evident from the statistics data and the unsolicited comments from the participants, the first virtual community of practice for language educators was the most innovative and desirable method of conducting professional development. Not only did participants increased their linguistic and technology knowledge, but felt satisfied in sharing. This feeling of intellectual reciprocity in an online professional development was also espoused by a study conducted by Cheung et al. (2013) in their description of relationships in an online community. The authors commented that “when members found that their contributions could successfully help other members in the community, their knowledge self-efficacy was enhanced” (p. 1363).

After seven weeks of ongoing professional development, there were already requests for a continuation of this VCoP for non-native teachers and a second part to this pilot program. One of the participants commented “Would you please let me know if you have any more courses?” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 7, 2016). Yet, another one posted “There should be a second round of this study, in which participant teachers come back to report on documented success and difficulties
experienced while applying the new-found diversity these applications bring to teaching and learning.” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 11, 2016).

In the literature review Nistor et al. (2014) referenced Hakkarainen, Paavola and Lippoen 2004 when they argued that “participation in a community leads to the accumulation of experience, stimulates the social construction of knowledge and the development of expertise” (p. 340). The authors’ justification of having a community of practice were seen in the favorable results of the seven weeks study and the positive, unsolicited comments from the participants about the VCoP for non-native Spanish educators.

The first VCoP for non-native Spanish educators proved to be successful in the areas of linguistic improvement, technology implementation, and acceptance of a new type of professional development, there were several recommendations the researcher would like to make to departments of education, state, regional, and national world language associations.

Implications and Recommendations

The linguistic and technology success experienced by non-native Spanish educators who participated in the virtual community of practice served as the evidence these educators needed to mandate the development of professional development in the target language. In order to begin this renovation of professional language development, educators from Mississippi and Iowa needed to share with other world language colleagues the benefits an online platform for teachers provided. Promoting the linguistic and professional values of the virtual community of practice as official professional development already began as was mentioned by a member during the study: “I am using
the VCoP certificate to renew my teaching license and I do plan to use it for my teacher evaluation in the spring” (VCoP participant, January 6, 2016). The advantages of an online platform for language educators were seen at the school and district levels.

Moving from the local and regional levels, world language associations such as the Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA) and the Iowa World Language Association (IWLA) have already considered the introduction of an online component for target language professional development. Former Executive Director of the MSFLA suggested that the face-to-face conferences held throughout the state are much needed and should not be disbanded; however, an online professional development extension from the conference could be created in the target language to provide that ongoing professional contact that was seen in the VCoP to reach all the state’s educators (V. LaCour, personal communication, April 23, 2015).

Similarly, the IWLA expressed a formal interest in the VCoP study results and hoped to use some of the findings to improve professional development for world language educators in Iowa. The President-elect of the IWLA invited the researcher of the study to present the research and findings at the next state conference to be held in Coralville, IA. (see Appendix N).

Because state organizations support the teaching and learning of various world languages, improving professional development cannot happen overnight. The researcher recommends that state departments of education and language associations begin with one language. Departments of education and language associations should use this study and its results with permission to create an online professional development to disseminate to their members. Further, after successful implementation of a Spanish
online professional development, other languages’ online professional development
platforms can be created. The creation of an online platform unique to a specific language
takes time because each world language contains its distinctiveness that requires a team
of experts from that language to build a language-specific VCoP site.

Building a language-specific site does not refer solely to its linguistic
components. The method in which the VCoP is delivered is of utmost importance.
Because some school districts block the use Google and other public website builders,
creators of other VCoP need to consult the school districts they are serving to see if they
allow the use of a public server. Also, VCoP builders need to research if the learning
management system (LMS) already in place at the districts allows for the creation of a
VCoP. For instance, the Canvas LMS has an electronic portfolio feature that could be
used for a simple VCoP. The researcher suggests that control of the VCoP is given to the
district’s world language coordinator who schedules when the online community’s
lessons start and end.

Before creating a VCoP it would be beneficial to survey a district’s world
language educators to find out the specific areas on which educators would like to
improve. This could lead to designing various, short VCoP that center on a single
content, such as a specific linguistic component of the language, or learning about the
culture of a specific target language Another design of a future VCoP could be a more
lengthy VCoP aligned with the adopted textbook and teaching materials that could last
the entire school year.

This VCoP research showed that world language educators wanted to use more
technology in the classroom. This desire for more technology tools was confirmed by the
positive VCoP unsolicited comments from the participants. Because this VCoP study supplied two technology tools each of the seven weeks, educators did not have time to create projects with the tools and share with the community. Thus, a recommendation for a future VCoP is to create shorter online communities where participants are required to create projects with the tools and post them to the community for feedback. A shorter VCoP could allocate two weeks for instructors to learn and work with a new technology. Virtual communities that last a shorter amount of time can then be delivered throughout the school year, such as every quarter, to provide educators with several opportunities a year to engage in online learning.

In order to create shorter or content-specific VCoP there needs to be a team of individuals responsible for the various tasks of building the community. The researcher suggests that school districts interested in developing a world language VCoP enlist the assistance of classroom teachers and instructional or educational technologists. Each school sends one or two teachers, each of whom representing a linguistic component or cultural aspect, known as the “content matter experts”. The content experts then give the technologists the information they want on the content-specific VCoP to build the online platform. The information provided to the technologists is an assortment of activities that classroom teachers do to bring language and culture to the students. Of course, these content experts also have technology tools they have used that can go in the online community the technology experts create. The responsibility of the technologists is then to transform these activities into technology modules for educators to access, try out, and comment on the community.
Limitations

There were several limitations encountered while conducting the study on a virtual community of practice for non-native Spanish teachers. The first limitation was the length of the study that lasted seven weeks. When the researcher initially contacted potential participants informing them of the VCoP study and its potential for linguistic and technology improvement, there were over fifty affirmative replies. Even though potential participants wanted to take advantage of this pioneering professional development that would grant them two free continuing education units, they realized that seven weeks was too much to commit to a research project when their schedules at work did allow for much more. For this reason, the researcher determined that perhaps more than two CEU’s should be awarded as incentives for such a lengthy participation in an online community.

Consistent with Benn’s (2014) definition of a time-deprived, typical high school teacher who is “grey with fatigue and stress at school for 10 hours or more a day, wandering from duty to duty, playground, classroom or after-school club” (para. 2), a VCoP member commented along the same lines. Although this VCoP member finished the seven weeks, this educator contributed that “es difícil entregar todo para la fecha indicada cuando el desarrollo profesional dura muchas semanas” (VCoP participant, personal communication, January 6, 2016). This participant’s comment translates to “it is difficult to turn everything in on the due date when the professional development lasts so many weeks”.

Because the research was an online study that recruited world language educators online from MS and IA many educators who had initially replied that they would
participate had not met the researcher. Although almost impossible, the researcher determined that if he had met all participants of both language organizations, the Mississippi Foreign Language Association and the Iowa World Language Association, more educators would have joined the study. Because the researcher is a member of the MSLFA, more participants came from the MSFLA than from the IWLA. If the research had had more participants from both language association pools, the results could possibly have been somewhat different than they were. Even if the number of participants had been higher, the researcher believes that both groups would have still shown an increase in their linguistic components.

Another limitation was the time in which the research was conducted. During the seven week study, there were three major holidays: Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year’s. Because these weeks were considered down weeks, educators did not post or reply to other participants as readily as they did before and after the holidays. Also, the researcher had to send more reminders during these times than any other time. Furthermore, on certain occasions the researcher had to allow participants to post their entries past the due date in order to maintain the desired one-hundred percent participation among all twenty-two members. By researching when educators would be more willing to participate in an online professional development, the number of participants could increase exponentially.

The VCoP professional development platform was created using Google Sites and many schools had the use of Google blocked and restricted access to the technology tools’ sites that the researcher provided. Because many teachers considered the professional development as part of school duty, many accessed the site and submitted
their work from their classrooms. However, there were some educators who could not
work from their classrooms and had to take the time away from family and other
responsibilities to participate in the community.

Even though there were a few limitations, the first non-native Spanish educators’
VCoP proved to be successful with many benefits to its participants. Nonetheless, for the
creation of a VCoP that is tailored to every world language taught in the K-12 school
system there has to be more research.

Future Research

Although the first virtual community of practice for non-native Spanish educators
was “a pioneer professional development necessary for us teachers” (VCoP participant,
unsolicited communication, January 25, 2016), there is still more research needed in
many areas of a VCoP. Researchers can add to this study by applying it to to other world
languages taught at the K-12 level to see if they receive similar results. Also, future
research has the possibility of having more participants then the current study to analyze
linguistic growth. The researcher recommends that future researchers promote the VCoP
in person to different school districts, and language associations to secure a higher
number of participants. A future researcher could use the same technology tools seen in
the seven weeks or delete some and add others that will have come out by then.

Another future research is to include native speakers with non-native speakers of
the language. By having a study with natives and non-native speakers, future research
will determine if the linguistic components of the non-native educators increase more
than what was seen in the current study. Not only can non-natives improve, but native
speakers can also improve in language and technology when working with non-native educators.

Although not the best VCoP for linguistic growth, perhaps, future researchers could create a VCoP for language educator regardless of target language to discuss approaches to teaching with technology. This type of VCoP could be seen as an extension of a face-to-face professional development where the VCoP is used to share general teaching ideas with technology. This type of VCoP could also connect more language educators whose domain is to embed more technology in the teaching of world languages. Of course, it will be up to the individual teacher to tweak these lessons to fit their particular language and culture.

Future research on VCoP could also concentrate on the community college world language educator. Because many community college Spanish teachers are also non-native speakers, a VCoP for the community college educator could connect these instructors with others who are geographically disperse. Additionally, connecting community college educators with high school teachers could be beneficial to both groups; community college educators could learn about using technology in their classrooms whereas high school teachers could improve their linguistic competence.

Because each VCoP needs a moderator, there has to be research on how to select this individual. Should this person be an educator from the same district? Should the moderator be someone outside the district? In addition, depending on the length of the online community, the moderator has to be remunerated with money or benefits from the districts such as continuing education units.
APPENDIX A – VCoP Consent Form

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI
AUTHORIZATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH PROJECT

Consent is hereby given to participate in the study titled:
(Virtual Communities of Practice as Professional Development for World Language Educators)

1. **Purpose:** The purpose of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of a virtual community of practice (VCoP) as professional development for non-native Spanish educators. The study is being performed to explore a virtual platform as professional development to increase non-native educators’ linguistic competence and technology integration in the world language classroom. The results of the study may be used to improve how current world language professional development is conducted. The results of the study may also indicate that better professional development for world language educators is most fruitful when it is conducted in the target language, the language that the educators are teaching.

2. **Description of Study:** The researcher, who is also be called the moderator of the virtual community of practice (VCoP) creates an online platform guided by the teaching and learning standards of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). One VCoP is completely in Spanish while the other one is entirely in English. During each of the six weeks of the study, the researcher introduces two technology tools each week to include a written tutorial for one and an oral tutorial for the other one. The participants log on to the virtual community and access each technology tool. The participants then create two Spanish teaching lessons using each of the two technology tools. After the creation of the two lessons the participants place those lessons under the two ACTFL standards that best coincide with the lessons they created. The time it takes each participant to read, listen to the tutorials and create their lesson varies depending of the language level of each participant and how often during the week they access the module. Additionally, the moderator holds a one-hour synchronous meeting each week to allow the participants to practice their speaking abilities. By taking part in the study, the participants know that there are restrictions to their normal, everyday activities/schedules. Participating in the virtual community imposes a one to two hour restriction on the participants’ normal activities.

At the end of the study the researcher determines if participants engaged in the Spanish virtual community of practice increased their linguistic competence over those who engaged in the English language virtual community of practice.

3. **Benefits:** The benefits that may accrue to the participant as a result of participation in the study are many. First, non-native Spanish educators improve their writing, speaking, and listening abilities in the target language. Second, participants receive two continuing education units (CEU’s) free of charge for taking part in the virtual community of practice study. Third, educators learn how to implement a plethora of technology tools for the acquisition of language and culture. Fourth, language teachers connect with other language educators and develop an educational support system. Fifth, educators are more knowledgeable of the world language teaching and learning standards.

4. **Risks:** There are no known physical, psychological, social, or financial research-related risks, inconveniences, or side effects that can be expected from the Virtual Communities of Practice as Professional Development for World Language Educators. There are no known hazards or discomforts for educators participating in the Virtual Communities of Practice as Professional Development for World Language Educators. There are no potential risks to the participants.
5. **Confidentiality:** Any private information the participants share with researcher who is also the moderator of the study remains confidential with the researcher. No private information is exchanged between the researcher and the participants of the study.

6. **Alternative Procedures:** There are no alternative courses of action open to the participant instead of participation in the Virtual Communities of Practice as Professional Development for World Language Educators.

7. **Participant's Assurance:** Whereas no assurance can be made concerning results that may be obtained (since results from investigational studies cannot be predicted) the researcher will take every precaution consistent with the best scientific practice. Participation in this project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. Questions concerning the research should be directed to Javier G. Gómez at (904) 328-2071 or via email javier.gomez@mgccc.edu

This project and this consent form have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. Any questions or concerns about rights as a research participant should be directed to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board, The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5116, Hattiesburg, MS 39406-5116, (601) 266-5997. A copy of this form will be given to the participant.

8. **Signatures:** In conformance with the federal guidelines, the signature of the participant or parent or guardian must appear on all written consent documents. The University also requires that the date and the signature of the person explaining the study to the subject appear on the consent form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of the Research Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dec 23, 2015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature of the Person Explaining the Study</td>
<td>Date</td>
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</table>

In instances where the participant is a minor (under the age of eighteen years), a signature line for the minor's assent and a signature line for the parents/guardians' consent is required:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signature of the Minor Research Participant</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Signature of Parent/Guardian</th>
<th>Date</th>
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</table>

Participant's Initials
Virtual Community of Practice for Non-Native K-12 Spanish Educators

Welcome to the first Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP) for non-native K-12 Spanish teachers.

To access the technology tutorials, please click on the "Technology Tools" on the left navigation: the number next to "Technology Tools" refers to the week. There, you find links to written and oral tutorials; all tutorials are in Spanish. As you review the tutorials, think about ideas on using these tools in your classroom.

On the left navigation, please find the links in Spanish and English to ACTFL’s 5C’s. Each "C" also contains a comments box where you submit your brief written and spoken teaching ideas. Because your two ideas go under one or two of the ACTFL’s 5C’s, please also provide a brief reason why you connect the teaching idea(s) to that standard(s).

If you are in the Spanish only group, please click and add your comments to the 5C’s in Spanish (Objetivos). If you are in the English group, please click the 5C’s in English.

Please submit all comments into the comments box on this site. If you cannot access the comments box, please click on the Facebook link found under each "C" to leave your comments. To do this, we have to be Facebook friends so I can add you to the Facebook VCoP Group.

Although not required, if you see comments from other participants that you enjoy, please feel free to comment on their submissions.

Please read, sign and send the researcher the VCoP Consent Form.

¡Muchas gracias por su participación!

Javier
APPENDIX C - Letter to the MSFLA

Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education
J.B. George Building (JBG), 143
118 College Drive, #5057
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

Mrs. Janet Bunch
Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA)
President
Spanish Instructor
Northwest Mississippi Community College
DeSoto Center-Southaven
5197 W.E. Ross Parkway
Southaven, MS 38671

Tuesday, August 11, 2015

Dear Mrs. Bunch,

During the Fall 2015 I will be conducting a dissertation study for K-12 non-native Spanish teachers. This doctoral research will examine an online platform for professional development to improve this group’s linguistic competence and technology integration in the world language classroom.

Once I receive the institutional review board (IRB) approval, I would like to request your help in recruiting non-native Spanish teachers in Mississippi through the Mississippi Foreign Language Association (MSFLA).

My PhD board requires that if the MSFLA agrees to help me recruit participants after I receive IRB approval, to please inform me in a short, formal letter sent as an attachment to this email; these documents will become part of the dissertation appendices.

I thank you immensely for helping improve our teachers’ linguistic and technology knowledge.

Very respectfully,

Javier G. Gómez
PhD Candidate
Instructional Technology and Design
The University of Southern Mississippi
APPENDIX D – Letter to the IWLA

Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education  
J.B. George Building (JBG), 143  
118 College Drive, #5057  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

Mr. Jason Noble  
Iowa World Language Association (IWLA)  
Vice-President

Thursday, August 13, 2015

Dear Mr. Noble,

During the Fall 2015 I will be conducting a dissertation study for K-12 non-native Spanish teachers. This doctoral research will examine an online platform for professional development to improve this group’s linguistic competence and technology integration in the world language classroom.

Once I receive the institutional review board (IRB) approval, I would like to request your help in recruiting non-native Spanish teachers in Iowa through the Iowa World Language Association (IWLA).

My PhD board requires that if the IWLA agrees to help me recruit participants after I receive IRB approval, to please inform me in a short, formal letter sent as an attachment to this email; these documents will become part of the dissertation appendices.

I thank you immensely for helping improve our teachers’ linguistic and technology knowledge.

Very respectfully,

Javier G. Gómez  
PhD Candidate  
Instructional Technology and Design  
The University of Southern Mississippi
APPENDIX E – Letter from the MSFLA

Mississippi Foreign Language Association est. 1934

Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education
J.B. George Building (JBG), 143
118 College Drive, #5057
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

Javier Gomez
Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College
2300 U.S. 90
Gautier, MS 39553

Dear Mr. Gomez and Institutional Review Board,

I am happy to extend the assistance of the members of the MFLA on behalf of the Board in helping you complete your research. I am sure many of our nonnative Spanish members in both the Elementary and Secondary education sections will be glad to assist you in your endeavors. We will assist you in selection of qualifying individuals and the invitation of the members to participate in your research on using an online platform for professional development to improve the group’s linguistic competence and technology integration in the world language classroom. Thank you for contacting us and for your commitment to improving language learning and instruction.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Mrs. Janet Bunch
Mississippi Foreign Language Association
President
Spanish Instructor
Northwest Mississippi Community College
DeSoto Center-Southaven
5197 W.E. Ross Parkway
Southaven, MS 38671
APPENDIX F – Letter from the IWLA

Jason Noble, VP
229 University St. Pella, IA 50219
Phone: (641) 621-0143
noblejpceagles.org
iwla.net

Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education
J.B. George Building (JBG), 143
118 College Drive, #5057
Hattiesburg, MS 39406
c/o Javier G. Gómez

Monday, August 24th, 2015

Dear Mr. Gómez,

The Iowa World Language Association would be happy to assist you in recruiting non-native Spanish teaching members of our organization to participate in your dissertation study. We are happy to use our social media and e-mail blasts to share this opportunity with our membership. Please send us the information you would like us to share at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Jason L. Noble
Vice President, IWLA

Spanish teacher
Pella Christian HS
Pella, IA

IWLAl has a mission to promote World Language Education and Cultures at all levels of education (K-12 & Post Secondary), developing proficiency in target languages, and encouraging multi-lingual communication with other cultures in the state of Iowa.
NOTICE OF COMMITTEE ACTION

The project has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26.111), Department of Health and Human Services (45 CFR Part 46), and university guidelines to ensure adherence to the following criteria:

- The risks to subjects are minimized.
- The risks to subjects are reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered regarding risks to subjects must be reported immediately, but not later than 10 days following the event. This should be reported to the IRB Office via the "Adverse Effect Report Form".
- If approved, the maximum period of approval is limited to twelve months.

Projects that exceed this period must submit an application for renewal or continuation.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: 15093005
PROJECT TITLE: Virtual Communities of Practice as Professional Development for World Language Educators
PROJECT TYPE: New Project
RESEARCHER(S): Javier Gerardo Gomez
COLLEGE/DIVISION: College of Education and Psychology
DEPARTMENT: Curriculum, Instruction and Special Education
FUNDING AGENCY/SPONSOR: N/A
IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Expedited Review Approval
PERIOD OF APPROVAL: 10/20/2015 to 10/19/2016

Lawrence A. Hosman, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board
APPENDIX H – Letter to the MDE

Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education  
J.B. George Building (JBG), 143  
118 College Drive, #5057  
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

Mr. Limuel Eubanks  
Division Director  
Office of Curriculum and Instruction  
Mississippi Department of Education  
P.O. Box 771  
Jackson, MS 39205-0771

Monday, August 10, 2015

Dear Mr. Eubanks,

During the Fall 2015 I will be conducting a dissertation study for K-12 non-native Spanish teachers. This doctoral research will examine an online platform for professional development to improve this group’s linguistic competence and technology integration in the world language classroom.

Once I receive the institutional review board (IRB) approval, I would like to request your assistance in contacting non-native Spanish teachers in Mississippi through the foreign language listserv.

My PhD board requires that if the Mississippi Department of Education agrees to help me recruit participants after IRB approval, to please inform me in a short, formal letter sent as an attachment to this email; these documents will become part of the dissertation appendices.

I thank you immensely for helping improve our teachers’ linguistic and technology knowledge.

Very respectfully,

Javier G. Gómez  
PhD Candidate  
Instructional Technology and Design  
The University of Southern Mississippi
Mississippi Department of Education
Central High School Building
359 North West Street
P.O. Box 771
Jackson, MS 39205-0771

Javier Gómez
Department of Curriculum, Instruction, and Special Education
J.B. George Building (JBG), 143
118 College Drive, #5057
Hattiesburg, MS 39406

Monday, August 24th 2015

Dear Mr. Gómez,

Thank you for the letter inviting the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) to help recruit participants for your doctoral research. Your PhD dissertation on online professional development for world language educators to improve their linguistic and technology competence sounds very promising for language educators.

As the World Language Coordinator at the MDE I will be happy to assist you in reaching out to the K-12 non-native Spanish teachers in Mississippi through the Mississippi World Language listserv. Please contact me as soon as you receive IRB approval so I may contact all Spanish teachers in our listserv.

Very respectfully,

Limeul L. Eubanks
Mississippi Department of Education
World Language Coordinator
Visual and Performing Arts
Library Media
Curriculum and Instruction
APPENDIX J – Permission to Use Rubrics

Gomez, Javier

From: Kristin King <KRISTIN.KING@cobbk12.org>
Sent: Friday, January 08, 2016 10:54 AM
To: Gomez, Javier
Cc: Elsa Brown; Megan Clark; Gayla Galuszka; Lauren Stewart
Subject: RE: World Language Rubrics

Hello Mr. Gomez!

Of course you are welcome to use these two rubrics, and thank you for stating that you will give us credit for our work.

Good luck with your dissertation!

Kristin King

Kristin A King
Harrison High School
World Language Dept. Chair
AP Spanish Teacher
4500 Due West Rd.
Kennesaw, GA 30144
678-594-8104

From: Gomez, Javier [mailto:javier.gomez@mgccc.edu]
Sent: Friday, January 08, 2016 10:47 AM
To: Kristin King <KRISTIN.KING@cobbk12.org>
Cc: Elsa Brown <Elsa.Brown@cobbk12.org>; Megan Clark <Megan.CLARK@cobbk12.org>; Gayla Galuszka <Gayla.Galuszka@cobbk12.org>; Lauren Stewart <Lauren.Stewart@cobbk12.org>
Subject: World Language Rubrics

Hello Ms. King,

My name is Javier Gómez, Spanish instructor at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College. I am currently finishing my PhD in technology and world languages and have searched extensively for good writing/speaking rubrics. Fortunately, I came across your Vertical Team: Resources for Spanish Teachers site and your two amazing rubrics!

I would like to use these two rubrics for my data analysis (of course, giving you and your school credit) in my dissertation. If I may, could you please give me permission to use them?

By the way, we might see each other at SCOLT.

Thank you in advance for your reply,

Javier
APPENDIX K – Scoring Rubric for Writing Assignments

SCORING RUBRIC FOR WORLD LANGUAGE WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE RANGE</th>
<th>AP NUMBER</th>
<th>DEMONSTRATION OF ABILITY &amp; CONTROL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95-100</td>
<td>5</td>
<td><strong>Demonstrates EXCELLENCE (Strong Control)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Ease of expression marked by a good sense of idiomatic expressions in the target language.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Clarity of organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Accuracy and variety in vocabulary, grammar and syntax, few errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Thorough and creative development of the topic may compensate for more language problems than this category normally allows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85-94</td>
<td>4</td>
<td><strong>Demonstrates COMPETENCE (Good Control)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Reads smoothly overall despite some errors in grammar and usage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Evidence of organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Varied and generally appropriate vocabulary.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Thorough treatment of the topic may compensate for more language problems than this category normally allows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78-84</td>
<td>3</td>
<td><strong>Suggests COMPETENCE (Fair Control)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Easily comprehensible, with some signs of fluency and organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Correct use of simple grammatical structures with minor errors and/or less accurate use of more complex structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Some apt vocabulary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Appropriate treatment of the topic may compensate for more language problems than this category normally allows.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74-77</td>
<td>2</td>
<td><strong>Suggests INCOMPETENCE (Weak Control)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Generally comprehensible, but frequently forces interpretation on the part of the reader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Inaccuracies in grammatical structures and/or limited vocabulary throughout.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Contains some redeeming features.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Evidence of efforts to treat the topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-73</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Demonstrates INCOMPETENCE (Poor or NO Control)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Barely comprehensible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Almost total lack of structural accuracy and/or vocabulary resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Unacceptable from most points of view.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- A 2 may be distinguished from a 1 by having more error-free word sequences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>A composition that is very clearly on another topic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blank or not written in target language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

BASED ON AP-FRENCH LANGUAGE 2016 SCORING GUIDELINES & COBB COUNTY SCHOOL SYSTEM GRADING SCALE

126
## SCORING RUBRIC FOR WORLD LANGUAGE SPEAKING ASSIGNMENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>AP NUMBER</th>
<th>DEMONSTRATION OF ABILITY &amp; CONTROL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 95-100| 5         | Response demonstrates **VERY GOOD** or **SUPERIOR** communicative skills.  
- A well-developed and appropriate answer characterized by the correct use of a variety of syntactic structures.  
- Broad use of vocabulary.  
- Sustained presentation and connection of ideas.  
- Easily comprehensible pronunciation.  
- Approaches or reaches a high level of fluency (ease of expression). |
| 85-94 | 4         | Response demonstrates **GOOD** communicative skills.  
- An appropriate answer characterized by fluency (ease of expression).  
- Mostly correct use of syntax.  
- Goes beyond control of basic structures.  
- Connection of ideas.  
- Some range of vocabulary.  
- Pronunciation does not interfere with communication. |
| 78-84 | 3         | Response demonstrates **ADEQUATE** communicative skills.  
- An appropriate answer characterized by moderate fluency (ease of expression).  
- Some development of ideas.  
- May rely on repetition.  
- Shows control of basic syntactic patterns and core vocabulary.  
- Some uncertainty when student moves beyond the basics.  
- Pronunciation may require close attention on the part of the listener. |
| 74-77 | 2         | Response demonstrates **LIMITED** communicative skills.  
- An appropriate answer restricted by serious flaws in core grammar, usage and pronunciation.  
- Low level of fluency (ease of expression).  
- Speaker may struggle to express ideas.  
- Answer may require some interpretation. |
| 70-73 | 1         | Response demonstrates **EXTREMELY WEAK** communicative skills.  
- An appropriate or partially appropriate answer that shows little control of grammar, usage and pronunciation.  
- Answer forces interpretation or suggests that the student did not fully understand the question.  
- Relies primarily on vocabulary provided in the pictures and questions.  
- Frequent anglicisms or interference from other languages.  
- No fluency (ease of expression). |
| 0     | 0         | The response is totally incomprehensible, does not address the question at all, or any attempt to evade the question/topic. |
| 0     | 0         | No response or a response that is not in the target language. |

**Based on AP French Language 2010 Scoring Guidelines & Cobb County School System Grading Scale**
APPENDIX M – VCoP Participants’ Survey

Virtual Community of Practice (VCoP) Participants

* Required

Gender *

- Female
- Male

Ethnicity/Race *

- African-American
- Native-American
- White
- Other:

Highest degree: *

- Bachelors
- Masters
- Specialist
- Doctorate
- Other:

Years teaching Spanish: *

- 0-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21 +

State world language association(s) you belong to: *

- Alabama
- Iowa
- Louisiana
Regional and/or national world language association(s) you belong to (please type in the acronym): *

Number of times a year that you participate in an online professional development for Spanish educators: *

Current teaching assignment: *

Degree in... *

129
Mr. Gomez,

Greetings. I hope this email finds you healthy and warm to start the new year.

It has been our pleasure at the Iowa World Language Association to learn about your research with non-native Spanish K-12 teachers to improve their linguistic competence and technology skills in the world language classroom. We understand that several of our Iowa teachers participated in the research.

The Iowa World Language Association would like to formally invite you to present your research and findings at our next conference in Coralville, IA on October 7th and 8th, 2016. Our theme will be "Keys to the World Language Classroom" and will feature ACTFL Executive Director, Marty Abbott as the keynote speaker.

Thank you,

Jason Noble
IWLA President Elect
REFERENCES


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Kolvoord, R., Charles, M., & Purcell, S. (2014). What happens after the professional
development: Case studies on implementing GIS in the Classroom. In J. MaKinster, N. Trautmann, & M. Barnett (Eds.), *Teaching science and investigating environmental issues with geospatial technology* (pp. 303-320). Heidelberg, Germany: Springer.


137


