CREATING CONDITIONS FOR AUTHENTICITY IN THE SPANISH CLASSROOM: PROMOTING AGENCY, EMPATHY, AND INQUIRY THROUGH A US-MEXICO ROLE-IMMERSION SIMULATION

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates if and how a US-Mexico border role-immersion simulation creates conditions for authenticity in an intermediate Spanish classroom. Aiming to promote whole-person engagement within a rich contextualized scenario, 16 undergraduate students adopted the roles of real-world cultural identities and were tasked with achieving individual and collective goals aimed at curbing the problems of drug trafficking and violence at the border. Learners participated in a variety of activities including becoming familiar with the scenario, selecting and developing character roles, and engaging in a set of learner-managed class sessions in which they collectively devised solutions to problems.

In order to understand how the dynamic interplay among the various elements in the simulation influenced learners’ subjective perceptions, I adopted an ecological vision of the classroom and used a qualitative approach, collecting self-reported and interactional data. Following Charmaz’s (2006) Constructivist Grounded Theory, I conducted a line-by-line coding of the pre- and post-simulation questionnaires and two post-simulation interviews and then derived categories based on recurrent themes. As for the interactional data, I video-recorded and transcribed two learner-managed classes. After translating these verbal exchanges as well as learners’ virtual communications on the technology platform Google Plus into English, I coded the data in terms of agency, as operationalized by van Lier (2008), and analyzed it, drawing on complexity theory. Findings showed that a majority of learners likened their simulation experience to being
immersed in real-world circumstances. These learners also exhibited high degrees of both intellectual and affective (i.e., personal) engagement during the simulation. Learners who only displayed one of the two were less likely to consider their classroom experience authentic.

These results suggested that adopting an ecological perspective to explore relationships among the many dynamic elements present in the simulation uncovered the potential of this role-immersion simulation to cultivate in learners a sense that they were engaged in authentic linguistic and cultural encounters. However, data also indicated that learners’ capacity to perceive their experience as authentic and personally meaningful may be contingent on the particular nature of their encounters and their incoming views and experiences related to the communities under study.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The concept of authenticity is highly regarded in the field of foreign language education, often conjuring up images of real-world or immersive encounters with the language and culture. Frequently associated with a sojourn abroad, authentic experiences are generally understood to be an effective avenue through which to engender dramatic linguistic and cultural gains on the part of learners, as they are surrounded by the target language and may be exposed to individuals brought up under alternate cultural and social norms. Interaction in such an immersion setting holds significant potential for learners to gain firsthand experiences with the target language and new cultural perspectives that oftentimes are not readily accessible in academic or domestic settings. Although such experiences can prove advantageous, according to a 2017 report by the Institute of International Education, only 15% of students obtaining a bachelor’s degree in the 2015-2016 academic year studied abroad. Furthermore, research has shown that learners’ encounters in both foreign and domestic immersion contexts can vary significantly and that learners’ diverse experiences in the same setting frequently result in vastly different outcomes, essentially debunking the widespread belief that a sojourn abroad or an immersion experience automatically produces linguistically, culturally, or globally competent individuals. Kinginger (2008) explained that in a study abroad context, the “qualities of student experiences” (p. 107) were of utmost importance and had great incidence on the learning and growth of an individual. Factors that contribute to learners’ overall experiences are numerous and might include individual differences (i.e.,
personal histories, personalities, gender, position toward language learning and use), personal interpretations of encounters, and the degree to which a learner is able and willing to engage with the community, among others (Brecht, Davidson, & Ginsburg, 1993; DeKeyser, 1991). Although the dynamic relationship between these elements inevitably influences the quality of learners’ experiences, a crucial determinant is whether they choose to engage meaningfully in the target language with local cultures. In other words, avoiding interactions with the target culture often inhibits growth, whereas learners more prone to immersing themselves into the community are increasingly likely to evolve in their nuanced understanding of the relationship between language use and culture (Agar, 1994; Isabelli-García, 2006). Considering that a vast majority of learners’ exposure to the target language and cultural phenomena occurs in a classroom setting, the imperative for educators, then, is to identify and promote high-quality or authentic experiences within the four walls of the classroom.

1.1 The Importance of Authenticity in the Foreign Language Classroom

In academic learning environments, instructional practices and materials attempting to give primacy to authenticity are widespread and abundant. The idea of authenticity in the classroom has been associated with notions ranging from the type of language being used, task type, and who is using and producing the language as well as conceptualizing it as a process that includes the negotiated understanding between the text and the receiver or reader, interaction between two individuals, or social aspects of the classroom (Benson & Voller, 1997; Breen, 1985; Porter & Roberts, 1981; Swaffar, 1985; van Lier, 1996). The onset of the quest for authenticity in the classroom can be attributed to Communicative Language Teaching, which emphasized the use of authentic
texts and focused on communicating genuine meaning as opposed to simply teaching
form with little attention to meaning or context (Mishan, 2005). The notion of authentic
texts and materials took hold as a means of infusing genuine elements of the target
language and culture into the classroom, as opposed to materials manipulated for the
purposes of language learning (Gilmore, 2007). More recent approaches to promote
authenticity have leveraged technological advancements to facilitate access to encounters
with native speakers (i.e., telecollaboration, digital chats), engagement with primary
source materials (i.e., online videos, texts, and images), and immersion in simulated real-
world experiences (i.e., virtual reality, second life, etc.), all of which have the potential to
contribute to learners’ sense that they are interacting firsthand with authentic content,
individuals, or settings in the target language (Borau, Ullrich, Feng, & Shen, 2009;
Byram, 1997; Kim, 2011; Lan, Kan, Hsiao, Yang, & Chang, 2013; Lee, 2009; Lomicka
& Lord, 2012; Mitchell, 2016; Rüschoff & Ritter, 2001; Zheng, Young, Wagner, &
Brewer, 2009).

The aim of these approaches is to bridge the gap between academic and authentic
settings, but we must consider whether these practices truly create an authentic
experience for learners. To do so, a clearer understanding of what is meant by the term
authenticity is needed. Specific sets of materials, strategies, and approaches can play a
beneficial role in learners’ overall classroom experience as well as positively impact their
learning; however, I posit that the understanding of academic learning environments as
less authentic than a sojourn abroad is rooted, at least in part, in the nature of the overall
full sensory experience that more naturally occurs in the latter. As Kinginger (2008)
explained,
a sojourn abroad usually represents an entirely new level of exposure not only to the language itself but also to its use in society. The language, in a sense becomes real and deeply consequential, in its rich and perplexing variability and in its relationship to other semiotic cultural tools. (p. 21)

Wilkinson (2002) echoed this idea explaining that when compared to a trek abroad, classroom foreign language learning can seem less relevant to students as they tend to correlate it primarily with academic settings. Because learners have been socialized to engage in intellectual or cognitive learning in a classroom context, they are often unable to fully grasp the rich connection inherent between the language and the peoples and societies that use it. On the other hand, through lived encounters, an experience abroad is more likely to stimulate emotions and heighten sensitivity to these connections, giving deeper relevance and meaning to language study (Kohonen, Jaatinen, Kaikkonen, & Lehtovaara, 2001).

Numerous studies examining student learning in study abroad contexts have documented linguistic improvement and have shown that learners tend toward greater achievement when compared to those who remained in a domestic setting (Brecht et al., 1993; Carlson, Burn, Useem, & Yachimowicz, 1990; Freed, 1990, 1995; Lafford, 1995; Milleret, 1991). However, findings from other studies have repudiated generalized associations unquestionably linking an experience abroad with learning gains (DeKeyser, 1991; Freed, Segalowitz, & Dewey, 2004; Lafford & Collentine, 2006). A study conducted by Freed et al. (2004) compared learning outcomes related to fluency for learners in three separate contexts: study abroad, a domestic intensive summer immersion, and a classroom setting. Results revealed that despite the non-foreign context, the intensive immersion group outperformed both other groups. The authors speculated that the immersion group’s growth may have been attributable to their additional time
spent engaging in activities in which the target language was used. This finding suggests that other variables, as opposed to physical location, may play a greater role in influencing learning. Nonetheless, results from a study by Ginsburg and Miller (2000) surprisingly revealed no correlation between linguistic progress and time on task in an abroad context. Such inconsistencies were also present when examining studies that investigated the development of cultural competences in foreign settings; although results in some indicated that learners who travelled abroad showed deepened cultural understanding (Engle & Engle, 2004; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001), others showed no correlation between experiences in a foreign country and learners’ ability to become more culturally competent (Lokkesmoe, Kuchinke, & Ardichvili, 2016), and still others revealed mixed and inconclusive results (Majumdar, Keystone, & Cuttress, 1999; Williams, 2005; Zielinski, 2007). Although these incongruous studies may initially seem perplexing, they highlight the complexity inherent in the language learning process and elusiveness of a one-size-fits-all approach. Such findings have prompted scholarly attempts to more acutely identify and correlate practices and experiences to particular learner outcomes.

1.2 Authenticity: The Need for Depth and Quality

As articulated by Kearney (2010), two characteristics consistently associated with learner growth include learners’ depth of engagement and quality of experience (Byrnes, 2012; Dewey, Belnap, & Hillstrom, 2013; Freed et al., 2004; Kinginger, 2008). Most foreign language educators can likely relate to the idea that enthusiastic learners who are observably engaged often demonstrate higher achievement than those who seem to put forth minimal effort and appear disconnected. Although such correlations are based on
anecdotes and intuitions and are surely not always the case, they point to a generally held belief that optimizing one’s depth of engagement with the target language, culture, and content is likely to positively affect learning outcomes. Lafford (2008), referring to a sojourn abroad, explained the importance of learners becoming “strongly engaged” (p. v) with peoples and communities abroad. Ginsburg and Miller (2000) also emphasized the need for learners to harness their energies for learning purposes, stressing that researchers should attempt to better understand “the specifics of students’ experiences […] and how they use them for learning” (p. 256, emphasis original). These notions all revolve around the idea that a more engaged learner is more likely to progress in some capacity.

I now turn to the idea of quality of experience, which, to recall, can be associated with an array of factors related to both the learner and the environment. Although learners differ in the ways they approach their language learning, the quality of one’s experience inevitably hinges in large part on the nature of the learning setting. Thus, a foreign context, for example, is considered an apt environment to promote learning as learners gain broad access to target language use and potential for intercultural encounters, which can promote new understandings of and outlooks on global and local topics (Kinginger, 2004). In the classroom setting, a context with similar opportunities for learners to develop their linguistic repertoires, connect with other culture groups, and gain a newfound appreciation of global issues is not always inherently present. However, by relating the notion of authenticity to depth and quality, we are freed from restrictive confines that previously linked the term with structural elements (i.e., physical location or time on task) (Kearney, 2010) and are presented with new ways of conceptualizing how to cultivate an authentic learning experience. As today’s language programs are
characterized by often unsatisfactory gains on the part of learners and stagnant retention beyond the introductory levels (Cammarata, 2016; Paesani, Allen, & Dupuy, 2016), I submit that curricular models that promote in-depth and high-quality experiences within the four walls of the classroom hold significant promise and are likely to chart the path forward.

1.3 An Ecological Vision of the Classroom: Considering the Totality of the Learning Experience

Although an academic learning environment may seem an improbable site to create such authentic experiences, several scholars have turned to the metaphor of classroom ecology as a useful conceptualization that can guide pedagogical practice (Blocher, 1974; Bronfenbrenner, 1976; Doyle, 1977; Hamilton, 1983; Tudor, 2001; van Lier, 1996, 2004a, 2004b). With its roots in biology, an ecological framework adopts a holistic perspective, which allows for a collective examination of the array of inextricably linked elements present in the learning setting. Such an approach is appropriate in order to understand sophisticated notions like depth and quality, as traditional frameworks that attempt to isolate variables or employ reductive cause-effect models would likely not suffice in accounting for such dynamic concepts. The ecology metaphor recognizes the complex nature of causality and, as such, focuses on “the study of the relationships between all the various organisms and their physical environment” (van Lier, 2004b, p. 144). With a focus on relationships within the classroom setting, this perspective offers a suitable lens through which to view “the totality of participants, relationships, structures, objects, and processes that together constitute the shared experience of classroom language teaching and learning” (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013, p. 779). Such a
conceptualization of the classroom has the potential to account for the richness and multiplicity present in this environment.

Another crucial concept within an ecological framework is the primacy of context. From this view, learning is seen as inextricably linked to the context in which it occurs. As van Lier (2004b) explained, “context is central, it cannot be reduced, and it cannot be pushed aside or into the background. The context is the focal field of study” (p. 144). However, unlike a sojourn abroad, within a classroom setting a rich context must be nurtured. Furthermore, context-reduced language, like that often found in language classrooms, differs greatly from highly contextualized language used to communicate everyday ideas in real-world encounters (Cummins, 1986) and limits potential for authenticity. Thus, to promote quality experiences in the classroom, primacy must be given to cultivating a context that lends itself to real-world encounters.

1.3.1 A Relational Perspective: Examining Dynamic Interactions to Identify and Understand Learning Opportunities

Such encounters are likely to arise organically, depending heavily on the situated and interrelated elements in the classroom, and can often be difficult to plan or contrive; thus, to understand if and how a context offers opportunities for authentic encounters, I draw on the notions of affordance and emergence. The former refers to “a relationship between an organism (a learner in our case) and the environment, that signals an opportunity for or inhibition of action” (van Lier, 2004a, p. 4). In other words, an affordance is an opportunity that arises from a context imbued with meaning-making potential. In a classroom setting, an affordance can also be understood as “what is available to the person to do something with” (van Lier, 2004a, p 91). Conceptualizing the classroom as a dynamic system of elements, affordances for authenticity can be
identified through examining the learner in relation to other elements in the context-rich setting and understanding if and under what circumstances he or she perceives and acts on an opportunity to engage deeply and meaningfully with it (Larsen-Freeman, 2014).

The related construct of emergence refers to “a process whereby something new, and possibly unexpected, arises from the interaction of the elements in a system” (Larsen-Freeman, 2014, p. 665). This definition highlights the idea that a set of basic elements, through dynamic interaction, can transform into something of an entirely different nature. A practical classroom example might be when a teacher uses the same thought-provoking discussion questions for two separate classes and, in one class, learners become observably engaged in spirited discussion whereas in the other class learners seem uninterested and share minimally with others. Although learning may occur in both scenarios, this comparison loosely highlights how a holistic and relational view can account for the multitude of possible actions and interactions that might lead one group of learners toward entrenched engagement but not another.

1.3.2 The Promise of an Ecological Framework for Foreign Language Learning

Recent literature highlighting the value of ecological metaphors with relation to the classroom environment have emphasized the need for a wider base of empirical research to elaborate further on the potential of a relational view of learning within the field of second language acquisition (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2014; Morgan & Martin, 2014). Guerrettaz and Johnston’s (2013) study, in which they examined the relationship between classroom materials (i.e., the textbook) and language learning through an ecological framework, confirmed that “[c]lassroom ecology offers a flexible yet principled way of understanding relationships among elements in the classroom” (p.
Morgan and Martin (2014) asserted that the study by Guerrettaz and Johnston “stimulates more research on classroom dynamics and program design from a holistic ecological framework relevant to second/additional language settings” (p. 667) and complements the growing interest in possibilities related to ecological visions of the classroom. These authors also called for studies that “look at all relations (i.e., affordances) between materials and other classroom/program features and assess their learning opportunities within the overall system” (p. 669).

1.4 The Current Study

Thus, the present study aimed to create a highly contextualized and holistic experience in the classroom setting and explore the relationships between learners and other elements in the classroom to determine how these relationships work together to promote deep engagement and high-quality learning experiences (or not). To set the context, learners engaged in a fictitious but culturally grounded simulated scenario at the US-Mexico border. More specifically, they participated in a role-immersion simulation, which drew on features of global simulations, but also incorporated predetermined yet flexible character roles for each student. In order to promote a high degree of personal accountability, each student assumed an alternate identity with a unique stake in the issues of drug trafficking and violence at the US-Mexico border. Learners were tasked with proposing solutions to these problems that they believed might combat a myriad of border issues while also accommodating their unique characters’ interests. By assigning learners their own tailored roles and objectives, the goal of this simulation was to incite a strong individual and collective investment on the part of learners that might give rise to authentic encounters. By exploring the interactions and relationships among learners, the
content, and their character roles in the simulated environment, this study aimed to gain insight regarding if and in what ways these relationships provide affordances for authenticity in the classroom environment.

1.5 Chapter Overview

In the chapters that follow, I first establish the foundation for the present study through a review of relevant literature and then proceed to describe the methodology and findings. I conclude in the last chapter by addressing pedagogical and theoretical implications of this study for the field of foreign language learning as well as its limitations and suggestions for future research.

In Chapter 2, I began by focusing on how a social constructivist framework accords with notions of authenticity addressed in the introduction chapter. I then proceeded to outline the evolving importance given to context within the field over the last several decades, highlighting recent approaches that deem its role to be fundamental. In consideration of the dual importance of a rich context as well as learner engagement in that context, I proceeded to define agency as a means of operationalizing engagement and discussing literature that has investigated how to promote it in a classroom environment. In order to encourage agency, I drew on Wells’ (1999) idea of community of inquiry and described how it conceives of learners as individuals with value and knowledge to contribute, which is conducive to offering learners opportunities to activate their agency. I then described the relationship between experiential learning, imagination, and emotional engagement as integral components to promoting learner connections with communities beyond the classroom and, thus, relevant to cultivating authenticity. I concluded this chapter by outlining pedagogical approaches that have shown to
encourage authentic experiences in the classroom, namely global simulations and Reacting to the Past games, and proceeded to describe how using a combination of elements from these pedagogies, I developed the role-immersion simulation used for the present study.

Chapter 3 details the methods used in the present study. I started by offering a rationale for selecting a 4th semester, intermediate Spanish course. Then, I described the scenario, topics, and character roles used in the role-immersion simulation. In order to implement the simulation within the intermediate course, I subsequently specified how I adapted the coordinated curriculum to accommodate it. Next, I proceeded to present the four phases of the simulation, the reflection component, and the assessment procedures employed in each phase. Because the instructor function in the simulation diverged from that of a traditional classroom, I outlined the evolving role of the instructor during the different simulation phases. In this chapter, I also specified the instruments used to collect data, the data collection procedures, and how data were analyzed. To capture learners’ interactional encounters, I used the technology platform Google Plus (digital interactions) and ethnographic video recordings (face-to-face interactions), which shed light on learners’ engagement with the topics and other learners during the simulation. The other instruments included pre- and post-simulation questionnaires and two post-simulation interviews, which provided insights related to learners’ own perceptions of their overall simulation experience, the topics addressed, and the act of adopting a character role.

Using Charmaz’s (2006) Grounded Theory and drawing on complexity theory, I analyzed the data using agency as operationalized by van Lier (2008) and based on
emergent recurrent themes to understand the affordances created by the simulation and how learners perceived and acted on them (or not).

In Chapter 4, I present and interpret the findings from the present study in order to answer the research questions. After reporting on learners’ overall impressions of the simulation experience, I examined the conditions that created affordances for intellectual and emotional engagement. Specifically, I outlined how learners’ interactions with the content and their classmates shed light on their depth of engagement with both. Then, I detailed learners’ approaches to adopting an alternate identity, and the role this process played in their capacity to develop more intimate bonds with the people and circumstances represented in the simulation (or not). To uncover elements and circumstances that may have hindered some learners from picking up on the affordances in the simulation and inhibiting their full participation (i.e., as thinking, feeling, acting individuals), I identified and described trends that emerged in the data.

Chapter 5 discusses how findings presented in Chapter 4 offer insights relevant to the field of foreign learning. I also provided the pedagogical and theoretical implications of the present study. Furthermore, this chapter outlines the limitations of the study, offering suggestions related to areas that could be improved or drawbacks present in the implementation of the study. I concluded by sharing thoughts related to future areas of research that might be of interest or fruitful to the field of foreign language education in light of the findings of this study.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents relevant literature in order to provide a theoretical and practical foundation for the present study, which focuses on developing a set of conditions in the foreign language (FL) classroom that can give rise to a holistic experience conducive to cultivating authentic encounters as described in Chapter 1. In light of the crucial role social interactions within a rich context play in engendering such an authentic environment, this chapter begins by situating the study within a social constructivist framework and proceeds to focus on movements and approaches that have shifted toward giving primacy to context. However, because context alone does not automatically create an authentic experience, learners must also activate their agency or their willingness to take initiative to shape their learning experience (van Lier, 2008), I then outline how contextualized curricula can be leveraged to stimulate intellectual engagement and in-depth critical thinking.

As a means of engaging learners by tapping into their higher order thinking skills, I look at content-based FL learning models that adopt an inquiry orientation. Such research is relevant to the present study because immersion, even a sojourn abroad, can only contribute to the development of linguistic and cultural competences if an individual is willing to engage meaningfully within the environment (Kinginger, 2008). Relatedly, because learners are accustomed to exhibiting high degrees of agency in their everyday lives (Little, n.d.), I explore van Lier’s (2008) framework in which he relates engagement to agency and links such concepts to positive learning outcomes. The operationalization
of agency in terms of observable engagement provides structure to the concept that can often remain abstract. Specifically, I consider two types of agency: individual and collaborative. Though they are intricately interwoven, the latter tends to give rise to higher quality learning encounters, thus identifying the ways in which it manifests in an academic setting can serve to inform pedagogical practice.

To establish the role of agency in a classroom context, I proceed to examine several studies that have correlated learners’ capacity to activate their agency with learning potential. However, because these studies do not provide directions on how to create conditions to cultivate a classroom that can give way to agentive engagement, I turn to the notion of a community of inquiry (Wells, 1999) as an avenue to promote collaborative agency in the classroom setting. I focus on how experiential learning models can contribute to the creation of such a community by affording learners opportunities to activate their agency while also promoting direct encounters with the language, content, and cultures of study. In particular, I examine the potential of imagination to evoke in learners the sense that they are experiencing a scenario first hand and interacting in an authentic alternate realm that transcends the walls of the classroom. Because activating the imagination also has the power to access the affective realm, I then address how imagination can foster emotional connections with foreign peoples and circumstances, specifically focusing on empathy. Emotional aspects of learning that invigorate and engage learners as opposed to debilitating emotions such as anxiety (Horwitz, 2016) are often overlooked in formal classroom settings yet are vital to the creation of a holistic learning experiences necessary to cultivate a sense of authenticity in the classroom.
Next, I review approaches that have shown to leverage most or all of the elements discussed above in order to inform a whole-person learning experience in the FL classroom. In particular, I outline components of global simulations and Reacting to the Past games and illustrate how integrating aspects of these frameworks to create what I refer to as a role-immersion simulation holds great potential for FL learning. I proceed to introduce the contextual scenario selected for the role-immersion simulation for the present study, namely drug trafficking and violence at the US-Mexico border, and explain how such controversial and relevant topics can promote learner engagement. Finally, to leverage extended opportunities for social exchanges and collaboration, I discuss the integration of an out-of-class technology-mediated communication component. Specifically, this section establishes the benefits of engaging diverse modalities to add an alternate dimension that can complement the face-to-face interactions of the role-immersion simulation.

2.1 Social Constructivism: The Interconnection Between Social Engagement and Authenticity

A social constructivist epistemology provides a theoretical foundation that establishes the socially and contextually situated nature of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, the formation of learners’ understanding is considered to be a shared process that is “socially constructed” (Reagan, 1999, p. 415) and, thus, intricately intertwined with where, when, and in what social context the learning takes place (Simina & Hamel, 2005; Yang & Wilson, 2006). Such an understanding of learning aligns well with an ecological view that prioritizes the relationships between all participants as well as the physical environment and underscores the importance of regarding the learning experience as a holistic endeavor (van Lier, 2004b).
Social constructivism also considers individuals to be “active constructors of their own learning environment” (Mitchell & Myles, 1988, p. 162), which contrasts transmission-oriented views of learning in which the learner is seen as an entity that simply acquires knowledge from outside sources (Reagan, 1999). Socially oriented perspectives consider learning to occur through dialogic interaction between learners and all elements in their environment (Fosnot & Perry, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky described two types of dialogue, intermental and intramental, that, together, are understood to be vital to knowledge creation. Intermental dialogue refers to instances in which learners engage with different sources such as teachers, peers, classroom materials, or other content in a social setting whereas intramental dialogue occurs when learners grapple with, reconstruct, or reflect critically on the information, ideas, or knowledge such that they are able to make sense of it for themselves (Yang & Wilson, 2006). Cultivating opportunities for both types of dialogue are important to promote learning.

Another inherent aspect of social constructivism is the role scaffolding plays in knowledge formation. In the Vygoskyan paradigm, scaffolding refers to the guidance provided to a learner so that he or she may better make sense of how to complete a difficult task. While often associated the teacher-learner relationship, research has pointed to the role that peer-to-peer scaffolding plays in the facilitation of understanding and knowledge development. For example, a study conducted by Ko, Shallert, and Walters (2003) revealed that intermediate level ESL learners’ ability to articulate a story improved after peers worked together to negotiate different aspects of the story. Likewise, Machado’s (2000) findings suggested that engaging in peer-to-peer
conversations about task instructions in the L2 while preparing to carry out that task helped advanced EFL learners interpret and execute the tasks more accurately.

In light of the above literature on how the role of social interaction and a situated context influences learner understanding, it is unsurprising that within the field of FL, a sojourn abroad is considered an effective means of cultivating new knowledge and perspectives (Agar, 1994; Carroll, 1967; Collentine, 2004). Such an experience provides potential scenarios for individuals to engage in collaborative encounters with the target culture and language in ways that might lead to dialogic interaction and thus promote new understandings and perspectives (Kinginger, 2008). However, as discussed in Chapter 1, creating opportunities for similar authentic encounters are often overlooked in FL classrooms because such settings are seen as lacking comparable direct access to the target culture and language. However, aiming to promote such immersive and authentic learning inside the classroom is an advantageous area of research that has remained underexplored. There is great promise for learning, regardless of locale, if a collaborative and rich sociocultural environment can be fostered (Freed et al., 2004). Specifically, one study by Clark and Minami (2015) points to the potential of creating an immersion setting because such a context, “can serve as a tool for socially constructed, mediated learning” (p. 188). In their study, post-secondary learners of Arabic participated in a 9-hour intensive Arabic immersion village set up in a remote domestic location. Findings from five of these learners of Advanced or Superior proficiency showed that the emergent social interaction that ensued by “work[ing] together to share knowledge, skills and perspectives with others” (p. 199) became a site for cultural and linguistic growth. In accordance with social constructivism, such results point to the potential for learning
offered by the emergent social interactions that transpire within simulated immersive environments.

2.2 The Shifting Role of Context in Foreign Language Education: Past and Present Trends

Although notions of immersion in FL learning are generally associated with significant exposure to the language and culture outside of a classroom setting (Clark & Minami, 2015; Freed et al., 2004; Lokkesmoe et al., 2016; Serrano, Llanes, & Tragant, 2011), the question becomes how to create such an environment inside the classroom. The advantages of immersion are rooted in the ecological idea of affordance, or an opportunity for meaningful action, offered by the rich context. Moments in which learners act on these affordances are prime sites for learning. In a classroom conceptualized as an ecology, context is central, but as van Lier (2004b) asserted, a deeply contextualized classroom setting “cannot be taken for granted, it is not always automatically ‘there’ in students, teachers, and course providers. It needs to be developed” (p. 141).

Coinciding with the social turn in SLA that occurred around the beginning of the 21st century, the field has begun to prioritize the important role that context plays in FL learning. However, long before the prospect of a social turn, an approach known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which originated in the 1970s but gained popularity in the late 20th century, made attempts to bring context to the forefront. CLT was the one of the first mainstream frameworks to make significant contributions toward foregrounding contextualized situations in which learners are prompted to practice language that they might encounter in a sojourn abroad (Garrett-Rucks, 2016). However, despite CLT’s aims to integrate language more seamlessly within a real-world context, its
operationalization has become problematic for several reasons. Due to many educators’
efforts to implement CLT over the last almost 5 decades, the concept of CLT has become
increasingly difficult to define and now can encompass a broad range of instructional
practices (Richards, 2006; Spada, 2007). Though wide application illustrates the
contributions of CLT to the field of FL education, particularly in moving away from a
focus on isolated grammatical form to a more meaning- and contextualized-focused
curriculum, how it has manifested in the classroom often falls short of such aims (Paesani
et al., 2016). Many textbooks used in FL classrooms, although organized by contextual
themes such as family, food, transportation, or places in town (Garrett-Rucks, 2016),
continue to maintain grammar as the overarching curricular organizer (Martel, 2013).
Because of this, Martel asserted, proficiency gains on the part of learners have not been
actualized to their full potential. Although thematic units typically used in these courses
profess to give primacy to context, the focus on grammar as well as ephemeral
“interactional, transactional oral language use” (Pennycook, 1994, p. 311) is not
conducive to the type of in-depth and situated engagement linked to quality authentic
encounters. Relatedly, such exchanges do little to integrate thought-provoking topics
whereby learners may “utilize deeper, more complex forms of thinking” (Cammarata,
Tedick, & Osborn, 2016, p. 10) and develop in their capacity to “intelligently discuss the
cultural content with which they interact when moving to advanced level courses”
(Paesani et al., 2016, p. 8). The treatment of interdisciplinary and cultural content can
also remain additive at times, which contradicts the National Standards’ (2015)
promotion of the five Cs as “tightly interrelated and suggestive of integrated language
learning from an interdisciplinary perspective” (Magnan, Murphy, & Sahakyan, 2014, p. 12).

2.2.1 Approaches That Give Primacy to Context in Foreign Language Learning

In attempts to address the shortcomings of previous pedagogical frameworks, FL educational literature has recently embraced approaches aimed at promoting a more integrated curriculum that prioritizes the exploration of linguistic, cultural, and conceptual features within content-rich program. In particular, literacy-, genre-, and content-based curricula have gained notoriety as they inherently assure integration between language and social, cultural, as well as disciplinary, phenomena (Byrnes, 2012; Cammarata, 2016; Martel, 2016; Paesani et al., 2016). Literacy- and genre-based approaches both emphasize reflective engagement with written, oral, and visual texts from a variety of genres in order to help learners interpret, question, contemplate, and transform information so as to develop in them a deepened capacity to understand the meanings behind certain linguistic choices as well as giving primacy to connections between those choices and the sociocultural setting (Arens, 2008; Swaffar & Arens, 2005). Content-based instructional (CBI) approaches prioritize links between interdisciplinary content and language by “embed[ding] language instruction in the context of content that is meaningful to learners” (Cammarata et al., 2016, p. 12). While options for selecting content are wide-ranging, within a FL setting, Cammarata et al. promoted the prioritization of thematic content that touches on moral and ethical issues, which can nurture intellectual sensitivity and promote reflection on one’s worldview and a capacity to empathize. By focusing more on content-driven topics as opposed to language as the object of study, such curricular frameworks promote intellectual
engagement that develops higher-order thinking skills able to tap into deeper and more complex forms of thinking (Martel, 2013). Furthermore, creating interdisciplinary connections “more accurately represent[s] the reality and nature of knowledge” (Reagan & Osborn, 2002, p. 74).

Stimulating critical thinking within a content-rich environment has shown to enhance language development. Pessoa, Hendry, Donato, Tucker, and Lee (2007) conducted a study in which they compared two Spanish teachers’ discourse in a content-based science unit focused on sustainable energy. The first teacher, Grace, focused on developing learners’ conceptual knowledge of the topics. She used language integrated within the disciplinary context and, in her class, “thinking science and learning the language of science occurred simultaneously” (Donato, 2016, p. 33 emphasis original). The other teacher, James, admitted that he did not feel competent as a science teacher and focused more on Spanish vocabulary learning through games and worksheets largely isolated from the academic content. When he did discuss the content, the researchers described the interactions as formulaic and routine. James’ objective centered around using the academic content as a means to practice Spanish whereas Grace focused on cultivating conceptual knowledge related to renewable energy, but did so in Spanish. The researchers postulated that Grace’s students would likely outperform James’ in regard to content, but that James’ students would surpass Grace’s with respect to control of the Spanish language (i.e., vocabulary and grammatical accuracy). However, on an end-of-semester writing assessment, Grace’s learners outperformed James’ in all areas and results showed statistically significant differences in all areas analyzed. These findings suggest that FL curricula embedded in interdisciplinary content can be a promising
avenue to foster both linguistic development and real-world conceptual knowledge, better aligning with the broadened scope of FL education today.

Additional findings that reinforce the advantages of teaching language through contextualized content are found in Kennedy’s (2006) study, which centered on understanding how the brain processes a new language. Specifically, she examined the way brain activity occurs and the best means of stimulating language development from a neurological perspective. Results from her study revealed that “brain activities are directly linked by a network of neurons that simultaneously perform a variety of operations” (p. 480). Thus, because the brain tends to “consider the entire experience and search for meaningful patterns,” she explained that, “thematic, content-based, interdisciplinary language instruction at all levels” (p. 480) is an apt way to integrate language with meaningful experiences in ways that will allow the brain to make important connections.

The above research points to the many potential advantages inherent in encouraging learners to practice a language within meaningful and relevant contexts. As learners use the language to explore diverse genres and intriguing content, they are better positioned to not only develop their linguistic skills, but also cultivate their capacity to think critically, become sensitive to new ideas, and embrace alternate perspectives.

2.2.2 Content-based Learning: A Means of Nurturing Learner Interest and Inquiry

One feature that distinguishes CBI from literacy- and genre-based approaches is its expressed focus on cultivating learners’ curiosity by centering on the incorporation of topics of local and global significance. In particular, issues of interest are those that help learners connect their formal learning to their lives outside of the classroom context in
ways that encourage them to understand their impact in the world, develop awareness of their local and global responsibilities, and become cognizant of the role power structures play within social, cultural, political, and economic realms (Cammarata et al., 2016; Reagan, 2016). Such gripping topics that can pique learners’ curiosity serve to promote engagement and exploration (Cammarata, 2016) and are well suited to guide learners to make connections between the content, topics, and real life.

To recall, in order to promote an authentic encounter, learners must not only gain access to a rich sociocultural context that offers opportunities for meaningful engagement with real-world matters, but they must also be encouraged to engage with such opportunities. Kinginger (2008) posited that even in study abroad contexts, the depth of learners’ engagement is of great consequence as she explained, “immersion [is] increasingly a matter of choice and even a struggle” (p. 108). She contended that for learning to occur, even learners in a target language and culture environment must choose to engage meaningfully in high quality experiences, thus activating their agency or “socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn, 2001, p. 112). Regardless of locale, learners become agents of their learning when they “actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their learning” (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 145), a process which is always a social event (van Lier, 2008). However, because classroom learners have been socialized into more passive roles within many formal learning environments, aiming to steer them toward becoming active co-creators in the classroom can clash with their past lived experience. Although they are accustomed to drawing on their own expertise and exhibiting agency in their lives outside the classroom (Little, 2010), Chavez (2011) explained it is possible that learners see little wrong with the disconnect between
their classroom learning and their real-life practices. Thus, formal education spaces must prioritize nurturing agentive dispositions in learners. Inquiry driven content-based approaches are an excellent starting point for creating the conditions necessary to spark learner interest such that they may move beyond the thinking-light practices of simply finding the correct answer or mere recall and comprehension, and progress toward a willingness to engage in the critical analysis of topics in ways that may help them make connections between those topics, the language used, and their own lives. Thus, it becomes important to consider the practical aspects of how to identify and promote learner agency within a classroom setting in order to cultivate a higher degree of personal involvement such that learners may become more inclined to expand their understanding of and reconsider certain beliefs (Kohonen et al., 2001; Paul & Elder, 2009).

2.3 The Need for Depth of Engagement with Content: Activating Learner Agency

To give organization to the notion of agency within a formal learning context, van Lier (2008) proposed a framework that operationalizes the construct in terms of observable engagement, which he described as “the activity and initiative of the learner” (p. 163). He discussed six phases as seen in Table 2.1, from least agency (Level 1) to greatest agency (Level 6). In order for materials and interactions to become personally significant for learners, as illustrated in Table 2.1, higher levels of agency are associated with increased depth of engagement, which van Lier encased in the idea of volition (e.g., Levels 3-6). However, the motivation for demonstrating volition is also of importance as illustrated by comparing Level 3, in which learners volunteer only when prompted by an external stimulus, with Level 6, in which learners take initiative without any prompt and
are “contributing to the debate because they feel they have something to say and a strong opinion about it” (van Lier, 2008, p. 169).

Table 2.1

Agency Operationalized by van Lier (2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency</th>
<th>Description of learner action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Learners are unresponsive or minimally responsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Learners carry out instructions given by the teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Learners volunteer answers to teachers’ questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Learners voluntarily ask questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Learners volunteer to assist or instruct other learners and create a collaborative agency event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Learners voluntarily enter into debate with one another and create a collaborative agency event</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What differentiates these levels is the observable quality and depth of engagement on the part of the learner. It is important to note that some learners may participate in ways that are not observable. As Lantolf (2007) described, learners may formulate thoughts and even express them internally, both of which are valid inner-speech practices. Nonetheless, in alignment with social constructivist notions that learning is a social process, observable engagement (i.e., generating ideas and transforming and producing meaningful language in context) plays a crucial mediating role in knowledge development. From an ecological perspective, affordances for learning can only arise through active and social engagement (Larsen-Freeman, 2014; van Lier, 2004b). At the upper levels of van Lier’s (2008) framework (i.e., 5 and 6), when multiple learners voluntarily initiate exchanges, they activate their agency in an interactional setting allowing opportunities for a “collaborative agency event” (p. 170) to emerge. Here, van
Lier highlighted two types of agency—individual and collaborative—and argued that the latter can be characterized by a higher quality experience because it draws “together the creative energies and symbolic capacities of a larger number of learners” (p. 169).

To give organization to the concept of collaborative agency, I drew on links between an ecological perspective and dynamic systems theory specifically with regard to emergence or “the reorganization or simple elements into a more complex system” (van Lier, 2004a, p. 82). When learners opt to engage such energies and capacities within a joint event, the learning system (i.e., the ongoing interactions among learners, their ideas, other environmental factors, etc.) transforms into an entirely new socially constructed collective whole that is “not only more than the sum of its parts, it is of a different nature than the parts” (van Lier, 2004a, p. 5). Therefore, if and when learners choose to engage agentively, the potential for the classroom ecology to reach a collaborative state of “maximum agency, autonomy, creativity, and transformation” (Menezes, 2013, p. 69) arises.

2.4 Creating Favorable Classroom Conditions to Promote Learner Agency

Although van Lier’s (2008) framework provides a foundation for examining learners’ situated choices, actions, and interactions in terms of agency and sheds light on how to identify when certain conditions present affordances for agency within a classroom setting, very few scholars have conducted research on agency in the FL classroom. A few studies have examined the effect of translation on learner agency in the classroom (Källkvist, 2013), agency in conjunction with teacher development (Feryok, 2012), and agency related to out-of-class immigrant settings (Miller, 2010, 2014). In another study, Waring (2011) investigated learner agency in relation to in-class initiative
taking and examined the specific ways adult beginner, intermediate, and advanced ESL learners of varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds showed initiative within the classroom setting. She identified three initial types of initiative and determined that when learners demonstrate initiative, they “stretch the extent of their participation and gain access to various learning opportunities” (p. 215). Such a conclusion correlates agency with learning potential in the language classroom. However, her study juxtaposed “advancing teacher agendas” with “promoting learner participation” (p. 215), implying that when learners engage in initiative taking, it put the advancement of the teacher’s agenda in jeopardy. Yet, stimulating learner agency is precisely what can lead learners to assign meaning to their experiences as they develop their own thoughts, actions, and speech. Thus, it seems the teacher agenda should actively “encourage learners to explore the world and themselves authentically as agents of their own lives” (Korhonen, 2014, p. 81) in order to maximize learning. Considering that learners are only able to engage their agency if the learning environment allows for it (Pavlkenko, 2002, p. 293), further studies that offer specific conditions or practices to promote agency in the classroom are necessary (Vaughn, 2014). Specifically for FL learning contexts, it is important to consider how such conditions might steer learners’ agentive engagement toward expanding interdisciplinary understanding and cultivating linguistic and cultural competences.

### 2.5 Encouraging Agency and Collaborative Knowledge Construction: Cultivating a Community of Inquiry

A prerequisite to creating an environment conducive to individual and collective agency involves first conceptualizing the classroom as a community in which all participants have value, knowledge, and resources to contribute. Wells’ (1999) push to
transform classrooms into “communities of inquiry” (p. 98) (CoI) aimed to create such a setting by affording learners opportunities to direct their own learning through tapping into and building on their own firsthand experiences. Wells defined a CoI as a learning ecology that is “created emergently in the many modes of conversation” and in which “the teacher and students dialogically make sense of topics of individual and social significance, through action, knowledge building and reflection” (p. 98). In other words, a CoI provides an interactive and dialogic space imbued with topics that may activate learners’ “action potential,” which is “mediated by social, interactional, cultural, institutional, and other contextual factors” (van Lier, 2008, p. 171 emphasis original). An inquiry orientation aims to harness this action potential by ensuring a connection to learners’ interests, as discussed earlier in this chapter with regard to selecting content and fostering the co-creation of knowledge by all participants in conjunction with other mediating influences (i.e., course materials, textual, audio, and video content, information from the Internet, etc.). Particularly related to FL learning contexts, choosing provocative cultural and global issues and guiding learners to make connections between such issues and their own lives can help extend their interest and responsibility beyond the immediacy of their current reality. As such, a CoI has the potential to develop in learners a deeper conceptual knowledge of the topics and cultivate new understandings of other peoples and cultures in order to equip them “with the socially valued ways of thinking and acting […] so that they may both use them and develop them further” (Wells, 1999, p. 121). Furthermore, a CoI affords learners the flexibility to select and shift their focus and level of engagement depending on their particular inclinations, in effect creating a space much like an authentic context outside the academic world. In their lives beyond
the classroom, learners maintain a large degree of control over when, how, and with what topics they activate their agency. Drawing on Vygotskyan principles that insist learning is effectively facilitated in scenarios in which the object of focus is not explicitly on learning something, a CoI gives primacy to using the TL to engage with relevant social, cultural, and global topics (Wells, 1999, p. 121). Such an approach to FL instruction and learning has the potential to promote learner agency such that learners’ evolving understanding has the potential to inform and alter their future actions in and outside the classroom. However, cultivating a CoI in which learners opt to engage in conversations and interactions in ways that can lead them to develop their linguistic repertoire while also making broader connections with circumstances, peoples, and cultures not immediately accessible to them is not altogether straightforward.

2.6 Communities of Inquiry Enacted Through Experiential Learning

Experiential learning (EL) models offer an apt means of drawing on learners’ own experiences and knowledge in an interactive setting while also promoting real or perceived firsthand encounters with the phenomenon of study. EL occurs when learners have direct access to the focus of study and then actively do something with it in ways that tap into their physical, emotional, and intellectual channels (Kohonen, n.d.; Kohonen et al., 2001). Direct personal experience gives “life texture and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts” (Kolb, 1984, p. 21). However, as noted in Chapter 1, opportunities for direct experiences or authentic encounters with the language and culture are often associated with a sojourn abroad and widely considered to be limited within a classroom context (Garrett-Rucks, 2013; Kearney, 2010). Offering learners access to authentic materials, such as texts, videos, or digitally mediated content is one way to try
to overcome this obstacle. Although the provision of real-world linguistic and cultural phenomena in formal learning environments has many advantages (Borau et al., 2009; Garrett-Rucks, 2013), it still narrowly sidesteps the main tenet of EL, which calls for direct, tangible, and firsthand encounters in which the learner does not simply observe or read about a phenomenon, but instead “it refers to personal learning, living one’s learning personally” (Kohonen et al., 2001, p. 162). Engaging with materials mediated by these modalities gives way to experiences that are, in some sense, less concrete and can “separate learners from the responsibilities of real human encounters and relations in the present world” (Kohonen et al., 2001, p. 23). On the other hand, experiences abroad offer immediate access to the culture, language, and people in ways that lend themselves to such lived learning experiences. EL models have the potential to cultivate a similar environment while also prioritizing, “practices whereby participants have opportunities to learn from their own and each others’ experiences, being actively and personally engaged in the process” (Kohonen, n.d., p 1). Through a dual emphasis on both context and engagement, EL lends itself to authentic encounters that promote meaningful and situated language use, while also incorporating a human element that is often elusive in academic learning environments. It is this feature that makes EL compatible with notions of authenticity and may help learners recognize and become sensitive to unfamiliar or foreign phenomena and, thus, progress in their global competence [American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, (ACTFL), 2014].

2.7 Imagination: A Gateway to Gaining Direct Access to Alternate Cultural and Linguistic Realms

Conceptualizing how an abroad context lends itself to direct linguistic and cultural encounters is largely straightforward; however, promoting similar experiences as
outlined by EL models within the four walls of the classroom where a concrete reality is not inherently present introduces challenges. One means that has the potential to encourage perceived firsthand experiences in a FL academic setting is by activating learners’ imagination such that they envision or perceive themselves to be engaging in a real-world scenario. Imagination can be described as a “process of self-expansion by transcending our time and space and envisioning new images of ourselves and the world” (Wenger, 1998, p 173). Stimulating the imagination provides a gateway that can bridge the gap between the here and now and the world beyond. As such, the classroom has the potential to become a space in which alternate temporal or cultural realms can converge with learners’ present experience, giving way to perceived firsthand encounters that extend beyond their immediate reality (Thomas, 2005).

To create the conditions to promote a capacity for such imaginative reach, the curricula must aim to entice learners toward a deeper sense of engagement with peoples and cultures not immediately accessible to them. In other words, learners must be captivated by the stories, circumstances, or peoples with which they encounter in the classroom such that they are at a heightened disposition to create connections between their own experiences and the experiences of those in another time or place (Kanno & Norton, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1998). Similar to how a gripping plotline in a story can evoke a profound investment in the fate of the characters on the part of a reader, in the FL classroom, active imaginative engagement offers the possibility of emancipation from the here and now and affords learners opportunities to become personally involved in alternate worlds. As such, the potential for learners to gain a sense
that they are directly in touch with the phenomena is heightened, thus promoting EL (Kohonen et al., 2001).

2.8 Experiential Learning Activated via the Imagination: The Potential for Emotional Engagement

Engaging the imagination in ways that promote perceived direct encounters with the peoples and cultures not immediately accessible also better positions learners to tap into their affective realms, which is a vital component of experiential learning and often neglected in formal learning environments (Kohonen et al., 2001; Wells, 1999). MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012) contended that imagination can play a powerful role in engaging and influencing one’s emotions. Specifically, EL techniques focused on connecting learners with the stories and circumstances of others can nurture in learners a capacity to identify and empathize with these people’s lives and become invested in what happens to them, which relates to global competence and intercultural understanding (ACTFL, 2014). In order to become affectively involved with others, learners must be offered opportunities to engage with the “holder of linguistic and cultural information” (as cited and translated in Perón, 2010) in ways that promote the extraction of personal meaning and empathetic involvement. Of the many definitions of empathy, one that highlights whole-person involvement in alignment with an ecological perspective was proposed by Bennett (1979): the “imaginative, intellectual and emotional participation in another’s experience” (p. 422). However, the idea of participating in someone else’s experience resembles the commonly held conception of putting oneself in the shoes of another (Zhu, 2011). This understanding of empathy can be problematic for two reasons. First, it implies a duality in which one person must, or could, come to accurately understand the perspective of another, which is particularly difficult to imagine across
cultures (Broome, 1991). Second, it ignores principles of social constructivism that view all understanding to be jointly constructed (Reagan, 1999). Thus, a more appropriate conception of empathy, and further in line with an ecological paradigm that gives primacy to relationships, highlights the “dialogic notion of betweenness” that DeTurk (2001) argued “is at the heart of the relational approach to empathy” (p. 376). Particularly within a FL setting where imagination is the primary gateway allowing learners access to another’s experiences and perspectives to cultivate empathy, learners must participate in the “collective building of subjective understanding” (DeTurk, 2001, p. 376) as they engage with each other and other cultures within the classroom. Such a process emphasizes learners as dynamic agents with personal histories and proclivities and, as such, opens the door for them to explore points of intersection between their own lives and the imagined, real, and possible cultural personas and groups they encounter. Through dialogic interactions, as learners evolve in their understanding of others, learners may be more inclined to develop increased concern for their well-being (Chen, 2013). Such in-depth and personalized experiences can trigger a positive emotional component within FL learning that is often overlooked (Wells, 1999).

2.9 Pedagogical Approaches That Promote Experiential Learning in the Classroom

Curricular approaches that aim to increase learners’ emotional involvement as well as the intellectual rigor of FL learning can facilitate an authentic experience by engaging learners as whole people. Pedagogies that foreground substantive contextualized content and social activity in order to encourage learners to engage in real or perceived firsthand encounters with the target language and culture are more likely to create such experiences.
2.9.1 Global Simulations

One approach that has shown promise with regard to encouraging such holistic experiences through leveraging the imagination is the global simulation (GS) (Allen & Dupuy, 2013; Levine, 2004). A GS is comprised of various characteristics, many of which have their origins in the more general construct of a simulation. According to Jones (1984), a simulation must consist of three key elements: reality of function, a simulated environment, and structure. Reality of function refers to the fact that participants in the simulation must act as if they were operating in reality. Next, a simulated environment indicates that the experience is entirely fictitious even though, paradoxically, participants must behave in it as though it were real. Third, the simulation should have structure, which means it should be based on a problem or project that students are able to solve or complete. The structure serves as the impetus to engage learners in the simulated environment. While simulations can take place over short periods of time, Levine distinguishes a GS, particularly within the field of FL, in that it is carried out over a longer period of time such as weeks, months, or the entire semester. Also, in alignment with Jones’ definition of a simulation, a GS in the FL classroom places more emphasis on completing the task or project at hand and less on the explicit learning of language. Such a focus “allows learners to make grammar work for them and in so doing, enhance the manifestation of their agency through the new language” (Lantolf, 2013, p. 30). By situating language use within the realization of meaningful activities, GSs coincide with holistic approaches to language learning. Relatedly, the teachers’ role emphasizes language in context by facilitating and aiding students as they go about achieving their tasks. Such a function contrasts approaches in which teachers
heavily guide the sequence and ongoing provision of content within a curriculum. The 
classroom organization offered by a GS allows freedom for learners to draw on their own 
knowledge, their understanding of the situation, and make decisions to navigate the 
scenario as if it were a real-world situation (Little, 2010).

GSs in FL education have become more commonplace in the last decade or so, 
likely as a result of the benefits they have shown to offer in promoting authentic 
communication within a rich contextualized sociocultural setting (Dupuy, 2006; Kearney, 
2012; Levine, 2004; Michelson, 2017; Perón, 2010). To encourage such authentic 
linguistic and cultural experiences, learners typically participate in a series of activities or 
projects that involve realia and they must use the realia to complete a task. For example, 
in one GS implemented by Dupuy, learners collectively selected a pre-existing apartment 
building in France where the GS would take place using authentic materials such as 
articles, phone books, and maps. Likewise, in a GS reported on by Kearney (2015), 
before each class, learners often prepared by reading authentic texts that included 
“images, excerpts from speeches, or posters making legal proclamations” (p. 77) to 
situate the scenario in France during the World War II time period. Then, learners and the 
teacher analyzed or discussed such readings in class to promote a deep understanding of 
these sources so as to inform learners’ ongoing creation of the “fictive, yet historically 
rooted worlds” (p. 77). Furthermore, in most GSs carried out in FL classrooms, learners 
“assume the role of a self-developed character and collaborate with other members of 
their community as the creators and inventors of their own world” (Mills & Péron, 2008, 
p. 240). Character adoption and development aims to cultivate in learners the capacity to 
consider what life might be like within an alternate realm from a firsthand perspective.
While there are various approaches to developing a character, typically learners are tasked with imagining their characters while also considering the real-world contextual anchors in the simulated scenario (Kearney, 2015). By understanding the context, learners are encouraged to develop their characters in ways that accurately integrate the cultural, temporal, and linguistic norms of the simulation scenario, as much as possible.

2.9.2 Reacting to the Past Games

Another variation of the simulation framework, which has become popular in university history courses, is called Reacting to the Past (RTTP) (Carnes, 2014). RTTP games incorporate many elements of a GS, but are distinctive in that instead of allowing learners to develop their characters based on their understanding of the simulation context, in RTTP learners take on the roles of historical figures informed by a variety of classic texts and then reenact a prominent historical event. Thus, learners must come to understand who their character was by engaging with extensive written discourse and then attempt to maintain the integrity of the persona through enacting him or her, though the outcome of the reenacted event may differ from history. Each RTTP role also incorporates specific objectives reflective of the historical figure’s self-interests during the event. Objectives among roles intentionally incorporate conflicts, moral and other dilemmas, and include interests related to a variety of topics relevant to that time period, all of which serve to promote debate and engagement with topics from various perspectives. As learners become aware of other characters’ agendas and issues, grapple with the conflicts, and make important decisions that affect the fate of their characters through the enactment of their role, they become deeply invested in the issues and outcomes. One learner reported, “I was reading hundreds of pages a night and writing
thousands of words a week for Reacting, but it never felt like work” (Carnes, 2014, p. 84). These processes encourage learners to exercise their agency as they are able to “actively transform their world and do not merely conform to it” (Donato, 2000, p. 46). They engage in the critical analysis of the content and become personally accountable for achieving their own characters’ objectives, through which a competitive element emerges. Learners must fight, persuade, and critically consider various avenues to advocate for their platforms, which lends itself to a deeper understanding of the perspective their character and the development of a “capacity for coping with people of different backgrounds” (Carnes, 2014, p. 225).

RTTP has been carried out in a handful of upper-level FL classes (Schaller, 2012; S. Slaughter, personal communication, January 26, 2015). For example, Schaller (2012) implemented a role-immersion game that she modified to fit an advanced (6th semester) university French course. She used an already published RTTP game, “Rousseau, Burke and Revolution in France, 1791” that focused on the post-Revolutionary time period in Paris. In her game, students spent 3 weeks engaging in the design of legislative documents that would later become law in the new French state. While unsure of how her advanced-level students would perform with the modified authentic texts and debating complex issues in French, the results were overwhelmingly positive. Through observations and student comments from a post-game survey, Schaller found that, in general, students’ spontaneous language production and linguistic complexity improved. Students also reported that they felt more confident in their speaking abilities and they also highly valued the interactive peer-oriented nature of the game.
The only documented use of RTTP games in an intermediate FL course to my knowledge was implemented by Albright (2014), who used a published game called “Beware the Ides of March, Rome in 44 B.C.E.” in her Latin course. It is noteworthy to mention that Latin courses differ significantly from many other FL courses because Latin is often not a spoken language. Therefore, Latin courses are often conducted mostly or entirely in English, with texts at times being presented in Latin. Albright incorporated the RTTP game into her course with the expressed goal of improving students’ comprehension and pronunciation of Latin as well as helping them “understand the larger significance of the Latin texts they were translating” (p. 3). During the first 5 weeks of the semester, she prepared for the game through assigning game texts in both English and Latin for students to read and quizzing them on cultural and historical information related to game themes. Then, in Week 6 of the semester, her students began playing the game as their characters. Because students at Albright’s institution must learn to pronounce Latin correctly, she incorporated into the game two formal speeches (350-400 words), some of which had to be in Latin. In groups, students also discussed the issues in English and researched various topics to justify their game decisions. Results from student responses to two post-game questionnaires showed that the RTTP game was students’ (85.7%) favorite part of the semester and that they believed they had gained a deeper understanding of Roman history and Latin texts. Approximately two-thirds of students that participated in the RTTP game completed the first questionnaire and about half completed the second one.

While these studies point to the potential for RTTP in FL learning environments, critics have also denounced role-playing components within simulation frameworks
asserting that roles restrict learners’ ability to truly think and behave as they might if the scenario were real and, instead, force them to act as someone else or invent behaviors, which limits the authentic nature of their experiences (Crookall & Oxford, 1990; Jones, 1984). Nonetheless, data from RTTP games point to a number of advantages to incorporating real-world roles. Learners who participated RTTP reported gaining a sense that they were authentically interacting as these alternate identities and felt as if they were actually participating in the enactment of the events. They indicated that engaging in such encounters as their character challenged their own views, granted them access to new information and vantage points, and led them to consider new ideas and perspectives (Carnes, 2014). Such findings accord well with cultural and interdisciplinary learning objectives in the field of FL that aim to encourage learners to expand their understanding of the world, recognize the subjective nature of their cultural perspectives, and gain access, even if just temporarily, to new frames of reference (Kearney, 2010; National Standards, 2015)

2.9.3 Role-immersion Simulations: A Hybrid Framework to Promote Personalized and Real-world Learner Engagement

In RTTP, learners generally participate in the games using their first language (L1), which allows for deep engagement with extensive textual content that learners with limited language proficiency would likely not be able to sustain. On the other hand, a GS approach, which promotes scaffolding digestible content and information, seems more suitable for a FL learning context and may assuage potential learner anxiety associated with an unfamiliar classroom learning experience. In order to leverage the potential for deep cultural learning and engagement demonstrated in RTTP games while also attending
to the language proficiency level of FL learners, in this study I adopted elements of both RTTP and GS frameworks to create what I refer to as a role-immersion simulation.

In a role-immersion simulation, like a GS, learners are provided a fictitious yet culturally grounded real-world scenario in which they interact. They complete a series of activities that build on each other in order to advance learners’ understanding of the context. With regard to character adoption, development, and enactment, role-immersion simulations merge the RTTP and GS frameworks. Like GSs, learners use their imagination to develop aspects of their characters such as the person’s gender, hobbies, interests, and physical traits. However, their character roles also incorporate specific real-world information that learners must take into consideration. While roles are not actual people (i.e., historical figures in RTTP), the characters provide learners with certain characteristics and information (i.e., a professional title, unique interests, etc.) that ground them the simulated situation. Also drawing on RTTP, each role includes a set of unique objectives and, where appropriate, contextual information related to why the character embraces certain stances or goals. This information serves as an initial point of departure for learners to engage in the simulation, as they understand these objectives as a set of individual tasks they must strive to achieve. By combining aspects of GSs and RTTP, the characters are anchored in the rich contextualized scenario by means of real-world tangible attributes and objectives. Thus, learners can become engaged with this persona as they co-construct the totality of the identity while also attending to his or her personalized goals and discerning how best to achieve them through enactment. The “balance of real-world anchoring and student-invented details” (Kearney, 2015, p. 75) is essential to encouraging learners to become engaged with the characters and
circumstances surrounding the simulation while also involving them in the development of an in-depth understanding of issues that affect these people and the situation represented in the simulated context.

2.9.4 Drug Trafficking and Violence at the US-Mexico Border: Encouraging Learners to Grapple With Stimulating Issues of Contemporary and Geographical Relevance

In order to foster learner engagement in the role-immersion simulation, I followed Cammarata’s (2016) call to incorporate “content that is meaningful to learners, capable of sparking students’ interest and connecting with their lived world here and now” (p. 128). Thus, I opted to use a US-Mexico simulation that touched on the controversial topics of drug trafficking and violence at the US Mexico border. This simulation was originally created for an introductory undergraduate course called Introduction to Latin American and Latino Studies (Franco, 2013). Because these themes coincide with negative stereotypes associated with Mexico (Maciel, 1990), using them as a basis for the role-immersion simulation presents an opportunity for learners to consider an array of complicated issues from diverse perspectives as their characters that can serve to challenge their preconceived notions of Mexico (Franco, 2014). The character roles in this simulation incorporate moral, social, economic, political, and cultural issues and dilemmas. As learners wrestle with the diverse issues in the simulation from the perspective of their characters, the objective is to create in them a more nuanced awareness of the issues and encourage intellectual and emotional connections with these peoples, cultures, and topics.
2.10 Extending the Learning Community Beyond the Classroom: A Multimodal Approach

To promote a high-quality, multimodal, and integrated learning experience, an out-of-class digitally mediated component also comprised part of the role-immersion simulation for the present study. The use of technology can extend a classroom learning community by breaking down the traditional boundaries that confine learning to a particular place and time and providing further affordances for social engagement (Reinhardt & Thorne, 2016). Additional opportunities for interaction outside the classroom can motivate learners to engage in the co-construction of knowledge (Kessler, 2013; Thorne, Black, & Sykes, 2009; Ziegler, 2007), which provides alternatives and enhanced possibilities for agentive engagement. Content mediated by technology, particularly when asynchronous, also offers learners increased time to process, synthesize, evaluate, and respond to information and, thus, can complement the spontaneous nature of face-to-face communication. Particularly with FL learners, such opportunities can encourage them to consider information in new ways and provide time for them develop alternate ideas and perspectives as they engage with others online.

The incorporation of digital technologies also helps promote connections between learners’ everyday lives and their formal learning endeavors because the way that they experience the world and the nature of their encounters has become significantly impacted by the ubiquity of technological advancements and interconnectivity. While face-to-face encounters are certainly important, it would be imprudent to overlook how the relatively recent emergence social media and Web 2.0 technologies has affected the ways learners today process information (Prensky, 2001). Because 21st century learners’ understanding of the world has been formed in part by their socialization within a
digitally connected environment, incorporating technologically mediated modes of communication in academic learning provides a degree of coherence between formal educational settings and the world outside the classroom.

Google Plus was selected as an appropriate platform through which out-of-class interactions took place in the present study because it allows individuals to create a user profile, real or fictitious, and then interact with other users via the Internet. These profiles can serve as visual and textual representations of learners’ simulation characters, further reifying these alternate personas. Users on Google Plus can send private or public messages to one or more individuals in their circles (i.e., groups of people selected by the user), which allows learners to interact with other characters virtually, adding another interactional dimension beyond the confines of the classroom.

2.11 Research Questions

In light of the discussion presented above, the following research questions were considered:

*RQ1:* What were learners’ overall impressions of their participation in the US-Mexico role-immersion simulation

*RQ2:* How did the US-Mexico role-immersion simulation create affordances (or not) for depth of engagement (i.e. agency)?

*RQ3:* What affordances emerged (or not) from adopting an alternate identity?

*RQ4:* What factors limited affordances related to adopting an alternate identity?
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

This chapter describes a role-immersion simulation that took place in a 4th-semester Spanish language course. The course is part of a 2-year language sequence aimed at helping learners progress from novice- to intermediate-level proficiency as well as advance in their cultural awareness and interdisciplinary knowledge (National Standards, 2015). Learners in this course meet 2 days a week for 75 minutes each and typically range from intermediate-low to intermediate-mid proficiency (ACTFL, 2012). After the completion of this intermediate-level course, learners often continue on to advanced-level content courses that might include literary, cultural, and linguistic topics. Thus, this course was selected for the present study because it constitutes an ideal site to bridge the gap between lower-level language courses and upper-level content courses (Byrnes, 2012; Drewelow & Mitchell, 2015; Kramsch, 2014). The successful completion of a pilot study conducted during the spring 2015 semester suggests that learners at this level have the linguistic capacity to participate in an adapted version of such a simulation. Thus, learners in this course are well positioned to develop their ability to interact with cultural respect and understanding by nurturing in them a capacity for empathy in which they can recognize and interpret situations from alternative perspectives (ACTFL, 2014).

To demonstrate how to incorporate the role-immersion simulation into a more traditional curriculum, I begin this chapter by describing the various simulation components, providing a timeline, and explaining how the different phases were carried
out. I then proceed to presenting the study’s participants, instruments, and data collection and analysis procedures.

3.1 Role-Immersion Simulation in a 4th-Semester Spanish Course

In this section, I describe the simulation topics, content, and scenario as well as specify the various character roles, all of which were presented to students in Spanish. Then, I detail how I integrated this simulation into the intermediate Spanish language course by providing a schedule of the four phases, activities carried out in each phase, and the assessments used. All in-class instructions and activities during the four phases of the simulation were carried out in Spanish. The explanation of the study and obtaining of consent was conducted in English as were the reflection activities carried out in class (see Reflection section below).

3.1.1 Simulation Topics and Description of Scenario

The materials used for this study were based on a US-Mexico border role-immersion simulation developed in English by Franco (2013) for an Introduction to Latin American and Latino Studies undergraduate course. Franco designed the content-based simulation in order to develop learners’ “understanding of border spaces as politically messy, culturally diverse, and socially complex” (p. 2). The simulation is set in a present-day political scenario focused on addressing the issues of drug trafficking and violence at the US-Mexico border. I adapted and translated Franco’s materials into Spanish, supplemented her content with some additional activities in Spanish, and modified the schedule to fit an intermediate-level foreign language course. The objective of the modified version of this simulation was for learners to collectively create two proposals that addressed the interrelated problems of drugs and violence in the border region. To
achieve these goals, learners discussed, learned about, and evaluated an array of issues related to these two topics. They considered, for example, the advantages and disadvantages of creating a bi-national city at the border, legalizing drugs, and options for allocating limited financial resources in order to combat drug trafficking and violence. Learners also took on the role of an alternate identity during the simulation. In the two final proposals, learners recommended specific solutions that they believed best resolve the issues of drug trafficking and violence while also catering to their characters’ individual interests. Focusing on creating the conditions for authenticity guided my decision to provide only contextualized language resources to learners; thus, no explicit linguistic or vocabulary instruction was given during the simulation. At its culmination, players finalized the solutions included in each proposal and then voted in favor of or against each of the two proposals. A simple majority determined the outcome. Overall, the simulation activities aimed to encourage learners to individually and collaboratively consider diverse perspectives as well as critically investigate issues affecting the border region, both practices that accord well with developing global competence (ACTFL, 2014).

3.1.2 Character Roles

The roles learners assumed in this simulation included political figures, community stakeholders, United Nations representatives, and news reporters (Table 3.1). Each character had distinct objectives to achieve in the simulation and some of the objectives conflicted with one another. The incompatible goals were intended to cultivate an environment in which learners had to use the target language to critically contemplate
a variety of interrelated issues, strategize possible solutions, and work to convince others to vote for the solutions they considered most effective.

Table 3.1

*List of Character Roles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mexican Characters</th>
<th>American Characters</th>
<th>Neutral Characters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President of Mexico</td>
<td>President of the United States</td>
<td>United Nations Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican Secretary of Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>U.S. Secretary of State *</td>
<td>United Nations Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor of the City of Juarez</td>
<td>U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Agent</td>
<td>A member of the powerful Zaragoza family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chief of Police for the City of Juarez</td>
<td>Mayor of El Paso, Texas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Javier Sicilia, political activist and poet *</td>
<td>US Global Contractor *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident of the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood in the City of Juarez *</td>
<td>Fox News Reporter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female factory worker in a maquiladora factory *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Roles selected to give in-class presentation (see Phase 2 below)

The information provided in each of the character roles set the stage for conflict and debate as several characters’ objectives directly clashed with others’ agendas. For example, the Global Contractor and the member of the Zaragoza family were tasked with promoting the construction of a bi-national city at the border. However, the site for the city included the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood. So if learners voted to build the city, the neighborhood would be destroyed. Another controversy emerged through Javier Sicilia’s
position in favor of legalizing drugs as a strategy to reduce the power of the drug cartels, which was at odds with the stance of the President of the US, whose character information prohibited him or her from supporting drug legalization in the US. Also, while the maquiladora worker needed to fight for better working conditions, the Mexican President and Secretary of Foreign Affairs were tasked with trying to limit maquiladora workers’ rights to advocate for themselves. Although other players may not have had clear opponents, they were charged with figuring out how to achieve their own objectives, allocate limited financial resources, and make determinations about their positions on the interlocking web of issues for the final vote.

3.1.3 Adapting the Curriculum: The Implementation of the Simulation

The activities related to the simulation as outlined in Table 3.2 were implemented during weeks 11-14 (4 weeks) of a 15-week semester. The curriculum was designed this way so that the simulation could serve as the culmination to the conclusion of learners’ introductory and intermediate coursework, allowing them to put into practice the skills they had developed and prepare them for their advanced-level study. To integrate the simulation, learners covered each of the five chapters typically included in this coordinated course during the first 9 weeks of the course. While all of the grammar structures were examined, the exercises associated with each were reduced. Additionally, learners studied only two of the four readings presented in each chapter. Although less time was spent on the cultural readings and grammar activities from the textbook, the end-of-semester simulation created a means through which learners were able to make use of their linguistic knowledge while also advancing their understanding of pointed real-world cultural topics. The integration of language, interdisciplinary topics, and
culture in the simulation promoted an authentic, emergent, and holistic language learning experience conducive to equipping learners for future courses and encounters (Byrnes, 2012; Martel, 2016).

Table 3.2

Schedule of Simulation Activities and Assessments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Phase</th>
<th>Summary of Activities</th>
<th>Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Week 1:** | **Introduction to simulation content and Mexican business etiquette**  
**Phase 1/Phase 2** | **Learners select simulation character**  
**2. Learners develop a Google Plus profile for simulation character**  
**3. Learners begin sending casual messages to other players via Google Plus (homework)** | **Google Plus Profile rubric (Appendix A)** |
| **Week 2:** | **Learners view and discuss two videos describing Mexican and American stereotypes**  
**Phase 2** | **Some learners give in-class presentations as their character**  
**3. Learners begin sending strategic ally recruitment messages on Google Plus (homework)** | **Up to 5% extra credit for learner presentations**  
**Google Plus Ally Recruitment rubric (Appendices B, C, D)** |
| **Week 3:** | **Learners listen to and discuss a pop song related to Mexican stereotypes**  
**Phase 2** | **Learners participate in one-on-one meetings with other players to solidify alliances and share objectives/interests**  
| **Phase 3** | **Learners introduce themselves as characters and publicly state their objectives**  
**2. Mexican and American delegations meet to discuss collective objectives**  
**3. Players separate into drug trafficking and border violence caucuses and begin creating proposals**  
**4. Learners continue sending strategic ally recruitment messages on Google Plus (homework)** | **Summit Day 1 assessment rubric (Appendix E)** |
Table 3.2 (con’t)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Phase</th>
<th>Summary of Activities</th>
<th>Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 4: Phase 3/Phase 4</td>
<td>1. Learners continue working in one or both caucuses, drug trafficking or border violence, to finalize the two proposals. All learners must include one or more solutions to these issues in the final proposals. &lt;br&gt;2. The Mexican and U.S. Presidents make final modifications to proposals on the projector screen. Others watch and make comments. &lt;br&gt;3. Lastly, learners vote in favor of or against each proposal and a majority vote stands.</td>
<td>Summit Day 2 assessment rubric (Appendix E)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Summation Day 3 assessment rubric (Appendix E)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.4 Simulation Phases, Content, and Activities

The simulation was comprised of four phases conducted entirely in Spanish and followed by a reflection that took place during the last week of the semester. Below I outline each phase by explaining objectives, activities, and how they were carried out as well as the reflection.

3.1.4.1 Phase 1: Getting to know the content and scenario. This phase lasted three 75-minute class periods (Week 1 and Day 1 of Week 2). During this time, learners developed a general understanding of relevant historical, cultural, and political topics related to the US-Mexico border. They read excerpts that highlighted the history of both countries’ approaches to combating the transport of illegal drugs and instances of violence related to Mexico and the border region. The texts, adapted and translated from Franco’s (2013) materials, reviewed the US’s historical efforts to eliminate the production of illegal drugs and Mexico’s attempt to dismantle the drug cartels. Additional readings (Appendix F) included a recount of a U.S. Border Patrol agent’s killing of a 15-year old Mexican boy at the border as well as the 2014 Iguala mass kidnappings in Mexico. During discussions surrounding these topics, in groups, learners contemplated
and discussed the events leading to the present-day issues of drug trafficking and violence at the US-Mexico border. In order to prepare learners to operate in culturally appropriate ways during the summit (Phase 3), they also watched videos (Appendix G) on and discussed US and Mexican stereotypes and performed out-of-class research on cultural differences related to negotiation practices in each country.

3.1.4.2 Phase 2: Getting into character. Week 1 was also devoted to the selection of characters. As learners became familiar with the content and scenario in which the simulation is situated, on Day 1 of the simulation the instructor distributed the list of characters. As homework, learners ranked and submitted a rationale for their top three character choices via the learning management system. On Day 2 of Week 1, the instructor assigned each learner a character accompanied by a half-page description of the role\(^1\). In the event that one of the learner’s top three choices was not available, the instructor took into consideration the learner’s rationale and attempted to accommodate these preferences through another role. In such cases, the instructor had a brief one-on-one conversation with the learner. In addition to learner preferences, the instructor also assigned some roles based on learner strengths. For example, the two U.N. Representatives and the two Presidents were assigned to learners with strong verbal communication skills and adequate command of the target language, as these were leadership roles that required active participation and communication. Learners then spent two class periods (Day 2 of Week 1 and Day 1 of Week 2) imagining and shaping this person on the social media platform Google Plus. Learners decided on their characters’ gender and described his or her personal traits, family, hobbies, and likes and

\(^1\) For this information please contact Sara Finney at srfinney777@gmail.com
dislikes. Their profile also included a picture and a cover photo. In order to become oriented with sending messages on Google Plus, as homework during Week 1 learners sent relationship-building messages with characters they considered possible allies. During the 2nd week, seven learners (see Table 3.1) gave in-class presentations that served to publicly promote their characters’ platforms while also providing information related to the primary controversies to other learners. For example, the presentations revealed proponents and opponents of legalizing drugs, building a bi-national city, and improving maquiladora workers’ working conditions, among others, and set the stage for debate and problem solving during the summit (Phase 3). In Week 2, learners’ out-of-class assignments centered on sending digital messages aimed at cultivating alliances with other characters in order to advance their agendas. They also continued learning about the content and promoting their platforms through face-to-face individual meetings as their characters during the last class session prior to the summit (Day 1 of Week 3).

3.1.4.3 Phase 3: The summit, preparing the proposals. This phase lasted two class periods (Day 2 of Week 3 and Day 1 of Week 4) during which learners were tasked with the collective goal of crafting two proposals to address the problems of drugs trafficking and border violence. Learners participated in caucuses corresponding with these two themes, which they selected based on their characters’ objectives. At different points during this phase, learners were able to switch caucuses as well as gather in smaller groups to discuss options and solidify alliances. The United Nations Representatives directed and managed discussions during the caucuses. They documented players’ proposed solutions and uploaded a working version of the proposal to Google Plus after each summit day for others to view.
3.1.4.4 Phase 4: Voting the proposals. On the last day of the summit (Day 2 of Week 4), learners introduced a final version of each proposal to the President of Mexico and the US. These players modified the proposals on the projector screen making decisions to resolve any conflicts and then presenting the finalized version for a vote. All learners except the United Nations Representatives and the News Reporter cast their vote for or against each proposal and a majority passed (or not) each proposal. The United Nations Representatives did not vote as they were neutral parties invited to the summit with the purpose of moderating the caucuses. Likewise, the objectives of the News Reporter focused on covering and reporting highlights of the caucuses and, thus, he or she did not have a stake in the outcome of the summit.

3.1.5 Reflection

Reflective components were incorporated in English after each summit day as well as during the last week of the semester, once the simulation was complete. Reflection on one’s experiences are essential for experiences to gain personal meaning (Kohonen et al., 2001). Therefore, at the end of each summit day, learners were prompted to consciously reflect on the effectiveness of their strategies in helping them progress (or not) toward achieving their characters’ objectives (Appendix H). Additionally, once the simulation concluded, the final week of the semester (two class days) was set aside for the researcher to individually interview learners in a separate room for data collection purposes and for learners to participate in individual and group reflections. After sharing their personal opinions of their experience on the post-questionnaire, learners participated in a 45-minute in-class discussion in English regarding their simulation experience. The instructor led the reflective activity by asking general questions such as “what was your
overall impression of the simulation?”, “what did you learn from your experience?”, and “what did you like or dislike?” Learners shared their thoughts about the simulation experience openly.

3.1.6 Assessment

Performance assessments were selected to evaluate learners during the simulation because they focus on assessing learners’ ability to perform a task (Blaz, 2013). These type of assessments have proven useful for pedagogies that produce individualized learner results related to a variety of competencies, focus on real-world tasks, and incorporate complex and contextualized themes (Wiggins, 1989). Therefore, I created all rubrics (Appendices B, D, E, F, H, I) for this simulation in order to gauge learners’ progress with regard to the multiple competencies exhibited. All rubrics were piloted in one 4th-semester Spanish course during the spring 2015 semester and minor modifications were made to make categories more explicit for learners. To reflect the learning objectives of this study, rubrics evaluated learners’ abilities in the areas of linguistic competence, communication of ideas, strategic consideration of other players’ interests, and making connections with local and global communities by acquiring and applying political, cultural, and historical knowledge to new contexts (National Standards, 2015).

In addition to the performance assessment rubrics, learners also received a daily participation grade in alignment with the coordinated curriculum. These points reflected learners’ class attendance and performance during all class sessions.

3.1.6.1 Phase 1 and 2 assessments. During Phase 1, as learners became oriented to the simulation content, the only assignment learners completed as homework included
researching, identifying, and bringing to class specific examples of strategies to engage in professional negotiation settings commonly employed in Mexican culture. Learners’ first assessment, during Phase 2, evaluated the social media profile they created for their characters, which was assessed using the Google Plus Profile Creation Rubric (Appendix A). Learners received a detailed description (Appendix I) of what to include in this profile and the instructor reviewed the rubric at the beginning of the class. Additionally, the instructor walked around the room while learners built their character profile to provide ongoing feedback and answer questions. The rubric for this assignment was used to evaluate learners’ creativity, content, and language in their Google Plus profiles. These categories highlighted learners’ ability to creatively imagine themselves as someone else and cohesively develop and communicate, through images and writing, this person’s background, interests, and professional objectives on the social media platform Google Plus. The next writing assessment, also during Phase 2, evaluated learners’ strategic ally recruitment messages sent to other players. To recall, learners first sent relationship-building messages to their peers in order to familiarize themselves with communicating on the social media platform. These initial messages were not evaluated; instead they served as a formative activity to prepare learners for the strategic ally recruitment messages. Using the Google Plus Ally Recruitment Rubric (Appendix B), two sets of messages were evaluated collectively based on content, strategic approach, and language abilities evident in learners’ messages. The content of these rubrics was altered slightly for the News Reporter (Appendix C) and United Nations Representatives (Appendix D) to reflect their distinctive objectives. In order to provide ongoing feedback, learners received detailed comments and suggestions from the instructor after their first set of
messages. These comments served as explicit guidelines further aiding learners in understanding in what ways they met and fell short of the rubric expectations. Learners were then directed to integrate these suggestions into their next set of messages, after which they received their first Google Plus Ally Recruitment grade. A similar process occurred during Week 3 when learners received their second Google Plus Ally Recruitment grade based on two sets of messages.

Additionally, the seven learners whose character roles required them to give in-class presentations received between 1% and 5% extra credit based on how well they met the criteria outlined in the instructions (Appendix J).

3.1.6.2 Phase 3 and 4 assessments. Learners’ performances during the summit (3 days) were evaluated based on the Summit Day Rubric (Appendix E). This rubric assessed real-world competencies such as learners’ ability to listen and communicate meaningful ideas during the caucuses, strategize in order to achieve their characters’ objectives, and interact entirely in the target language. Based on the distinct character objectives, the News Reporter had a separate Newsflash rubric (Appendix K) aimed at evaluating his or her Newsflash videos created during the summit.

3.1.7 Instructor Role and Tasks

In this section, I highlight specific aspects of the simulation in which the instructor responsibilities diverged from a traditional instructor role. In particular, this section describes the formative function of the instructor during the simulation and outlines the process of providing feedback. All information and directions were given in Spanish during class sessions; however, students were allowed and encouraged to ask
questions before or after class in English regarding any uncertainties and rubric feedback was provided to students in English.

Prior to the summit, the instructor was tasked with equipping learners to engage successfully in the learner-driven caucuses. Apart from orienting learners to the content, she also pushed learners to begin considering tangible solutions to their characters’ problems. This process occurred primarily through ally recruitment on Google Plus and in face-to-face meetings and presentations. At all points before and during the summit, the instructor’s role included challenging learners to think critically and to devise potential concrete solutions to their characters’ problems. Then, at the onset of the summit, the learners and the instructor swapped roles in that learners began to look to each other as authorities and the instructor transitioned to a guide on the side. The instructor’s focus shifted to solely encouraging in-depth discussion, answering questions, and providing feedback and direction when needed. Although the instructor relinquished control, the importance of continuing to direct learners through ongoing formative feedback was vital to learners’ success in this type of classroom structure. During the first day of the summit, many learners felt a sense of uncertainty as they became responsible for the discussion content, pace, and trajectory of their learning environment. Even with ample preparation, many learners turned to the instructor with questions and doubts. The instructor’s role was to reassure learners who looked to her for guidance through queries such as, “what are your goals?” and “how are you trying to achieve them?” Some learners had not yet considered how they might reach their goals; thus, posing these questions prompted them to reflect on strategies. If learners asked these questions during class sessions, the interactions were carried out in Spanish, if learners sought additional
guidance outside of the class sessions, the instructor would offer suggestions in English. The instructor’s goal was to empower learners to consider their characters' objectives and begin to forge their own path regarding how they would participate in the summit and attempt to meet those goals.

During the 3 days of the summit, the instructor took notes and documented learners’ engagement in correspondence with the Summit Day Rubric categories in order to provide individualized and specific feedback. Then, after each summit day, the instructor’s duty was to provide guidance using the four categories outlined in the rubric. To be successful, this feedback highlighted both how learners were meeting expectations as well as how their performances could improve (Sadler, 1989). To do so, the instructor examined notes from the summit day class period in conjunction with each learner’s character goals, their Summit Day Reflection comments, and their solutions documented on the working version of the proposals uploaded to Google Plus. Specifically, the instructor’s comments aimed to highlight strategies or approaches that led the learner to receive all points in a particular category and areas of improvement in situations where he or she did not receive full points. The instructor needed to identify the strategies that appeared to be advancing (or not) the learner’s objectives, remind the learner of objectives that were not clearly addressed, and, possibly, offer thought-provoking questions such as “How did proposing this solution help you advance your character’s goals?” “How do you plan to overcome the current opposition to your solutions?” or, if the student did not propose a solution, “You did not propose any solutions to reach your character’s objectives, what specific/tangible solutions will you propose on day two/three of the summit in order to do so?”
It was crucial that learners received each set of feedback prior to the next summit day in order to reflect and reevaluate where needed. Thus, the instructor sent a digital version of their rubric comments via email prior to the following class period. Additionally, all learners received a hard copy of their rubric at the beginning of the next class period and were provided a few moments to consider the feedback. The focus of this feedback was to help clarify expectations, motivate learners, and encourage the development of skills being assessed (Blaz, 2013; Tochon, 2014).

3.2 Participants

The participants in this study included 16 learners enrolled in an intermediate Spanish course taught by one instructor at a large public university located in the southeastern United States. At the beginning of the semester, the instructor informed the learners that their curriculum would diverge from the coordinated syllabus and she gave a brief description of the simulation. Then, during the 1st day of week 11, I visited the class, informed learners of the study, and asked them to participate (IRB Approval in Appendix L). All learners in the course agreed to take part in the study (n=17); however, one learner was later removed because she stopped attending the class regularly during Week 3 of the simulation and, thus, was unavailable to complete post-simulation data collection activities. Of the 16 remaining participants, 7 missed 1 or 2 days during the 5-week study, but their absences did not affect their ability to remain in the study as they still participated in most or all of the simulation activities.

Of the participants in the study, seven were male and nine were female. All of them were native English speakers and their ages ranged from 18 to 22 except one male learner who was 49 years old. As shown in Tables 3.3 and 3.4, learners’ majors and
minors in this course varied, which indicates a diverse group.

Table 3.3

*Participants’ Majors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Pre-Law</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public Relations</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Art History</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Relations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nursing</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undeclared</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Masters in TESOL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4

*Participants’ Minors*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minor</th>
<th>Number of students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Studio Art</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Business</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Studies</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately half of learners were minoring in Spanish (Table 3.4) and one indicated a
double major that included Spanish (Table 3.3). Other students in this section were either taking Spanish as a general educational requirement associated with their majors or as an elective.

3.3 Instruments and Data Collection

In this section, I describe the instruments used to collect data as well as the procedures and protocols employed. Drawing on ecological notions of learning that underscore the holistic and relational nature of experiences, I collected data comprised of learner interactions in order to explore in what ways the simulation led learners to engage with the content, their characters, and each other and, in turn, their overall learning experience. The questionnaires and interviews were used to understand learners’ self-reported perceptions of the simulation and how the different components, specifically adopting a character role and participating in a content-based and interactive learning community, led to such perceptions.

3.3.1 Interactional Data Collection

During Phases 2, 3 and 4 of the simulation, I collected participants’ digital exchanges via Google Plus. Once the summit began (Phase 3), I also video recorded all face-to-face learner interactions during two 75-minute class periods. Similar to their virtual encounters on Google Plus, this ethnographic data captured how participants engaged with one another and with the simulation content. I later transcribed the recordings and translated them into English.

3.3.2 Questionnaires

Learners completed a pre-questionnaire prior to the simulation as well as a post-questionnaire after participation in the simulation. I initially created the questionnaires
using Drewelow’s (2011a) instrument as a model to elicit learners’ perceptions. Through piloting the questionnaires, I discovered that the open-ended items provided rich data appropriate for exploratory research (Brown, 2009), which corresponded with my aims of gaining insights regarding learners’ impressions of the simulation as well as Mexicans and Mexico.

3.3.2.1 Pre-questionnaire. Prior to exposure to simulation content, at the beginning of Class Session 1 (Phase 1), learners completed a 10-minute online pre-questionnaire (Appendix M) in English in order to identify their conceptions of Mexico and Mexicans, both positive and negative, as well as their perceptions of where these images originated and any prior experience with Mexicans or in Mexico. In addition to soliciting bio data (items 1-3, 12), I also elicited positive, negative, and neutral images of Mexico and Mexicans (items 4-7), where learners believed their conceptions of Mexico/Mexicans came from (item 8), experiences abroad (item 9), and previous exposure to Mexico/Mexicans (item 10). I also aimed to gain insight regarding their understanding of the potential differences between Mexicans in the US and Mexicans living in Mexico, given the border content of the simulation (item 10).

3.3.2.2 Post-questionnaire. At the culmination of the simulation, I administered an online questionnaire in English (Appendix N) that took participants 15 minutes to complete in class during the penultimate day of the course. The objective of the questionnaire centered on determining learners’ perceptions of their overall simulation experience as well as their impressions of character adoption and their perceived language development. For the present study, I adapted the pilot questionnaire to consist of questions aimed at eliciting learners’ general perceptions of their simulation
experience (items 1 and 2), their beliefs on changes (or not) regarding how they perceive Mexicans (items 3, 4 and 5), and their appraisal of their own beliefs about Mexicans when compared to others from the United States (item 5). Such questions intended to touch on how engaging specifically with the US-Mexico border content influenced learners’ perceptions of this region and culture. Participants were also asked to describe their impression of adopting an alternate identity for the game (item 6) and how they considered the game to have affected their Spanish language abilities (item 7). Lastly, the questionnaire provided an opportunity for participants to share any additional relevant comments (item 8). Also, prior to the simulation, learners provided bio data information consisting of their name, major(s) and minor(s), which I then associated with their post-simulation questionnaire answers.

3.3.3 Interviews

I conducted a character interview with all participants (n=16) and a general interview with 11 participants, who were selected based on specific comments from the post-questionnaire that led the researcher to inquire further. The number of questions for each learner varied during the two interviews, but the character interview protocol (Appendix O) and the general interview protocol (Appendix P) were similar across learners. All face-to-face semi-structured interviews were carried out in a separate room during the final two class periods of the course and lasted between 2 and 7 minutes each.

3.3.3.1 Character interview. The purpose of the character interview was to better understand the motivations and reasons behind learners’ choices related to their character development, particularly on Google Plus. In order to create questions for the interview, I first examined learners’ Google Plus profiles and identified comments in which they
ascribed attributes to their characters that had not originated from their character sheet information. I proceeded to ask learners why they selected these traits for their characters in order to better understand the ways in which they conceptualized this persona. Based on learner responses to my initial questions, I probed further where necessary in accord with semi-structured interview procedures (Richards, 2009).

**3.3.3.2 General interview.** The goal of the general interview was to explore some learners’ (n=11) post-questionnaire answers in order to gain a more accurate understanding of their exact meaning in instances in which it was not apparent. To identify areas into which I wanted to delve further, I first examined learners’ questionnaire responses and extracted comments that were ambiguous. Next, during the interviews, I read the questionnaire question as well as the learner’s response. I then asked learners to elaborate further using phrases like “what did you mean by this?” or “can you give me an example?” These conversations further clarified how learners perceived aspects of their simulation experience, their understanding of the content or border situation, their character adoption, and their language development.

**3.4 Data Analysis**

Drawing on the construct of a classroom ecology that considers the totality of the classroom experience (van Lier, 2004a), my aim was to understand learners’ overall perceptions of the simulation and uncover the affordances that learners perceived and acted on that led them to embrace such perceptions. Thus, the data collected through the various instruments during the simulation were qualitative in nature.

I started by examining learners’ impressions of participating in the role-immersion simulation to discover their general perceptions related to the experience.
Then, in order to gain insight regarding the simulation conditions and classroom practices that may have contributed to learners’ perceptions, I proceeded to explore affordances, or “meaningful ways of relating to the environment” (van Lier, 2004b, p. 147), that emerged from different relationships present in the simulation. Specifically, to gauge the depth with which learners engaged in the simulation content and their peers, I explored if and how affordances for observable initiative (i.e., agency) were brought forth and picked up on by learners. Furthermore, to uncover the opportunities for learners to relate on a personal level to the communities and circumstances represented in the simulation, I focused on affordances that arose from learners’ adoption and development of individual character identities.

To address the research questions presented in Chapter 2, I analyzed two separate types of data, self-reported \( (RQ1, RQ3, RQ4) \) and interactional \( (RQ2) \), using Charmaz’s (2006) Constructivist Grounded Theory. The self-reported data sources included the pre- and post-simulation questionnaires as well as the character and general interviews. The interactional data consisted of ethnographic video-recorded data from two learner-directed class sessions (Phase 3: At the summit: Preparing the proposals), and digitally collected data (learner exchanges on Google Plus). Below, I describe the procedures I used for each research question.

To answer \( RQ1 \), which explored learners’ overall impressions of the simulation, I coded learners’ comments from the post-simulation questionnaire and the general interview line-by-line and identified all instances in which learners offered descriptions of their simulation experience. I then developed two categories based on recurrent themes within their descriptions, which I report on in Chapter 4.
In order to gain insights regarding the possible conditions that contributed to learners’ overall impressions, I addressed RQ2, which centered on the affordances offered for learner engagement with the content and other learners. Using the interactional data, I coded each idea shared by learners (face-to-face and digital) as one incident (Charmaz 2006). Then, I labeled the content of each incident [i.e., the simulation topic(s) addressed] and the other characters (i.e., learners) involved in the interactional encounter. I also categorized each incident in terms of observable learner initiative (i.e., agency), in alignment with an adapted version of van Lier’s (2008) six descriptive categories of ascending agency. Because van Lier’s continuum was based on a teacher-directed class, I modified it to coincide with the initiative present in the learner-managed class sessions, specifying if each incident was learner-initiated or provoked or generated by another source. Based on this information, I placed each incident in one of the six agency categories aligning with the level of initiative demonstrated. Conceptualizing the classroom as an ecology, which coincided with complexity or dynamic systems theory, I ascribed to the idea that “any analysis of details must be intimately and continually connected to the whole” (van Lier, 2004a, p. 199). Thus, I took both a microlevel and macrolevel approach to the agency data. First, I examined each individual learner’s incidents of agency and noted the changes (or lack thereof) in the degree of agency demonstrated as the phase progressed. I subsequently looked at the agentive evolution from a holistic perspective. Considering the classroom as a dynamic system that is flexible and sensitive to feedback from the environment, one learner’s demonstration of agency inevitably influences the system as a whole, as it infuses new energy (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Larsen-Freeman, 1997). While it is impossible to predict
when these agency instances will occur or how they will impact the system in that particular moment, adopting a global perspective can shed light on the overall ways the system reorganizes itself over time in response to these infusions of energy. By examining the data from both a detailed and holistic perspective, I identified patterns related to depth of engagement (i.e., agency), which I outline in Chapter 4.

To address RQ3 and understand the affordances presented by the learner-character relationship, I looked at the choices learners made when building their characters, using information from their Google Plus character profiles and their responses to the character interview; two distinct orientations arose. With an objective of appraising if and how character building and enactment influenced learners’ relationship with the border scenario, I compared learners’ pre-questionnaire comments with their post-simulation statements and identified any shifts (or not) regarding their views on or sense of involvement with the border circumstances. I report on the two patterns that emerged and make correlations in Chapter 4.

As for RQ4, I wanted to understand the factors that may have inhibited learners from entertaining a new perspective on or sense of involvement with the border situation. To do so, I looked at post-simulation comments from learners who indicated minimal or no shift in their perspectives toward Mexicans, Mexico, or the border to gain insights. Two recurrent themes arose and I describe them in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 4

AUTHENTIC VS. ACADEMIC: FACTORS INFLUENCING LEARNERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE DURING A ROLE-IMMERSION SIMULATION

This chapter explores how the US-Mexico role-immersion simulation created conditions for authenticity (or not) inside the foreign language (FL) classroom. To do so, I first examine learners’ general impressions of their participation in the simulation (RQ1). Using learners’ perceptions as a point of departure, I spend the remainder of this chapter focusing on affordances created by the simulation that led learners toward these perceptions. The simulation aimed to create a holistic experience, tapping into both intellectual and affective realms. Thus, to appraise if and how it promoted higher levels of intellectual engagement, I looked at the ways learners demonstrated observable initiative, or agency, to engage critically with the content and their peers (RQ2). Then, given the potential for personal involvement associated with learners’ adoption of an alternate real-world character identity, I explore affordances that emerged from the learner-character relationship (RQ3). Finally, to understand possible barriers inhibiting learners from progressing toward a more personal connection or involvement with the people and communities represented in the simulation, I investigate data among learners who did not demonstrate a shift in their involvement with the border circumstances and make correlations (RQ4). It is important to note that the findings presented below represent my interpretation of the data.
4.1 Two Divergent Impressions: Learners’ Perceptions of the Simulation Through a Lens of Authenticity or Linguistic Skills Development

Examining learners’ comments from the post-simulation interviews and questionnaire revealed two distinct trends regarding how they perceived the simulation. Almost two-thirds of learners (10 out of 16) described their participation in the simulation as reminiscent of authentic encounters they might find outside an academic learning setting. The others (6 out of 16) characterized their simulation experience in terms of linguistic development.

4.1.1 Factors Contributing to Learners’ Sense of Authenticity in the Classroom

To describe their simulation experiences as authentic, the first group of learners (10) used words like “real” and “practical,” and compared their experience to “being abroad.” These learners also made stark contrasts between their conceptualization of a typical FL classroom format and their simulation experience. To describe the former, they used phrases like “traditional,” “textbook,” “normal class,” “memorized,” and “a piece of paper” and compared these conceptions with phrases like “communicate,” “adapt,” “actual conversations,” “immersing,” and “deep.”

In order to understand what specifically contributed to their perceptions, I examined the post-simulation remarks in which learners described the practices during the simulation that gave them such an impression and two themes emerged: the need to employ a variety of skillsets simultaneously, particularly activating higher-order thinking capacities, and a sense of personal accountability to communicate during Phase 3 (At the summit, preparing the proposals).

4.1.1.1 A rich content-driven curriculum: Learners associate in-depth thinking and holistic skills development with authenticity. Learners frequently compared the
simulation, which was content-driven, to their experiences in other FL classes, which are largely guided by a textbook that is organized around grammatical structures grounded in thematic units (Martel, 2013). Such comparisons revealed that they perceived the two approaches to differ significantly. Learners described the simulation by stating they had to “talk more on topics,” “go deeper,” reach a new “level of thinking,” and “think about the material” in a “practical sense.” Prevalent in these remarks are the themes of increased thought and in-depth participation with the topics, which suggest that learners perceived a heightened intellectual engagement with the simulation content. For example, one learner contrasted such notions of depth with her perception of other FL curricula, describing the latter stating: “one might just say “cómo estás [how are you] blah blah.” Her use of a greeting (“how are you”), a straightforward memorized phrase that requires little mental effort, coupled with a term void of meaning (“blah”), display her attempt to express, by way of comparison, how the simulation engaged her mental capacities in more challenging ways. Another learner echoed this idea by stating that in a typical FL classroom, the “goal” is to “figure out if [the answer] is right,” which implies that once a right-wrong conclusion is drawn, there is no need for additional thought or reflection. She distinguished this conception with her sense that in the simulation that “there was a lot of communication” and “a lot of negotiation” which she insisted was “nicer.” The term “communication” suggests that she perceived the simulation to have afforded her the opportunity to share meaningful ideas, requiring comprehension, synthesis of information, and appropriate responses as opposed to merely identifying a correct answer. Furthermore, by emphasizing the need for “negotiation” in the simulation, she highlighted the imperative for learners to grapple with the topics and overcome obstacles
as opposed to simply exchanging information. Such descriptions allude to how learners perceived the content-driven curriculum to invite them to take a critical approach to using the language and, thus, move beyond “follow[ing] all the little grammatical rules” or “focusing on a specific tense for however many days.” By depicting grammar and tenses as “little” and “specific,” these learners indicated an impression that developing knowledge about tenses and grammar can be perceived as limited or isolated. In contrast, one learner asserted that in the simulation he had to use “an amalgam of knowledge” and another expressed she felt she was “immersing [her]self in the language.” These remarks underscore how they perceived the content-driven curriculum to be a holistic endeavor, lending itself to integrating different areas of learners’ knowledge, leading them to perceive it as more of a comprehensive learning experience. Engaging in practices in which their language use and critical engagement with content were inextricably linked led learners to feel they engaged in practices that might be useful in the real world such as “how to voice our opinion logically” and how to “adapt my skills to different situations.” Such perceptions suggest that the content-based curriculum was a contributing factor to learners’ increased sense of authenticity in the classroom.

4.1.1.2 Personal accountability: The impetus to engage in real communication.

The contextualized content-based scenario provided appropriate topics and opportunities for learners to engage meaningfully and deeply while using the language; however, the personal accountability related to each learner having individualized objectives in the simulation was the catalyst that incited learners to actively participate. All 10 learners in this category used words like “had to,” “made me,” “forced,” and “pushed” to indicate this sense of compulsion to take a proactive approach to participating in the learner-
directed class periods during Phase 3. Learners also specifically identified that they felt obligated not only to communicate, but that doing so in real time, that is without practicing or receiving time to prepare, contributed to their sense that they were engaging in “real conversations” or participating in “a dance” that one might do “with Spanish speakers.” Such remarks illustrate that learners likened the sense of feeling they needed to communicate impromptu with their peers to real-world language use.

4.1.1.2.1 Learners equate feeling compelled to communicate in the target language to an immersion experience. During the summit, the classroom shifted from a teacher-directed classroom structure to two learner-managed caucuses. As the two U.N. Representatives managed the caucuses, asking questions and probing for details, learners indicated that they began to feel obligated to participate in the talks, with one learner stating, “it was nice to be forced to speak Spanish” and another indicating “it made me use the language.” To explain why they felt “forced” to engage with the language, one learner highlighted “I had the agenda that I wanted and I wanted to get my way in the game,” which made him “put in extra effort.” This remark emphasizes the connection between having an “agenda” and learners’ sense of accountability to actively pursue their goals and the need to use the language to do so. This learner elaborated that in the process of trying to achieve his agenda, his language use became “more natural.” His use of “natural” suggests he sensed a shift from the feeling he was in an academic context toward a sense he was interacting in an everyday communication setting. Likewise, another learner likened feeling obligated “to do speaking, listening, and writing” to her experience in Spain, which suggests that focusing on using the language to achieve a task evoked in her a sense that she was in a target language environment. Another echoed a
similar idea that to achieve her goals she had to use the language “to write stuff out” and then “talk about that exact thing that I had written out in person and elaborate more and just use [the language].” In other words, in order to advance her agenda, she had to remain focused on discussing, both in writing and verbally, the issues that mattered to her character with others, a process she later equated to immersion. What is salient in these learners’ comments is the feeling of necessity to use the language as the primary semiotic resource to construct and share meaning within the interactions. Focusing on reaching their characters’ goals created in learners a sense that they had transcended the classroom and were engaging in a more authentic realm.

4.1.1.2.2 Communicating meaning in real time: Learners consider spontaneous exchanges to mirror real-world conversations. Although some learners mentioned that they valued engaging in various types of communication (i.e., writing, speaking, listening), all 10 learners explicitly pinpointed that the urgency to communicate in real time with their peers contributed to their perception of authenticity in the classroom. One learner explained the summit was like having an “actual conversation” because he “actually had to respond to people’s comments” which required “thinking about it right on the spot.” Another said it helped him “be able to speak quickly and have real conversations” and another added that it aided her in “actually applying [the language] in conversation.” Their repeated use of “actual” and “real” suggest that they distinguished the summit experience from other instances in which they have used the language in ways they perceived to be less authentic, which they described using words like “structure,” “memorized,” and “organization.” One learner emphasized that while she appreciated having opportunities to learn “how to do things like organized sentences” in
other class activities, she believed the simulation helped her “practice” what she had learned as she was able to have “a conversation for one hour straight.” What her remarks accentuate is that to participate in Phase 3 of the simulation, learners indeed needed to have the linguistic foundation to converse with others, but it also demanded that they access and use their language skills appropriately, and in the moment, to convey their ideas to others. Engaging in unscripted meaningful exchanges required learners to simultaneously activate multiple skills oftentimes not needed to complete more structured textbook activities. For example, one learner articulated specifically the various skills he had to tap into in order to interact successfully with his peers. He explained that he appreciated “being able to say something to someone and then hearing what they say back and thinking how I have to rephrase what I wanted.” This remark highlights how learners had to share ideas, comprehend those of others, synthesize them, and respond appropriately. This learner added, “then hearing what they say back and thinking how I have to rephrase what I wanted, like include theirs, or if I wasn’t coming off the right way or to, like, understand what they were confused on.” This quote uncovers how during the interactions, learners were tasked with navigating the emergent miscommunications that occurred in conversations by thinking critically about them and then adjusting their responses accordingly. These types of impromptu communication encounters required learners not only communicate in real time, but also formulate their own thoughts and express those thoughts in the target language such that others understood them in an instantaneous manner, which learners described as a challenging but valuable endeavor. It was, indeed, the challenge of figuring out “certain ways of
speaking, thinking on my feet,” that created a sense that learners were engaging “in semi-real circumstances.”

**4.1.2 Learners’ Perceptions of the Simulation in Terms of Advancing Specific Language Skills**

The second group of learners (n=6), made no comparisons between the simulation and other FL classroom experiences, nor did they describe the simulation environment as approximating a realistic setting. Instead, these learners focused on the simulation as a means to develop (or not) isolated linguistic skills and modalities. Based on their comments, learners were categorized into one of two groups. Four learners shared remarks about the specific language-related skills they felt they advanced and the other two indicated that they did not perceive the simulation to have advanced their linguistic abilities. Considering that the content-driven curriculum and personal accountability were primary contributors to a sense of authenticity for other learners, in this section I considered how these learners perceived and discussed (or not) these hallmarks of the simulation.

**4.1.2.1 A focus on cultivating particular skills and modalities.** Four learners’ remarks centered on specific abilities they felt they had improved such as vocabulary (two learners) and speaking and listening skills (two learners). Two of these four learners mentioned that they felt a sense of accountability to use the language, but data from three of them suggest that engaging with the content did not become significant, as they either avoided mentioning it at all or indicated the acquisition of small tidbits of new knowledge: “Honestly I had no idea either cities [El Paso/Juarez] were real until I did research.” This quote shows that the most salient aspect of engaging with the content for this learner was a realization that two cities existed, which suggests that the real-world
issues addressed in the simulation remained mostly inconsequential to her. The other learner in this category did indicate that the topics gained significance to her, remarking that “looking at pictures” online made the topics seem more real. The medium through which the content gained significance (visual images) distinguishes her from the group of learners who described the simulation in terms of authenticity; they experienced the content as meaningful through activating in-depth critical thinking as they grappled with the various topics. Thus, the learners in this group either did not perceive themselves to have activated higher-order thinking skills related to the content, or they did not consider it to be relevant to their overall learning experience.

**4.1.2.2 A perception that language skills remain stagnant.** Two learners explicitly stated that they considered their participation in the simulation to have “neither positively or negatively affected” their language abilities. Only one of these learners indicated she felt compelled to use the language, stating, “it was hard because I had to make sure I understood what everyone was saying and make sure the proposals were correct.” This remark suggests that she not only felt a sense of accountability (had to), but also that she engaged her intellectual capacities through comprehending and synthesizing information as well as negotiating meaning to create the proposals. Yet, she did not correlate such experiences with authenticity or with improved language abilities.

Likewise, the other learner explained, “I learned how to negotiate with others in Spanish,” a process also involving higher order thinking skills. What differentiates these two learners from the authenticity group is that they did not consider these integrated practices to be particularly valuable when compared to other classroom practices. To recall, a prominent theme among the authenticity group was their frequent comparisons
between employing a variety of skills to engage deeply with content and their perception that these elements were often lacking in a curriculum guided by the textbook. However, the two learners in this group made no such comparisons. Moreover, in light of their impression that their language skills did not improve after the simulation, data suggest that, for these learners, extracting and pinpointing areas of language improvement proved difficult when clear and explicit focus on linguistic elements was not the main focus of the class.

4.2 Expected, Unexpected, and Elusive Affordances for Learners to Progress Toward High Levels of Agency

In order to gain insight regarding learners’ depth of engagement with the content and their peers, I examined if and how the simulation created affordances for agency, operationalized through observable initiative on the part of learners (van Lier, 2008). Specifically looking at learner interactions during Phase 3 (At the summit, preparing the proposals), I adopted a vision of “the classroom as a complex system, an interlocking set of elements and relationships in which any one element can only be understood in the light of its interactions with other elements” (Guerrettaz & Johnston, 2013, p. 783). In this case, I identified each learner’s individual agency events, examined the agentive trajectory of each learner, and then considered the collective agency evolution of all learners. Coinciding with an ecological perspective, such an approach allows for both a holistic and detailed understanding of learner agency within a dynamic classroom setting (van Lier, 2004a).

I used van Lier’s (2008) agency engagement continuum as a guide, particularly aligning with his concept of initiative as a primary indicator of agency. Table 4.1
illustrates a modified version of this continuum in alignment with the ways learners demonstrated initiative throughout Phase 3.

Table 4.1

*Agency Conceptualized in Terms of Observable Engagement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of engagement</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1 – Passive</td>
<td>minimally responsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2 – Obedient</td>
<td>responds when called on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3 – Participatory</td>
<td>volunteers to answer a question or carry out expected task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4 – Inquiry</td>
<td>voluntarily asks a question</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5 – Autonomous</td>
<td>offers self-generated idea or adopts a stance on an issue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6 – Committed</td>
<td>voluntarily confronts or challenges another learner</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*adapted from van Lier (2008)*

In Table 4.1, Levels 1 and 2 illustrate highly limited or no volition whereas Levels 3 through 6 show learner volition in ascension; Level 3 constitutes minimal levels of initiative and Levels 4, 5, and 6 represent ascending levels of individual initiative as learners are voluntarily contributing their own capacities without being prompted to do so. For example, in Level 4 learners voluntarily posed questions to solicit additional information and in Level 5 learners devised an original thought or new position on an issue and shared it with the group. In order to conceive of a new relevant thought or take a position, learners had to comprehend and synthesize information and critically consider how to respond, all of which align with higher order thinking skills and increased agency. Level 6 involved learners actively fighting for a particular stance or idea, which manifested when learners became invested in a position to such an extent that they
challenged or confronted others, which suggests a high level of initiative and commitment. In the present study, Levels 4, 5, and 6 created opportunities for collaborative agency, or instances in which learners jointly contributed their intellectual and creative energies such that the event arguably transcended individual agency and became a “collaborative co-constructed enterprise” (van Lier, 2008, p. 168). Drawing on constructivist notions that consider learning to best occur through social engagement, I focus my reporting on the three levels of agency that created opportunities for collaborative events.

Looking at learner agency from a macrolevel perspective, Figure 4.1 depicts each learner’s individual agentive evolution over time (each of the 16 lines represents a learner) as well as offers a visual depiction of the general collective trend. This comprehensive view reveals that overall learners’ agency increased as Phase 3 progressed, but also shows that each individual learner’s agentive trajectory was nonlinear and unpredictable. Such behavior reinforces how the learning environment
during Phase 3 constituted a complex system, as within such systems “globally a pattern emerges, but locally it is impossible to predict just what the details will look like” (Larsen-Freeman, 1997, p. 146).

Examining the agency at the microlevel, that is analyzing each individual learner’s agency instances, showed that initially a majority of learners (13 out of 16) demonstrated limited initiative, placing them at obedient (Level 2) on the agency scale. Learners simply paraphrased their character objectives as outlined on their instructor-provided character sheets and only responded to when called upon by the two U.N. Mediators, who learners viewed initially as the proxy teachers. Of the other three learners, the two U.N. Mediators began at the level of inquiry (Level 4), as they were tasked with asking questions of others as part of their objectives; the News Reporter started at participatory (Level 3) through a degree of volition demonstrated in the creation of his news flash videos, as assigned by the instructor.

Over time, learners activated their agency and the circumstances surrounding such instances of initiative revealed two affordances offered by the simulation for learners to progress agentively: attempts to promote their character agendas (14 learners) or advocating for two marginalized characters (5 learners). While the former was an expected affordance for agency, as the character objectives aimed to promote interaction, engagement, and problem solving, the latter was an unexpected affordance. Lastly, two learners did not act on either affordance and, as such, did not shift their agency.

4.2.1 Expected Affordances for Agency Arise as Learners Work to Achieve Character Objectives

To illustrate how the simulation created affordances for increased agency as learners worked to reach their character goals, I extracted representative examples of
learner initiative at each of the three levels (4, 5, and 6). I report these data from lower to higher levels of agency to depict the global trend, although most individual learners’ agency followed a nonlinear pattern. In alignment with a vision of the classroom as a complex system, open and feedback-sensitive, when learners demonstrated initiative they infused new energy into the system and caused it to react and re-organize. Although not always the case, often these reactions manifested in increased initiative on the part of other learners and, thus, higher levels of learner agency. This phenomenon guided my decision to report on a majority of initiative-taking instances that resulted in a collaborative event. That is, the examples reveal how initiative on the part of one learner created opportunities for other learners to take initiative and affected the overall learning system (i.e., other learners and their depth of engagement), resulting in collaborative agency.

Table 4.2

*Highest Agency Achieved by Learners who Progressed Agentively*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest level of agency reached to achieve objectives</th>
<th>Number of learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4 – inquiry</td>
<td>3 learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5 – autonomy</td>
<td>5 learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6 – commitment</td>
<td>6 learners</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 illustrates learners’ highest level of agency reached as they attempted to advance their agendas. A majority of learners that reached Level 6, for example, also engaged in Level 4 and 5 agentive practices, but I categorized them to display the highest agency achieved. Also, to recall, 12 of the 14 learners in Table 4.2 began at Level 2—
obedient. Of the other two learners, one started at Level 3 and progressed to Level 4; the other moved from Level 4 to Level 6.

4.2.1.1 Taking initiative through inquiry. In order to engage in inquiry and generate relevant questions, learners first had to grasp others’ claims and views and synthesize the information in relation to their own characters’ agendas. Then, based on this analysis, they proceeded to ask questions that aligned with promoting their objectives or undermining their competitors’ goals.

The Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident was against the construction of a bi-national city and the Global Contractor needed it to be built. In light of these conflicting goals, as the Global Contractor described his plan for a bi-national city, the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident posed the question, “what is the ultimate goal of the bi-national city?” and elaborated, “if the city is built, we don’t have houses or jobs.” Through this self-generated query and comment, the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident implied that the negative consequences of the city (demolishing her neighborhood) outweighed the lack of clearly stated benefits that might come from building such a city. Thus, through these comments, she aimed to garner support for her own agenda and weaken that of her opponent. Becoming aware of this information, the U.S. President then engaged in inquiry as well, turning to ask the Global Contractor, “you want to eliminate the houses in the neighborhood area?”, to which he responded “Yes.” In this case, the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident’s initiative created an opportunity for initiative on the part of the U.S. President. Upon learning of the unfavorable impact the bi-national city would have on the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident, the U.S. President pulled back on a previous stance in which she had initially offered financial
support for the bi-national city; she retracted her offer stating, “our country does not have more money.” This interactional encounter illustrates how a collaborative event took place after the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident’s question and comment (Level 4), aimed at advancing her own objectives, prompted initiative on the part of the U.S. President, as she critically reflected on new information and shifted positions (Level 5).

Likewise, in another instance the Mexican activist, who was tasked with promoting legalized drugs conflicted with the DEA Agent, who was against it. As such, the activist’s initial proposal of legalizing “all drugs” in both Mexico and the US led the DEA Agent to proactively ask, “you’re going to legalize all drugs?”, clarifying twice “all of them?” By emphasizing the word “all” repeatedly, this learner aimed to accentuate the radical nature of the activist’s proposal and cast doubt on such a drastic approach. Her questions prompted two other learners to demonstrate initiative with one inquiring “Acid?”, another adding “Cocaine?”, and yet another taking an initial stance against drug legalization, “that’s bad for business at the border.” The DEA Agent’s question not only led two learners to engage actively in the discussions (Level 4), but also resulted in one learner taking a stance (Level 5) that aligned with DEA Agent’s agenda. These types of brief inquiries to advocate for their agendas characterized agency at the beginning of Phase 3.

4.2.1.2 Increasing initiative by volunteering original ideas and adopting stances. As Phase 3 progressed, learners not only responded to others’ questions by demonstrating initiative, but they began to engage of their own will. They voluntarily contributed their own ideas to solve problems and adopted positions on issues.
The U.S. President was tasked with allocating her budget to endeavors she felt would best combat drugs and violence, in alignment with her mandates. To do so, she took a stance on her budget (Level 5): she decided to pay for only part of the Merida Initiative, a $1.5 billion deal to provide resources to Mexico to combat border problems. The U.S. President displayed evidence of critically considering her objectives, her budget, and the involved parties and then making a situated decision she believed was in the best interest of her character demonstrating a high degree of initiative. She explained to the Mexican President, “The U.S. has many more soldiers at the border than Mexico. I want to help you, but I cannot pay for all of your resources. Do you have the money to pay for thirty or forty percent?” Her choice directly impacted the Mexican President’s ability to achieve his mandate of renewing the Merida Initiative and, as such, prompted him to demonstrate initiative by seeking help from another learner (Level 4). The Mexican President turned to his ally, the Mexican Minister: “Mexico needs to pay thirty percent of the [Merida] initiative. I understand, but I don’t know how to obtain the funds. Do you have ideas?” This series of interactions reveals how initiative creates opportunities for additional initiative, as the Minister then tapped into her own knowledge of the other characters in the simulation, particularly the wealth of the Zaragoza family member, and offered a new idea (Level 5) to the Mexican President: “You could possibly ask the Zaragoza family member for funds.” The Mexican President took her advice and involved another learner, Zaragoza, into his problem-solving efforts. As one learner activated agency in order to advance a character agenda, other opportunities for initiative taking emerged and learners jointly engaged in problem-solving efforts.
The El Paso Mayor decided to take a stance in favor of the bi-national city (Level 5) because she believed it would facilitate reaching her character’s objectives. However, she recognized a problem with this endeavor: “We are taking the houses and jobs of people.” She showed further initiative by asking an ally, the Global Contractor, how she could assist in promoting it (Level 4), “How can my city help with this? Money? People? Resources?” Thus, by taking a stance, this learner then felt compelled to engage agentively with potential allies to overcome obstacles she perceived to impede her from reaching goals. Her increase in agency created an opportunity for the Global Contractor to show initiative by providing a new idea (Level 5), “I want to give the Lomas de Poleo people the opportunity to buy new businesses in the bi-national city.” He also contemplated an alternate option (Level 5), “maybe we could build the city next to their neighborhood,” and sought additional advice from the El Paso Mayor (Level 4), “How can we make this deal possible?” This response provoked further intellectual engagement on the part of the El Paso Mayor (Level 5), “El Paso could house a certain number of people that need housing during the construction. Or we could talk with the Zaragoza family to see if there are houses or jobs that need to be filled?” To try and reach their mutual goals, these learners engaged in extensive and collaborative problem-solving efforts, which were imbued with learner-generated ideas and inquiry.

4.2.1.3 Becoming entrenched in the simulated scenario: Challenging and confronting others. Once learners solidified positions on issues, some of them vigorously advocated for them. After initial resistance to his plan to legalize drugs, the Mexican activist altered the details of his proposal and turned his efforts to challenge the two presidents directly so that they would reconsider their positions. He sent a message to the
Mexican President with a link to a time.com article highlighting not only how legalizing drugs has shown to decrease drug trafficking at the US-Mexico border, but also explaining that, “in many U.S. states, marijuana is legal. These states made a lot of money off of the taxes, and Mexico needs money.” In order to convince the president, the activist invested time and energy in finding evidence to support his plan by conducting additional Internet research. He also revealed a clear understanding of the Mexican President’s need for financial resources and used this understanding as part of his persuasion strategy. Such effort reveals a deep investment in swaying the president to his side. The activist took a similar direct approach with the U.S. President catering to her interest in reducing the drug cartels’ power. He explained that the “government regulation” of legalized marijuana would reduce “the power of the drug cartels because people would want to buy from a regulated industry.” By communicating how his plan advanced these two presidents’ goals, the activist’s commitment manifested through direct appeals and resulted in the presidents’ joint reassessment their stances (Level 5). The U.S. President explained, “I need to speak with the [Mexican President], but I think it’s a good idea.” Ultimately, the presidents shifted their positions and opted to pass this provision.

The Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident displayed a commitment to confronting others who supported the bi-national city, making persistent pleas: “You all want my land, and I want to stay on my land!” To the Mexican President she argued that “to put an end to the corruption, we need to start with my city, Juarez” as opposed to building a bi-national city. Likewise, to the activist she contended, “if this city is built, the violence of Juarez and the US violence can enter the new [bi-national] city as well.
We need to start with our city first.” These repeated self-generated pleas urging others to reconsider their stances reveal a high degree of initiative. She also visited both caucuses, trying to challenge her opponents: “who wants the bi-national city?” and “I want to stay in my house and [the maquiladora worker] wants to stay at her job.” Her urgency for others to see her point of view was recognized by other learners, as one explained to the group, “she came here to convince us.” By trying to reach her objectives, the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident became a fierce advocate for her position, showing frequent and high degrees of initiative to do so.

4.2.2 Unexpected Affordances for Agency Emerge as Learners Advocate Against Injustice

The plight of two characters, the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident and the maquiladora worker, created unexpected affordances for five learners (approximately one-third of the class) to activate high levels of agency (Levels 4, 5, and 6). All learners in this category reached the highest level of agency (Level 6) through advocating for these two marginalized characters, which in almost all cases resulted in a collaborative event. Learners participated in back-and-forth debates about how to accommodate the maquiladora worker and the displaced Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident.

4.2.2.1 Moral dilemmas motivate learners to react. When learners became aware of provisions with the potential to negatively impact two marginalized characters, they took action to respond. For example, when the Mexican President indicated a desire to limit the maquiladora workers’ right to strike, two other learners reacted in protest. The U.S. President inquired (Level 4), “you want to limit their rights?!” and then proceeded to challenge (Level 6) the Mexican President’s idea by commenting, “I don’t understand
[... ] the maquiladoras are receiving the effects of violence.” As the Mexican President attempted to put a positive spin on his plan, highlighting an intention to also improve their working conditions, the Juarez Mayor voluntarily insisted (Level 6), “I don’t think you can eliminate the voice of the maquiladoras [workers] and at the same time say you want to improve the conditions.” Because these learners’ instances of volition revolved around defending the maquiladora workers and had no bearing on the advancement of their own character objectives, their choice to make such contributions to the caucuses suggests that they moved beyond simply carrying out the tasks required of them in the simulation. They sensed an injustice and felt compelled to respond. Likewise, upon learning that the bi-national city would require the demolition of the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood, effectively displacing the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident, learners again demonstrated initiative to advocate for this learner. The U.S. President clarified to the Global Contractor (Level 4), “You want to get rid of [the houses]?” a question that produced uncomfortable laughter by the group. The Juarez Mayor mockingly responded, “force them out!” Although not a direct confrontation (Level 6), his remark served to implicitly denounce the Global Contractor’s intention by highlighting its negative impact to the group: obliging the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood residents to leave against their will. These initial reactions show learners’ unexpected concern for the fate of other characters to such an extent that they put forth efforts to better understand the circumstances surrounding these characters and display their dissent.

4.2.2.2 Learners fight for fair outcomes on behalf of marginalized characters.

Learners progressed in their initiative, voluntarily challenging others to promote just solutions for these characters. The U.N. Representative reminded the learners in her
caucus to remain focused on the maquiladora worker and the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident in their absence, “How are we going to help [the maquiladora worker and the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident].” This comment posed a question (Level 4) that her caucus was tasked with answering. She continued, “they aren’t here now, but we need to think of them too,” pushing learners to consider their needs (Level 6). Others started generating new ideas to help the two characters (Level 5). The El Paso Mayor and U.S. President offered to “provide money for the new houses” for the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood residents to live in the bi-national city and the Mexican activist inquired about alternatives that might help her: “Is it possible for the government or the Zaragoza family to provide, I don’t know, compensation for the [Lomas de Poleo] neighborhood residents?” and the Mexican President insisted, “they need jobs.” These remarks demonstrate how learners showed effort toward contemplating and sharing alternative options to accommodate the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident. Learners also confronted opponents of the marginalized characters (Level 6), with the Mexican activist advocating for the maquiladora worker, “she wants the conditions in her job to improve” and the U.S President insisting, “Improve! Yes, the law needs to improve [the conditions].” The U.N. Representative produced a similar confrontational encounter directed at the proponent of the bi-national city, “you’re going to pay for [the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood residents’] houses or you’re going to build new houses for them [. . .] they aren’t paying anything, you’re paying for everything!” These learners’ responses show high levels of initiative in terms of advocacy, which suggests that the moral dilemmas became markedly consequential to them.
4.2.3 Affordances for Increased Agency Remain Inaccessible for Two Learners

Data suggest that the two affordances that emerged for learners to demonstrate agentive progression (working to achieve character objectives and advocating for marginalized characters) did not present themselves for two learners (U.N. Representative and maquiladora worker). To understand potential reasons for their stagnant agency, I examined data coinciding with each of these learners in terms of both affordances. Also, these two learners were part of the group that did not experience the simulation as authentic.

4.2.3.1 The ability to achieve character objectives without progressing agentively. Regarding the first affordance, data suggest that both learners in this category were able to reach their objectives without increasing their agency. For example, the U.N. Representative was tasked with ensuring the provisions in the proposals were detailed and accurate, a task which she completed by remaining at Level 4—inquiry. She asked appropriate questions, synthesized information, and crafted a clear proposal while remaining at this level of agency. The maquiladora worker, on the other hand, remained at Level 2—obedient, responding only when asked questions by other learners. Yet, with this level of agency she was able to achieve almost all of her goals. The unanticipated assistance from other learners’ advocacy may have played a role in her limited initiative. Unlike other learners who had to fight to achieve their goals, this learner may not have felt as compelled to demonstrate initiative, as others were doing so on her behalf.

4.2.3.2 Elusive opportunities to advocate for others. Neither of these two learners acted on the potential affordance to advocate for the marginalized characters. Although one U.N. Representative reached Level 6—committed by advocating for others, the other
U.N Representative did not. The latter managed the caucus with significantly less exposure to the two marginalized characters, which likely contributed to the elusiveness of this affordance for her.

The maquiladora worker was one of the marginalized characters for whom others advocated, which may have played a role in her not actively promoting her own agenda. However, in her post-simulation comments she insisted, “if I felt I needed to say something, then I had to speak up,” which suggests that she indeed felt a sense of obligation to press for her interests. She elaborated, though, that she has “a lot of problem with [speaking up]” because she has “never been really comfortable with speaking” and feels “lot more comfortable reading and writing.” In the face-to-face interactions, she did repeat her character’s objectives when prompted by others, but when asked to elaborate and formulate potential solutions, she repeatedly responded, “I don’t know” and “I don’t know, help me.” These remarks might suggest that it was simply the discomfort she felt with speaking that led her not to activate agency. However, she maintained a similar level of passivity and superficiality in the content of her written communications. Thus, a comprehensive view of this learner’s situation indicates that while verbalizing her thoughts may have been burdensome for her, devising self-generated solutions to her character’s problems (i.e., activate high degrees of critical thinking) and then communicating these solutions in the target language to others (verbal or written) manifested as the primary challenge. Although others’ promoting her agenda may have played a role, data suggested that while she felt a sense of unease related to verbalizing her thoughts, the unfamiliar process of engaging with the content critically and
conceiving of her own ideas on how to potentially resolve the issues of her character was
the primary obstacle inhibiting her from adopting a more active role.

4.3 Learners’ Approach to Character Adoption Determines Their Relationship
With the US-Mexico Border Circumstances

As the character objectives aimed to promote intellectual and interactive
engagement, the adoption of an alternate identity, a hallmark of role-immersion, intended
to activate a relational or personal element in learners. To understand if and how
affordances for such engagement arose, I examined learners’ relationships with their
character roles. During Phase 2 (Getting into character), learners were tasked with
selecting and building their characters. To do so, they created a Google Plus profile
determining gender, personality, family, and additional interests. In constructing their
characters, data suggest that learners took two approaches: imagining the life of such a
persona (10 learners) or using aspects related to their own lives (6 learners).

4.3.1. Attempts to Imagine the Life of an Unfamiliar Character: Developing
Deepened Personal Bonds With Communities Involved in the Border Scenario

The 10 learners who attempted to imagine the life of their characters used phrases
like “I figured,” “I felt like,” “it makes sense that,” and “I just thought,” indicating they
tried to consider the lives of their roles using the contextual anchors they were given on
their character sheets. In other words, these learners contemplated the information
associated with their character and ascribed hobbies, backgrounds, and interests that they
believed might accurately align with such a persona. Divided into two categories, half of
learners in this group (5) focused on trying to accurately portray the life of their political
figures, using stereotyped images of such figures as their starting point; the other half (5)
took creative liberties to amplify certain facets of their characters based on segments of
the information they were provided. All of these learners revealed an increased
personalized bond with the situation at the border post-simulation using phrases such as “sympathetic,” “empathize,” “pity,” “legitimate concerns,” “involved,” and “human.”

Eight of these learners were also those that considered their overall simulation experience as authentic.

4.3.1.1 Aiming for accuracy: Learners turn to stereotypes to create the perfect political figure. Trying to depict their characters accurately emerged as a trend among five learners, as the Mexican President explained, “I tried to make him as realistic as possible” and another stating she wanted to create the “perfect Secretary of State.” Such an approach suggests that these learners were making efforts to understand the lives of these people to create a depiction reflective of their perception of reality. Additionally, they seem to be aiming for correctness, a characteristic that coincides with success in academic contexts. In attempting to envision attributes of characters these learners knew little about, they turned to familiar and stereotypical concepts that they associated with such a public position to facilitate the task. Prominent in their descriptions of their political characters were notions of power, political origins, and maintaining a public image. The U.S. President described her character as “confident and authoritative” and the U.S. Secretary of State selected her character’s name because, through her research, she discovered it meant “power, strong, warrior.” This learner also opted for Baltimore as her character’s city of origin because it is “close to D.C.,” which is where many politicians reside or visit frequency. The Mexican President explained that he portrayed his character as valuing family and the U.S. President stated hers was part of the “Kennedy family” because these learners “figured it would look good,” indicating their emphasis on considering how others would perceive them in these very public positions.
These learners also opted to ascribe characteristics, hobbies, and interests in alignment with their understanding of their characters as educated individuals that maintain busy lifestyles with significant responsibility. For example, the two U.N. Mediators considered that being part of the United Nations required a level of sophistication that they embodied through making their characters “worldly” and “intelligent,” with one speaking “five languages.” Such attributes suggest that these learners considered the qualities one might need to work for a well-known global organization. Likewise, the Mexican President portrayed his character as a fan of Mexico’s most popular sport, “soccer,” and the Secretary of State rationalized a primary hobby of going to the “mountains to relax” because her job is “stressful.” Although these are stereotyped images often associated with Mexico (soccer) or a politician (busy, stressful), what it reveals is that these learners made efforts to contemplate their character roles as they ascribed hobbies. Data suggested that initially trying to imagine the world of these political figures and engaging in developing them accurately coincided with these learners’ abilities to make personal connections with the simulation circumstances.

To determine if and how the process of adopting and constructing a character role affected learners’ personal stance toward the border situation, I compared their comments before and after the simulation to identify any shifts (or lack thereof). Learners in this category demonstrated a marked shift in the way they viewed Mexicans and their interpretations of the border situation. Tables 4.3 and 4.4 show pre-simulation images that learners associated with Mexico and the Mexican people, respectively.
Table 4.3

Learners’ (Political Characters) Pre impressions of Mexico

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre impressions of Mexico</th>
<th>5 learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Violence/danger/crime</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beach</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs/cartels</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal immigration</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4

Learners’ (Political Characters) Pre impressions of Mexicans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre impressions of Mexicans</th>
<th>5 learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical attributes</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hard-working</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When depicting Mexico, all five learners employed stereotypical images, both positive and negative. Also, four of the five learners largely reduced the Mexican people to a set of simplified and overgeneralized attributes (“dark hair, dark skin,” “Spanish,” and “hard working”). The other learner highlighted personal experiences with Mexicans in Arizona as opposed to ascribing sweeping generalizations.

After the simulation, however, the essence of all five of these learners’ comments indicated a more humanistic view of individuals dealing with the border issues, as they used words and phrases like “people” with “legitimate concerns” and for whom they felt “pity” and “sympathy.” By using such terms, these learners indicated that they began to
personify the characters in the simulation and see them as representative of actual individuals. By highlighting their “legitimate concerns” and indicating emotional involvement (sympathy, pity), these learners illustrated an ability to move beyond the immediacy of simply interacting with classmates or fictitious entities, and come to experience these characters not only as real people, but as people with genuine and valid apprehensions to which they could relate emotionally. Although some of learners’ comments continued to indicate an us vs. them dichotomy, using terms like “Americans” to refer to themselves, contrasted with “they” or “Mexicans,” their broadened appreciation for the impact of these issues on others points to progression toward closing that division. In other words, by beginning to expand their perspectives and consider the issues from the vantage point of someone involved in the border situation, Mexican or American, they progressed toward a deepened bond with those communities, more able to relate to their concerns and displaying empathy. One learner’s remarks illustrate this evolution, as prior to the simulation she solely considered how the border issues impacted her own life: “My parents don’t want me to visit often because of the danger of getting robbed, assaulted, or even taken.” However, after the simulation, she was able to sympathize with the “families living in dangerous situations,” revealing a shift from an etic to emic perspective. As she gained access to another frame of reference through becoming a U.N. Representative and hearing the many stories of others in the simulated scenario, this process facilitated her ability to entertain a view in which she related to those impacted by these issues as opposed to considering how it influenced her own life personally. Post-simulation she was better able to appreciate how certain circumstances might be difficult for others. Another learner who took on the role of the U.S. President
shifted from associating Mexicans with “poverty” toward a recognition of them as people with generally accepted human desires: “Mexican culture wants peace and doesn’t like to be associated with poverty and violence.” Such a shift points to her progression from an initial distanced perspective toward a more nuanced understanding of Mexicans as people who, like anyone, simply seek peace and justice. Thus, by engaging imaginatively with the contextual anchors of their characters, these learners’ imaginative reach expanded and by the end of the simulation they were able to identify, broaden, and reassess previously unquestioned beliefs through being exposed to new perspectives.

4.3.1.2 Taking creative liberties: Learners fashion civilian and law enforcement characters’ pasts and bring their missions to life. Five other learners accessed and reflected on the information from their civilian and law enforcement characters, and subsequently used it as a starting point to build them. They selected and amplified certain aspects of their roles based on their own interpretations and inclinations. For example, the maquiladora worker conceptualized her role to be a fighter for change, stating she selected a “protest photo [on Google Plus] to send a message” that she was “trying to change things.” Two other learners emphasized that their character goals involved carrying out “backdoor deals,” with one stressing he considered himself “a lion trying to win” and the other transforming his character into a “mobster” and “dictator,” in alignment with what they perceived to be underhanded character objectives. Another learner turned his character into a success story. Because his character sheet included attributes such as “strong” and a “difficult” personality, he envisioned the role as someone who “came up from poor” and became the “police chief.” The Mexican activist and poet decided to accentuate the poet side of his role, explaining emphatically that he
was also a poet, “Oh my god, yeah, I write poetry and fiction, non-fiction. I'm a creative writer,” which contributed to his decision to “infuse” these attributes into his character. These learners found a niche within their character information with which they connected (“I liked being able to create a persona and emphasize certain aspects”), and as such, they were able to fashion stories, add attributes, and ascribe details to their characters in ways that they believed to be congruent with their understanding of them. This process involved them making choices regarding how they would expand on the character information given to them. They used their own knowledge in tandem with the contextual pillars situating each role in the border scenario.

Data from these learners’ pre and post comments suggest that a sense of palpable involvement with these personas and the circumstances contributed to their sense of deepened understanding and connection with the border situation by the end of the simulation. Prior to the simulation, these five learners associated stereotypical images of Mexico. As displayed in Table 4.5, most prevalent in their comments were the ideas of drugs and cartels as well as vague references to culture. The general pre simulation impressions of these learners are largely comparable to those of the aforementioned political characters.

Likewise, as seen in Table 4.6, all learners in this group homogenized Mexican people, characterizing them as either “hard-working” or “family-oriented,” which suggests a distanced and stereotyped, yet mostly positive, view.
Table 4.5  
*Learners’ (Civilian Characters) Pre impressions of Mexico*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-impressions of Mexico</th>
<th>5 learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drugs/cartels</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture (‘vibrant’/ ‘lively’)</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beach</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence/danger/crime</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal immigration</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6  
*Learners’ (Civilian Characters) Pre impressions of Mexicans*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-impressions of Mexicans</th>
<th>5 learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard-working</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-oriented</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the simulation, these learners highlighted experiential aspects of enacting their characters, with one learner explaining that his character “transformed and came alive” and he started “to think like what I would do in this situation.” Another echoed this idea, insisting that adopting a new identity “helped us do things we wouldn’t normally do,” explaining “if we were ourselves we might have behaved differently.” These comments suggest that by adopting a new perspective and then taking action as these individuals, learners temporarily experienced the world differently through actions and
thoughts. Engaging with a co-constructed alternate identity experientially allowed them to operate as these personas, thus, evolving in their connections with the people they represented, as indicated by the comment “it gave me a more human lens through which to see the country and its people;” another explained he “empathized” with the people “in the cities with drugs and violence.” This newfound connection also manifested in heightened interest as one learner indicated prior to the simulation she would have been unlikely to watch a TV program on the maquiladora factories, but afterward she stated, “that would be really interesting to watch.” Another highlighted that before the simulation he didn’t “have any idea what’s going on down at the border,” but afterward he felt he was “involved” with the people and circumstances. This sense of interest and involvement suggests that the simulation helped learners see links between their own lives and the situation at the border, a general theme that emerged among these learners’ post remarks.

4.3.2 The Absence of Imagination: Learners who Base Characters on Their own Lives Remain Disconnected From the Border Circumstances. The six learners who primarily used aspects from their own lives to build their character identities mostly circumvented any inclusion of real-world anchors provided to them on their character sheets. Instead, these learners accessed arbitrary areas of their own present or future lives to build their characters. In comparing their pre and post remarks, these learners showed limited or no shift in their interpretation of or connection with the US-Mexico border situation. Notably, over half of these learners (4) were also the learners that considered the simulation in terms of academic skills development as opposed to authenticity.
One learner explained that her character represented “a fake life based on what [she] might want in the future,” specifying that her alternate identity was married because she “obviously want[s] to be married” and originated in “California” because that was her “real life” and she “love[s] California.” Another stated, “I was just kind of like, [Shauna^2], in twenty years, what are you doing?” These remarks highlight how the learners built their identities primarily through the lens of their own lives. Other learners in this group focused less on their future lives and instead used their current lives as a point of reference. One remarked that her character liked to “create seven layer cakes” because her “dad is a chef” and she planned parties with him, another revealed that her character was in college “with short black hair” because it reflected her own appearance, and yet another explained that his character had a pet turtle because he owned “a tortoise” in his real life. The rationale provided by these learners regarding their character choices revealed limited imaginative reach with regard to the cultural context situating their characters within the border situation. Instead they seemed to simply superimpose characteristics from their own lives to flesh out their identities, a practice that marked these learners’ approach to building their roles. Considering that a majority of the learners who approached their characters in this manner were also those who considered the simulation through an academic lens as opposed to an authentic one, this trend may suggest that this initial disconnect between learners and the contextual anchors provided through their character roles has incidence on their overall impressions of the experience at its culmination.

In examining these learners’ pre and post comments, a pattern arose indicating that minimal or no heightened connection to the border circumstances. Prior to the

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^2 Learner names have been modified to protect anonymity
simulation, these learners’ perceptions of Mexico largely aligned with other groups. As illustrated in Table 4.7, the same topics reappear again, indicating both positive and negative stereotypes associated with the country.

Table 4.7

*Learners’ (Political/Civilian Mixed) Pre impressions of Mexico*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-impressions of Mexico</th>
<th>6 learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beach/Warm weather</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture (‘vibrant’/ ‘lively’)</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs/cartels</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence/danger/crime</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal immigration</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican flag</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding these learners incoming views of Mexicans, three learners avoided mentioning specific attributes of Mexicans, instead stating phrases like “they’re people just like the rest of us” and “I don’t have an impression, positive or negative,” citing personal experience with Mexicans as the reason for their comments. The other three generalized Mexican people, associating various positive and negative characteristics with the group, as shown in Table 4.8. Although the negative comments (i.e. low education, rude, illegal) originate from only two students, it is notable that such unfavorable descriptions were not present in the other two groups’ statements.
Table 4.8

*Learners’ (Political/Civilian Mixed) Pre impressions of Mexicans*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-impressions of Mexicans</th>
<th>6 learners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hard-working</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low level of education</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rude</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendly</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the simulation, these learners’ remarks were characterized by the notable absence of any impact the simulation experience had on their views of the border or Mexicans. Instead their comments related to acquiring new information (one learner indicated she became aware of the existence of the two border cities), or nondescript generalizations (“Money is the motivator for everything”). Their comments focused primarily on other aspects of the simulation such as achieving their goals (“I liked having an objective in the game”) or the target language (“I can speak Spanish better than the other kids”). These data suggest that reaching their goals and practicing the target language had greater incidence on their learning experience than engaging with the real or potential communities represented in the simulation. By emphasizing isolated aspects of the simulation (language, objectives) and keeping the contextual circumstances at a distance, these learners embraced academic and intellectual aspects of their learning, and affective involvement remains elusive. Data suggest that because the stories of the characters did not become germane to these learners, they were not well positioned to reassess their views on or relationships with the communities or border situation.
4.4 Factors Inhibiting Some Learners’ Sense of Connection With the US-Mexico Border Circumstances and Communities

Because the six learners that superimposed their own lives onto their character roles and did not develop a heightened connection with simulated scenario represented approximately one third of learners, I searched their post comments to understand potential reasons behind this disconnect. Two common themes emerged: five learners stated that they preferred more or less guidance during the simulation and four continued to rely on their previous experiences with Mexicans to determine their views. All learners appeared in one of these two categories, with three of them present in both groups.

4.4.1 A Desire for More (or Less) Direction During the Simulation

Five learners highlighted that for them, the simulation was “confusing,” “complicated,” and “vague.” They elaborated on such comments by offering their own suggestions on how to improve the simulation: “we were not given enough information” and “I disliked being limited.” A majority of these comments show that learners felt a preference for more guidance (4 learners), with one learner desiring greater degrees of freedom during the simulation. Those in the former category wanted clear instructions and a level of organization likely similar to that found in a teacher-fronted classroom structured around textbook activities. The simulation indeed involved several curricular changes and evolving expectations of learners. For example, although it began as a teacher-directed learning setting, by the second week of the simulation, learners were tasked with taking on a more active role as they developed their characters. Likewise, in week three, the learner-directed classes started, again shifting the classroom dynamic and affording them more autonomy. These shifts left learners feeling unsure of the best ways to proceed, as the simulation did not offer step-by-step instructions often found in other
FL class activities. Data suggest that the uncertainty associated with these tasks may have inhibited their ability to become entrenched in the stories present within the characters and circumstances.

Contrastingly, the other learner embraced the simulation-based curriculum and, instead of desiring more guidance, indicated that he preferred greater degrees of liberty to operate in the simulation in ways that transcended reality and allowed him to enter into a fun fantasy world. He initially oriented to the character adoption process as an opportunity for infinite creativity to carry out his own agenda. However, upon realizing that the contextual pillars firmly grounded his character and the simulation in a real-world scenario with difficult dilemmas, he became less enthralled. He explained that when he realized he “HAD to follow [his] criteria” the simulation became “unenjoyable” for him, which points to a resistance to connecting with the circumstances and people present in the simulation.

4.4.2 A Perception of the Simulation as Artificial: Learners Remain Focused on Previous Real-life Experiences With Mexicans to Determine Stances

After the simulation, four learners reiterated the accuracy of their pre-simulation perceptions of Mexicans, highlighting that their previous exposure to Mexicans continued to be the primary authority determining their views.

For example, one explained that he had grown up “with many Mexicans around school” and had lived “alongside Mexicans for 10 years.” Another emphasized that she “had more exposure with Mexico than the average American.” By considering themselves to be already quite knowledgeable of Mexicans based on previous experience and exposure, these learners continued to rely on those experiences, indicating little or no impact of the simulation on their perceptions. One of the learners explained post
simulation that she believed the stereotypes she had formed in California about Mexicans “were mostly accurate,” which suggests that interacting with the simulation did not impact her pre-conceived perceptions. Another learner’s comment that the simulation topics “were all fabricated images” points to an entrenched disconnect between the classroom and the real world. In other words, although the simulation content was based largely on the historical and present-day circumstances surrounding the border, the term “fabricated” suggests that the mere inclusion of information in an academic context may render it less valid or legitimate for some learners, particularly if the information presented offers a perspective that is unfamiliar or that diverges from their own experiences related to the topics. These data also insinuate that there may be a sense that authenticity or genuineness and a classroom setting are mutually exclusive that could be deeply ingrained in some learners.

Two of the four learners in this category indicated a perception of the simulation as authentic, which was an unexpected finding considering that none of these learners displayed an increased emotional connection to the border communities, which seemed crucial to creating a sense of authenticity for a majority of learners. I re-examined the data from these two learners to understand this seemingly contradictory finding and discovered that they demonstrated high degrees of initiative to fight against injustice for two marginalized characters, a practice avoided by all others in this category. To recall, engaging in assisting others who were facing potentially detrimental outcomes had no direct bearing on these learners’ own success. Thus, opting to invest energy in such initiatives was entirely of their own accord, suggesting that the stories of these characters engendered in them a personal sense of moral responsibility to do so. I posit that
becoming deeply entrenched in these moral issues did in fact affect these two learners’ perceptions of the simulation by adding the missing personal element. However, due to their extensive exposure to Mexicans in their hometowns, this engagement did not prove sufficient to change views that they had developed over years of exposure to and interactions with Mexicans. For others in this group (two), data suggest no evidence of affective engagement.

4.5 Discussion

To answer RQ1, which focused on learners’ overall impressions of their participation in the US-Mexico role-immersion simulation, findings suggest that approximately two thirds of learners perceived the experience as authentic and akin to engaging in real-world encounters while the other one third considered it in terms of an academic exercise. To explore how elements of the simulation led learners to these divergent perceptions, RQ2 examined the ways in which learners recognized and acted on affordances for deep engagement (i.e., agency) with the content and their peers and RQ3 centered on affordances for personal involvement with the characters and their stories. Data indicated that all but two learners became increasingly agentively engaged in the simulation through progressing to high degrees of critical thinking, problem solving, inquiry, and proactive advocacy efforts in the target language. Also, results showed that roughly two thirds of learners evolved in their capacity to empathize with communities involved in the border situation through becoming entangled in the stories of the characters. That is, the fates of their characters became personally consequential to learners. Regarding RQ4, which examined potential reasons behind some learners’ inability to make personal connections with the simulated scenario, data revealed that
uncertainty regarding how to meet expectations in the new curricular format as well as
pre-conceived perceptions based on their real-world encounters with Mexicans played a role.

A holistic view of the data revealed strong correlations between learners who
activated intellectual capacities (RQ2) and became personal involved (RQ3) in their
learning and those who considered it as an authentic experience (8 of 16 learners).
Likewise, almost all of learners that tapped into only one of the two (i.e., intellectual or
personal) considered the simulation from an academic perspective. The exception to this
trend involved two learners that did not progress toward empathy and, yet, described the
simulation in terms of authenticity. Data suggest that these two learners found an
alternate avenue through which to activate an emotional element in their learning
experience, which may have contributed to their overall sense of authenticity.

4.5.1 Creating the Conditions for Authenticity

Findings from the present study suggest that role-immersion can create conditions
for authenticity in a classroom setting by fashioning a set of real-world circumstances,
incorporating captivating content, and creating a clear individual incentive for learners to
immerse themselves into these elements. Thus, considerable attention to developing a
pedagogical design that promotes these phenomena in the classroom is integral to
cultivating authenticity. In particular, data suggest that pedagogies must encourage
learners to undergo two significant transitions, both of which may be unfamiliar and
uncomfortable for them within a classroom setting. The first shift involves learners
moving from a passive reliance on the teacher and textbook toward an active role in co-
managing their learning experience. Data revealed that such a transition does not come
naturally and only transpired in the present study through incorporating a degree of interwoven individual and collective responsibilities and goals that learners had to achieve learners. Creating the conditions (i.e., personal and group goals) to incentivize learners to take charge of their learning in a socially oriented context as well as giving them the flexibility to do so in their own way is likely to help facilitate this transition toward a more agentive learner.

Second, learners must be afforded opportunities for personal or emotional engagement with the content, a sensory experience that is rarely present in classroom learning environments (Wells, 1999). In other words, in addition to being held accountable to engage with the content and their peers, the content itself must be conducive to tapping into emotional realms. This affective element proved an integral component in the role-immersion simulation to creating authenticity in the classroom and supports Kohonen et al.’s (2001) claim that true experiential learning must involve “both communicatively and personally meaningful processes and contents” (p. 4). In the present study, personal meaning emerged for learners from interacting intensively with the real-world stories and circumstances of the characters in the simulation, a process that brought the scenario and communities to life.

Findings suggest links between authenticity and a full sensory experience in an academic environment and adopting an ecological vision of the classroom offered insights as to why some learners were able to perceive and pick up on affordances to make these two transitions and some were not. The nature of an affordance is that it is simply an opportunity available to be seized, but learners must recognize it and then choose to do something with it if learning potential is to be realized. Data from this study
suggest that while affordances arose for all learners, the unpredictable and organic nature of learner interactions inevitably affected when, how, and with what frequency they presented themselves. In other words, by giving learners significant degrees of freedom to decide how they engage with the content, their characters, and their peers, it is impossible to predict or know with certainty the specific ways in which their interactions will lead to affordances for engagement and learning. Yet, findings from this study also show that these are precisely the conditions that can contribute to more authentic and personally meaningful encounters, as all learners in the present study made one of the two transitions and half of them were able to make both. These results coincide with Widdowson’s (1996) claim that learners “need to be induced to invest the language with their own personalities and purposes […] which will give point to their learning” (p. 67). The paradox in adopting such a vision for classroom learning is that curricular approaches that aim to promote investment on the part of learners can develop conditions to create affordances for personally relevant meaning-making, but learners must still opt to act on them in order for the language, content, and learning to take hold.

4.5.2 Cultivating Opportunities for Agency set Learners on a Trajectory Toward Depth of Engagement

Within role-immersion, one of the primary objectives of tasking learners with adopting a character role with specific interests in the scenario is to promote a heightened sense of personal responsibility to cultivate agency within their learning. In other words, the aim was to promote a “process in which students intentionally and somewhat proactively try to personalize and otherwise enrich both what is to be learned and the conditions and circumstances under which it is to be learned” (Reeve & Tseng, 2011, p. 258). Thus, as learners in the present study engaged meaningfully with the language,
content, and others in the learning environment in order to reach their individualized objectives, their learning became intentional and more personal; thus, the individual agendas indeed promoted agency. Although almost all learners began by demonstrating a high level of passivity, they quickly realized that inaction would not lead to reaching their goals. Thus, the character objectives served as an external impetus for them to advance toward elevated engagement. Although the particular ways they engaged in the simulation to achieve their goals differed, the classroom became imbued with learners voluntarily posing questions, offering self-generated ideas, taking stances, and confronting others to promote their platforms, all of which display high levels of agency.

Data also revealed an unanticipated affordance for agentive progression that arose, as approximately one-third of learners began advocating actively against perceived injustices. What is interesting about this phenomenon is that it was entirely intrinsically motivated. In other words, while the character objectives created a teacher-imposed incentive for learners to progress toward higher levels of agency, as they had to achieve their objectives, learners’ decisions to invest their energies in promoting fair outcomes for other characters stemmed from an internal sense of moral responsibility that emerged as they interacted with others. Although this unintended affordance for increased agency would have likely remained unavailable without the initial accountability created by the individual objectives, it is striking because it was wholly learner-initiated, which can be considered to be of a higher quality because it tapped into learners’ own interests and passions to such an extent that they felt personally compelled to take action. These data reveal how certain circumstances can create a rich convergence of active intellectual and emotional involvement in the learning process (van Lier, 2008; Wells, 1999).
In order to understand the broader impact of learner agency on the overall learning ecology, I also examined the collective agentive trends through the lens of complexity theory. Adopting a vision of the classroom as a complex system allowed a global pattern to emerge, which revealed that as some learners began taking initiative (i.e., demonstrating agency), they infused their intellectual and creative energies into the classroom environment. These energies (i.e., new ideas or solutions, questions, or alternate points of views to consider, etc.) then provided additional opportunities for others to do something with (van Lier, 2004a). Although individual initiative-taking instance appeared to be idiosyncratic, looking at such instances from a macro perspective through the lens of complexity theory brought to light a collective shift that revealed an overall increasing agentive trajectory. What is notable about this finding is that, while learner action and interactions are not linear or predictable, data suggest that when the learning conditions create affordances for agency, and learners perceive and act on those affordances, this process has a positive impact on the overall depth of engagement of the learners in the classroom, as learners respond to agency with agency and create collaborative learning events.

4.5.3 Imaginative Engagement With Real-world Personas (i.e., Character Roles) Create Potential for Personal Involvement With Unfamiliar Communities.

Ahn (2015) insisted that promoting participation, solidarity, and empathy across cultures is key to helping learners progress toward global citizenship. Findings from the present study offer empirical insights on how to lead learners to evolve toward these more global outlooks, specifically through engagement with their character roles. Data reveal that as learners built their characters, one-third simply ascribed aspects of their own lives to their roles, showing little attempt at engagement with these personas; the
other two-thirds of learners tried to comprehend their unfamiliar personas by identifying small areas of common ground or by turning to familiar stereotypes. The latter group’s approach allowed them to form an initial, albeit superficial, relationship with their characters, which proved important because these were also the learners that reevaluated their stance toward the border scenario and became personally involved with the issues and communities. The type of character role (political vs. civilian) influenced these learners’ approach creating their roles. For example, those who adopted civilian or law enforcement characters (i.e., Mexican activist, maquiladora worker, Global Contractor, Juarez Police Chief, wealthy Zaragoza family member) selected and heavily emphasized and amplified particular facets of their role to which they most closely related. The learners who took on political figures (i.e., Mexican and U.S. Presidents, both U.N. Representatives, Secretary of State) largely used political stereotypes as such conceptions were accessible and comprehensible to them. These learners’ attempts to understand their characters through stereotypes or familiar tangible attributes supported Smith and Mackie’s (2000) assertion that stereotypes and generalizations can serve as a coping strategy that enables us to make sense of the unfamiliar. By initially finding an avenue through which to relate to their unfamiliar roles by focusing on areas of their character they could relate to as a point of departure and then further developing this persona through the imagination, these learners engaged in a process of envisioning the potential lives of these people. Based on the results, this process then set them on a path toward becoming involved with these personas and the scenario. The other learners, who adopted an inward orientation to character building focusing primarily on themselves did not form deepened bonds or new relationships with the border communities. Findings suggest that
the type of role may have contributed to their orientation to character development, as over half of learners in this group adopted less prominent political figures (both Juarez and El Paso Mayors, DEA Agent, Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs) when compared to the Mexican and U.S. Presidents or U.N. Representatives from the other category, which in turn affected their ability to develop empathy or not. Learners may not be able to relate to lower profile political leaders or establish connections with them, as they have likely had less exposure to the lives of such individuals.

These results point to the powerful role that stereotypes and establishing common ground can play in helping learners to establish a gateway to connect their classroom experiences to new real-world communities. The learners who were able to initially envision and wrap their minds around at least some aspects of a character very unfamiliar to them were better positioned to empathetically relate to these “individuals” as real people at the conclusion of the simulation. Fostering learners’ involvement and interest in other cultural communities is not typically at the forefront of FL curricular design and modifying the way educators conceptualize and create curricula for lower-level language programs in favor of these aims would constitute a considerable culture shift. However, ACTFL’s inclusion of Intercultural Can-Do Statements in the recent 2017 revision of the document offers a guide and highlights the increasing importance being placed on culture in FL learning. In the present study, as learners forged connections with the simulated scenario and the communities represented, they developed solidarity and an interest in the fate of those impacted, which aligns with advancing toward increased “awareness, sensitivity, empathy, and knowledge of the perspective of others” (ACTFL, 2014, ¶ 8) and promoting global citizenry.
4.5.4 A Persistent Disconnect: Some Learners Continue to Separate Academic Learning and the Real World

Data from learners who did not display a newfound involvement in the simulation circumstances and communities highlight two challenges that need to be considered when implementing role immersion: the potential for learners to feel uncertainty regarding a classroom structure that deviates considerably from familiar FL curricula and the impact of learners’ previous experiences with the communities represented in the simulation. Regarding the former, learners have developed a degree of familiarity with the structure and format of a FL classroom guided by a textbook, which is generally characterized by step-by-step instructions, clear right-wrong answers, and a consistent focus, implicit or explicit, on the linguistic components under study. That is, if learners work to understand the concepts presented and are able to follow directions and identify or produce the correct answer, they are likely to receive a good grade and, thus, achieve success. By adopting a curriculum that no longer adheres to these norms, such as the role-immersion simulation, learners may perceive their classroom as unfamiliar and foreign, which may then give rise to sensations such as anxiety and insecurity, both of which can hinder them from engaging fully in the experience (Arnold & Brown, 1999). The simulation indeed deviated from the typical classroom structure, adopting an approach that more aligns with Kramsch’s (2014) call to promote “fluid discourse processes as comparison, contrast, analysis, interpretation, inferencing, and de- and recontextualization” (p. 308). Such a shift problematized and blurred the definition of success to which learners were accustomed as well as the path to achieving it. In other words, learners were tasked with considering complex issues at a high level of critical engagement and expressing their emerging ideas as they interacted with others in the target language without an overt
focus on the linguistic elements, which led them to feel a sense of ambiguity about how these processes facilitated their FL learning. Furthermore, a learner could feasibly fight vigorously to achieve his or her character objectives and still “lose” in the simulation (though significant effort would likely still result in a favorable grade or score). The simulation also complicates notions of “success,” as one learner’s victory may constitute another learner’s defeat. Thus, I submit that most or all learners likely encountered moments of anxiety as they engaged in this new curriculum. However, in alignment with Dewaele and MacIntyre’s (2014) finding that learners find enjoyment when they feel they have mastered an aspect of FL, some learners were able to overcome the anxiety as they experienced themselves successfully using the language in ways that mirrored practices they might need in a real-world setting. However, the other learners were unable to move beyond a feeling of anxiety, as they remained focused solely on linguistic aspects of their language learning, which were no longer explicit and overtly pinpointed in the curriculum. For these learners, their adherence to a particular view of what classroom language learning should prioritize (i.e., clearly articulated linguistic aspects) may have hindered them from fully overcoming the anxiety associated with the new approach. In order to help assuage learner anxiety, incorporating brief reflective activities to help learners make a connection between their practices in the classroom and how they may facilitate language fluency could be implemented. For example, encouraging learners to keep a running list of relevant vocabulary they are learning or highlighting different verb tenses in context during the simulation that correspond with information covered during the semester could provide a degree of familiarity that might help learners make connections between the simulation practices and their language learning.
The second challenge brought to light by data from learners who did not develop empathy toward the border situation aligns with Drewelow’s (2011a) finding that learners bring their own previous experiences and opinions about the target language cultures or communities under study. Depending on how entrenched they are, one academic experience may not be sufficient to alter them. Although the simulation was imbued with artifacts representative of a version of the border reality (i.e., circumstances, communities, stories), some learners perceived these ideas as artificial when compared to their own encounters with Mexicans. Such a finding aligned with Drewelow (2011b), who found that learners may selectively perceive information in their own terms such that it simply reinforces their already pre-conceived views as opposed to allowing the new insights to potentially transform their perspectives. However, data from two learners in this category also suggest that transformation is an ongoing process that must be continually nurtured. Although these two learners did not shift in their perceptions of Mexicans or the border, they considered their classroom encounters in terms of authenticity, which suggested that the language and content became, to some extent, consequential to them. This is an important first step, as learners are generally predisposed to anticipate a limited connection between their classroom experiences and real-life practices (Chavez, 2011). These data highlight how role-immersion can help learners begin to see connections between their classroom and the real world, which can help pave the way for future classroom practices to potentially challenge their worldviews. However, as Kohonen (n.d.) asserted, “theoretical concepts will become part of the individual's frame of reference only after he has experienced them meaningfully at
an emotional level” (p. 4); thus, classroom practice must also offer ample opportunities for holistic and in-depth engagement to promote such meaningful engagement.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The purpose of the present study was to explore if and how the US-Mexico role-immersion simulation created conditions for authenticity inside the FL classroom. To do so, I conceptualized authenticity in terms of quality and depth, aiming to create the conditions for a high-quality experience through a rich contextualized scenario and opportunities for learners to become deeply engaged within that scenario. Grounded in this understanding, higher degrees of authenticity may coincide with whole-person learner engagement in a robust real-world context with significant meaning-making potential. Specifically, my goal was to promote a holistic language learning experience through encouraging both critical intellectual engagement with the complex border issues and personal involvement in the stories of the real and imagined communities represented in the simulation.

In Chapter 4, I examined how learners perceived the process of participating in the simulation, with a particular emphasis on authenticity. I then looked at the specific conditions and practices that contributed to learner impressions. Adopting an ecological vision of the classroom, I explored if and how the simulation offered learners affordances for intellectual, social, and affective (i.e., personal) engagement and how different combinations of the simulation elements and the dynamic interplay between them impacted learner perceptions of their classroom experience.

In this chapter, I expand on the insights discussed in Chapter 4 by taking a broader perspective and discussing the findings of this study in terms of the general
contributions they offer related to envisioning new possibilities for holistic and integrated curricula in FL learning. I also specify how role-immersion simulations can be advantageous for the field of FL education, particularly at the intermediate level, and detail the crucial elements for the successful development and implementation of a role-immersion simulation. I conclude this chapter with pedagogical and theoretical implications of the current investigation as well as a description of limitations and suggestions for future research.

5.1 Role-Immersion Simulations: Creating the Conditions for Learners to Envision Themselves as Authentic Users of the Language

Kearney (2010) explained that within the FL classroom setting “opportunities for true immersion are undoubtedly being missed” (p. 333). Findings from the present study indicate significant promise for the US-Mexico role-immersion simulation in this area, as most learners (10 out of 16) likened their simulation experience to real-world encounters and interactions in abroad settings. In other words, these learners gained a sense that they were interacting in an authentic target language environment because the simulation afforded them opportunities for meaning making and situated communicative practice and incentivized them to act on these opportunities, which brought the imagined alternate world to life. Specifically, by participating in the process of “having authorship of [their] actions, having the voice that speaks [their] words, and being emotionally connected to [their] actions and speech” (van Lier, 2004a, p. 8), they began to envisage themselves as users of the language in a realistic realm. The simulation presented conditions that facilitated a temporary transformation from seeing themselves as language learners in an academic setting to experiencing themselves as language users, able to navigate simulated real-world encounters. Notably, they had the opportunity to become agents of
their own learning, no longer passively complying with academic and teacher-driven norms, but actively making situated decisions regarding how to act and express themselves in an alternate cultural world that they collectively brought to life. As learners engaged critically with the language and cultural phenomena, they participated in a trial run of sorts for future, potential, and imagined real-world encounters. Facilitating learners’ engagement in such practices can contribute to their ongoing evolution toward visualizing themselves as viable participants in multicultural and multilingual communities.

However, in addition to creating the conditions for learners to envision new possibilities regarding their relationship with the language and potential target language communities, Kinginger (2008) noted that the ways learners “do and do not imagine themselves as users of the languages they study ultimately matter very much” (p. 108). She suggested that even in a study abroad setting, learners are not always ready, able, or willing to embrace a conceptualization of themselves as real-world participants in the target language communities. This idea highlights that activating learners’ capacity to engage deeply with the language and culture in ways that become personally meaningful cannot be reduced to a pedagogical formula, but also depends on the learners. In the present study, approximately one-third of learners (6 out of 16) did not perceive their simulation experience in terms of authenticity. Although the curricular format and practices shifted, these learners remained firmly grounded in the academic environment. This orientation, one into which learners have undoubtedly been socialized, suggests that some learners may not be mentally and affectively prepared to experience their classroom setting as a holistic space with opportunities to activate their agency and connect with
other communities in real and meaningful ways. Indeed, the simulation may have been
the first instance in which some of these learners had ever been exposed to such a
possibility. Because data indicate that high intellectual and affective engagement jointly
contributed to most learners’ sense of authenticity, I examine ways to further promote
both types of engagement for all learners in subsequent sections.

5.2 The Potential of Role-immersion Simulations to Promote Socially
Oriented and Intellectual Initiative

Van Lier (2008) asserted that “learning depends on the activity and the initiative
of the learner” (p. 163) and correlated elevated degrees of initiative with increased
agency. In particular, the high levels of agency, which coincide with maximum learning
potential, emerge in instances when individual learner initiative is present, but also
necessarily involve socially mediated activity, as “agencies are always co-constructed”
(Pavlenko, 2002, p. 293). The findings in this study support such an interrelationship
between social activity and initiative, as learners only began increasing their agency as
the peer-to-peer interactions ensued. In other words, although learners were provided
with thought-provoking content and given involved tasks to complete, they initially
demonstrated low or medium levels of agency, mostly responding when called upon and
restating information they had been provided. However, upon continuing to engage with
their peers, learners began to critically question and reflect on the information, devise
new ideas, and become strong and vocal advocates for their stances. Of course, the
simulation content and set-up aimed to draw learners in, but alone it proved insufficient
in provoking learners toward deeper levels of intellectual and social engagement.

The peer discussions also gave way to increased agency in an unexpected way, as
some learners became cognizant of and captivated by moral dilemmas that arose. This
increased awareness of injustices prompted learners to vigorously fight for fair outcomes by debating and confronting their classmates even though such actions had no impact on their personal success. This finding coincides with Cammarata’s (2016) claim that to “stimulate students’ motivation to engage willingly and wholeheartedly in the study of a language both within and beyond the school setting” (p. 9) it is imperative that curricula favor themes “linked to social justice, ecojustice, ethics, rights, and power.” (p. 10). Data confirm that these types of topics can be motivating for learners.

The results related to learner interaction in the present study support the claim that “meanings are constructed between rather than within individuals and are shaped by the social activity in which they arise and the collaborative nature of the interaction” (Gibbons, 2003, p. 268). In other words, rich contextualization that links to the world and learners’ lives outside the classroom is essential to connecting their classroom experiences to other living communities and cultures and helping them develop new bonds; however, of equal or greater importance is creating the conditions to promote social activity, which is what gives the content personal meaning. It was through interactions that learners began voluntarily increasing their intellectual and personal involvement in the learning setting, which accords well with Carnes’ (2014) assertion that role-immersion can access “the often untapped wellsprings of motivation and imagination” (p. 13) in ways that can “revitalize our classrooms” (p. 14). Role-immersion offers an option where individual learner agency, social interaction, and real-world phenomena converge in ways that open up learning opportunities that, without the presence of all three, may remain unavailable.
5.3 The Path Toward Empathy: The Dual Importance of Establishing Common Ground and Helping Learners “Experience” Target Culture Communities

Drewelow (2015) and Itakura (2004) contended that using stereotypes as a starting point for learners to engage with other cultures can facilitate the “seemingly impossible task of learning a new language and discovering new patterns and behaviors” (Drewelow, 2015, p. 73). Data from the current study reveal that learners who developed their characters by turning to and expanding on facets of the role they could relate to, including stereotypes, were also those who progressed toward a more intimate sense of involvement with the border scenario. Contrastingly, the learners who built their characters as an extension of themselves demonstrated minimal or no progression in their solidarity with the border circumstances and communities.

These strong correlations suggest that helping learners progress toward empathy is a dual process. It is not just embodying someone else that will lead learners to develop empathy; they also need opportunities to consider and imagine the lives of such unfamiliar people. In this study, building learners’ characters provided an opportunity to do so, but not all learners were able to capitalize on it. In other words, because learners knew very little about the people these characters represented, they needed to first “get to know” them in a way. To do so, most used stereotypes and areas of shared understanding as a point of departure. Although stereotypes often conjure up negative connotations in FL learning, the learners that emphasized stereotypical familiar facets of their characters were in fact trying to bridge the divide they perceived between themselves and this extremely foreign persona. This finding supports Kohonen et al. (2001), who asserted that by initially trying to grasp the essence of who their characters were through stereotypes, learners were later able to trigger “changes in thinking” and “stimulate
development for [their] ability for empathy” (p. 89). Contrastingly, the process of simply projecting learners’ own lives onto the characters proved unfavorable in promoting such changes or development, even though they also embodied these personas.

These findings demonstrate the potential for role-immersion to promote deepened understanding of and involvement with unfamiliar cultural communities, but also highlight the importance of first providing learners with ample opportunities to contemplate and envision who people in the communities might be. In particular, results point to the integral role stereotypes and relatable criteria can play in setting learners on a trajectory toward cultivating increased connections with the communities represented. To help learners identify an aspect of their characters they can relate to, incorporating minor modifications such as, for example, including an assignment where learners research an actual individual similar to their character, could help foster a connection. Such a task might uncover new information and ideas that could assist learners in creating associations between their own understanding of the world and the lives of their characters. Although not a substantial curricular change, considering alternatives to help learners who do not readily recognize a connection between themselves and their character can help set them down a path toward developing personal bonds with the cultures and communities present in the simulation.

It is also imperative not to let learners stagnate in initial superficial or stereotypical conceptions. Learners’ subsequent embodiment of their roles in the simulation is what allowed them to develop a deeper and more complex view of the scenario and the people involved. That is, for possibilities for new perspectives and relationships to emerge for learners, they must first activate their imagination and be able
to connect with the potential lives of these personas, possibly using stereotypes. Then, they need opportunities to experience the challenges and stories of the characters firsthand through enactment. This dual process is what can expose new understandings that pave the way for personal bonds with other communities and is what helped a majority of learners in the present study evolve toward empathy.

5.4 Components of a Successful Role-immersion Simulation

Based on the findings in the present study, a set of fundamental criteria emerged as necessary to serve as the basis for developing and carrying out a successful role-immersion simulation. That is, to promote intellectual and emotional engagement and cultivate a sense in learners that they are participating in an alternate and authentic realm, consideration should be given to three vital components: the cultural scenario, the character roles, and the individual and collective goals.

First, in order to create the potential for the classroom to transform into a community filled with vigor and inquiry, the simulation scenario must be complex, multifaceted, and grounded in real-world phenomena. The US-Mexico role-immersion simulation was based in part on RTTP pedagogy, which incorporates many diverse perspectives, issues, and sides. Similarly, a role-immersion simulation must consider scenarios that might encompass the breadth and depth needed to create a rich context within which all learners (i.e., characters) can become entrenched.

Second, because all learners take on a unique character with particular interests and these roles provide the foundation through which learners interact in the simulation, it is important that significant contextual information be included in the role descriptions. In other words, in addition to learning about the contextual scenario and circumstances
through equal exposure to an array of sources (i.e., reading texts, watching videos, exposure and discussion of images, researching information from the Internet), the character descriptions also provide vital details to which only certain learners have initial access. As such, the only option for learners to fully understand the various aspects of the scenario is through engagement with each other, which becomes important if learners wish to achieve success in the simulation. By situating much of the crucial information needed to operate well in the simulation within the character roles, learners quickly realize that their peers are resources of equal or greater importance than details provided by other sources. This phenomenon contributes to learners’ willingness to engage proactively in discussion and debate, which is an important component of the pedagogy.

Lastly, a vital factor in providing the impetus for learners to take initiative and engage in the simulation is assigning both individual and collective goals. All of learners’ individual character objectives must relate to a larger joint goal or outcome. The collective objective is what unites learners and has the potential to create a rich and communal experience. For example, in the US-Mexico role-immersion simulation, learners’ character goals all revolved around some aspect directly or indirectly related to solving the problems of drug trafficking and violence at the border. Each character played an important role in elucidating the different aspects and perspectives related to these diverse and multifaceted problems. However, learners were only prompted to share their ideas and perspectives in light of the collective goal, which was to devise specific and tangible solutions on which learners would vote yes or no. This concrete goal is what led them to grapple with the varied individual objectives, opinions, and interests in the
simulation, because ultimately they had to make a final decision on whether to support the proposals or not.

### 5.5 Possibilities for Role-immersion Simulations Within Intermediate FL Learning

The findings from this study suggest that the US-Mexico role-immersion simulation offers varied and integrated opportunities for socially oriented engagement with the target language and cultural content. Thus, this and other potential role-immersion simulations have significant promise for FL learning, particularly at the intermediate level. That is, role-immersion can address the calls in FL education to incorporate intellectually rigorous curricula that promote in-depth mental engagement and activate personalized involvement on the part of learners, as well as contribute to closing the language-content bifurcation (Byrnes, 2012; Cammarata, 2016; Carnes, 2014; Kohonen et al., 2001; Martel, 2013, 2016; Paesani et al., 2016). Regarding the former, role-immersion offers an avenue to realize the type of in-depth engagement that early versions of CLT emphasized, but that have not always come to fruition in the classroom. Willis Allen and Paesani (2010) summarized these versions of CLT as language learning in which learners are “engaging with other members of a community or social group through oral and written language production and interpretation,” (p. 121) practices that may link communication, culture, and communities in meaningful and integrated ways for learners.

With respect to the language-content gap, organizing segments of the intermediate curriculum with the goal of emphasizing content and prioritizing analytical and critical thinking skills can facilitate learners’ transition to upper-division courses, as incorporating these aims can serve to more cohesively integrate the often disconnected
two-tiered system (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007). Although issues of articulation would undoubtedly need to be addressed, incorporating role-immersion offers a digestible way for departments to begin to address the calls in the field without launching a language program overhaul, which can be a considerable undertaking that departments may not be prepared to tackle. Although I am not suggesting role-immersion as the only avenue through which to address these broad curricular aims, findings indicate that it indeed offers an option to increase coherence within the broader FL curriculum, as it can begin to integrate cultural and literary content at the lower levels of instruction (i.e., intermediate) in ways that are appropriate and meaningful for learners. A majority of learners in the present study felt a personal connection to the topics and communities represented in the simulation, which is important because “[t]he more learner emotions and feelings can be involved in the process, the deeper the learning experiences are” (Kohonen et al., 2001, p. 101). Furthermore, role-immersion prioritizes expanding learners’ interdisciplinary understanding and can complement intermediate FL curricula by integrating “thinking-rich non-linguistic foreign language content” (Martel, 2016, p. 102) and tapping into learners’ higher intellectual capacities in ways that coincide with upper echelons of Bloom’s taxonomy. In sum, the pedagogy offers an option that can activate learner engagement, foster solidarity across cultures, promote global responsibility, and cultivate empathy (Ahn, 2015; Maxim, 2009), goals that directly align with the directions of the field of FL and yet often prove challenging to achieve at the intermediate level.

The US-Mexico simulation offers a pre-set interdisciplinary curricular model appropriate and reproducible for the intermediate language level. Such an option may be
appealing to language program directors and coordinated sections, as it provides a curricular possibility that could be implemented across sections with multiple instructors. Moreover, in light of research that suggests learners are accustomed to their academic experiences being far removed from their everyday lives, one way to begin to help connect classroom practices to learners lives outside the classroom is by shifting our curricular approach to explicitly cultivate such links for learners (Chavez, 2011; Michelson & Dupuy, 2014).

5.6 Pedagogical Implications

With this study, I sought to inform pedagogical practice in the field of FL education by focusing on an approach aimed at promoting an authentic experience for learners in an academic context. Below, I describe insights offered by the present study related to creating such an experience in the classroom. Specifically, I outline the importance of offering a wide range of multimodal opportunities for engagement with the language and content in ways that tap into various senses. I also offer suggestions related to priming learners for any large-scale shift in the academic format, such as moving from a textbook-driven curriculum to a role-immersion simulation. Then, I highlight the importance of both individual initiative and social engagement when aiming to cultivate authenticity in FL learning.

5.6.1 Connecting Academic Experiences With Authenticity: The Need for Diverse Opportunities to Engage With Language and Real-world Content

Findings from the present study suggest that to create authentic experiences, pedagogical design must offer avenues through which learners can engage different aspects of their selves (i.e., intellectually, personally, emotionally) via a variety of modalities within a highly contextualized setting. There were apparent data trends in the
current study suggesting it was largely the learners who activated critical thinking and became personally involved in the simulation that also perceived it as authentic. However, that was not the case for all learners, which suggests that it can be challenging to predict with certainty just how learners will interact with and perceive their learning environment. Thus, in order to promote authenticity and personally meaningful experiences, pedagogies must present diverse options for learners to become intertwined in the learning process. In this study, for example, the character agendas incited urgency on the part of most learners to critically use the target language and content to navigate the scenario. However, one learner did not observably engage higher order thinking skills, yet she connected with the personal stories of the characters and developed empathy toward the groups represented by her role. Still another group, approximately one-third of learners, demonstrated increased intellectual engagement, but did not develop bonds with the communities in the simulations; some of them perceived their experience as authentic while others did not. Although these cases represent the minority, they emphasize the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of each learner and the role that their own inclinations, experiences, and knowledge inevitably play in the evolution of their learning. Yet, they also highlight the need to offer variety and complexity within a pedagogical approach. By incorporating individual characters, a variety of real-world dilemmas, diverse ways in which learners can interact with their peers and the content (i.e., teacher-driven/learner-driven classes and interactions, teacher-provided/learner-researched content, etc.), this pedagogical approach presents many opportunities for learning with the understanding that learners will interpret each activity and interaction differently. By doing so, it can allow learners to pick up on new ideas and perspectives in
the ways that emerge as meaningful to them, and then integrate them into their current repertoire in personally consequential ways, which I submit has significant promise in personalizing and maximizing the FL learning experience.

5.6.2 Preparing Learners for Considerable Curricular Shifts in Academic Learning Environments

Role-immersion simulations diverge from typical intermediate FL curricula, which are generally guided in large part by a textbook. As role-immersion simulations progress, they place increasing levels of responsibility on learners, culminating with a set of entirely learner-managed classes. This level of autonomy in an academic setting is likely unfamiliar to most learners. Also, role-immersion puts less or no emphasis on explicit language teaching and instead prioritizes holistically integrating language, content, cultural communities, personal stories, and moral dilemmas, which also constitutes a marked curricular shift considering learners are accustomed to some or significant focus on linguistic elements in an intermediate FL classroom.

In order to facilitate this change, a number of factors should be considered. Many learners will likely need reassurance and support, as they are expected to operate in more autonomous ways. In the US-Mexico simulation, the instructor’s role revolved around encouraging learners to think critically about possible courses of action based on their character goals, as opposed to explicitly offering answers or solutions. Guiding with questions and emphasizing that there is not one right answer proved effective in inviting learners to reflect on possibilities and make their own decisions during the simulation.

Another factor to consider is how to encourage learners to not only navigate the new academic format successfully, but also to help them feel comfortable doing so. If persistent resistance or widespread uncertainty is prevalent, it is unlikely that learners
will be able to fully engage in the simulation, activate affective realms, and make personal connections with cultural communities. Thus, it is important to incorporate what Kohonen et al. (2001) referred to as “sensitising activities” (p. 89). These activities aim to expose learners to foreign and unfamiliar phenomena, encourage them to make comparisons between their native and target cultures, and help them explore the diverse standards present in various cultures. The ultimate goal of including opportunities for learners to become sensitized to new cultural ideas and communities is to help them manage the difficult task of engaging with difference. If these activities can help them to develop a capacity to successfully navigate and explore previously unfamiliar or inaccessible cultures or communities, new possibilities for alternate understandings and perspectives may emerge. Findings from the present study suggest that sensitizing activities toward the beginning of the simulation proved vital in helping learners gain access to and cope with the many unfamiliar facets present in the simulation.

Specifically, learners co-constructed their characters and participated in a wide range of activities such as researching, presenting on, contemplating, and discussing content related to different issues and characters. These practices helped to prepare a majority of learners intellectually and emotionally to feel equipped to transition to the a more autonomous role during the last phases in the simulation and find personal meaning in their learning during the process.

5.6.3 Tackling the Pedagogical Challenge of Fostering Deep Individual and Social Engagement

Findings from the present study offer an innovative way of promoting socially-oriented activities in which learners “bring their full contribution to the work at hand” (Kohonen et al., 2001, p. 41, emphasis original). Often, in FL learning environments,
fostering both individual and social engagement in the classroom can prove challenging. Identifying individual effort in FL academic settings can be more straightforward than pinpointing the effort or initiative put forth in by learners when they participate in group activities or projects. However, because learning is a social process, scholars and educators turn to projects that incorporate collaboration and cooperation in the classroom (Clark & Minami, 2015; Dewey & Dewey, 1915; Kohonen et al., 2001; Magner, Saltrick, & Wesolowski, 2011). Although collaborative projects can be fruitful, at times they also result in a simple division of labor in which learners circumvent the very social encounters that may promote a higher learning quality (van Lier, 2008). This presents the question, how can we maximize individual effort and social engagement? Results from the present study suggest that tasks that activate personal accountability are integral to individual engagement. However, to promote a more in-depth experience, this personal accountability must be inextricably connected to a collective goal. In other words, to leverage both individual and social learning, pedagogies should incorporate a degree of personal and individual responsibility for each learner, while also situating this accountability within a socially oriented setting in order that one cannot occur without the other. In the present study, this goal was reached through each learner being tasked with a unique character agenda that was entirely his or her responsibility to achieve. Then, to meet the individual goals, learners also had to gain a majority vote for their solutions, which required them to become socially engaged such that they could gain support from others. Although this process is certainly not the only way to go about promoting high levels of individual and social initiative, these findings offer general principles that can serve to guide pedagogical practice in this area.
5.7. Theoretical Implications

The current investigation also aimed to add to the theoretical understanding of authenticity, agency, and empathy from an ecological perspective within the field of FL education. Below I discuss how the present study provided new insights regarding each of these areas.

5.7.1 An Ecologically Guided Curriculum: The Potential for Personally Meaningful and Authentic Learning

In the present study, I adopted an ecological view to conceptualize and attempt to cultivate the conditions for authenticity in an academic setting. That is, in developing the role-immersion simulation, I gave primacy to the inseparable nature of context and language and aimed to promote a holistic FL learning experience. I also focused on fostering an environment that prioritized relationships among learners, the language, and the cultural communities, among others, in hopes of encouraging affordances for authentic communication and interactions to emerge. Data suggest that, indeed, a majority of learners gained a sense that they were interacting in an authentic realm, highlighting how using the language in a highly contextualized real-world setting was an integral contributor. Furthermore, data indicate that most learners triggered higher levels of intellectual and emotional engagement when they were interacting meaningfully with their peers or with the people represented in the simulation. Thus, these findings point to benefits regarding not just examining the FL classroom from an ecological perspective, but allowing the ecological paradigm to drive curricular design. In prioritizing curricula that capitalize on the relationships between language, context, and communities, both real and imagined, significant potential emerges to create additional learning opportunities that may otherwise remain unavailable.
5.7.2 Adding to the Understanding of Agency in the FL Classroom

The present study adds to the body of literature regarding how to identify agency in the FL classroom, particularly in tasks largely managed by learners as opposed to those that are teacher-driven. Van Lier (2008) offered insights regarding understanding agency in observable ways in a typical teacher-fronted classroom, specifically describing the highest levels of agency as collaborative events in which two or more learners show initiative and also engage their capacities jointly, allowing social learning opportunities to emerge. Examples include instances in which learners voluntarily offer assistance to others or enter willingly into a debate with others because they feel passionately or that they have something to say. The findings from this study add alternate possibilities for agency that emerged through role-immersion and could potentially be relevant within other learner-managed tasks involving problem solving. Learners in the simulation showed initiative by conceiving of and sharing self-generated ideas to resolve a variety of issues. To do so, they synthesized information, considered and analyzed it, and then opted to share original ideas with their peers. Then, these ideas became available for other learners to use and build on to continue generating further thoughts, a process that lent itself to creating collaborative agency. Often, solutions that emerged through these joint knowledge creation events would not have been available without learners first activating their agency by contributing a new thought, idea, or opinion. Thus, the role-immersion simulation offers a means through which to create conditions for high levels of agency by affording learners extended opportunities to individually and jointly consider and devise potential solutions to challenging real-world problems. Ways to create opportunities for collaborative agency events is of particular interest to the field of
FL because they can be challenging to identify and cultivate in classroom settings, and yet they offer substantial opportunities for learning.

5.7.3 Leveraging Universally Shared Experiences to Promote Empathy

Studies have shown that using stereotypes in FL curricula can help learners make initial connections to the target culture and, coupled with critical reflection, can facilitate deeper and more nuanced understandings of a culture (Drewelow, 2011a, 2015; Knutson, 2006). The present study supports this idea and contributes an additional way to promote connections with diverse communities: incorporating topics and issues that present areas of potentially shared knowledge between learners and otherwise unfamiliar groups. Specifically, considering facets of life that learners can grasp onto based on their own knowledge and experience in the world can be a starting point for deeper connections with the target culture. For example, moral dilemmas, villains, victims, and tangible features (i.e., difficulties in a job, family, etc.) within the cultural content and stories shared with learners can serve as relatable phenomena with which learners can gain an initial superficial understanding. Most, if not all, learners have experience or knowledge of these concepts and they are typically concrete ideas that learners can envision in some fashion. In trying to help learners progress toward empathy and solidarity with foreign and unfamiliar groups and cultures, these universally understood ideas as well as other familiar areas of these cultures, communities, or individuals (i.e., stereotypes) can establish a link between learners’ own experience and these groups, which can be cultivated into deeper bonds through continued and multidimensional exposure and critical engagement with the culture or community.
5.8. Limitations of the Study

Although the findings in this study contribute to the field of FL education, it is also important to address the limitations of the study. In this section, I discuss possible limitations related to time allocated to the simulation in an intermediate curriculum and I consider issues related to the implementation process.

5.8.1 Affording Learners Adequate Opportunities to Become Familiar and Connect With Diverse Aspects of the Simulated Scenario

Making decisions regarding how much time to allocate for the role-immersion simulation as well as how to effectively use that time to prepare learners to engage with such a complex and multifaceted contextual scenario proved challenging. Because this study was implemented in a coordinated program, I aimed to accommodate both the simulation and the textbook curriculum by striving to use the least amount of class periods possible for the role-immersion simulation. Thus, I opted to dedicate 2.5 weeks for the initial phases of exposing learners to content and language (Phases 1 and 2) and 1.5 weeks for learners to generate and vote on the proposals (Phases 3 and 4). Then, I considered which content and activities to incorporate to orient learners to the scenario during the first two phases, given their language proficiency and limited knowledge of these topics. Furthermore, in order for learners to uncover and reflect on how their own pre-conceived ideas of Mexico and the border might contribute to a one-dimensional view, I felt it was imperative to also address potential stereotypes learners might embrace, which added additional topics to go over. In class, I prioritized content related to the injustices occurring at the maquiladora factories and those against women, students, and children. In alignment with Cammarata’s (2016) recommendations, these provocative topics have potential to captivate learners on a personal level. However, this
choice led to the exclusion of other material. Incorporating additional time for learners to consider other aspects of the simulation content and character roles could facilitate a more realistic and multidimensional view. However, given the already high demand on intermediate programs to cover considerable amounts of material in a short period of time, another option might be to modify Phases 1 and 2 to exclude teacher-provided content (e.g., stereotype videos) and, instead, incorporate guided, student-directed activities that allow learners to select a topic of interest and carry out a more in-depth examination of it. Possible topics could include the illegal drug trade, the legalization of drugs, the maquiladora factories, the Merida Initiative, a personal narrative related to the border scenario, or another learner-generated topic related to the circumstances or to the learner’s character role. By offering extended opportunities to explore the multifaceted nature of the themes present in the simulation, learners would likely acquire additional points of reference and broaden their understanding in ways that are interesting to them personally and that would help them navigate the diverse topics and circumstances during the last two phases.

5.8.2 Implementation Considerations

Due to the duration of the simulation (4 weeks), it is unlikely that all learners will be able to attend all class periods, as unforeseen situations and circumstances inevitably come up causing learners to miss classes occasionally. By design, each of the class sessions in the simulation plays an integral role in first scaffolding the information and preparing learners to be able to actively participate in devising realistic solutions to the border problems, and then actually carrying out the task. Thus, missing 1 of the 8 days of the simulation surely has an impact on learners’ overall experience. To address this issue,
apart from the possibility of incorporating additional time for the simulation, including learner-driven research opportunities such those previously mentioned and amplifying homework opportunities to facilitate learners’ exploration and engagement with the variety of different topics intertwined in the simulation scenario could help orient learners to the scenario and lessen the impact of missing a class session.

Another limitation that emerged from the data relates to assigning roles to learners. Although learners should be given a voice with regard to their character choice, considering their proficiency, communication skills, and tendencies when assigning roles may be beneficial. To recall, the two U.N. Representatives and the Mexican and U.S. Presidents were assigned to learners with strong verbal communication skills, confidence, and higher linguistic proficiency. Relatedly, it may be advantageous to assign roles that include explicit advocacy (i.e., the maquiladora worker, the Mexican activist, and the Lomas de Poleo neighborhood resident) to these types of learners as well. When affective filters are high or a learner tends to avoid verbalizing their ideas with others, they may excel in roles that allow them to make decisions about their stances and engage verbally on their own terms. Like the leadership positions, the advocacy roles may push learners to promote a stance, thus increasing their anxiety and causing a degree of discomfort that might otherwise be avoided through designating another character role.

Lastly, a limitation of the study that became evident in learners’ post-simulation remarks on the questionnaire and general interview was a general sense of ambiguity at times. The nature of the simulation involves several different components: the characters, the premise and content, and, toward the end, the collective learner-driven development of proposals. Comprehending the information, getting to know the characters, and
striving to discern their new and evolving roles throughout the simulation may have contributed to learners’ sense of uncertainty regarding their ability to understand and meet expectations. Learners commented that various aspects of the simulation (e.g., instructions, character objectives, expectations) were vague or confusing at times. Although the instructor reviewed expectations, rubrics, and instructions prior to each phase of the simulation, provided several formative learning opportunities, and encouraged learners to ask questions in English after class or during office hours, allotting additional chances for learners to process the evolving expectations of them during the simulation might assuage their unease regarding how to successfully engage in completing their tasks.

5.9 Future Research

Findings from the present study reveal promise for role-immersion simulations within FL education, but because this pedagogical approach is in still in its infant stages in FL learning, I believe future research exploring the advantages and best practices related to role-immersion may be fruitful. In particular, I consider two possibilities: exploring how a role-immersion simulation might be adapted to include language and content goals, as well as investigating the ways in which learners’ own diverse experiences may influence their perceptions of the role-immersion simulation.

The aim of the present study revolved around creating an authentic experience in the classroom, which guided my decision not to include explicit language instruction or objectives into the curriculum. However, a promising avenue for future research might include integrating linguistic and content-based objectives within the implementation of a role-immersion simulation, which accords well with Pessoa et al.’s (2007)
recommendations to incorporate both. Another role-immersion simulation that I
developed, based on education and labor issues in present-day Spain, was successfully
modified to include language instruction to meet both linguistic and content objectives in
an advanced grammar and syntax course (C. Mitchell, personal communication, May 3,
2017). Thus, extending and modifying the US-Mexico role-immersion simulation in a
similar way to meet intermediate language goals could be productive. In particular, such
a modification could be of interest to coordinated intermediate classes that need to ensure
a set of linguistic structures are covered across sections. It could also shed light on how to
best promote language development within a rich content-based simulation curriculum.

The findings from the present study suggest that learners’ lived experiences likely
played a role in their perceptions of the simulation. Although learners shared general
ideas about their previous experiences with and views of Mexicans and the US-Mexico
border, I did not seek out detailed accounts. Further research linking learners’ more
specific experiences to their impressions of the simulation as well as their ability to
reassess stances related to the communities represented could be fruitful. In particular,
research in this area could reveal how the type of experiences as well as learners’
positioning toward the communities at the onset of the simulation may impact their
capacity to connect with the simulation and consider it in terms of authenticity (or not).

5.10 Final Thoughts

To conclude, the current study has shown that the US-Mexico role-immersion
simulation has significant potential create an immersive and personally meaningful
learning experience for the 21st-century intermediate learner. The simulation can serve as
prototype for intermediate FL learning that can complement textbook curricula in ways
that might serve to invigorate learners and add a new zest of energy into the classroom. With possibilities to activate broad engagement on the part of learners, this type of pedagogy is particularly relevant for language program directors and others teaching and developing curricula at the intermediate level and can help bridge the divide between intermediate- and advanced-level courses. In the context of the 21st century, it is increasingly important to promote diverse opportunities for learners to become vital players in their own process of learning. Role immersion aligns with aims to not only broaden the scope of intermediate FL learning, but does so with the intention of promoting language development while also nurturing cultural understanding and global citizenship (ACTFL, 2014; Carnes, 2014).
REFERENCES


Freed, B. F. (1990). Language learning in a study abroad context: The effects of interaction and noninteractive out-of-class contact on grammatical achievement and oral proficiency. In J.E. Alatis (Ed.) Linguistics, language teaching, and


Kinginger, C. (2004). Alice doesn’t live here anymore: Foreign language learning as identity (re)construction. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (eds.) *Negotiation of*


APPENDIX A

GOOGLE PLUS PROFILE CREATION RUBRIC
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attended Class</th>
<th>□ Yes (see below for grade)</th>
<th>□ No (receives 0% for assignment - class attendance required)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>□ 20 □ 18 □ 16 Original and inventive material on Google+ profile while maintaining relevance to character. Provided details so that character &quot;comes to life.&quot; Creative profile picture, cover photo, and content.</td>
<td>□ 14 □ 12 □ 10 Somewhat original and inventive, but lacks enriching details and/or elaboration. Relatively creative profile picture and content. Possibly some information missing or contrasting with character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content</td>
<td>□ 20 □ 18 □ 16 Met or exceeded content guidelines regarding quantity and categories (i.e. Educación, Historia, etc.) outlined on Google+ assignment sheet.</td>
<td>□ 14 □ 12 □ 10 Some content guidelines were not fulfilled regarding quantity and categories (i.e. Educación, Historia, etc.) outlined on Google+ assignment sheet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization, Purpose and Point of View</td>
<td>□ 20 □ 18 □ 16 Clear focus, cohesive information, information flows well in all areas of Google+ profile. Obviously has a clear understanding of character.</td>
<td>□ 14 □ 12 □ 10 Generally clear focus, somewhat cohesive with some problematic areas of Google+ profile (possibly missing information). May demonstrate a lack of understanding of character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Control / Grammar</td>
<td>□ 20 □ 18 □ 16 Excellent control of grammatical forms and complete sentences where appropriate. Some structural errors that do not affect meaning.</td>
<td>□ 14 □ 12 □ 10 Adequate use of grammatical forms, but some phrases missing key elements. Errors sometimes interfere with meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>□ 20 □ 18 □ 16 Rich and varied word choices, used adequately and appropriately for a SP202 level. Words spelled properly and accents used correctly. No English used. Google+ is being used in Spanish.</td>
<td>□ 14 □ 12 □ 10 Word choices somewhat limited for an SP202 student. Inconsistent spelling and accents and/or English used. Google+ may not have been switched to Spanish as instructed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments
APPENDIX B

GOOGLE PLUS ALLY RECRUITMENT RUBRIC
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>☐ 20 ☐ 18 ☐ 16</th>
<th>☐ 14 ☐ 12 ☐ 10</th>
<th>☐ 8 ☐ 6 ☐ 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>Content relevant to both your character and the recipients of all messages. Well-developed content and ideas.</td>
<td>Content somewhat relevant to both your character and the recipients of messages. Some well-developed content and ideas, but others lacking in depth.</td>
<td>Content very superficial and not really taking into consideration your character and/or the recipients of messages. Messages not well developed and lacking in depth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic approach</strong></td>
<td>Persuasive and well-developed arguments tailored to each potential ally. Obviously planned out how to appeal to each character’s specific interests. Sent messages to most/all possible characters that could be allies.</td>
<td>Somewhat persuasive arguments, but not all messages well tailored for potential ally. Did not reach out to some obvious potential allies with shared interests in order to recruit them.</td>
<td>Poorly developed arguments to persuade potential allies. Few attempts made to recruit possible allies. Did not respond appropriately/in a timely manner to other characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language Control / Grammar</strong></td>
<td>Excellent control of grammatical forms and complete sentences. Appropriate formal language use for this context. Some structural errors appropriate for this level that do not affect meaning.</td>
<td>Adequate use of grammatical forms, but some phrases missing key elements. Possibly some informal language inappropriate for formal contexts. Errors sometimes interfere with meaning.</td>
<td>Inadequate or inaccurate use of basic structures, and most phrases missing key elements. Errors frequently interfere with meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocabulary</strong></td>
<td>Appropriate word choices to convey message. Evidence of using wordreference/appropriate words for context. Evidence of proofreading message for errors. Words spelled properly and accents used correctly. No English used.</td>
<td>Word choices somewhat inadequate, some evidence of proofreading messages for errors. Inconsistent spelling and accents. English used.</td>
<td>Vocabulary somewhat limited or inappropriate. Little to no evidence of proofreading messages for accuracy. Incorrect spelling and accents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comments</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C

NEWS REPORTER GOOGLE PLUS ALLY RECRUITMENT RUBRIC
| Name: _________________________________________ |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>☐ 20 ☐ 18 ☐ 16 ☐ 14 ☐ 12 ☐ 10 ☐ 8 ☐ 6 ☐ 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Content relevant to the recipients of all messages. Well-developed content and ideas.</td>
<td>Content somewhat relevant to the recipients of messages. Some well-developed content and ideas, but others lacking in depth.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic approach</th>
<th>☐ 40 ☐ 38 ☐ 36 ☐ 34 ☐ 32 ☐ 30 ☐ 28 ☐ 26 ☐ 24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Messages sent to provoke players and cause conflicts. Obviously planned out how to provoke each character to whom a message is sent.</td>
<td>Somewhat persuasive arguments, but not all messages well tailored for potential ally. Did not reach out to some obvious potential allies with shared interests in order to recruit them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Control / Grammar</th>
<th>☐ 20 ☐ 18 ☐ 16 ☐ 14 ☐ 12 ☐ 10 ☐ 8 ☐ 6 ☐ 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent control of grammatical forms and complete sentences. Appropriate formal language use for this context. Some structural errors appropriate for this level that do not affect meaning.</td>
<td>Adequate use of grammatical forms, but some phrases missing key elements. Possibly some informal language inappropriate for formal contexts. Errors sometimes interfere with meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>☐ 20 ☐ 18 ☐ 16 ☐ 14 ☐ 12 ☐ 10 ☐ 8 ☐ 6 ☐ 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate word choices to convey message. Evidence of using wordreference/appropriate words for context. Evidence of proofreading message for errors. Words spelled properly and accents used correctly. No English used.</td>
<td>Word choices somewhat inadequate, some evidence of proofreading messages for errors.. Inconsistent spelling and accents. English used.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Comments | | | |
APPENDIX D

UNITED NATIONS REPRESENTATIVES GOOGLE PLUS ALLY RECRUITMENT RUBRIC
Name: ________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>□ 20 □ 18 □ 16 Content relevant to the recipients of all messages. Well-developed content and ideas.</th>
<th>□ 14 □ 12 □ 10 Content somewhat relevant to the recipients of messages. Some well-developed content and ideas, but others lacking in depth.</th>
<th>□ 8 □ 6 □ 4 Content very superficial and not really taking into consideration the recipients of messages. Messages not well developed and lacking in depth.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic approach</td>
<td>□ 40 □ 38 □ 36 Messages sent to promote peaceful solutions. Messages sent demonstrate an understanding of the recipient's goals and an attempt to encourage them in the right direction to promote peaceful solutions that are best for everyone.</td>
<td>□ 34 □ 32 □ 30 Messages sent to promote peaceful solutions. Messages sent demonstrate some understanding of the recipient's goals and some attempts to encourage them in the right direction to promote peaceful solutions. Possibly some lack of depth of thought.</td>
<td>□ 28 □ 26 □ 24 Poorly developed arguments to encourage peaceful solutions. Few attempts made to recruit possible allies. May not have responded appropriately/in a timely manner to other characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Control / Grammar</td>
<td>□ 20 □ 18 □ 16 Excellent control of grammatical forms and complete sentences. Appropriate formal language use for this context. Some structural errors appropriate for this level that do not affect meaning.</td>
<td>□ 14 □ 12 □ 10 Adequate use of grammatical forms, but some phrases missing key elements. Possibly some informal language inappropriate for formal contexts. Errors sometimes interfere with meaning.</td>
<td>□ 8 □ 6 □ 4 Inadequate or inaccurate use of basic structures, and most phrases missing key elements. Errors frequently interfere with meaning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>□ 20 □ 18 □ 16 Appropriate word choices to convey message. Evidence of using wordreference/appropriate words for context. Evidence of proofreading message for errors. Words spelled properly and accents used correctly. No English used.</td>
<td>□ 14 □ 12 □ 10 Word choices somewhat inadequate, some evidence of proofreading messages for errors. Inconsistent spelling and accents. English used.</td>
<td>□ 8 □ 6 □ 4 Vocabulary somewhat limited or inappropriate. Little to no evidence of proofreading messages for accuracy. Incorrect spelling and accents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

SUMMIT DAY RUBRIC
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>☐ 30 ☐ 28 ☐ 26</th>
<th>Actively participated in game day. Spoke and contributed thoughts and opinions when appropriate. Paid attention when others spoke. Obviously engaged throughout class time.</th>
<th>☐ 24 ☐ 22 ☐ 20</th>
<th>Participated in game, but infrequent thoughts and opinions shared. Possibly not paying attention to others and/or some apparent disengagement in activities/discussion.</th>
<th>☐ 18 ☐ 16 ☐ 14</th>
<th>Did not speak, spoke very infrequently and/or did not contribute when appropriate during game day. Apparently disengaged in activities/discussion.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy</td>
<td>☐ 30 ☐ 28 ☐ 26</td>
<td>Evident thought and planning put into game strategy to achieve goals, recruit allies, select working group, and/or collaborate with players to create mutually beneficial provisions.</td>
<td>☐ 24 ☐ 22 ☐ 20</td>
<td>Some thought and planning put into strategy, but some areas lacking, such as not making every effort to achieve goals and/or create mutually beneficial collaborative efforts.</td>
<td>☐ 18 ☐ 16 ☐ 14</td>
<td>Evident lack of strategy to achieve goals. Little or no attempts made to proactively achieve goals and/or create mutually beneficial collaborative efforts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preparedness</td>
<td>☐ 20 ☐ 18 ☐ 16</td>
<td>Came to class fully prepared for game day. Attended class prepared with all materials required for this game day AND all materials were of high quality and well-thought out.</td>
<td>☐ 14 ☐ 12 ☐ 10</td>
<td>Mostly prepared for game day, but lacking high quality or well-thought out materials.</td>
<td>☐ 8 ☐ 6 ☐ 4</td>
<td>Not prepared with appropriate materials for game day and/or very low quality materials due to lack of sufficient preparation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language/ Vocabulary</td>
<td>☐ 20 ☐ 18 ☐ 16</td>
<td>Spoke and interacted entirely in Spanish during game day.</td>
<td>☐ 14 ☐ 12 ☐ 10</td>
<td>Spoke and interacted mostly in Spanish, but some English used during game day.</td>
<td>☐ 8 ☐ 6 ☐ 4</td>
<td>Significant amount of English used during game day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX F

READINGS
UNITED OR DIVIDED STATES? A BORDER ROLE-IMMERSION SIMULATION
Negotiating border problems between the U.S. and Mexico

Illegal Drugs in the U.S.
During the 1970s, the U.S. declared an international “War on Drugs” to fight the increase in drug trafficking entering the U.S. By focusing on eradicating the production of illegal drugs as well as prohibiting drug trafficking in the U.S., the political leaders during the 1980s believed they could reduce the demand for cocaine, crack, marijuana, and other illegal substances in the U.S. Recently, proponents of legalizing drugs and public health initiatives aiming to prevent addiction have emerged as an alternate solution to the problem of drugs.

1. The above text mentions an attempt at eradicating the production of drugs abroad and reducing drug trafficking to reduce the amount of illegal drugs entering the U.S. It also mentions a possible solution: legalizing drugs. What do you think of these ideas? Are there other ideas to reduce the problem for the U.S.?

Illegal Drugs in Mexico
On the other side of the border, Mexico has been trying to fight drugs with its own “War on drug trafficking” since 2006, when President Calderon sent 65,000 Mexican troops to the state of Michoacán to eradicate violence associated with drugs and fulfill his promise to eliminate the drug cartels. Before that, the violence among the cartels was not prevalent. However, when Calderon publically denounced the cartels and began to pursue them, the cartels started one of the deadliest battles in modern history. Now, the number of deaths related to the cartels is around 60,000 and rising.

2. Do you agree with President Calderon’s decision to pursue the drug cartels or do you think it would have been better to leave them alone? Why?

Violence and conflict at the border
During the summer of 2012, a U.S. border patrol agent, Jesus, Mesa, was watching the El Paso, Texas border when he saw a 15 year old boy, Sergio Hernandez, walking along the border. When the agent attempted to arrest Sergio, the boy started running to Mexican territory and Mesa took out his weapon and shot Sergio two times – and he killed him with a bullet to the head. The U.S. Department of Justice sent a letter to Sergio’s parents in the City of Juarez explaining that “there was no jurisdiction to present a violation against Mesa because their son was not within the U.S. limits when he was shot.”

3. What problems do you see with the assassination of Sergio Hernandez? Do you think the agent should have shot and killed him? Why?
In Recent News:
Additionally, the kidnapping of 43 students from Iguala, Mexico received international attention this past year. It is believed that these students, who were headed to protest at a conference held by the mayor’s wife, were kidnapped by the mayor of Iguala, who turned them over to a gang to be killed. This incident is causing protests all over Mexico and receiving international condemnation.

4. Have you heard anything about the “43 students” that were kidnapped in Mexico? If so, what have you heard about the situation?

Your task:
Now, under great pressure, the U.S. and Mexico have decided to send negotiators (you and your classmates) to a Summit to create a proposal with concrete steps to solve the problems of drug trafficking and violence, which affect both countries and the border.

5. What are some possible solutions that could resolve violence and drug trafficking that affect the two countries?

Soon, you will select a character with specific interests and you will create your own tangible solutions that you will propose during the Summit meetings in order to achieve your character’s objectives during the simulation.
APPENDIX G

VIDEOS
U.S. Stereotypes

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tiPGTPzV2ds
(1:03 – 2:00 of video)

In preparation:

1. In your opinion, what are the stereotypes (positive and negative) of people from the United States according to other countries?

Vocabulary

tener fama – to be famous for something
lograr – to achieve
autoproclamarse – to self-proclaim
promover – to promote

Listening:

1. Make a list of stereotypes that are mentioned in the video (play video)
2. Now, listen to the video with the transcription (play video second time)

Transcription
The U.S. is famous for being a country full of fat people. They say that the people from the U.S. work so many hours that they don’t have time to prepare their lunches or dinners. Therefore, fast food is the best solution. But, fast food is high in calories and since they also do not have time to exercise, they gain weight easily. Maybe their obsession with achieving success in their jobs also explains why they are a country of drug addicts. It seems that they turn to cocaine as the only way to fill the void left by a life dedicated to work. The people from the U.S. are also famous for being war-hungry. Their technological superiority has led them to consider themselves the world’s police. Since its creation, the U.S. has invaded 70 countries and provoked the destabilization of governments in almost every country in the world.

Discussion:

1. How do you feel about the stereotypes that were mentioned? Did they surprise you? Are they true or false? Why?
2. Compare the stereotypes that they mentioned with the ones the class mentioned before watching the video. What are some similarities/differences?
3. Where do these stereotypes come from?
4. How do stereotypes become popular?
Mexican Stereotypes

http://youtu.be/UhG7lfMZMXw

In preparation:

2. In your opinion, what are the stereotypes (positive and negative) of Mexicans according to people from the U.S.?

3. Vocabulary
   - pasado de moda – to go out of style
   - flojos – lazy
   - promedio – average
   - picosa – spicy

Listening/watching:

1. Make a list of stereotypes that are mentioned in the video (play video)
2. Now, listen to the video with the transcription (play video second time)

Transcription

Stereotype number 1, Mexicans always wear a sombrero and take a siesta next to a cactus. This stereotype was created during the Mexican Revolution, where they did use sombreros, but most of these people were farmers. This trend has long been out of style.

Second, the siesta, that Mexicans are lazy. A study was conducted not long ago regarding how many hours Mexicans work on average, and they work ten hours. This is more than the Japanese, Koreans, and Americans.

A stereotype sponsored by Hollywood. Mexico is one big cantina where you can drink and do drugs right and left. Well, ok, in Mexico it is illegal to drink alcohol until 18 years of age. And, most places, it is not permitted to consume alcohol in public areas. It must be in a bar or at home. Regarding drugs, basically everything is illegal, it does not matter how much is in possession.

The cliché that all Mexican food is spicy, which is not at all true because if it were, I wouldn’t eat anything. The majority of dishes are accompanied by a sauce, but it can be added to taste. There is an incredible amount of food that is not spicy.

The famous stereotype that Mexicans only eat tacos and burritos. Well, basically, in Mexico there are many different types of dishes and tacos are only one of them. What is a fact is that the tortilla is a staple during meals, just like rice in Japan.
The cliché for which we can thank many U.S. movies: that Mexico is a great big desert and for some reason it always has a yellow photo tint or something odd. Well, actually, Mexico is not one big desert. We have forests in which snow occasionally falls and many tropical areas.

All Mexicans are brown skinned. This stereotype is partly true, but even though most people are darker skinned, some Mexicans are White Caucasians, some have African descent, and obviously indigenous groups.

The stereotype that all Mexicans are corrupt. This unfortunately has some truth. Mostly in the higher political spheres that are famous for their corruption. But, we also need to think there are countries with more corruption, like Ukraine, if that means anything.

Mexicans are pistol slingers, like Speedy González who carried around his pistol. But, in reality, in Mexico, it is illegal to have weapons. To obtain a weapon in your house, you need a special permit that is fairly difficult to get.

Discussion:

1. Compare the stereotypes that were mentioned in the video with those that the class mentioned. What are some similarities/differences?

2. Where do these stereotypes come from?

3. Did you learn something you did not know before in this video?

4. Do you think taking Spanish classes and learning about other cultures helps people not blindly accept these stereotypes? Why yes or no?
APPENDIX H

SUMMIT DAY REFLECTION
Summit Day _____ (#)

1. Did you move closer to reaching my goals?  Yes  No  Maybe
   Explain why you feel this way:
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

2. In hindsight, would you have done anything different today?  Yes  No  Maybe
   Explain:
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

3. Things you need to focus on during the next class (or using Google Plus) are:
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX I

GOOGLE PLUS PROFILE DESCRIPTION INSTRUCTIONS
(Distributed to students in Spanish)

My username: ___________________________
My password: ___________________________

List to complete:

☐ What is your name?
☐ Add a photo to your Google Plus character profile
☐ Fill out History:
  o Brief description: at least three sentences
  o Introduction – at least 10 sentences
    ▪ How are you physically?
    ▪ Do you have a family?
    ▪ What are your interests?
    ▪ What do you like to do in your free time?
    ▪ What type of person are you?
    ▪ What is important to you?
    ▪ Is there something that makes you different from others?
  o Things you’re proud of – at least three sentences
    ▪ Do you have a family that you’re proud of?
    ▪ What have you achieved in your life that you’re proud of?
☐ Fill out Work:
  o Profession
  o Skills – at least nine sentences
    ▪ Describe your job-related skills
    ▪ Comment on other skills you have outside of your job
  o Employment – at least six sentences
    ▪ What is your primary objective in the simulation
    ▪ What are your other interests in the simulation

☐ Fill out Education:
  o Where did you study?
  o When did you graduate?
  o What did you study?

☐ Fill out basic information
  o Are you looking for a relationship?
  o Are you married?
  o When is your birthday?
APPENDIX J

INSTRUCTIONS FOR IN-CLASS PRESENTATION
You are going to give a presentation to (1) describe the problem/situation that your character is confronting (2) denounce other characters that are not in agreement with your position (3) convince other characters that your position is the best. You should use supplementary materials (ex. PowerPoint/Prezi/images/etc.) and your presentation should last at least 3 minutes. The other players should understand the problem/situation after listening to your presentation and understand your point of view. Your presentation should be convincing and persuasive.
APPENDIX K

NEWSFLASH RUBRIC FOR SUMMIT DAY
| Creativity and Content (during video Newsflash!) | ☐ 30 ☐ 28 ☐ 26 | Newsflash was creative, interesting and exciting! Newsflash lasted at least 90 seconds and provided ample details (possibly embellished) about negotiations that took place. Engaging for viewer. | ☐ 24 ☐ 22 ☐ 20 | Newsflash was somewhat interesting, but was lacking in enriching details or was not at least 90 seconds in length. Possibly lacking relevance, or was not very engaging for the viewer. | ☐ 18 ☐ 16 ☐ 14 | Newsflash included no attempt at originality or inventiveness. Little to no details and content has little to no relevance to theme. Boring for viewer. |
| Participation (during in-class negotiation day) | ☐ 40 ☐ 38 ☐ 36 | Actively participated in game day. Spoke and contributed thoughts and opinions when appropriate. Paid attention when others spoke. Obviously engaged throughout class time. | ☐ 34 ☐ 30 ☐ 26 | Participated in game, but infrequent thoughts and opinions shared. Possibly not paying attention to others and/or some apparent disengagement in activities/discussion. | ☐ 24 ☐ 22 ☐ 20 | Did not speak, spoke very infrequently and/or did not contribute when appropriate during game day. Apparently disengaged in activities/discussion. |
| Organization, Purpose and Point of View (during video Newsflash!) | ☐ 15 ☐ 13 ☐ 11 | Clear focus, organized, logical flow, easy to follow for viewer. Spoke slowly and clearly. Evidence of significant planning and well-developed point of view. | ☐ 9 ☐ 7 ☐ 5 | Generally clear and well organized with few lapses in focus. Sometimes difficult to understand due to unclear speech. A few unclear points that require minimal interpretation. Some evidence of planning. | ☐ 3 ☐ 1 ☐ 0 | Unclear focus. Hard to follow, requires significant interpretation. Little to no evidence of planning and lack of point of view and logic. |
| Language/Vocabulary (during video Newsflash!) | ☐ 15 ☐ 13 ☐ 11 | Excellent control over grammatical forms and clear sentences. Varied word choice, but used words others understand at the 202 level. Few errors that do not affect meaning. | ☐ 9 ☐ 7 ☐ 5 | Adequate use of grammatical forms, but some sentences lacking key elements and/or errors interfere with meaning. Word choice/spelling/accents adequate. | ☐ 3 ☐ 1 ☐ 0 | Inaccurate or inadequate use of basic structures. Errors frequently interfere with meaning. Vocabulary somewhat limited and/or inadequate word choice/spelling/accents. |
APPENDIX L

IRB APPROVAL
August 7, 2017

Sara Finney, M.A.
Department of Modern Languages & Classics
College of Arts & Sciences
The University of Alabama
Box 870246

Re: IRB # 14-08-430-R3 “Spanish-language Role-Play Games”

Dear Ms. Finney:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research. Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 2 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on August 6, 2018. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Study Closure Form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Chair, Non-Medical Institutional Review Board
The University of Alabama
APPENDIX M

PRE QUESTIONNAIRE
1. Name

2. Major

3. Minor(s)

4. When you think of Mexicans, what comes to mind immediately? Please describe your impressions toward Mexicans.

5. When you think of Mexico, what comes to your mind immediately? Please describe your impressions of Mexico.

6. What positive aspects or images do you associate with Mexicans/Mexico?

7. What negative aspects or images do you associate with Mexicans/Mexico?

8. Where do your impressions and images about Mexicans and Mexico come from? (check your top three)
   
   ___ Personal experience with Mexican in the USA (Explain)
   ___ Personal Mexican in Mexico (Explain)
   ___ Films
   ___ TV shows drama
   ___ TV shows comedy
   ___ TV news (which channel)
   ___ Newspaper
   ___ Magazines
   ___ Social media
   ___ Internet searches
   ___ Books
   ___ Food/Restaurants

9. Please describe any experience you have had abroad, the reason for your trip, and how long you stayed.

10. What is your previous experience with Mexico and/or Mexicans?

11. In your opinion, is there a difference between Mexicans in Mexico and Mexicans who live in the USA? Please explain.

12. What city/state/country are you from originally?
APPENDIX N

POST QUESTIONNAIRE
1. Please share your overall impression about the game (possible topics: likes/dislikes, what you feel you learned/did not learn, anything that stood out to you, etc.)

2. What is the most significant thing you learned during this game?

3. Has the way you view Mexico/Mexicans changed? Yes / No
   a. If yes, which of your impressions or images have changed?

4. What influenced the way you see Mexicans/Mexico? (check all that apply)
   ___ Instructor
   ___ Out-of-class research
   ___ Becoming a character
   ___ Playing the game
   ___ In-class stereotypes videos
   ___ “Frijolero” song
   ___ Other

5. Do you think your impressions are typical of how Americans view Mexicans? Explain any differences.

6. Talk about the experience of adopting a character for the game. What did you like/dislike? Did anything stand out to you about that?

7. If not already mentioned above, please explain how you believe this game affected (positively or negatively) your Spanish language abilities:

8. List any additional/relevant comments (optional)
APPENDIX O

CHARACTER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
1. How are you? How is the end of the semester going for you?
2. In this interview I am trying to get an understanding regarding certain decisions you made about your simulation character. There is no right or wrong answer, I’m just curious about how you developed your character. So, we will look at your character’s Google Plus profile together on my laptop, and I’ll just go through my questions.
3. After showing the student his or her character’s Google Plus profile, I probed using prompts such as:
   a. Why did you choose this/these photos for your character?
   b. Why did you select this name for your character?
   c. Why was your character from X city?
   d. Why did your character go to school at X school?
   e. Why did your character enjoy X hobby?
   f. Why did you put this comment in your character’s profile?
APPENDIX P

GENERAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
1. How are you? I appreciate you coming to chat with me again.

2. This interview is to explore some of your answers from the questionnaire you answered in class a bit more in depth. I will first read the question that I want you to elaborate on, and then I will read the answer you put on the questionnaire. I will also show both the question and your answer to you on the computer screen while I read them. Then I will ask you to elaborate.

3. After reading the question and the student’s answer, I probed using prompts such as:
   
   a. Tell me more about that.
   b. Can you elaborate on that a little bit?
   c. Why is/was that the case?
   d. What did you mean by that?
   e. How did that idea come about for you?
   f. Why is that important?