WHERE’S THE COMMUNITY?: BILINGUAL INTERNET CHAT AND THE “FIFTH C” OF THE NATIONAL STANDARDS

Abstract

Situated in the Five Cs of the National Standards framework (Communication, Cultures, Comparisons, Connections, and Communities), this study analyzes chat room communication during a ten-week collaboration between university-level Spanish L1 learners of English and English L1 learners of Spanish. The study aims to relate this Internet-based community of learners to the Fifth C, the Communities standard, illustrating how learners can become integrated into a bilingual speech community, which can subsume the remaining four Cs of the Standards. Suggestions will be made for updating the Communities Standard.

Key Words

bilingual chat, ESL, learner communities, National Standards, Spanish, synchronous computer-mediated communication

1.0 Introduction

The National Standards have impacted K-12 foreign language (FL)\(^1\) instruction across the nation. The alliterated “Five Cs” approach of the Standards reorganized the goals of FL instruction beyond the traditional four skills approach (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). (See Appendix A for a complete listing of the Standards). Principally designed for K-12 instruction, the Standards have been widely adopted in the postsecondary context as well (Phillips & Terry, 1999). Standards-based textbooks for postsecondary instruction have already emerged (see for example Collopy O’Donnell & Kelly, 2003). Most FL teaching materials still center primarily on the Communication and Cultures standards, although some effort has been made by publishers to integrate more fully the Comparisons, Connections, and Communities standards (Blaz, 2002).

The are a number of publications centered upon the National Standards (for example, Blaz, 2002; Gettys, 2003; Guntermann, 1999; McGee, 2001; Phillips & Terry, 1999; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2005), but empirical studies framed within the Standards are relatively few (for examples see Okubo & Kumahata, 2001; Torii-Williams, 2004). A particularly promising research area is the intersection of Internet technology and the National Standards. The Internet can complement and enhance classroom instruction by providing learners immediate access to information in and about the L2 and its associated cultures, as well as opportunities to connect with native speakers of the language via computer-mediated communication.

Research related to the National Standards should not only explore their pedagogical applications, but also seek to update, challenge, and expand the tenets upon which the Standards were formulated. The recent proliferation of Internet chat and instant messaging, for example, coupled with the “social turn” in second language acquisition theory (Block, 2003), has created a new realm of possibilities for the Communities standard not thought of when the Standards document was drafted. Specifically, notions of community of practice (Wenger, 1998), community of learners (Hall, 2002), speech

\(^1\) Foreign language (FL) and second language (L2) will be used interchangeably in this article.
**community** (Hymes, 1972) and *virtual community* (Crystal, 2001) provide theoretical bases for the possible expansion of the Communities standard.

This study builds upon the extant literature on the National Standards and on FL chat room communication by establishing a connection between a bilingual Internet chat collaboration and the “Five Cs”, with an emphasis on the Communities standard. Chatscripts and student questionnaires serve as the data to answer the general research question, “In what ways can a bilingual chat collaboration promote communicative behaviors as described in the Five Cs of the National Standards, particularly the Community Standard?” Excerpts of communication exemplifying the Cultures, Comparisons and Connections standards will be presented. Theoretical constructs based on the concept of *community* will be invoked to propose an expansion of the Communities standard and the anchoring of Communications, Cultures, Connections and Comparisons within the Communities standard.

### 2.0 Internet Chat and FL Learning

Synchronous computer-mediated communication (“chat”) was first incorporated into FL teaching and research in the early 1990s. Early studies of this electronic mode of communication highlighted a number of its pedagogical advantages, including increased quantity and equality of participation among members of a chat group (as compared to face to face conversation) (Warschauer, 1996a), the ability to communicate without interruption, reduced anxiety to communicate in the L2, honest and candid expression of emotion, personalized identification of target language errors (via chatscripts), (Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995), and use of more lexically and syntactically complex language as compared to face to face communication Warschauer (1996a).

Studies carried out in the interactionist framework of second language acquisition have confirmed that learners in chat rooms can engage in the negotiation of meaning, which is believed by interactionist theorists to promote the development of grammatical competence (Blake, 2000; Pellettieri, 2000). Smith (2003) devised an expansion of the Varonis and Gass (1985) model of negotiation of meaning, bringing this model in line with the reality of synchronous electronic communication.

Recent scholarship has also focused on sociocultural aspects of chat, especially in intercultural communication. A number of studies report on reciprocal international chat collaborations in which learners of language A who are native speakers of language B are paired with native speakers of language A who are learning language B. In Europe these reciprocal arrangements are commonly referred to as *tandem language learning* (e.g., Brammerts, 1996) and in the U.S. as telecollaboration (e.g., Belz, 2001; 2002; 2003; Warschauer, 1996b). A well developed collaboration of this type is the Cultura project, designed to develop FL students' understanding of foreign cultural attitudes, concepts, beliefs, and ways of interacting and looking at the world (Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Mailet, 2001). The Cultura Project utilizes tasks such as word associations and sentence completions to stimulate learning of subtle cultural differences. Belz (2002) sheds light on various social behaviors and issues associated with a telecollaboration between a U.S. university and one in Germany. For example, she notes that mismatches in proficiency had negative effects on interpersonal and linguistic aspects of the partnership, which in turn affected how some participants felt about what they had gained from the collaboration.
The various studies on collaborative, cross-language chat demonstrate the unique ways in which FL learners make real-life connections and form social relationships with native speakers of their FL within an electronically-mediated bilingual speech community setting.

2.1 Chat and the Notion of Community

A number of theoretical conceptions of community in the literature can relate to FL use and learning. A speech community, for example, consists of members who frequently interact, using shared rules of speaking and interpretation of speech performance, and often distinguishing themselves from other speech communities (Hymes, 1972). Discourse communities are groups that achieve certain goals or purposes through communication which is usually some type of written genre (Swales, 1990). A community of practice is comprised of individuals who interact on a regular basis around a common set of issues, interests or needs, or sustained pursuit of some type of enterprise (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Finally, the virtual community has been defined as a shared space of Internet communication with unseen others in which the participants may develop a sense of community-centered identity and belonging (Crystal, 2001).

In a study of fourth-semester learners of Spanish engaged in nine weekly one-hour chat sessions in small groups, Darhower (2002) describes how the chatters transformed the chat room environment into a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) governed by its own set of communicative norms developed online by its members. Communicating almost entirely in Spanish, the learners demonstrated social cohesion by means of extensive greetings and leave-takings and use of humor; they experimented with alternate identities and role plays, and engaged in sarcasm and insults of a playful nature. The study shows that electronic discourse affords language learners a communicative environment in which they are empowered to develop their L2 communicative skills in a more autonomous way than what the typical teacher-centered L2 classroom affords them. Another recent study centered upon the notion of community (Arnold, Ducate, Lomicka, & Lord, 2005) demonstrated the benefits that social learning afforded undergraduate teacher education students in cross-institutional asynchronous discussion forums.

The fifth C of the National Standards, Communities, as it is currently worded, places the learner within the L2 speech community only indirectly. Standard 5.1 states that “Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting and Standard 5.2 “Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment. Only in the Sample Progress Indicators, Grade 12, does it specify that, “Students establish and/or maintain interpersonal relations with speakers of the language. The few studies that exist on the Communities standard focus on receiving or providing information in the L2 on web sites, or implementing service learning projects (Heffner-Charles, 2000; Overfield, 1997). With the now ubiquitous use of Internet technology, drawing on the concepts of community presented above, the Communities standard could be significantly expanded. Specifically, “community” can provide the means by which Communication and the other three Cs of the Standards can be carried out. It is not by accident that “communication” and “community” are derived from the same stem. This study aims to describe and analyze a community based, electronically mediated language learning forum.
3.0 The Study: Participants and Context

A class of 20 fourth-semester (L1 English) Spanish students at a large public university in North Carolina was paired with a (L1 Spanish) class of 20 intermediate conversational English students at a large public university in Puerto Rico to participate in weekly bilingual chat sessions. The majority of the students on both sides were within the intermediate-mid to intermediate-high proficiency range on the ACTFL scale (estimated). The instructors\(^2\) of the classes generally did not participate in the chat sessions.

In groups of three to five learners, about half from each linguistic background, the students participated in weekly bilingual chat sessions, half an hour in English and half an hour in Spanish. The topics, listed in Figure 1, were selected based on grammatical objectives of the language courses, such as past narration, as well as providing chatters with opportunities to learn about each other’s culture. During the last two weeks the topic was left open in order to allow students to pursue discussion of their individual interests. Although the topics were designed to some degree with the National Standards in mind, learners were not specifically instructed to attempt to fulfill the indicators of the Standards in their chat sessions. The chatscript data used in this study are part of a larger set of data collected during the same semester.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week One</th>
<th>Get to know each other</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week Two</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Three</td>
<td>Significant childhood events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Four</td>
<td>Significant childhood events (continued)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Five</td>
<td>The Devil’s Sentry Box” (A Puerto Rican legend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Six</td>
<td>Lola of America (A Puerto Rican legend)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Seven</td>
<td>Puerto Rican and United States relations in political perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Eight</td>
<td>Get to know each other (some groups have new chat partners)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Nine</td>
<td>Free Topic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Ten</td>
<td>Free Topic</td>
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3.1 Data Collection

Transcripts of the ten chat sessions and a participant questionnaire are the data driving this study. The questionnaire included 34 Likert scale questions, 16 of which were related to the National Standards. Another section of the questionnaire sought participant perspectives on the chat collaboration via the open-ended question, “What did you like most about the chats?” The chatscripts were catalogued according to week and group number. Episode 1A, for example, was Group A’s chat session during week one. To provide a description of participant communicative behaviors, excerpts were extracted from the weekly chatscripts to illustrate examples of chat communication centered upon the Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities standards. The Communications standard is not specifically illustrated because “participating in conversations”, the criterion stated in Communications standard 1.1., is basically carried

\(^2\) The researcher was the instructor of the North Carolina students.
out throughout the chat sessions, unless a particular chatter is not participating. The excerpts chosen for analysis are from one of the eight chat groups, Group A. It was decided to focus on one group in order to reduce the large amount of data collected during the study and to follow the same group in an ethnographic manner. Group A was chosen via purposive sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) because their interactions clearly demonstrated a sense of community. The participants of Group A were two female and one male student from Puerto Rico, and two female and one male student from North Carolina. All were between 18 and 22 years of age.

3.2 Data Analysis

The data analysis will begin with the Likert scale questions focused on the five Cs of the National Standards, followed by the open-ended question, “What did you like most about the chats”?, and will end with chat excerpts from Group A.

3.2.1 Likert Scale Items

Table 2 shows the means for the 16 Likert scale questions on the questionnaire (N=33) focused on the five Cs. The Likert scale options were: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral/undecided (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1).

Table 2: Results of post-chat questionnaire: Likert Scale Items.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions 1-5: Communication</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I provided information to my chat partners in my second language.</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I expressed my feelings and emotions in my second language in the chat.</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I obtained information from my chat partners in my second language.</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I exchanged opinions with my chat partners in my second language.</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I understood and interpreted messages on a variety of topics in my second language.</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions 6-10: Cultures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. I learned about cultural practices of my chat partners’ country from chatting.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I learned about cultural perspectives of my chat partners’ country from chatting.</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I learned about cultural products (food, arts, literature, etc.) of my chat partners’ country from chatting.</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I understand the relationship between some cultural practices and perspectives of my chat partners’ country from chatting.</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I understand the relationship between some cultural products and perspectives of my chat partners’ country from chatting.</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions 11-12: Connections</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11. My knowledge of other disciplines (i.e., political science, sociology, etc.) has been reinforced or furthered through chatting in my second language.</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I acquired information and recognized viewpoints that are only available from someone from my chat partners’ country.</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions 13-14: Comparisons</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. I came to understand some things about language by comparing Spanish</td>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and English in the chats.

14. I came to understand something about the concept of culture by comparing the culture of the other country with my own

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 15: Communities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15. Chatting with students from the other country enabled me to use my second language for personal enjoyment and enrichment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. I plan to chat with native speakers of my second language in the future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly all of the items produced means of 4.2 or above, the exceptions being questions eight and ten at 3.5 and 3.8 respectively. A likely reason for the low means for these items was the participants’ failure to identify the full gamut of “cultural products” that they discussed in their chat sessions. Overall, the questionnaire data indicate that the learners perceived the bilingual chat experience to have produced a number of opportunities for L2 communication as described in the National Standards.

3.2.2 Open ended Question

To gain additional information on student perceptions of the chats, 12 open-ended questions were put in the questionnaire. Table 3 reports responses to the question, “What did you like the most about the chat”? The researcher subjectively categorized the responses into Cultures, Comparisons, Connections and Communities, although many of the responses overlapped into other categories.

Table 3: Student Responses to “What did you like the most about the chat?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultures:</th>
<th>Connections:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>getting to learn new things about Puerto Rico, even though I have visited before.</td>
<td>the way of make new friends and compare the feelings and there points of view of the war , the friendship and been a universitary studets. (also Communities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it [was] very interesting and I learned a lot about the Puerto Rican culture.</td>
<td>the fact that we were actually talking to real people and they were our age and interested in similar things, yet also in different things that I could learn about from them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chatting directly with someone from a spanish culture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>getting know about the people in Puerto Rico. how they live and wht they believe in.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being able to see what other people in other cultures do for fun, hobbies, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparisons:</th>
<th>Communities:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the fact that I learned about the opinions on certain topics of the chat members.</td>
<td>meeting the girls in my chat- we got along very well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>talking to people who lived in a different culture than mine, and had different opinions on things.</td>
<td>When there was an interesting conversation, chat was a good experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note that, due to the bilingual nature of the chat sessions, some of the discourse referred to in the questionnaire may have been realized in the learners’ L1, which is not addressed in any way in the standards.

When the comment could have been placed into more than one category, the researcher subjectively placed them into one or the other category. Language expression was left in its original form.
being able to talk to students from a different
culture and not only learn about their culture, but
also to find all the similarities between our cultures.
(Also Cultures)

I liked the opportunity to exchange opinions and
facts with people of other country with other
culture. (Also Cultures)

talking about the cultural perspectives of the war.
to learn different points of view about the topics.

As shown in Table 3, the participants identified a number of factors that relate
their chat experience to the National Standards. Several of the comments related to
meeting people from another culture, which demonstrates the Communities standards 5.2,
“using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment, and 5.1, “using the language
beyond the classroom setting” since the interactions occurred in a chat room setting
rather than in the classroom. It appears that the learners felt a sense of community within
their chat room setting. The following section triangulates these data through illustrative
excerpts of chat room communication relating to one or more of the Five Cs.

3.2.3 Chat Excerpts

The following excerpts were selected to illustrate chat room communication in
Group A related to the Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities standards.
The standards being illustrated are listed after the heading of each excerpt. The excerpts
are presented in chronological order.

Excerpt 1 (Episode 1A): cultures 2.1; connections 3.2; comparisons 4.2
1. PR1>>>what you do for fun?
2. PR1>>>we have to many places for fun
3. US2>>>do you have a lot of clubs?
4. NC1>>>oohh I like dancing too
5. PR1>>>ahh our other national sport is the drink
6. PR1>>>if you go to the Old San Juan.....wow
7. NC1>>>is that a city?
8. PR1>>>the old San Juan have too many places for dance
9. NC2>>>we do not have enough
10. NC2>>>most clubs are expensive or for 21 and older
11. PR1>>>Old San Juan is part of San Juan (PR’s capital city) but is the colonial area
12. NC1>>>oohhhh
13. NC1>>>like Charleston
14. NC2>>>wow is it pretty?
15. PR1>>>in puerto rico you need only 18 for enter in a bar, pub or disco
16. PR1>>>is very pretty

5 In this, and all excerpts, the original language was left intact, regardless of mechanical and language
errors. Students from North Carolina are labeled “NC1” and “NC2”, and students from Puerto Rico are
labeled PR1, PR2 and PR3.
The discussion compares nightlife entertainment in Puerto Rico with that of the U.S., especially regarding the practice of drinking alcoholic beverages. Through this exchange, the chatters learn about how cultural perspectives on the practice of consuming alcoholic beverages differ in their respective homelands. In lines 6-16, they discuss the ways in which their respective capital cities differ in the availability of nightclubs and in the legal drinking age. From this they conclude that Puerto Rican culture is more liberal than United States culture in terms of consumption of alcoholic beverages. Discussion of issues relating to alcohol consumption gave students the opportunity to discover how different cultures view and carry out the same practices in similar or different ways.

**Excerpt 2 (Episode 5A): cultures 2.1, connections 3.2**

1. PR1>>and you really think that this war is necessary
2. NC1>>yes, i do.
3. PR1>>ok
4. NC1>>i think we have tried everything else, with patience
5. NC2>>me too
6. PR2>>our people in that wars are always “meat of cannons”
7. PR1>>that is true
8. NC1>>what do you mean?
9. PR1>>our peole alwais are in front of the cannons
10. NC2>>Do you mean that all of your people get killed all the time
11. PR2>>Since WW1 Puerto Ricans are always in the Front of Battle.... Why?
12. NC2>>because of our wars
13. PR1>>compared to othe states puertorricans is the most ..
14. PR1>>people than are activated
15. PR2>>Per Square Mile We are on the top of the Dead list.
16. NC1>>really...i have never heard that.
17. PR1>>yes that trut in the past war more puertocican died that others

In this excerpt NC1 and NC2 obtain a Puerto Rican perspective on the U.S. war in Iraq. Since Puerto Rico is a U.S. commonwealth, a number of Puerto Ricans have fought and died in U.S. wars, which NC1 and NC2 apparently were not aware of (line 16). As evidenced in the print and television media, U.S. citizens have always been divided over this particular war, with support for it decreasing over time. Puerto Ricans in general tend to be against war, as is evidenced by the many protests against U.S. wars and against having army ROTC programs on university campuses in Puerto Rico. The chat discussion enabled the students to share their unique cultural perspectives with each other regarding an issue that affects them both.

**Excerpt 3 (Episode 5A): cultures 2.1**

1. PR1>>Puede que aquel baile fuera el origen del perreo. Saben lo que es el perreo, [NC2] y [NC1]?
2. PR1>>El perreo es un baile tipico de Puerto Rico, donde hombres y mujeres bailan muy, muy, muy pegados, haciendo movimientos muy, muy, muy sensuales.
3. NC3>>es el perreo similar a el tengo
4. PR2>>no es similar al tango
6. PR1>>No, el tango es mucho mas elegante. El perreo es algo mucho mas moderno, lo baila la gente joven en las fiestas y las discotecas.
7. NC3>>oh, es el perreo muy dificil y que tipo de musica toca con el perreo?
8. PR1>>La musica del perreo se llama Regueton. No es dificil, solo hay que hacer gestos sexuales y pegarse bien. Es un poco pornografico.
9. PR2>>en los videos de Reggaeton es muy comun ver gente bailando el perreo
10. NC3>>ahhh si. es muy popular un Puerto Rico?
11. PR2>>si

The genesis of this discussion was a dance mentioned in the Puerto Rican legend “The Devil’s Sentry Box”. PR1’s pondering in line 1 whether the dance mentioned in the story is the origin of “el perreo” (a dance which is somewhat similar to the “dirty dancing” that was popular in the U.S. in the 1980s) enables NC1 to learn about this popular dance among Puerto Rican young adults. In line 8, NC1 tries to understand what the “perreo” is by drawing on his knowledge of Spanish-speaking cultures. PR1 and PR2 provide a detailed explanation about the dance (lines 2, 9, 11) and by the end of the excerpt it appears that NC1 comes to understand what it is. This excerpt relates to Cultures Standard 2.1., although it does not move into a discussion of the relationship between the cultural practice and the cultural perspectives that relate to it (i.e., the role of dancing in culture, as well as romantic relationships).

Excerpt 4 (Episode 6A): culture 2.2; connections 3.2
1. PR1>>Yes, we were reading an article about Lola Rodriguez de Tio
2. PR2>>she is one of our national icons
3. PR1>>She was a leader,
4. NC1>>what does she do?
5. PR2>>She write the original version of our National Anthem
6. NC1>>oooooh
7. NC1>>cool
8. PR1>>She was a poet, that wrote the first lirics of our national Hymn
9. NC2>>that’s cool
10. PR2>>and our flag is bases in she’s designs
11. NC1>>so she designed the flag?
12. PR1>>She was a very strong women that broke, in some terms, the prejuice about women.
… [Some unrelated lines of text were deleted here by the researcher.]
13. NC1>>wow
14. NC1>>she seems very important
15. NC2>>why is she called Lola of America?
16. PR1>>Because she fought of the liberties of many latinamericans countries
17. NC1>>liberties from what?
18. PR2>>remember that America is not only the United States
19. PR1>>For the independance of Spain, etc.
20. PR2>>All the Latin American countries studies the life and works of Lola Rodriguez de Tio
21. NC2>>that’s cool, she sounds very influential
22. PR1>>I mean been independance of Spain
23. NC2>>for independence from Spain?
24. NC1>>oh ok
25. PR1>>Yes she was and in some forms she is continuing her influence in many forms
26. NC2>>that’s awesome
27. PR1>>Yes from Spain
28. NC2>>how long ago did she live?
29. PR2>>she is named Lola de America because many persons in America says that she is Citizen of the
30. American Continent
The chatters exchange information about an important historical figure, Lola Rodríguez, and about the Puerto Rican flag. (Prior to this excerpt, the U.S. students had compared Lola to Betsy Ross, the person credited with the design of the U.S. flag.) Just as important as this exchange is PR2’s statement (line 18) that the U.S. is not the equivalent of “America”. This is an important cultural lesson for U.S. citizens, many of whom freely interchange the words “United States” and “America”. Equating the two terms can be seen as ethnocentric in other countries that inhabit the American continent.

**Excerpt 5 (Episode 7A): connections 3.1, 3.2, comparisons 4.2**

1. NC1>>how often do you have elections?
2. PR1>>Every 4 years
3. PR2>>at the same time that you
4. NC2>>do many people vote?
5. PR1>>Like the US sistem
6. PR2>>an 88%
7. NC1>>88%? wow that’s a lot
8. NC2>>wow!!!
9. NC1>>that’s great
10. PR1>>Puerto Rico have the highest level of voters
11. PR2>>that’s wrong
12. PR3>>Why?
13. PR2>>we are on the top five but Chile have an 98%
14. PR1>>The first country is Brasil Because you have to
15. NC2>>that’s crazy
16. PR1>>go voting
17. PR2>>becouse in the Chilean system the vote is compulsory
18. PR1>>like in Brasil
19. NC1>>oh ok
20. NC2>>we have a really low voter turnout
21. NC1>>do you have a unicameral legislature or a bicameral?
22. PR1>>Bicameral
23. PR2>>we elect our senators and representants in a bicameral system
24. PR3>>Bicameral
25. PR2>>and we elect an a Resident comissioner in US Congress
26. NC2>>what are your opinions about Puerto Rico being a U.S. state or being independent or neither?
27. PR2>>he have voice but not vote
28. PR3>>Well, thats is a good question
29. PR1>>the resident comissioner is a diplomatic figure
30. NC1>>who is the current resident comissioner?
31. PR1>>I think than all countries have the rigth of being free
32. PR2>>Anibal Acevedo Vila
33. PR2>>from the Popular Democratic Party
34. PR3>>Yes, I think so.
35. NC1>>so you would rather Puerto Rico be an Independent Country?
36. PR2>>you think what NC2
37. PR1>>that would be my choice insted of being a state
38. PR2>>No
39. PR2>>at this moment PR can’t support anindependent state
40. PR1>>but I believe in our status
41. PR1>>Why not?
In addition to making comparisons between the two cultures, this excerpt illustrates discussion of a content area – political science. Both PR1 and PR2 know a great deal about the topic. (PR2 is a political science major). First, the differences between the political reality of the U.S. and that of Puerto Rico are highlighted. Then the discussion of voter turnout leads to a comparison of the U.S. and Puerto Rico to other countries. The political status of Puerto Rico relative to the U.S. is brought up (line 26), which sparks a heated debate between PR1 and PR2. Interestingly, the Puerto Ricans were so passionate about their debate that they switched to their L1 to carry it out, while NC1 and NC2 were observers. From this debate, the NC students not only receive factual information but they also witness firsthand how Puerto Ricans participate in political discussions. Due to the U.S. students’ silence during the debate, PR2 tells them (line 74) not to get scared about the Puerto Rican communicative style.

Excerpt 6 (Episode 8A): comparisons 4.1
1. NC1>>when i am typing in spanish, is it very bad, or am i using spanish correctly?
2. NC1>>for example, what mistakes did i make>
3. PR1>>for example el primero frase
4. NC1>>si?
5. PR1>>you have to say la primera frase
6. NC2>>oh I said that wrong too
7. NC1>>ohhhhhh, ok
8. PR1>>yes
9. PR1>>in "los verbos son muy dificil", you have to say "los verbos son dificiles"
10. NC1>>is this because dificil must be plural also?
11. PR1>>in spanish, if nouns are plural then the adjectives are plural too
12. PR1>>yes, that’s the way
13. NC1>>ok, i always mess those up
14. NC2>>I often forget to change my verbs to be plural with my nouns like that

Group A chatters often compare their native cultures with one another, but they do not often make comparisons of language structures. In this exchange, however, the morphological feature of gender and number agreement in Spanish is brought to the attention of both NC1 and NC2 by PR1 (line 3). Since adjective agreement is not a grammatical property of English, Anglophones often do not eradicate this pattern of error from their speech until they achieve an advanced level of proficiency in Spanish. The chatters in this session took the opportunity to seek language advice from the native speakers while engaging in discussion of a particular topic. Having specific errors brought to their attention might raise these learners’ consciousness of morphological agreement and therefore help them to master it better.

Excerpt 7 (Episode 10A): communities 5.2
1. PR1>>chicas ya pueden decir que conocen a una persona de Puerto Rico
2. NC1>>si si!! :)
3. NC2>>haha yup
4. NC1>>y tu puede decir que conocen TRES personas de carolina del norte!
5. NC1>>conoce
6. NC1>>conoce chicas nos fue un placer haber compartido con ustedes,
7. PR1>>bueno chicas nos fue un placer haber compartido con ustedes,
8. nos escribimos, adios.
9. NC2>>me gusta conocer a personas en otros paises, es divertido
10. PR1>>si si claro que si....pues, adios y que tengan un buen fin del semestre
11. NC1>>si y vosotros tambien
12. NC1>>adios chicas!
13. NC1>>adios chicas!
14. NC2>>Si, ha sido muy divertido, adios chicas

This final excerpt is an example of using the L2 for personal enjoyment and enrichment (Communities 5.2). These students had chatted together for a total of ten weeks, and by the end it appeared that they not only recognized the benefit of the chat to their L2 development, but they also enjoyed the experience and planned to remain in contact. The chatters successfully created and integrated themselves into a bilingual virtual community of language learners.

4.0 Discussion
The data presented in this study provide a detailed look into the communicative activity that occurred throughout the ten-week bilingual chat collaboration. All but two of the Likert items related to the National Standards averaged above 4.0 and the open-ended question yielded a number of student perceptions that relate their chatting experience to
the Standards. The seven chat excerpts highlight conversations throughout Group A’s chat experience centered upon Cultures, Connections and Comparisons.

An interesting finding that stands out is the importance of community in the chat forum. The Likert data reflected a mean of 4.6 for, “used my second language for personal enjoyment and enrichment” (Communities 5.1), and a 4.2 mean for, “I plan to chat with native speakers of my second language in the future” (Communities 5.2.). Additionally, the chatters made a number of statements related to the Communities standard in response the question, “What did you like the most about the chats?” Beyond the notions referred to in standards 5.1 and 5.2, the excerpt data provide a snapshot of the community of practice that the chatters developed over time in their weekly sessions, in which they communicated about topics related to the Cultures, Comparisons and Connections standards while at the same time fomenting an enjoyable social relationship with one another. In this chat community, participants are afforded the opportunity to dialogically construct knowledge of their cultures, rather than merely studying facts about the cultures from a book or a web site.

In the excerpts taken from this community, an unexpected finding surfaced, which seems to partly contradict the learner responses on the questionnaire. Four of the seven excerpts were in English, the L1 of the U.S students, and most of the cultural content in all of the excerpts referred to Puerto Rico rather than the U.S. In other words, the U.S. students mostly obtained, rather than provided, information (Communications 1.1), and some of the time in their L1. The Puerto Rican students, on the other hand, mainly provided information, in both their L1 and L2. In order for both sides to achieve the goals of the National Standards, they would each obtain and provide information in their L2. The communication patterns that emerged in this community can likely be attributed to the fact that Puerto Ricans are exposed to U.S. culture in their daily lives since U.S. cable television, as well as restaurant and department store franchises, are readily available in Puerto Rico. U.S. citizens, other hand, have more limited access to Puerto Rican culture. This finding captures the unique L1/L2 dynamic that evolved in the chat community.

The role of the L1 in L2 learning has been debated by researchers and practitioners, particularly since the advent of communicative language teaching. The National Standards do not assign a role for the L1 in L2 learning. Recent research, however, attributes a positive role for the L1: “use of the L1 is beneficial for language learning, since it acts as a critical psychological tool that enables learners to construct effective collaborative dialogue in the completion of meaning-based language tasks” (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998). In the current study, the L1 of the Anglophone students was at times the vehicle by which they acquired knowledge of the L2 culture. This is not counterintuitive given the reciprocal nature of the chat community. However, in the excerpts, these learners very seldom provided information in their L2. This finding is not necessarily a negative one if one considers the goal of co-constructing cultural knowledge more important than the particular language in which the co-construction is carried out. In a bilingual setting, participants will establish their own norms and habits regarding the use of both languages for specific purposes. Nevertheless, teachers who wish to ensure the implementation of National Standards objectives in the chat environment may wish to design their tasks in a way that would encourage the objectives to be carried out in the L2.
What seems to be important in the patterns of communication observed in Group A is the way in which they became active participants in the use of their L2, as well as their L1, as they constructed their chat community. This is consonant with the “participation metaphor”, which views learning as a process of becoming a member of a certain community (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Sfard, 1998). In the chat community described in this study, language use was much more than a process of “obtaining and providing information”, as stated in Communications Standard 1.1. Communicating in the L2, as well as the L1, became a means for these learners to co-construct meaning within a variety of topics, as well as to form enjoyable social relationships with each other. Substantive communication relating to Cultures, Comparisons and Connections can be brought about as a byproduct of socialization in a (virtual) community of learners.

5.0 Limitations of the Study
There are some limitations to this study. First, due to the small number of participants and the qualitative nature of this study, readers will want to generalize the results cautiously. Members of a community of practice develop norms and behaviors that are specific to their particular context. Second, the assigned topics could have been designed to line up more closely with the objectives of the National Standards. Finally, upon implementing the questionnaire, the meanings of terms such as “cultural perspectives, practices and products” could have been made clearer to the participants, and the fact that the questions referred to communication in the L2 could have been emphasized.

6.0 Conclusion
This study looks at communication in a bilingual Internet chat community through the lens of the National Standards, and in so doing provides a theoretical basis for suggesting an update of some of the principles of the Standards. Communities standards 5.1 and 5.2 only call for learners to make use of the L2 outside of the classroom, without implying that learners should could create and integrate themselves into a community of speakers of the target language. Language learners could benefit from an updated conceptualization of “community”. A bilingual chat collaboration such as the one presented in this study puts the “community” in the “C”, lending support for the creation of a third Communities standard: “Standard 5.3: Students engage in intercultural communication in the target language by becoming active participants in a community of speakers of the language.” Communication framed in the community structure would empower learners to be active agents in their language learning process. With careful planning of chat topics, teachers can promote co-construction of meaning centered upon the Cultures, Comparisons and Connections standards, as a byproduct of participation and socialization in the community of language learners.
REFERENCES


**Communication: interpersonal, interpretive, presentational**

| Standard 1.1: | Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions. |
| Standard 1.2: | Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics. |
| Standard 1.3: | Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics. |

**Cultures: perspectives, practices, products**

| Standard 2.1: | Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the cultures studied. |
| Standard 2.2: | Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the cultures studied. |

**Connections**

| Standard 3.1: | Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language. |
| Standard 3.2: | Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures. |

**Comparisons**

| Standard 4.1: | Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own. |
| Standard 4.2: | Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own. |

**Communities**

| Standard 5.1: | Students use the language both within and beyond the school setting. |
| Standard 5.2: | Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment. |