

Expectations in the Foreign Language Classrooms: A Case Study

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Research shows the strong correlation between expectations and student achievement across different disciplines. However, little research has been conducted regarding the role of discipline specific classroom expectations in student academic achievement. This multiple instrumental case study discusses expectations in two rural Spanish high school classrooms in which teachers produced the highest achieving students. The data was collected through classroom observations, one-on-one audiotaped interviews with teachers and exploration of instructional materials. The study provides insights about the role of expectations in foreign language classrooms and offers examples of foreign language pedagogical practices that reflect high expectations. The study concludes that expectations shape the learning process in Spanish high school classrooms and contribute to high student achievement. Foreign language educators, faculty of teacher preparation programs, employees of professional development institutes, administrators and state teacher education policy makers will benefit from findings of the study by receiving a better understanding of the role of expectations in the foreign language classroom. Keywords: Foreign Language, Expectations, Teacher Education, Student Achievement, Case Study

Being a good teacher is a lot like being a good gardener. Good gardeners are optimistic and patient. They are able to see the potential in those struggling young seedlings and enjoy watching them grow, develop and bloom. They give special tender loving care to those few plants that are struggling and not thriving. They don't blame the plant when it's not performing well; they check the growing conditions. Is the soil the plant is growing in suitable or does it need amending? Does the plant need more water; does the plant need less water? Does the plant need more sunshine; does the plant need less sunshine? Good gardeners are good problem solvers. (Hartjes, E. 2009, December 9)

In order to prepare students to be global citizens in the 21st century, knowledge of a foreign language is of prime importance (Block & Cameron, 2002; Cates, 1990; Gallagher-Brett, 2005). Research states that "language skills and cultural expertise are also urgently needed to address economic challenges and the strength of American businesses in an increasingly global marketplace" (National Research Council, 2007, p. 1). Even though the importance of learning a foreign language is clear, the majority of high school students in the United States stop their foreign language learning journeys upon completion of a two-year foreign language requirement. For example, Nuffield Languages Inquiry (2000) found that nine out of ten students choose not to continue with their language study after the age of sixteen. How do we make students continue learning a foreign language and make this learning a meaningful experience for them? How to help students succeed in a foreign language?

A teacher plays a tremendous role in making learning meaningful to students, and therefore, makes a difference in student learning choices and experiences (Jordan, Mendro, &

Weerasinghe, 1997; Rowan, Correnti & Miller, 2002; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997). It becomes important to explore what a teacher can do to facilitate learning and to help students achieving high learning outcomes. Research in different discipline areas has revealed that expectations are a potential source of student academic achievement and success (Wilkins, 1976). Teacher expectations can significantly influence students and can add to student success or failure (Hillard III, 1991). If a teacher holds high expectations for students and challenges students to live up to high expectations by engaging them in meaningful learning activities, students tend to work harder, put more effort, and be more persistent in completing a learning task or project (Rosental & Jacobson, 1992). On the other hand, if a teacher has low expectations for students and perceives students as not capable of completing challenging learning tasks, this teacher will design simplistic classroom instruction that corresponds with low teacher expectations. This in turn will have a negative impact on student learning. A strong correlation between teacher expectations and student academic achievement was found in different areas of study (for example see Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Hoge & Butcher, 1984; Jussim, 1989; Jussim & Eccles, 1992). Little research has been conducted regarding discipline specific teacher expectations (Brosh, 1996; Schulz, 2000). More research is needed that will provide an understanding of expectations as a potential source of student academic achievement in a foreign language classroom. The purpose of this multiple instrumental case study is to explore expectations of teachers and students in two Spanish high school classrooms in the Midwest in which teachers participated in the LinguaFolio project and whose students had the highest achievement. LinguaFolio Self-Assessment of Competency is an instrument for a foreign language classroom that allows learners to evaluate their language and cultural competencies and promotes student reflection and self-assessment (Van Houten, 2006). LinguaFolio Self-Assessment of Competency teaches students to set goals and to take responsibility for their own learning (Van Houten, 2006). It develops student learning skills and strategies. To develop self-assessment skills students require guidance through an intentional step-by-step process. The more frequently students self-assess, the better they become at the self-evaluation process (Van Houten, 2006). LinguaFolio is designed to empower each learner to take responsibility for his or her language learning even when the formal language instruction has ended.

While the majority of studies utilized quantitative measures (e.g., see Jussim & Eccles, 1992; Jussim et al., 1996; Trouilloud, Sarrazin, Martinek, & Guillet 2002; Weinstein, 1988), very few studies exist that explored expectations using qualitative research design. A case study approach is needed because it will allow for an in-depth exploration of expectations through collection and analysis of multiple sources of data (Stake, 1995). The reason for choosing a case study design is the fact that it allows for a comprehensive and thorough exploration of an issue through at length collection of multiple forms of data (Creswell, 2007). In order to provide a thorough exploration of the problem, I interviewed two Spanish teachers about their expectations and beliefs on foreign language pedagogy and observed them "in action" while teaching a typical class to explore whether they act upon their expectations. I also reviewed their instructional materials such as lesson plans, worksheets, and textbooks to examine the difficulty and nature of student tasks and assignments. The two Spanish teachers chosen for this study represent two unique cases because students in their classrooms demonstrated the highest achievement when compared to students in classrooms of other teachers. Case study allows me to assure vigorous exploration and interpretation of data and helps me to draw conclusions about teacher expectations in the foreign language classroom. For the purpose of this study I will define expectations as beliefs and assertions about one's abilities to be able to perform a task.

Foreign language educators will benefit from findings of this study by broadening their understanding of teacher expectations as a potential source of student academic achievement. Administrators, faculty of teacher preparation programs, employees of professional development and hiring organizations, and state teacher education policy makers will benefit from findings of this study by receiving a better understanding of expectations in a foreign language classroom. Consequently, this will help them in making decisions regarding preparation, development and hiring of foreign language teachers and will lead to a development of well-suited curricula to prepare successful future teachers and to meet current student learning needs.

Research Questions

Central Question

What in-depth case analysis emerges from studying expectations of teachers and students in two Spanish high school classrooms in which teachers participated in the *LinguaFolio* project and produced the highest achieving students?

Sub-questions

- What are the expectations?
- What is a role of expectations in student achievement?
- What have teachers done in a classroom that might impact achievement?
- What are the differences between two teachers in terms of expectations? In terms of their behaviors?
- What lessons can be learned about expectations from these two cases?

Literature Review

Theoretical Lens

A researcher utilizes a theoretical lens to inform her study and to describe theories that stand behind her beliefs when analyzing and interpreting data (Creswell, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I draw on Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986, 1997) and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981, 1987) while conducting this study. Bandura's self-efficacy theory predicts that one's belief system influences behavior choice, effort invested, persistence, and task success in a learning process (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Dailey, 1999a). Self-efficacy is defined as a belief in one's ability to achieve a goal or an outcome (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986). According to the self-efficacy theory, individuals are likely to engage in activities to the extent that they perceive themselves competent at these activities. Higher self-efficacy is associated with more persistence and has a significant impact on individual goals and accomplishments (Bandura, 1977).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory claims that developmental processes take place through participation in cultural, linguistic, and historically formed settings, such as schooling and peer group interactions. The central concept of the theory is Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which can be defined as a distance between what a learner is able to do independently and what he or she is able to do with a social support. Therefore, learning happens through interactions between an "expert" (i.e., a teacher) and a "novice" (i.e., a student), where an "expert" provides guidance and assistance to a "novice."

The literature on teacher classroom behaviors and expectations falls into three main strands. It is necessary to explore these three strands in order to offer a comprehensive

synopsis of the current knowledge on the topic being studied. One strand of literature explores whether teacher effect exists in a classroom. Another strand focuses on exploring what constitutes effective foreign language teaching, and the last strand focuses on the role and effects of teacher expectations.

Teacher Effect

Extensive literature is focused on studying teacher effect in a classroom. Numerous studies revealed that teacher effect is the dominant factor affecting student academic achievement (Jordan, Mendro, & Weerasinghe, 1997; Rowan, Correnti, & Miller, 2002; Sanders & Horn, 1998; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Wright et al., 1997). For example, Sanders & Horn (1998) reported on findings from the Tennessee study revealing more than a 50-percentile point difference in student achievement for students after three consecutive years with an effective teacher versus ineffective teacher. The study concluded that teachers are major determinants of student academic progress. Similarly, the Texas study found an estimated 35-percentile point difference in reading achievement scores for students after three years with effective versus ineffective teachers (Archer, 1998). Darling-Hammond (2000) revealed results from the 50-state survey and concluded that effects of well-prepared teachers are stronger than the influence of student background factors such as poverty, language background and minority status. Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005) focused on studying student achievement in reading and math and found that teachers play an important role in student achievement and good teachers can close existing achievement gaps.

Foreign Language Pedagogy

The second strand of literature discusses behaviors and attitudes of effective foreign language teachers. Foreign language teachers are distinctive in terms of the nature of the subject, content of teaching, teaching methodology and teacher-learner relationships (Borg, 2006). Foreign language teachers need to create an environment where they communicate in the language that they teach. Numerous studies revealed that teacher content knowledge and their ability to share knowledge are among the most important teacher qualities that contribute to high student achievement outcomes (Arikan et al., 2008; Benson, Schroeder, Lantz, & Bird, 2001; Park & Lee, 2006; Young & Shaw, 1999). Some studies suggest that an effective foreign language teacher needs to be able to evoke and sustain interest and motivation of students and to be available for any questions and help (Brosh, 1995). Other studies claim that effective teachers should have a student-centered classroom, should be creative, and should teach outside the syllabus (Arikan et al., 2008).

Teacher Expectations in the Classroom

The third strand of literature is concerned with the role of expectations in a classroom. Studies showed that teacher expectations are often an accurate assessment of student ability and expectations do affect teacher-student interaction and student learning outcomes (Brophy, 1983; Cooper & Good, 1983). Research found that teacher expectations predicted student self-concept of ability (Bibik, 1999; Madon, Smith, Jussim, Russell, Walkewicz, Eccles, & Palumbo, 2001) and student performance expectations (Brattesani, Weinstein, & Marshall, 1984).

Krovetz (1999) claims that successful learning depends on a combination of student abilities together with high teacher expectations and teacher respect for students. Teacher stereotypes result in low expectations for students, which cause students to believe that their

abilities are consistent with what teachers, believe about them (Krovetz, 1999). Teacher expectations can have a substantial effect on student learning and performance. According to Hillard III (1991), by establishing expectations teachers construct learning experiences for students that allow students to release their potential. The lower teacher expectations, the less challenging experiences they will create for students, because students will be perceived as not capable of completing higher order analytical tasks. This results in a lower student self-efficacy and causes a student to put less effort and time into assignments and to try less hard while performing and completing learning tasks (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986, 1997). Rosenthal and Jacobson (1992) suggested similar outcomes, stating that teacher academic expectations for students resulted in students living up to those low expectations. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1992) randomly selected elementary students and introduced them to teachers as exceptionally bright. After eight months, those students demonstrated greater IQ gains than students who had not been introduced as exceptionally bright. The study explained this by mentioning that teacher expectations for students who were called exceptionally bright caused an actual shift in the intellectual performance of those students.

Good and Weinstein (1986) provided research-based suggestions for improving classroom instruction that features low expectations. They suggested offering learning experiences where students have opportunities for applications and higher order thinking activities instead of mechanical tasks. The authors recommended teachers to pay more attention to student interests and creative ideas and to encourage students to be active self-assessors in their learning process and to reflect on their learning. Classroom instruction that features high expectations should include activities that engage students to be active learners instead of passive receivers of information. Good and Weinstein (1986a) suggested encouraging students by emphasizing their progress and by avoiding public comparison of students.

Correlation between teacher expectations and student achievement, as found in the research (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Hoge & Butcher, 1984; Jussim, 1989), indicates that the higher expectations teachers have the higher student achievement will be. Although research has been conducted to study expectations in academics (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Bandura, 1986; Nicholls, 1989; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996) and in sport (Brustad, Bankes, & Smith, 2000; Roberts, 2001; Trouilloud et al., 2001), little research has been done to study discipline specific teacher expectations, and expectations of foreign language teachers in particular (Brosh, 1996; Schulz, 2000). In order to address this gap, more research is needed to provide a better understanding of teacher expectations as potential factors that contribute to student academic achievement in the foreign language classrooms. This study is intended to reveal practices of two Spanish teachers, whose students demonstrated high achievement in comparison with students of other teachers. The study discusses how teachers' expectations contributed to effective foreign language practices and high student learning outcomes.

All three strands of literature discussed here contribute to a better understanding of the research problem explored in this study.

Methodology

Positioning Myself

In qualitative research a researcher plays a central role, and therefore monitoring subjective factors that shape a research process is essential (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997; Peshkin, 1988). I assume that there is no one exact "recipe" in a classroom that would result in high achieving students, but a lot of "recipes" are possible. I do though believe in the power of expectations. I myself tend to work harder, to put more effort, and to be more

persistent in classes where expectations are high and I am pushed harder. I do take out more from classes with high expectations.

There may be a chance that my own experiences and beliefs about the potential of high expectations to influence student achievement might have influenced my interpretation of what I see in a classroom, and might have made me attribute other learning processes and factors in the classroom to high expectations. However, my experiences in a classroom as a foreign language teacher, foreign language teacher supervisor and teaching assistant for a couple of teacher certification courses provided some common ground. I also learned a great deal about the role of expectations from colleagues who are foreign language educators, and who generously shared their perspectives and critiques. Given the fact that I am not involved in determining future participation of teachers in the *LinguaFolio* project, my influence on teacher views about expectations is likely to have been minimal.

My interest in the topic of foreign language teacher expectations stems from the fact that I myself, as a foreign language educator, am deeply interested in knowing what elements are needed to ensure high student achievement and what role expectations play in the learning process.

Philosophical Assumptions

I hold a pragmatic worldview to conducting research. Worldview or philosophical assumptions inform qualitative research and shape how one views the world and goes about conducting research (Creswell, 2007). Philosophical assumptions "reflect a particular stance that researchers make when they choose qualitative research" (Creswell, 2007, p. 19). Guba (1990) defines philosophical assumptions as beliefs that guide inquiry.

The goal of a pragmatic approach to a case study, that I adopted here, is to explore the studied problem and focus on outcomes of the research. Pragmatism does not view the world as an absolute unity (Creswell, 2007). This worldview emphasizes researcher freedom "to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures of research that best meet their needs and purposes" (Creswell, 2007, p. 23). Pragmatism emphasizes "the importance of conducting research that best addresses the research problem" (Creswell, 2007, p. 23) instead of being concerned which methods to use.

Research Design

I used a multiple instrumental case study approach to explore expectations of Spanish high school teachers who participated in the *LinguaFolio* project in Nebraska and produced the highest achieving students. A case study approach is a qualitative research design that emphasizes thick description and interpretation (Erickson, 1986). A case study approach allows exploring a selected "bounded system "or a case over a period of time using in-depth data collection and analysis procedures (Creswell, 2007). The researcher accesses multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, documents and reports to provide rich description of a chosen system (Creswell, 2007). A multiple instrumental case study approach is appropriate for the problem of this study because a researcher strives to receive an in-depth understanding of a studied issue (Stake, 1995). The goal of a multiple instrumental case study is to receive "an insight into the question by studying a particular case" (Stake, 1995, p. 3). Multiple instrumental case study aims to understand not just a case itself but also a particular issue inside the case. The study explored two Spanish high school classrooms (i.e., the chosen cases), but paid particular attention to the selected issue i.e. expectations in these classrooms. I used one-on-one interviews, classroom observations and exploration of teaching materials to collect the data for the study.

Sampling

Two Spanish teachers who participated in the *LinguaFolio* project and whose students demonstrated the highest achievement on the Standards-based Measures of Proficiency (STAMP) were invited to participate in the study. Two selected teachers were both teaching in small rural communities. I utilized extreme or deviant sampling for selecting two Spanish teachers for this study, a type of purposeful sampling that involves selecting the most exceptional successes or failures related to a topic of interest (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Extreme or deviant sampling is necessary for this multiple instrumental case study because it allows selecting two Spanish teachers who are "exceptional successes." Being "exceptional successes" in this study means that selected teachers created classroom learning environment that helped students in their classrooms to achieve the highest learning outcomes on the Spanish standardized proficiency test as compared to students in the classrooms of other Spanish teachers. Therefore, these "unique" teachers served as excellent cases for this multiple instrumental case study.

Permissions Obtained

Before starting the data collection process, I sought to find permissions from the campus-based institutional review board (IRB), from individuals providing the data, as well as from individuals who were in charge of sites (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). After approval from the Institutional Review Board was received, I approached two Spanish teachers and asked them to participate in the study. Once school approvals and teacher consents were secured, I scheduled and conducted interviews and observations. I observed teachers conducting a typical Spanish class in their schools. I interviewed teachers in classrooms where they taught during their planning periods. Teachers offered their classrooms for interviews indicating that a classroom was a quiet place where they felt comfortable to talk about their foreign language beliefs and teaching practices. I explored some of the instructional materials while observing teachers instructing a class and also took copies of some materials and studied them at my convenience.

Ethical Considerations

The two Spanish teachers were asked to sign consent forms to be able to participate in the study. Consent forms described the nature and procedures of the study and indicated estimated time needed for collecting data from teachers. Consistent with the participant-centered focus of a qualitative case study research, I ensured respect for persons in all phases of the study. I demonstrated respect to participants primarily through reciprocity. Participants received a token of appreciation for sharing their experiences with me and for allowing me to observe them teaching. A box of chocolates and an annual volume of a foreign language journal were the tokens given to participants. I demonstrated respect to participants by designing an interview protocol that was engaging and respectful of their intelligence. The interview protocol was designed in a way that kept participant identities confidential. Interviews were conducted at the time and place convenient for participants. Pseudonyms were assigned to teachers when reporting data. I demonstrated respect to participants by continually acknowledging contributions that they made for the study.

Data Collection

I collected data through audio-recorded interviews with selected high school Spanish teachers, as well as through classroom observations and an examination of teacher instructional materials such as lesson plans, hand-outs and worksheets. Participants were asked to fill out demographic forms before an interview.

Demographic information. I designed a short questionnaire in order to elicit demographic information about participants. I decided what demographic information should be collected and finalized the demographic questionnaire after few revisions. Participants were asked to answer seven questions indicating their gender, level of education, and teaching experience. Demographic information included the following questions:

- Teacher's pseudonym
- Teacher's age
- Teacher's gender
- What is your current educational degree level?
- How many years of teaching experience do you have as of today? Where?
- How would you describe your teaching in a paragraph or two?
- How would you describe yourself in a paragraph or two?

Interviews. Because of the qualitative nature of this study, I relinquished expectations to a single "authentic" response to each interview question during the data collection process. I elicited multiple perspectives and alternative responses to interview questions by acknowledging multiple social locations that participants occupy (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). I also sought to acknowledge social and conversational dimensions of interview interactions (Grinstead, 2007; Houtkoop-Steenstra, 2000) and to reduce my social distance from study participants. Generating rapport with participants allowed me to be a co-creator rather than a sole-creator of meaning during interviews. I conducted audio-recorded semi-structured in-person one-on-one interviews with two selected teachers. The interview protocol included twelve open-ended questions that allowed me to collect rich data by exploring participant views and beliefs about their teaching. One 35-55 minute interview was conducted with each teacher. Initial interview questions were broader and provided context for subsequent questions, which were more specific in nature. I saved interview data as digital files and transcribed the data verbatim.

Observations. I conducted two audio-recorded observations with each teacher instructing a typical 45-50 minute high school class. I took a role of the complete observer. I designed an observational protocol to record descriptive and reflective notes. Later, I described portraits of teachers, physical setting of classrooms, particular events and activities that happened in classrooms as well as my own reactions.

Instructional materials. I examined lesson plans as well as Spanish handouts and student worksheets used during in-class and homework activities. I explored printed materials and web resources that teachers used while planning their lessons. This exploration helped me to see how teachers made use of resources to design meaningful and challenging activities, which demonstrate high expectations. By exploring instructional materials I was also able to examine the nature and difficulty of instructional tasks that were assigned to students.

Challenges

One of the challenges that I faced during the data collection process, was that the schools where both teachers work are located quite far from the town I reside, and therefore, it

was taking me a rather long period of time to get to those schools to collect the data. It was also challenging to think of a way to audio record lessons because when teachers moved far from a recording device, the quality of recording decreased. Clipping a lapel microphone and giving teachers an iPod in their pocket resulted in a good quality of recordings and solved this challenge.

Data Analysis

In the process of preparing my qualitative data for analysis, I organized instructional materials received from teachers for a review. I recorded observations and transcribed interviews into a word-processing file for analysis. I checked transcripts for accuracy and explored the data by reading through it with the purpose of developing an overall understanding of the database. I made memos by writing primary thoughts on the margins of the transcript. Memoing the data is an initial step in deciding on codes and themes (Creswell, 2007). I assigned labels to codes and used actual words of participants ("in vivo codes"). For example, I used Lola's actual words to describe the theme that explains how Lola motivates students to study Spanish and keeps them interested in it. I used an "in vivo code" and named it "You have to buy into what you are selling."

According to Stake (1995) "analysis is a matter of giving meaning to first impressions as well as to final compilations" (p. 71). I conducted direct interpretation of the data and looked at a single instance drawing meaning from it without looking for multiple instances of it (Stake, 1995). Due to the fact that it is possible that some important ideas appear only once, I did not try to make categorical aggregation of instances but directly interpreted what I saw. While observing teachers I could not always understand every single "sign," laugh, and student reaction, but students knew exactly what was meant and followed what they were asked to do by showing respect and appropriate behavior. I made the direct interpretation of what I saw calling it "positive student-teacher relationships." There might have been other things that I could explore and learn from observations, but I decided to attach "meaning to a small collection of impressions within a single episode without consciously feeling the need for data aggregation" (Stake, 1995, p. 74).

Later on, I looked for the correspondence and established patterns in the data. For example, Lola often mentioned a low-anxiety filter environment as being a necessary element for student success. She emphasized it throughout her interview calling it a "comfortable," "low anxiety," "low affective filter" environment. I looked for the correspondence between what she believes about learning environment by connecting the interview data and what she actually does to create a low anxiety environment in her classroom by referring to the data from classroom observations. I explored whether her beliefs on the importance of a low anxiety filter environment were consistent and corresponded with the actual established environment in the classroom by looking whether her classroom instruction corresponded with what she told me she believed in.

I continued with a cross-case analysis and examined themes across cases. For this purpose I looked for similarities and differences in both cases. For example, I noticed that both teachers share some similar practices to ensure effective instruction. Both teachers demonstrated the importance of high expectations and designed their every day instruction in a way that corresponded with high expectations that they held for students. Cross-case analysis also revealed some different features between two teachers. For example, both teachers have very different personalities but nevertheless are able to use them in a way that contributes to their instruction. Lola's personality is loud and active, whereas Rachel's personality is quiet and relaxed.

Finally, I provided naturalistic generalizations when interpreting both cases and made both cases understandable. Naturalistic generalizations can be described as conclusions received from "vicarious experience so well constructed that the person feel as if it happened to themselves" (Stake, 1995, p. 85). I provided personal interpretations of the sensory experiences and gave personalistic description of both classrooms and teachers. In order for readers to be able to receive a vivid picture and consider their own "alternative interpretations," I presented raw data prior to my own interpretations. I made information about me as a researcher available for readers both directly and indirectly. For example, I described my own take and beliefs about expectations in the *Positioning Myself* section of the study.

Validity Procedures

In qualitative research validity is the extent that the information is accurate and credible (Creswell, 2007). I employed several procedures to enhance the validity of this study. I made use of multiple and different sources of data in order to provide corroborating evidence (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I also conducted member-checking to receive accuracy and consistency of interview transcripts. For that purpose, I forwarded interview transcripts to participants for their review and obtained approvals from them regarding content. I also collected and kept all correspondence to and from participants and recorded everything in a research log. I asked my peers to review and provide an external check of the research process (Creswell, 2007). I provided rich descriptions that will help readers to make decisions regarding transferability (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Findings

In this section I provided a description of both cases, issues that emerged and a cross-case analysis comparing and contrasting two cases.

Case One: Lola's "Fun but Serious" Classroom

The classroom. The classroom is quite big and light with large windows on the side. Desks of an unusual shape, a shape of a trapezoid, are scattered around the classroom and allow two or three students to sit around them. Numerous authentic cultural Spanish posters hang on the walls and are constant reminders that we are in a Spanish classroom. Examples of such posters are the ones with cultural holidays and events like *Feria de Sevilla* or *Que bandera Que país*, and posters that provide a glimpse of ordinary life in Spanish speaking countries such as Bolivia, Belize, Guatemala, and Venezuela. Maps of Central and South America are some other examples of the authenticity in Lola's classroom. Artifacts of student work are displayed on the wall. At the entrance of the door *Mis reglas* (Rules) are clearly stated in English and in parallel in Spanish. The rules are brief and clear:

- Be in a seat working when the bell rings
- Bring all books and materials in class
- No candy
- Respect

Besides listed rules, goals for the class are stated as well:

- 100 % participation
- Tardies 0-1
- GPA 3-3.5

The teacher: Lola. Lola Lago is a twenty-four year old female, who received a Bachelor's degree in Spanish and has been teaching in a rural high school for almost two years. Lola is tall and has rather short black hair and big brown eyes. She has a cheerful and friendly personality. Lola has a loud teaching voice, is very passionate about teaching and mentions that teaching is something that she "was born to do," and therefore, cannot see herself "doing anything else and be happy."

Lola describes herself as being very caring and prides herself on making efforts "to see beyond the outer shell of people." She is a believer in "if you are going to do something you need to give 110 %." Lola is convinced that these characteristics allow her "to be very effective in the classroom" and "to reach more students." She indicates that her high expectations for students do not overshadow the fact that "learning a foreign language should be fun."

The lesson. In her written lesson plan Lola identifies objectives for the class and lists lesson activities together with detailed steps for their completion. La Esponja (warm-up) activity is a traditional routine in her classroom. "La Esponja esta aquí" ("Here is your warm-up activity") she announces loudly to students entering the classroom and points at the activity on an overhead projector. "La Esponja activity can be as simple as translating sentences or filling out crossword puzzle," explains Lola later to me. When checking La Esponja, Lola does not immediately approve or disapprove student answers, but after one student gives an answer, she asks her class, "Is it correct?" and when the class disapproves it she asks again, "How do you think should be correct?" PowerPoint presentation to review vocabulary follows La Esponja activity. Lola reviews Spanish vocabulary using multisensory input, which consists of visual, aural and written representation of each and every new word. After the review is completed, students are engaged in a pair-work activity. Lola allows students to move around and find a place in the classroom where they feel comfortable. She instructs students, "Go sit somewhere else" or "Go find a spot on the floor to relax." Lola keeps students on task and paces her lesson well. She monitors for students to do an activity in Spanish without referring to English. Students seem to be very aware of this. When a student asks his peer to pass a marker, the other replies, "Tell me in Spanish and I will give it to you."

Next Lola directs students to make "grupo de tres" (groups of threes) for the "Password game" activity. Students laugh when playing this game and judging from looks on their faces really enjoy it. "Freeze" says Lola, and all students stop talking and look at her. She has to clarify something to them. After permission to proceed is given students continue with the activity. A set of engaging student-centered activities is continued with "A war with flashcards," where students in groups of three work with one set of flashcards. "A war with flashcards" reinforces competition, and therefore is motivating to students. This activity ends this lesson.

Issues.

"High expectations no matter what." Expectations is one of the themes that emerged during the process of data analysis. Lola demonstrated her belief in high expectations by writing measurable and realistic objectives in her lesson plans, by acting on them, by expecting students to do their best during class and by discussing a role of expectations in her interview with me. Lola understands the importance of setting high expectations for herself and for her students and "sticking" firm with those expectations. She values the process of

goal setting in which she engages students in her classroom and which she believes makes students accountable for their learning.

Lola believes in setting high expectations to all students, and elaborated, "I think that having high expectations is not bad no matter what student you have." She argues that students will not have success in acquiring language when expectations in a classroom "are somewhat mediocre." She believes that there is a correlation between student achievement and teacher expectations, and stated, "If you look around the school and you see teacher expectations and how students are doing on the class...there is a huge correlation."

Lola not only emphasizes the importance of setting high expectations for herself and for her students, but the importance of "sticking firm with those expectations." She elaborates, "I have my expectations set.... I am not wishy-washy or lenient. I find it when you are lenient once, a kid can take advantage of that. I have the same expectations for you as I do for you." Lola has equally high expectations for all of her students.

Lola believes that asking students to set personal learning goals "raises student accountability" and "the belief that they can do it goes up." She argues that she makes students accountable for what they do because it will help them to be accountable in the outside world. Lola reflects about the importance of goal setting in her classroom by stating that "It changed student accountability because students have to answer for themselves.... Kids go back and see and pride and disappointment comes out."

"I care about them." Lola emphasizes the importance of a learning environment for students. She articulates that a learning environment needs to be a safe, low anxiety place, where there is a balance between humor and strictness. During lessons that I observed, Lola demonstrated her ability to correct student mistakes in a low anxiety environment. At the interview with me she mentioned the importance of being involved with students outside of school, which in her belief also adds to building a friendly learning environment.

Lola described comfortable classroom environment using such terms as "student-centered," "low anxiety place," an environment where students feel that "they are actually accomplishing something." She elaborates that "first and foremost it needs to be a low anxiety place," where a teacher keeps "the anxiety level down" and has students "constantly engaged."

Lola described her classroom environment as being "firm but fun" and called it "a little bit of both." Lola uses humor because "it makes kids less anxious in the classroom," but at the same time she adds "some seriousness" to show kids that "we are in business." Lola elaborates about having a balance between seriousness and fun in her classroom by stating that "We can have fun and we can say these little jokes and every once in a while discuss something, but we gotta get back to business, because I am in business."

While observing Lola, I noticed that she approaches error correction in a way that does not interfere with a low anxiety environment in her classroom. She does not "call out kids" or say "that's wrong" when they make mistakes but goes around "about the way of correcting mistakes" so that her students "do not feel stupid." She remembers "what it's like to be a student" and she thinks "from the student's standpoint" before correcting or calling on them. Lola supports kids outside the classroom because it "helps to build a rapport" and makes students "to respond easier when you ask them to do things in the classroom." Lola describes her involvement with students outside the class by stating the following:

I support my students outside of class. I go to their band concerts, I go to their wrestling. I know nothing about wrestling, but I go and watch them. I say "good job," and I think that helps interactions cause they see that I care about them.

"You have to buy into what you are selling." Lola believes in the importance of being able "to buy students into what you are selling." According to Lola, this ability includes teacher personality and attitude, knowledge of the subject matter as well as knowledge and confidence in second language acquisition theories, instructional technology and assessment.

When I asked Lola what makes her teaching successful, she answered without a second of hesitation "I think the attitude." She explained this statement, elaborating further:

I think it's a huge thing coming with a positive attitude.... Kids can tell if you are not into doing an activity, if you are not into teaching a topic, they're not gonna respond, they're not gonna do what you want them to do.

Lola added that "having a loud teaching voice" as well as "not being afraid to ask for help" are some of her personal characteristics that add to being "an effective teacher."

As previously stated, Lola believes that besides those personal characteristics knowledge is important. When observing Lola and reviewing her instructional materials I noticed that she conducts her lessons according to second language acquisition (SLA) theories. Lola follows SLA theories because behind those theories stands the research that says "that they work." Being comfortable with technology is a necessity too. "Technology is huge," Lola says and later elaborates, "I am very comfortable with it. I use it almost every day with something, whether it's showing a YouTube video or a PowerPoint or a game on a computer. I am constantly using technology."

An effective teacher needs "to be knowledgeable" in the assessment area. I noticed that Lola uses a variety of assessments in her classroom and gives "different assessment opportunities for students." She elaborates, "Having a variety of assessment makes a successful classroom."

Language proficiency plays an important role for Lola because "the higher teacher's proficiency the more comfortable she is teaching, and that increases student success and acquisition." Lola knows the abilities of her students, and therefore breaks sentences down, repeats them, and asks students for key words without referring to English.

Case Two: Rachel's "Realistic and Practical" Classroom

The classroom. The medium size classroom is light and clean. Individual desks are neatly organized in rows. A small window, which cannot be seen from the doors, is situated in a far corner of the classroom. Technology is in the left corner near teacher's desk, which is cluttered with stacks of paper. A desk is in a place that allows seeing all students very well and observing them when they work in their seats. There are only a couple of Spanish posters on the wall. The poster that includes Spanish question words "Quién?," " Como?," "Por que?" together with a map of Mexico are the only two posters in this classroom. Mexican sombreros of a variety of colors are hanging on the walls, and serve as authentic decorations in this classroom. A bookcase with Spanish books and dictionaries is in the back of the classroom. The classroom is not over decorated and overcrowded with artifacts but looks rather simple.

The teacher: Rachel. Rachel Smith is a twenty-nine year old female and a mother of a two-year old toddler. She received her Bachelor's Degree in Spanish and ESL and her Master's degree in Educational Administration. Rachel has seven years of teaching experience and is currently teaching Spanish and coaching two sports in a rural high school community. She is tall and slim with shoulder-length loose blond hair and blue eyes. She looked a bit shy when she greeted me.

Rachel describes herself as "a fairly relaxed teacher" who thinks "it's important for students to be able to use language in practical and realistic situations." In order to accomplish

this, she does "a lot of group work, partner speaking, role playing activities" and tries "to find an authentic context for the material as much as possible."

The lesson. Rachel starts her class with the "Bellringer," a review activity of what students did a day before. She gets "the housekeeping things out of the way" and then together with students checks the "Bellringer." She has clearly stated the objective in her lesson plan, which indicated that students would be able "to analyze familial relationships in readings." Once finished with the "Bellringer," Rachel provides directions for completion of a Family Tree activity, that students have to complete in pairs. Various pictures of family members with written descriptions written below are hanging around the classroom. Students walk around and stop in front of each picture to read descriptions that they need to fill out a family tree and answer the questions. Upon completion of the first part of this activity one student describes a family member to a peer who draws that member on a piece of paper. Later on, Rachel checks answers to the questions as a class. All students have an opportunity to volunteer their answers. This Family Tree activity takes the majority of class time. Rachel implements her knowledge of theories on second language acquisition into her lesson. For example, she provides students with multiple forms of information (i.e., visual and written) to help students comprehend new material. She also assists and guides students when necessary and in this way implements Vygotskian concept of scaffolding in her practice. She engages students in the pair work discovery learning activity, and allows for the negotiation of meaning to happen, which according to Krashen's hypothesis (1982) facilitates language acquisition. When students finish with the activity, Rachel wants to know how they feel about it. A couple of students cried out that the activity was "fun," while the others stated that "it was hard to start." Rachel finishes her class by reminding students about the quiz the next day. The bell rings. The objective of the class is accomplished. Students had ample opportunities to manipulate vocabulary on a topic of "Family" and were engaged in a set of contextualized activities that required a use of multiple modes of communication.

Issues.

"Expectations are huge for achievement." Rachel sees expectations as the important factor for student success in a classroom. She believes that a teacher should push students to use their abilities and not let them "slack off." Rachel engages students in a process of goal setting because she is convinced that goal setting keeps students focused and accountable for their achievement.

Rachel believes that "students will do whatever you expect them to do" and elaborates, "They'll do what you want of them, you just need to make sure that they know what you want and keep them at it." She believes that if a teacher has high expectations students "will live up to those expectations" and the job of a teacher is "to push students" to these expectations. During my observations, I noticed that Rachel expects students in her classroom to "try hard," "to try independently as much as they can," "to use their ability" and "to do things that are a little above their current ability."

She engages students in a goal setting process because "goals are good to focus" and "to give students something to work for." Rachel mentioned that students appreciate goal setting because they can always go back and "see how much they've learned" and can reflect upon "their strengths and weaknesses." Students will "sit down and analyze and look through" their goals at the end of a chapter. They will see whether goals were accomplished and will provide evidence and reflection for the future on what should be done differently.

"There is a line between a teacher and a friend." Rachel emphasized the importance of a safe learning environment for any learning process. She creates a comfortable learning

environment where there is "a line between a teacher and a friend." Rachel avoids direct error correction and criticism in her classroom in order for students not to "feel any discomfort."

I observed that Rachel has a low anxiety safe environment where students are "comfortable," feel like "they can voice their opinions" and "can be a part of the discussion." She called her classroom a "fairly relaxed environment" where students are not afraid to speak Spanish. She elaborates, "If it's an environment where they don't feel comfortable they are not going to use the language."

Rachel keeps a balance between being strict and friendly at the same time. She states that she is "not one of those teachers who needs a dead silence in the classroom," but she is friendly and makes students comfortable in a classroom by encouraging them "to give their opinions" and "to share things." Rachel is also firm with students. She mentioned that she loves to talk "about what is going on in a student's family or work," but she also reminds students that they are in her class to learn. Rachel elaborates:

I have friendly relationships with them but I am not their friend. I am not a teacher who is going to be all buddy buddy and let them do whatever they want. and we can have fun but I am there to teach them. There is a line between a teacher and a friend.

Rachel keeps the affective filter low in her classroom when it comes to correcting mistakes. I observed that she does not correct every mistake that students make when speaking Spanish because "it's better for them to be comfortable speaking even if it's not exactly perfect." Students in Rachel's classroom feel safe. They know that they will not receive criticism neither from her nor from their peers when they volunteer and give a wrong answer.

"The more you know the better." Rachel demonstrated what personal characteristics helped her to produce high achieving students and described what knowledge is necessary for being successful in the Spanish classroom. She showed the importance of "feeling comfortable in the subject matter as well as knowing how to teach it." Rachel understands that a teacher needs to be confident in other areas besides knowing a foreign language.

Rachel's "energy level plays the role in student willingness to work." She does not let the outside stuff affect what she is doing, and elaborates that when she is "tired and kind of crabby" it affects students and their interest level. When observing Rachel I noticed that she makes adjustments for her lesson plan. She explains later that her flexibility and "willingness to make adjustments" are personal characteristics that help her to be a more effective teacher. Rachel mentioned that her ability "not to get too frustrated or upset" when the lesson did not go well but "think about how to change it for the next time and move on" helps her to succeed as a teacher.

Rachel believes that second language acquisition theories are important to inform her teaching. I noticed that she follows Vygotsky's theory while creating her instructional materials and teaching in the classroom. She comments: "Scaffolding is pretty big because you can't throw something at kids and expect them to get it. You have to remember to take it piece by piece and break the material down." Rachel mentioned that she learned from theories that material needs to be "realistic and practical" to students, and that "context for introducing new grammar or vocabulary" is necessary to show students in what authentic situations it can be used. Rachel emphasized the importance of authenticity in teaching a foreign language. She emphasized "authentic materials," "authentic assessment," "authentic tasks" in her classroom.

Rachel feels "pretty comfortable with technology" and engages students in creating PowerPoints, movies, podcasts and uses online games from time to time. She also does "a

variety of assessment." Rachel is "pretty comfortable" with the language that she teaches. She believes that being proficient in a language does not mean you are going to be a good teacher, but agrees that "the more proficient you are in the language the better it is for students."

Cross-case Analysis

Much of Lola's and Rachel's lessons reflect similar processes to develop high achieving students. Both teachers scaffold learning in several ways. They create well-suited instructional materials and detailed lesson plans for students, starting with warm-up activities to review previous material and continuing with student-centered tasks that require negotiation of meaning using Spanish. They build their lessons taking into account student background knowledge and in this way are able to bridge the familiar with the unfamiliar for students. Building on student prior knowledge and experiences is consistent with current perspectives on learning theory (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Weaver, 1994). Underpinning both lessons are the (a) self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986, 1997) which predicts that individuals will learn better if they believe that they are capable of doing so and (b) the social aspect of learning in the construction of meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers are aware of these learning theories, and engage students in a meaningful learning that spurs them toward discovery and interaction in the second language.

Both Lola's and Rachel's classrooms have high expectations and both teachers are convinced that students will follow established expectations when a teacher clearly lets students know what is expected from the very beginning. Both teachers believe that expectations contribute to high student achievement in their Spanish classrooms. Teachers do a variety of things that might impact student achievement. For example, both teachers have a low affective filter environment in their classrooms, which is necessary for learning to happen (Krashen, 1982). The teachers' support and interactions with students outside of class add to building a low anxiety environment in the classroom. Both teachers combine seriousness with entertainment in their classrooms. "We can have fun...and once in a while discuss something, but we gotta get back to business," Lola states. Rachel agrees, explaining that "...we can have fun, but I am there to teach them. There is a line between a teacher and a friend."

Teacher proficiency in the target language as well as the ability to share this knowledge with students are important components in their teaching (Arikan et al., 2008; Benson et al., 2001; Young & Shaw, 1999). Lola's and Rachel's personalities are very different but they both are able to use their personal characteristics and strengths in a way that adds to success in their classrooms. Thus, Lola characterized herself as being "loud" and "firm," whereas Rachel is a more quiet and "relaxed teacher." Socio-affective skills add to teacher ability to be effective in the classroom. This is consistent with Park and Lee's (2006) findings that suggested that teacher socio-affective skills are important elements for productive student learning.

In the final analysis, I believe that Lola's and Rachel's high expectations, professional teacher training and their proficiency in Spanish language and culture together with their personalities deepen their awareness of student abilities and enhance their teaching. Lola and Rachel serve as excellent examples of foreign language educators with an ability to produce high achieving students. These stories add to our knowledge about the nature of student learning in the foreign language classroom and reveal how teachers can design classroom instruction that embeds high expectations. This may help other foreign language teachers to design pedagogical practices that will help to produce high achieving students.

Discussion

The study suggested that expectations play an important role in student learning. Expectations shape the learning process in Spanish high school classrooms, and therefore, contribute to student progress and behavior in those classrooms. Teacher belief in a strong correlation between established expectations and student academic achievement is consistent with other research findings (e.g., see Brophy, 1983; Cooper & Good, 1983).

To be able to make students live up to high expectations, teachers need to have high expectations for themselves and follow those expectations. Lola's and Rachel's high expectations for themselves were revealed in their effort to constantly use innovative technology in the classroom, to utilize a variety of assessments and ample amount of foreign language, and to conduct their pedagogical procedures according to second language acquisition theories. Having high expectations for themselves stimulated Lola and Rachel to set high expectations for their students, which as mentioned before, contributed to the overall student academic achievement and growth (Benson et al., 2001; Park & Lee, 2006; Young & Shaw, 1999).

Both teachers have high expectations for their students and act on those expectations in a variety of ways. An example of acting on high expectations is the fact that teachers create a comfortable learning environment, which allows students to live up to established high expectations as well as to use a foreign language without a fear of being criticized or ridiculed in a classroom (Krashen, 1982, as cited in Shrum & Glisan, 2005). Having a safe and comfortable learning environment is of an importance in any foreign language classroom because according to Krashen's input hypothesis (1982) it allows for the input to be noticed and reflected by the learner (Krashen, 1982, as cited in Shrum & Glisan, 2005). Teachers understand that a safe learning environment contributes to student learning and consequently, assists students in fulfilling high expectations that are set for them. The finding that Lola and Rachel teach students to set personal learning goals that make students responsible for their own learning (Van Houten, 2006) is another proof of them acting on high expectations (Brustad, Bankers, & Smith, 2000; Roberts, 2001). Lola and Rachel understand, that in order for students to fulfill high expectations, their self-efficacy needs to be enhanced. According to Bandura's self-efficacy theory, students are likely to engage in activities to the extent that they perceive themselves successful in those activities (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986). Teachers in both classrooms understand that perceived ability is a key factor in student academic achievement (Nicholls, 1989; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996) and direct their teaching procedures in a way that supports those beliefs. Both Lola and Rachel create learning activities in which students can succeed. They provide emotional stimulation and give students credible feedback to guide them through the lesson. As the data shows, Lola and Rachel act on their high expectations by giving students ample opportunities for the foreign language input, output, peer interactions and negotiation of meaning, that consequently, contribute to student language achievement (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981, 1987). These opportunities include a variety of student-centered activities, such as information gap activities, small group discussions in the foreign language, dialogues and other assignments that require the use of Spanish. Teachers' desire to engage students in as much Spanish as possible and their beliefs that students are capable of using Spanish in a variety of activities is a clear indication of high expectations that teachers have for students.

Limitations and Future Research

This study is by no means comprehensive and has limitations. The first limitation of the study is the fact that data was collected over a short period of time due to the time

constrains for which the project needed to be completed. I might have needed to spend more time on the site to receive a deeper understanding of the data. The second limitation of this study is the fact that although the study produced rich data, there is a fear that some data was neglected. Based on discussed limitations of the study, I suggest future research to be conducted in the following areas. First, future studies might replicate these findings selecting other participants across academic levels and explore their data through the in-depth qualitative analysis. Second, in order to get a broader picture of what makes these classrooms successful and allows students to receive high achievement scores, student perceptions about the topic should be explored. Thirdly, it will be interesting to study expectations in the low achieving classrooms and compare them with high achieving classrooms.

This being said, I hope that findings of this multiple instrumental case study will contribute to a more complete knowledge base of teacher expectations for foreign language educators in the United States.

Closing Vignette

I think teacher expectations are a huge thing for achievement. If you expect them to do well and you push them to do well, they will. You have to have good relationships with your students. I try to make things interesting to them, but there is a line between a teacher and a friend, and as long as you have a good relationship with students, you still have to expect them to work hard and expect them to learn, and that's where the majority of the class time is. It's not sitting and telling stories, it's I want you to work, I want you to learn, we can have fun but you still have to learn. And I learn as I go. I still have some time that I don't know what I am doing. You just have to improve and want to improve, not just get complacent of what you are doing from year to year. Be willing to make adjustments and that's about it. (Rachel, 2010 March 16)

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