Levels of the Oral Proficiency Skills of Foreign Language Teacher Candidates as Rated by Teacher Educators: A Descriptive Study

Dissertation

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By

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive study investigated the levels of oral proficiency of candidates for initial PreK-12 teacher licensure in Spanish and French as reported by faculty and students in the teacher education programs at Ohio colleges and universities. The study was motivated by the adoption of the NCATE/ACTFL Program standards for the preparation of foreign language teachers (Initial level—Undergraduate & Graduate; For K-12 and Secondary Certification Programs) as part of a six-year agreement between the Ohio Department of Education and NCATE (the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education) for programs to be accredited. Within the Program standards, a standard of Advanced-Low level oral proficiency, as measured by an ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview, is the expected level for teacher candidates to receive initial licensure in accredited languages. Historically, in a series of studies since 1967 (Carroll, 1967; Hiple & Manley, 1987; Swender, 2003; Mathews & Hansen, 2004), the Advanced-Low level has been a level that about half of college foreign language majors were reported to have reached at the end of their undergraduate program of foreign language study. Through a survey of faculty members in foreign language teacher education and faculty in foreign language departments in Ohio colleges and universities, and through interviews with selected faculty and teacher candidates at four Ohio colleges and universities, the present study investigated six research questions. These questions were
designed to study the extent to which faculty estimated or provided test data to show whether or not their foreign language teacher candidates were meeting this standard. Data were collected and analyzed related to the participants’ views on their teacher candidates’ strengths and weaknesses in oral proficiency in French and Spanish. The results seemed to indicate that at the time of data collection in 2009, candidates’ oral proficiency was rated predominantly at Intermediate-High. Implications of these findings for foreign language teacher education programs and for foreign teacher candidates are given, along with recommendations for further research. The survey instrument, a bibliography, and additional appendices are also included.
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To my mother, Marjory Ball
and my sister, Marian Beck
who would have been proud
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... ii
VITA .................................................................................................................. iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ............................................................................... v
DEDICATION ................................................................................................. vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS ................................................................................... vii
LIST OF TABLES .............................................................................................. x

CHAPTER ONE .................................................................................................1
STUDY OVERVIEW .......................................................................................1
  Prologue ........................................................................................................1
  Introduction .................................................................................................2
  Problem Statement ....................................................................................12
  Research Questions ...................................................................................14
  Definition of Terms ...................................................................................14
  Assumptions ...............................................................................................20
  Limitations ................................................................................................21
  Methodology ...............................................................................................22
  Timeline of the Study ...............................................................................26
  Organization of the Dissertation .............................................................27

CHAPTER TWO ...............................................................................................29
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ......................................................................29
  Introduction ................................................................................................29
  Speaking a Foreign Language ....................................................................29
  The ACTFL Speaking Guidelines and the Oral Proficiency Interview .......33
  Literature on the Typical Proficiency Levels of College Foreign Language Students ..................................................39
  Literature on the Role of Oral Proficiency as Part of Foreign Language Teacher Knowledge .................................................................................................44
  The Current Teacher-Knowledge Framework .........................................52
  Conclusion ..................................................................................................54

CHAPTER THREE ............................................................................................56
METODOLOGY .................................................................................................56
  Introduction ................................................................................................56
  The Survey Population ..............................................................................57
  Survey Data Collection ............................................................................59
  Analysis of Survey Results .......................................................................61
CHAPTER FOUR

METH

Faculty Views

Interview Data from River University

A Faculty View

Interview Data from Valley University

Conclusion

Student Views

Interview Data from Eastern College

Conclusion

A Student View

Valley University

Eastern College

Great Lakes University

INTRODUCTION TO SOURCES OF INTERVIEW DATA

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 4 AND 5

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 2, 3, AND 6

STUDENTS’ SUCCESS WITH PROFICIENCY HIGHER THAN ADVANCED

CANDIDATES’ SUCCESS WITH CONTENT AND CONTEXT FOR ADVANCED

CANDIDATES’ SUCCESS WITH LINGUISTIC ACCURACY FOR ADVANCED

CANDIDATES’ SUCCESS WITH TEXT TYPE FOR ADVANCED

QUESTIONS RELATED TO PRESENTATIONAL TEACHING IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 2, 3, AND 6

PROXIMITY OF AN NCATE REVIEW

CHARACTERISTICS OF INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTED

CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHER CANDIDATES

PROXIMITY OF AN NCATE REVIEW

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 3

THE PILOT STUDY

ETHICAL ISSUES

DESCRIPTIVE CASE SAMPLING

DESCRIPTIVE CASE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND CONSTRAINTS

ETICAL ISSUES

THE PILOT STUDY

CONCLUSION

STUDENT VIEWS

FACULTY VIEWS

INTERVIEW DATA FROM RIVER UNIVERSITY

A FACULTY VIEW

INTERVIEW DATA FROM VALLEY UNIVERSITY

FACULTY VIEWS

INTERVIEW DATA FROM EASTERN COLLEGE

CONCLUSION

A STUDENT VIEW

GREAT LAKES UNIVERSITY

EASTERN COLLEGE

VALLEY UNIVERSITY

RIVER UNIVERSITY

INTERVIEW DATA FROM GREAT LAKES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY VIEWS

A STUDENT VIEW

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEW DATA FROM EASTERN COLLEGE

FACULTY VIEWS

STUDENT VIEWS

INTERVIEW DATA FROM RIVER UNIVERSITY

FACULTY VIEWS

STUDENT VIEWS

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

CHARACTERISTICS OF INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTED

CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHER CANDIDATES

PROXIMITY OF AN NCATE REVIEW

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

CANDIDATES’ SUCCESS WITH GLOBAL TASKS AND FUNCTIONS OF ADVANCED-LOW

CANDIDATES’ SUCCESS WITH CONTENT AND CONTEXT FOR ADVANCED-LOW

CANDIDATES’ SUCCESS WITH LINGUISTIC ACCURACY FOR ADVANCED-LOW

CANDIDATES’ SUCCESS WITH TEXT TYPE FOR ADVANCED-LOW

QUESTIONS RELATED TO PROFICIENCY HIGHER THAN ADVANCED-LOW

QUESTIONS ON PRESENTATIONAL TEACHING IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 2, 3, AND 6

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 4 AND 5

INTRODUCTION TO SOURCES OF INTERVIEW DATA

GREAT LAKES UNIVERSITY

EASTERN COLLEGE

VALLEY UNIVERSITY

RIVER UNIVERSITY

INTERVIEW DATA FROM GREAT LAKES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY VIEWS

A STUDENT VIEW

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEW DATA FROM EASTERN COLLEGE

FACULTY VIEWS

STUDENT VIEWS

INTERVIEW DATA FROM RIVER UNIVERSITY

FACULTY VIEWS

STUDENT VIEWS

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA AND DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

THE SURVEY RESPONDENTS

CHARACTERISTICS OF INSTITUTIONS REPRESENTED

CHARACTERISTICS OF TEACHER CANDIDATES

PROXIMITY OF AN NCATE REVIEW

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

CANDIDATES’ SUCCESS WITH GLOBAL TASKS AND FUNCTIONS OF ADVANCED-LOW

CANDIDATES’ SUCCESS WITH CONTENT AND CONTEXT FOR ADVANCED-LOW

CANDIDATES’ SUCCESS WITH LINGUISTIC ACCURACY FOR ADVANCED-LOW

CANDIDATES’ SUCCESS WITH TEXT TYPE FOR ADVANCED-LOW

QUESTIONS RELATED TO PROFICIENCY HIGHER THAN ADVANCED-LOW

QUESTIONS ON PRESENTATIONAL TEACHING IN THE TARGET LANGUAGE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 2, 3, AND 6

RESEARCH QUESTIONS 4 AND 5

INTRODUCTION TO SOURCES OF INTERVIEW DATA

GREAT LAKES UNIVERSITY

EASTERN COLLEGE

VALLEY UNIVERSITY

RIVER UNIVERSITY

INTERVIEW DATA FROM GREAT LAKES UNIVERSITY

FACULTY VIEWS

A STUDENT VIEW

CONCLUSION

INTERVIEW DATA FROM EASTERN COLLEGE

FACULTY VIEWS

STUDENT VIEWS

INTERVIEW DATA FROM RIVER UNIVERSITY

FACULTY VIEWS

STUDENT VIEWS
Conclusion .......................................................................................... 152
Chapter Discussion ............................................................................. 153

CHAPTER FIVE .................................................................................. 156
FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .................. 156
   Summary of Results ........................................................................ 158
   Research Question 1 ..................................................................... 166
   Research Questions 2, 3, and 6 .................................................... 166
   Research Questions 4 and 5 .......................................................... 170
   Implications for Programs ............................................................. 177
   Implications for Teacher Candidates ............................................ 185
   Recommendations for Further Research ....................................... 186
   Conclusion .................................................................................... 189
Epilogue ............................................................................................. 189

LIST OF REFERENCES ......................................................................... 192
APPENDIX A: E-mail to Intended Survey Respondents .................... 202
APPENDIX B: Survey Questions ......................................................... 204
APPENDIX C: E-mail to Intended Faculty Interviewees ..................... 212
APPENDIX D: Instructions to Faculty Who Will Recruit Student Interviewees 214
APPENDIX E: Interview Questions ................................................... 217
APPENDIX F: Interview Consent Form ................................................ 220
# LIST OF TABLES

| Table 1 | ACTFL Speaking Guidelines | .................................................. | 35 |
| Table 2 | OPI Ratings of 3rd and 4th year College Foreign Language Majors (Swender) | .......................................................... | 41 |
| Table 3 | OPI Ratings of College Senior Foreign Language Majors (Mathews and Hansen) | .......................................................... | 43 |
| Table 4 | Summary of Teacher Preparation Standards | .................................................. | 53 |
| Table 5 | Reported Number of Candidates Recommended for Teacher Licensure in 2008-2009 at participating Ohio Colleges and Universities | .................................................. | 75 |
| Table 6 | Percentage of Native vs. Nonnative Speakers Among Teacher Candidates at Participating Institutions | .................................................. | 76 |
| Table 7 | Proximity of Survey Dates to NCATE Reviews | .................................................. | 77 |
| Table 8 | Questions Related to Global Functions and Tasks at the Advanced-Low Level of Proficiency | .................................................. | 81 |
| Table 9 | Handling a Complication or Unexpected Situation | .................................................. | 82 |
| Table 10 | Questions Related to Context and Content at the Advanced-Low Proficiency Level | .................................................. | 83 |
| Table 11 | Questions Related to Accuracy at the Advanced-Low Level of Proficiency | .................................................. | 84 |
| Table 12 | Questions Related to Weaknesses in Accuracy Permissible at the Advanced-Low Level of Proficiency | .................................................. | 85 |
| Table 13 | Questions Related to Text Type for the Advanced-Low Proficiency Level | .................................................. | 86 |
| Table 14 | Questions on Competencies Above the Advanced-Low Proficiency Level | .................................................. | 87 |
| Table 15 | Questions on Presentational Teaching in the Target Language | .................................................. | 88 |
| Table 16 | Respondents Who Reported OPI Results for 2008-2009 | .................................................. | 91 |
| Table 17 | OPI Scores Reported for Nonnative Speaker Teacher Candidates in 2008-2009 | .................................................. | 92 |
| Table 18 | OPI Ratings and Licensure Recommendations | .................................................. | 93 |
CHAPTER ONE
STUDY OVERVIEW

Prologue

This research was inspired in large part by the author’s personal experience as an instructor in the Foreign Languages Department in a small Ohio university. Teaching in a small department in a small institution, I work daily with the Spanish and French faculty on the issues facing us academically and otherwise. I also have contact with foreign language faculty from other institutions in Ohio at the state conference and through online listservs. Although I teach French, and sometimes English as a Second Language, I know the students who are French and Spanish majors. Through these sources, I came to see the issue of graduating teacher candidates achieving or not achieving Advanced-Low on the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview as a wrenching problem. For students, the OPI has been a source of anxiety and sometimes tears. For faculty, what to do about the OPI, and about an apparent disconnect between NCATE requirements and requirements from the Ohio Department of Education, has been a topic of frequent discussion for the past few years. In the hallways at the state conference, teacher education faculty have asked each other, usually in hushed tones, “What’s your OPI policy? How are your candidates doing?” At a session at the state conference in 2008, teacher education faculty from across the state stood up and stated publicly, “We are having trouble persuading
students to take the test. Are you all able to make your students take it?” “Our students are not up to the level. We know they need more study abroad, but we can’t force them to study abroad. What do you do at your school?” In my own university, we have seen some students struggle to get an Advanced-Low rating. A few have challenged us with arguments like, “My friend goes to XYZ University, and she doesn’t have to take the OPI. Why do we? It’s not fair.” One or two others called the Ohio Department of Education and were told that teacher candidates were not required to take the OPI. In short, issues associated with teacher candidates’ taking the OPI arose as a source of passionate argument for many, and of passionate curiosity and interest for me. Though I write in this study in a traditional style of the impersonal researcher, the topic is personal.

Introduction

Like many U.S. states, Ohio is today facing new standards for teacher licensure. In the past, teacher education programs in Ohio colleges and universities were accredited based on a review by ad hoc panels of experts from within the state. These experts recommended accreditation of college programs according to a set of standards agreed upon within the Ohio Department of Education. In 2007, the Ohio Department of Education signed a six-year agreement with the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education Programs (NCATE) (ODE-NCATE Partnership Agreement). Teacher preparation programs in almost all subject areas now submit program reports to a national review board that uses a standard national set of requirements established by the relevant Specialized Professional Association (SPA). In foreign languages, the SPA is the
American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), whose standards reflect a redefinition of the expectations for the linguistic skills of language learners of all levels based on the proficiency movement. Consequently, the foreign language teacher education programs in Ohio are now reviewed for accreditation by experts outside our own state, and by uniform national standards.

This set of national standards for foreign language teacher competencies reflects current understandings of pedagogy, professionalism, and language proficiency. This last area, language proficiency, has seen paradigmatic changes over the past twenty years. Beginning in the 1980s, linguistic content knowledge for all learners, from Novice to Superior levels, has come to be defined as what the learner can do in the language, not merely as what knowledge she can display or tell about the language (Schrum & Glisan, p. 16). ACTFL designed its Guidelines for Speaking, Writing, Listening, and Reading as tools for assessing learner proficiencies for second language learners at all levels (Liskin-Gasparro, 2000; Omaggio-Hadley 2000). Teacher candidates nearing the end of their studies are, in particular, expected to attain high level linguistic skills for the language(s) they are being licensed to teach.

The NCATE/ACTFL Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers (2002) do not address language proficiency alone. Rather, they describe six content areas in which teacher candidates must be prepared and assessed: 1. Languages, Linguistics, and Comparisons; 2. Cultures, Literatures, Cross-Disciplinary Concepts; 3. Language Acquisition Theories and Instructional Practices; 4. Integration of Standards into Curriculum and Instruction; 5. Assessment of Languages and Cultures;
and 6. Professionalism. This framework presents an overall vision of what teacher
candidates should know and be able to do as they enter into the U.S. language teaching
profession.

Within this framework, however, speaking proficiency receives special emphasis.
Two of eight points on the NCATE/ACTFL summary list directly address development
of candidates’ speaking skills. Programs should be characterized by “the development of
candidates’ foreign language proficiency in all areas of communication, with special
emphasis on developing oral proficiency, in all language courses.” They should include
“ongoing assessment of candidates’ oral proficiency and provision of diagnostic feedback
to candidates concerning their progress in meeting required levels of proficiency,”
(Program Standards, p. 2).

The Program Standards go on to list in detail speaking skills expected from
teacher candidates in the presentational and interpersonal modes. The former include the
ability to “present information, concepts, and ideas orally to an audience,” in formats that
may be pre-planned but also require extemporaneous speaking, “referring to notes as
needed, but not reading from them verbatim,” and using “connected discourse that
incorporates various time frames, vocabulary specific to the context of the presentation,
and extralinguistic support,” (Program Standards, p. 4). Evidence of these skills can be
shown through foreign language course work and in field experiences. In the
interpersonal mode, candidates are expected to achieve a rating of Advanced-Low on the
ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview, based on the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines, for
languages like Spanish, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Portuguese, and Russian. The
standard is Intermediate-High for languages such as Chinese, Arabic, Japanese and Korean. Candidates can also demonstrate interpersonal oral proficiency with similar ratings on the Texas Oral Proficiency Test. Thus, it is now expected that aspiring foreign language teachers will satisfy multiple sets of demands; among them, oral proficiency plays a key role. In 2008, thirty-two state departments of education—including the Ohio Department of Education—had adopted or adapted the NCATE/ACTFL standards (FAQs about the profession). In addition, several U.S. universities and colleges had adopted the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) outright or had written their own proficiency assessments based on the ACTFL Guidelines; these proficiency measures, and not courses taken, now serve as gatekeepers for completion of the particular University foreign language requirement. Liskin-Gasparro (2003) reported, “It is uncontroversial to state that today, just 20 years later, the terms oral proficiency, OPI, and ACTFL Guidelines are common currency in the discourse of foreign language teachers and preservice teacher candidates. Evidence of the impact of the proficiency guidelines can be seen at all levels and in all sectors of the foreign language teaching profession,” (Liskin-Gasparro, p. 483).

A large number of studies have addressed the issue of “reasonable expectations” for speaking proficiency levels among college-level students at the end of one, two, or more years of language study. These studies (Chalhoub-Deville, 1997; Glisan & Foltz, 1998; Halleck, 1995; Tschirner, 1992; Tschirner, 1996; Tschirner and Heilenman, 1998) have examined proficiency levels achieved in commonly taught Western European languages and have not included the less commonly taught languages (LCTLs). While variations within groups finishing the same year, for example first-year, second-year,
third-year of foreign language study exist, the studies have reached some common agreement. Wing and Gayeski (1984), Magnan (1986; 1987), Klee & Lange (1986), Tschirner (1992), Thompson (1995), Chalhoub-Deville (1997), Tschirner and Heilenmann (1998), and Garrett (2000) have found that college students tended to cluster at the Intermediate-Low level after one year of study, at the Intermediate-Mid level after two years and at the Intermediate-High level after three years.

For college seniors nearing graduation, a population that includes teacher candidates, there is also consistency in the findings. Carroll’s study (1967) found that “a median graduate with a foreign language major can speak and comprehend the language only at about an FSI Speaking rating of ‘2+’, (ie., somewhere between a ‘limited working proficiency’ and a ‘minimum professional proficiency’” (Carroll, p.134). An FSI score of 2/2+ is reported by various sources today to be equivalent to Advanced- Low on the ACTFL OPI (Swender 2003, p. 525).

Another large-scale study published by Hiple and Manley in 1987 reported two years of OPI results for college juniors and seniors in Texas. Forty-two percent of college juniors in the study were rated Advanced and 55.4 percent of seniors were so rated. The students included both education and non-education majors (Hiple & Manley, p. 149). Grosse Uber (1992) polled certified raters who also taught in foreign language departments for data on ratings they had assigned to college seniors in 1990-91. With data from 31 raters for 271 students, the raters reported oral proficiency scores of Advanced or above for 57% of students in Spanish, 35% of students in French, 82% of students in Russian, 64% of students in German, 73% of Japanese majors and 20% of
Italian majors (p.6). It should be noted that in 1992 the “Advanced” level was divided into two sublevels and not three. Advanced was subdivided into Advanced-Low, Advanced-Mid and Advanced-High when the ACTFL Guidelines were revised in 1999 (Swender, 1999).

Swender’s ACTFL study published in 2003 compared OPI scores for 501 students in the third and fourth years of college foreign language study. She found that 47% of third- and fourth-year foreign language majors were rated at the Advanced-Low oral proficiency or higher on the ACTFL scale. Fifty-six percent of these students were clustered at the borderline of Intermediate-High and Advanced-Low (Swender 2003, 523). In the same study, a table compared expected proficiency levels after specified years of study and minimum proficiency required for different job types. Swender reported that the Advanced-Low level is a minimum oral proficiency requirement for K-12 language teachers, physicians, police officers, military linguists, and billing clerks. On the other hand, a recent study reported on the oral proficiency of foreign language majors in their senior year at Weber State University in Utah (Mathews & Hansen 2004). The study instrument was a locally created SOPI based on the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines, rather than being an official OPI. Results differed among three languages: In Spanish, 15 students (60%) were rated at the ACTFL Advanced-Low level or higher, while ten students (40%) were rated at Intermediate High level or lower. One German student (17%) was rated at Advanced-Low, while five (83%) were rated at Intermediate-High. One French major (25%) was rated at Advanced-Low or higher, while three students (75%) were rated at Intermediate-High or lower (Mathews & Hansen, p. 636).
Thus the long-term trends suggested that about half of foreign language majors nearing graduation, including both teacher candidates and non-teacher candidates, were rated Advanced-Low on the ACTFL scale. Logically, it can be argued that about half of foreign language majors also did not reach the expected language oral proficiency standard. In setting Advanced-Low as the standard, ACTFL and NCATE seem to have raised the bar above the proficiency level that some students currently achieve. Published data on the speaking proficiency of first-year or more experienced classroom teachers was not found in the published professional literature. However, Phillips (1998, p.11) compared the language-related tasks that a classroom teacher should be able to carry out and argued that these tasks require Advanced-Low oral proficiency level skills.

As evidenced by the reported studies of student proficiency levels, reaching Advanced-Low rating on the OPI may be a difficult standard to meet. Weyers observed, “Of the areas in which teacher candidates are tested, oral proficiency is likely the most difficult for many of them,” (Weyers, 2010, p. 384). As the *OPI Tester Training Manual* explains (Swender, 1999), advancement up the *Speaking Guidelines* scale becomes slower as a learner moves to the upper levels. Like an inverted pyramid, the range of skills and knowledge required for moving to a higher level is narrow for novices and wider toward the top (Swender, 1999, p. 9). The existing studies generally show that foreign language majors who are seniors tend to cluster around the borderline between Intermediate-High and Advanced-Low, with approximately half of them falling above and half of them falling below the dividing line. ACTFL’s estimations state that, for most learners, reaching the Advanced-Low level of oral proficiency requires not just more
foreign language study at the University, but also a minimum of a year of study abroad (Swender, 2003, p. 525).

An OPI score of Advanced-Low, and the set of skills it represents, is only one of the ways that teacher candidates are expected to demonstrate their speaking skills. The Program Standards also require evidence such as presentational work that teacher candidates have created in their course work or in field experiences. Nonetheless, criticisms have sometimes been made about dependence on a single test or assessment. Norris (2003) found that, in two of four cases, language departments decided that the ACTFL Guidelines, and particularly the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines were only a part of a larger set of knowledge, skills, and dispositions that language department faculty wish to observe in students. Byrnes (1998) deemed that the ACTFL Guidelines and/or the OPI did not reflect what her department considered to be a full and proper model of “communication.” Bachman (1988; 1990) and Shohamy (1988) have proposed alternative models that add more components of speaking that they considered crucial to an analysis of a language learner’s proficiency. There has also been criticism about the validity and reliability of the OPI. Discussion of this topic is presented in Chapter 2.

Adoption of the ACTFL/NCATE standards by foreign language teacher education programs has only recently begun to affect foreign language curricula and/or the assessment of foreign language teacher candidates’ oral proficiency. A discussion in the ADFL Bulletin (2000) reported an exchange of views regarding the state of foreign language faculty members’ awareness of the requirements facing teaching candidates at that time. According to one contributor,
What is unsettling is that faculty members in foreign language departments, who
teach undergraduate teacher education candidates, are generally not familiar with
[documents such as The Teaching of French: A Syllabus of Competence (1989),
Professional Standards for Teachers of German (1992), ACTFL Provisional
Program Guidelines for Foreign Language Teacher Education (1988), and
AATSP Program Guidelines for Education and Training of Teachers of Spanish
and Portuguese (1992)....Most of my colleagues had not heard of NCATE
(National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education) until a team from
that council recently descended on our program of review for certification.
Generally, until such a program review occurs, University foreign programs have
very few interactions with departments of education that handle teacher education
programs (Davis, p. 62)

In contrast, another participant in the same discussion describes her Foreign
Language Department in these terms:

Our University, like many, has instituted a language proficiency requirement for
students taking the methods course. (This four-part exam will soon be used to
assess every major.) Because all faculty members help evaluate different sections
of the test, there have been many positive side effects. Not only have upper-level
professors become acquainted with the ACTFL guidelines, many have already
begun integrating communicative tasks in their classes (Knight, p.71).

Even more recently, some aspects of the application of the NCATE/ACTFL
standards seem to be a source of confusion. Pearson et al. state that adoption of the
NCATE/ACTFL standards means that 80% of an institution’s teacher candidates must meet the requirement of Advanced-Low on the OPI; otherwise the institution will not receive NCATE accreditation (Pearson et al., p. 508). Printed information and an e-mail question by the researcher to the ACTFL official who conducted a fall, 2006, NCATE workshop for Ohio teacher educators contradicted this statement. According to the printed information and the workshop leader, NCATE accreditation depended on an 80% pass rate on the first assessment measure on an institution’s NCATE accreditation report. In Ohio, until September, 2010, this was the Praxis II content exam. The OPI scores of a foreign language education program’s teacher candidates was an additional assessment measure, sixth on the list of measures required as part of an institution’s NCATE self-report for accreditation (Levy, 2006, private communication).

Officials of the Ohio Department of Education have stated that beginning in fall, 2010, the Ohio Department of Education would require the OPI of individual candidates, and the Department had chosen its standard as Intermediate-High (Kangas, 2008 Letter to Deans). According to the Department, until that date, foreign language teacher candidates had no mandate placed on them personally from the Ohio Department of Education to take the OPI or TOPT at all (Kangas, 2008, private communication). In the ODE’s view, the responsibility of institutions of higher education to demonstrate to NCATE, and report the past three years of candidates’ OPI or TOPT scores in accreditation reports, that their teacher candidates had been rated at Advanced-Low, placed no individual requirement on teacher candidates. The disjuncture between institutional and individual requirements made it problematic for foreign language
educators to try to hold their teacher candidates to the standard of obtaining an Advanced-Low rating on the OPI (Colville Hall, 2008; Colville-Hall & Cavour, 2008).

**Problem Statement**

While ACTFL and NCATE, two key professional organizations, have articulated a set of standards intended to define teacher candidates’ linguistic and pedagogical skills, implementation of these standards has posed some unknowns. It is not known, for example, whether the criteria described in the *Program Standards* (2002) match expectations currently held by foreign language departments and faculty for their teacher candidates’ oral proficiency, or to what extent teacher candidates in Spanish and French are being strictly required to demonstrated Advanced-Low proficiency on an official ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview or Texas Oral Proficiency Test. Clifford observed that, “extended course sequences [are] resulting in an ever-increasing number of schools and universities graduating students with Advanced and Superior language abilities,” (2008, p. 581). However, he did not cite any studies showing these results. At the same time, a body of research is emerging in which university foreign language faculty have proposed ways of helping their students to develop advanced skills (Byrnes, 1998; Donato & Brooks, 2004; Pearson, Fonseca-Greber & Foell, 2006; Weber-Fève, 2009), and some of these have reported increases in OPI scores (Brown, 2009; Lindseth, 2010; Weyers, 2010). Clifford (2008) urged that research into questions related to students’ achievement of Advanced language skills is of particular relevance at this time.
The present study sought to examine the relationship between the second language profession’s call for a designated level of language proficiency of pre-licensure students and the teacher educators’ expectations for their students in terms of demonstrated oral language competency. Given the new proficiency standards, who, in foreign language departments in Ohio’s colleges and universities, is likely to have insight about the speaking proficiency of students as they enter the K-12 teaching profession? Department chairs in colleges and universities might have important knowledge of the overall language curriculum and academic programs in their departments. Faculty who teach the upper-level courses have likely heard students speak, but they may have more systematically evaluated their students’ performance in written papers and assignments. Faculty who teach the foreign language teacher education courses and supervise teacher candidates in field experiences and student teaching may also know teacher candidates’ oral proficiency first-hand. Therefore, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that a combination Foreign Language Education faculty members, or faculty in Foreign Language Departments, are most likely to have regularly observed teacher education students in upper-division language courses, as novice teachers, in field experiences, or in departmentally-mandated speaking tests. In this study, contacts were first directed to faculty members identified as a department’s Foreign Language Education specialist. These individuals were asked to respond to the survey or agree to be interviewed, or to direct the researcher to another faculty member who was knowledgeable about teacher candidates’ oral proficiency.
Research Questions

The study was guided by the following primary research questions.

1. To what extent do respondents believe that their foreign language teacher candidates in Spanish and French who are graduating during the current academic year have achieved the level of speaking proficiency called for by ACTFL and NCATE?

2. What data do their departments have to show the oral proficiency of students recommended for teacher licensure by the individual institution?

3. How were these data obtained? When were they obtained? Where were the data observed?

4. What do respondents believe are teacher candidates’ strengths in oral proficiency?

5. If respondents believe that students have weaknesses in oral proficiency, what do they consider to be the students’ weak areas?

6. Are there differences in results between candidates for French licensure and Spanish licensure?

Definition of Terms

Key terms used in the study are defined operationally below:

ACTFL. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages is the national organization that has formulated Oral Proficiency Guidelines for foreign language learners. ACTFL is an organization of over 10,000 members including high school, community college, and University faculty members and administrators, and members of government and industry.

Advanced-Low. The ACTFL OPI Tester Training Manual defines performance at the Advanced-Low level in the following terms: Speakers at the Advanced-Low level are able to handle a variety of communicative tasks, although somewhat haltingly at times.
They participate actively in most informal and a limited number of formal conversations on activities related to school, home, and leisure activities and, to a lesser degree, those related to events of work, public, and personal interest or individual relevance.

Advanced-Low speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in all major time frames (past, present and future) in paragraph length discourse, but control of aspect may be lacking at times. They can handle appropriately the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar, though at times their discourse may be minimal for the level and strained. Communicative strategies such as rephrasing and circumlocution may be employed in such instances. In their narrations and descriptions, they combine and link sentences into connected discourse of paragraph length. When pressed for a fuller account, they tend to grope and rely on minimal discourse. Their first language is still evident in the candidate’s use of false cognates, literal translations, or the oral paragraph structure of the speaker’s own language rather than that of the target language.

While the language of Advanced-Low speakers may be marked by substantial, albeit irregular flow, it is typically somewhat strained and tentative, with noticeable self-correction and a certain “grammatical roughness.” The vocabulary of Advanced-Low speakers is primarily generic in nature.

Advanced-Low speakers contribute to target-language conversations with sufficient accuracy, clarity, and precision to convey their intended meanings without misrepresentation or confusion, and their language usage can be understood by native
speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, even though this may be achieved through repetition and restatement. When attempting to perform functions or handle topics associated with the Superior OPI level, the linguistic quality and quantity of their speech tends to deteriorate significantly. (Swender 1999, p. 84)

**Foreign Language Education Faculty** are defined as faculty who teach courses in foreign language teaching methods and curriculum, and who supervise students in field experiences. Generally, these are faculty who hold a doctorate in Foreign Language Education, Second Language Acquisition, or Pedagogy.

**Intermediate-High** The ACTFL OPI *Tester Training Manual* defines performance at the Intermediate-High level in the following terms: Intermediate-High speakers are able to converse with ease and confidence when dealing with most routine tasks and social situations of the Intermediate level. They are able successfully to handle uncomplicated tasks and social situations requiring an exchange of basic information related to work, school, recreation, particular interests and areas of competence, although hesitation and errors may be evident.

Intermediate-High speakers can typically handle the tasks pertaining to the Advanced level, but they are unable to sustain performance at that level for a variety of topics. With some consistency, speakers at the Intermediate High level can narrate and describe in major time frames using connected discourse of paragraph length. However, their performance on these Advanced level tasks will exhibit one or more features of breakdown, such as the failure to maintain the narration or description semantically or syntactically in the appropriate major time frame, the disintegration of connected
discourse, the misuse of cohesive devices, a reduction in breadth and appropriateness of vocabulary, or the failure to successfully circumlocute. Finally, a significant amount of hesitation may occur in their speech.

Intermediate-High speakers can generally be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, although the dominant language is still evident (e.g., use of code-switching, false cognates, literal translations). Gaps in communication may also occur. (Swender 1999, p. 86)

**National Standards for Foreign Language Learning** (2006). Targeted at K-16 language teachers, the *National Standards for Foreign Language Learning* were formulated by ACTFL in cooperation with the American Association of Teachers of French, the American Association of Teachers of German, and the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, as well as Teachers of Italian, Classical Languages, Teachers of Russian and Slavic Languages, and Japanese Language Association. The *Standards* define foreign language learning in a matrix of **Communications** (oral and written, presentational, interpersonal, and interpretive), **Cultures** (viewed through the interrelations of products, practices and perspectives), **Connections** (with other disciplines, such as art, science, history), **Comparisons** (linguistic and cultural), **Communities** (settings where the target languages are spoken widely). The *Standards* frame learning goals such as, “Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions,” (Standard 1.1) and, “Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own,” (Standard 4.1). A 518-page

NCATE. The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education sets standards for the accreditation of college and University programs that prepare elementary and secondary teachers, specialists, and administrators. NCATE teams review the program descriptions of each institution, department, and institutional unit seeking accreditation. NCATE has established partnerships with all fifty U.S. states; however, only in some states are all institutions required to earn NCATE accreditation. Currently, NCATE accredits 632 colleges, with 100 more seeking accreditation at the time of the present study (2009). ACTFL is one of the 33 NCATE member organizations. The Standards for Foreign Language Teacher Education were developed in 2002 by ACTFL for NCATE (www.ncate.org).

Ohio K-12 Academic Content Standards for Foreign Languages. The 2003 Ohio Standards are informed by ACTFL’s National Standards for Language Learning, by Standards from other U.S. states, and Standards set by the Council of Europe. They expand on the more general statements in these documents with more detailed performance indicators for content, length, specificity at each grade level. For example, where the National Standards for Language Learning state in Standard 2.1 that learners will “provide and exchange information,” the Ohio Content Standards for Foreign Languages state that eighth-graders will “interview others to obtain information about cultural and content-related concepts, e.g. school, traditions, the arts” (Ohio Content Standards, p. 96).
The **Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI)** is defined as a speaking assessment that follows a set of procedures established by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in its *Tester Training Manual* (1999). The assessment is based on global tasks and functions, context and content, accuracy, and text type (Swender 1999, p. 31). It includes a warm-up, an interactive process of level checks and probes, followed by a role play, and a wind-down (Swender 1999, p. 35). An official OPI assessment is administered and rated by a certified individual who has successfully passed ACTFL’s training program for certified OPI testers.

A **Proficiency test** refers to a test which measures general language ability rather than a specific body of material such as that presented in a textbook, program or course of instruction (Swender, 1999, glossary). This test is a general measure of a global, functional language ability as compared to an achievement test. This test is a type of summative evaluation and is given at some checkpoint in a student’s language study (e.g., upon return from a study abroad experience).

**Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers** (2002). Targeted at foreign language teacher education programs, the *National Standards* describe a set of abilities and dispositions that a novice teacher should be able to demonstrate pedagogically, linguistically, and professionally. These standards were formulated by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and serve as the key principles for NCATE accreditation of college and university foreign language education programs.
A senior is a student enrolled in her or his final year of undergraduate college study. Senior status is normally defined by the student’s institution based on the number of credit hours earned and academic terms successfully completed.

A teacher candidate is defined in this study as a college student or graduate enrolled in a degree program that is accredited by the Ohio Board of Regents in the state of Ohio to confer a Bachelor’s or Master’s degree and who has completed requirements for an initial teacher’s license.

Assumptions

The following basic assumptions have guided this study:

1. It is assumed that Foreign Language and Foreign Language Education faculty are sufficiently acquainted with their students’ foreign language speaking proficiency to allow them to formulate a professional opinion about their students’ level or oral proficiency at the end of the students’ teacher licensure program. This assumption is necessary since one key source of data in the study are the faculty ratings of their students as well as explanations about their students’ oral proficiency.

2. It is also assumed that Foreign Language Education faculty are sufficiently knowledgeable about the ACTFL/OPI criteria to describe their teacher education candidates’ target language oral proficiency levels. This information had become widely expected in the foreign language teaching profession in 2008-2009. Many foreign language educators have taken professional development workshops on this topic. Such sessions are regularly offered and attended at foreign language state, regional, and national conferences.
3. Finally, it is assumed that respondents will answer survey and interview questions truthfully and to the best of their knowledge, thereby providing trustworthy responses. Given the descriptive nature of the current study, this assumption is critical.

**Limitations**

This study investigated the OPI levels of Ohio teacher candidates for initial PreK-12 licensure in Spanish and French as known to foreign language teacher education faculty. However, students’ actual results on an official OPI test may prove to be different from the educators’ ratings or their knowledge of any OPI data. Knowledge of the prospective teachers’ oral proficiency as defined by the ACTFL *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* would require first-hand access to test results, which this study did not collect. In addition, a follow-up survey after several years might help to assess the accuracy of the educators’ ratings.

Another limitation of the present study is that it was conducted in a single state, Ohio, with all of the limitations that a single setting includes: specific institutions, their faculty and teacher candidates, academic content standards, and legislature mandates for teacher candidates.

Finally, the study is based on survey research and follow-up qualitative interviews. The results are, therefore, not generalizable to the entire population of foreign language faculty or foreign language teacher candidates.
Methodology

According to Hutchinson, surveys are one of the most commonly used instruments in educational research. A review by Hutchinson and Lovell (1999) found that surveys “were by far the most frequently used method of data collection among 209 studies reported in three leading higher education journals,” (p. 285).

This study used multiple methods to investigate teacher candidates’ OPI levels as known to foreign language and foreign language teacher education faculty in Ohio colleges and universities in 2009. One faculty member was contacted at every college or university in Ohio that offered initial PreK-12 licensure in Spanish and French.

An e-mail survey presented to faculty included questions concerning a) their expectations concerning the level of their college teacher education candidates’ target language oral proficiency skills, b) their perceptions of how well students would meet the ACTFL and NCATE oral proficiency standards; and c) extant data that measured licensure program teacher candidates’ target language oral proficiency.

The selection of the faculty member who was the initial contact was determined through institutional website information, communication with department chairs, and other sources (Ohio Foreign Language Association publications). If foreign language education faculty members reported that they did not know students’ speaking proficiency sufficiently well, they were asked to confer with other faculty in the program to answer the study survey. Survey results were tabulated and analyzed using descriptive quantitative measures in the SurveyMonkey software. Survey questions included an estimation of teacher candidates’ oral proficiency skills based on criteria in the ACTFL
Speaking Guidelines; these are divided into four categories: Global Tasks and Functions, Content and Context, Accuracy, and Text Type. Since each of these four areas is described in the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines, the subcomponents lend themselves to separate listing and division into as separate questions in a survey instrument, and in a post-survey instrument that compared respondents’ answers with the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines.

Dörnyei recommended that, in order to encourage an acceptable response rate, a questionnaire should be no more than four to six pages in length and require no more than thirty minutes of respondents’ time for completion (2003, p.18). Czaja and Blair (2005) warned researchers to expect that a mailed survey might take eight to ten weeks for completion, from the initial pre-announcement to receiving the last participant responses including reminders. Dörnyei estimated that a survey might take about six weeks (2003, p. 78). Thus, the current study made use of technology in order to reduce the time of administration.

An alternative to a postal survey is an online survey, which can be administered more quickly due to eliminating mailing times (Sue & Ritter, 2007, p. 5; Schonlau, Fricker & Elliott, 2002, p. 27). On the other hand, some characteristics of online surveys make them difficult to use under some circumstances. For example, Sue and Ritter (2007) advised not using an online survey if the target population has limited online access, or it may be difficult to find participants’ e-mail addresses, or if the researcher does not have access to technical resources to conduct the survey (2007, pp. 5-7). None of these factors applied in this study. Schonlau, Fricker & Elliott found a slight increase in skipped
questions in online surveys compared to mailed surveys, but they also identified some advantages of online surveys. For example, because mailed and online surveys are self-administered, they have yielded fewer “socially acceptable” responses than telephone surveys or face-to-face surveys. That is, respondents have been found to be less honest or forthcoming when talking directly to the researcher to avoid embarrassment on sensitive topics (2002, p. 17). The same researchers also found that both mailed and online surveys yielded longer responses to open-ended questions than face-to-face or telephone surveys. Moreover, the fact that they were already in electronic form facilitated electronic methods of analysis (xiv-xv).

As validation of the survey instrument in the present study, faculty from two institutions that were not included in the study were asked to participate in a pilot test and provide expert validation of the survey instrument. One of the invited experts participated and provided suggestions for the revision of some questions. The other invited expert declined to participate, saying she did not have the necessary information. She referred the researcher to another faculty member in her department, who did not reply to two requests to participate. The survey was then revised based on input by the expert who had offered feedback. For the survey population, the e-mailed request to take the survey was preceded by an e-mail that explained the study and alerted respondents to expect a second e-mail with the survey link. The second e-mail with the survey link included a requested deadline for response within three weeks and was followed by one reminder during the third week. Due to an initially low response rate, e-mail and telephone reminders were made and the deadline was extended.
A second part of the study consisted of four sets of interviews conducted in selected Ohio colleges and universities. Basic qualitative research investigates, as Merriam explained it, “(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences,” (2009, pp. 21-22). In each of these sites, site visits, analysis of documents such as program descriptions, university catalog information, and study abroad information, and interviews with faculty and students gave access to more detailed information than was available in the survey and to a variety of views and data. There was a purposeful selection of the sites (Merriam, 2009, pp.78-79). Balance was sought between smaller and larger institutions in order to include institutions whose resources differed. “Balance and variety are important; opportunity to learn is of primary importance,” Stake wrote (p. 447).

This qualitative part of the present study can be classed as a group of descriptive case studies. Experts disagree about the definition of case studies. Merriam underscored a “lingering uncertainty about [the] nature” of a case study (1998, p. 26). Yin defines a case study according to research procedure, where Stake considers the main characteristic of a case study to be what it studies, its bounded nature. Hays (2004) and Stake (2000) agree that case studies require investigation of the same questions through multiple sources and multiple methods and that no question should draw its data exclusively from interviews or observation, or any single data collection source. By these agreed-on conditions, the present study observed important principles of case studies. Hays (2004) recommended that in planning stages, researchers should “create a chart listing each research question and the planned data collection methods and source” (p.228). She
further stated that the time spent on interviews, observations and other sources of data collection for a case study can vary from one to three weeks to a year (p. 218). Methodology is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

**Timeline of the Study**

This study was conducted during the 2008-2009 academic year. The proposal for the study was first submitted on April 6, 2009, to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at a large Mid-Western University. The initial identification of possible participants was selected from the 2007-2008 list of fifty-one teacher preparation institutions in Ohio. The next step involved an e-mail sent by the researcher to selected faculty members at all institutions, public and private, in the group that offer an approved initial foreign language teacher preparation program. Details about the study and a request for participation were included, along with contact information for the faculty member who was principal investigator. On April 19, participants were e-mailed a link to the study survey and asked to complete it within three weeks. Follow-up contacts were made as needed in hopes of reaching at least a 75% response rate. The researcher sent two e-mail reminders to faculty who had not responded and subsequently made telephone calls to eight of them. Ongoing cataloguing, analysis, and description of data occurred on a regular basis as the data arrived. Following Hutchinson (2004), the researcher established a system for and tracking and coding the data, which were analyzed when complete using the tools available in the survey software SurveyMonkey.
Interviews at institutions elected for site interviews began on April 25, 2009 and continued until June 6, 2009. Following Hays (2004) and Stake (2004), the researcher wrote up field notes daily from case study data received. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were analyzed using the computer software NVivo.

In summary, the study included a survey that Dörnyei (2003) explained has the advantage of allowing the researcher to collect a large amount of data in a relatively short time, but the disadvantage of not allowing her to probe deeply or follow up with more questions (pp. 9-10); therefore, the present study included four site visits and interviews to provide more detailed information on the OPI levels of teacher candidates at four teacher education programs that were purposefully selected. Hutchinson (2004) posited that these allow a researcher to answer focused questions by producing in-depth descriptions and interpretations over a relatively short period of time, perhaps in a few weeks (p. 218).

**Organization of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is comprised of five chapters. Chapter One includes the problem statement, research questions, definitions, limitations, and an overview of the methodology and procedures that were followed. Chapter Two is a review of the literature, describing related professional literature on target language oral proficiency testing, the speaking skill, and foreign language teacher knowledge. Chapter Three describes the study methodology, including theories of survey and qualitative research, methods of data analysis such as coding with NVivo8, as well as the researcher’s ethical
obligations and philosophical stance. Chapter Four includes presentation and discussion of the data. Chapter Five describes the study findings, recommendations for further research and implications of the study for teacher education programs for teacher candidates. The chapter concludes with a final statement of post-study research in the area of this descriptive study. A bibliography and appendices including the primary survey instrument are included.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The NCATE/ACTFL Program Standards (2002) designate the OPI (or TOPT) as a measure of the success of foreign language teacher education programs in preparing their teacher candidates for the demands now expected of them by official bodies in the foreign language teaching profession. In a slightly different way, the OPI becomes a high-stakes test for individual teacher candidates. This chapter focuses on previous professional literature in three main areas that related to the OPI: 1) speaking a foreign language, 2) the Oral Proficiency Interview, its description, its history, criticisms and support for it, 3) oral proficiency as a component of foreign language teacher knowledge, and 4) the current

Speaking a Foreign Language

For over thirty years, the skill of speaking a foreign language has been discussed in the framework of the theory of communicative competence. The term “communicative competence” was first used by sociolinguist Dell Hymes in 1967. Hymes elaborated on the theory in 1972. The theory challenged Chomsky’s theory of language that consisted of competence and performance. According to Chomsky,
language had two primary components. Competence was a complete set of mental rules, acquired naturally through the activation of an ability in the human brain called the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Competence was a complete and perfect knowledge of how sentences in the native language are formed. Performance, in contrast, was the execution of sentence-creation. Performance might display imperfections that were not found in speakers’ mental competence (Ellis, pp. 12-13,81).

Hymes (2001) objected to Chomsky’s separation of competence and performance and to Chomsky’s limiting the definition of language knowledge as the knowledge to form grammatically acceptable sentences. He cited examples to show that linguistic competence included appropriateness as well as correctness. Hymes stated that a child was “able to accomplish a repertoire of speech acts, to take part in speech events, and evaluate their uses by others.” Competence in a language included “attitudes, values, motivations….and other codes of linguistic conduct” (p. 60). It included social knowledge such as when one should not ask a question (p. 62). Hymes further saw competence as a skill that was demonstrated, not an ideal mental set of rules. Its execution could not be separated from knowledge of those rules (p. 64). Hymes was not a second language theorist or researcher. His interest was in language as social behavior. Savignon (2000, p. 125) wrote that Hymes taught us that language means “how people talk, and what it means when they do. [This] comes not from linguistics alone.” She further explained that, language learning required us, “to understand language as human behavior in the full social context in which it occurs,” (Savignon 1987, p. 236).
A theory of communicative competence based on Hymes’ theory but specifically oriented toward foreign language learning was developed by Canale and Swain (1980), who theorized that Hymes’ construct was comprised of four components: grammatical competence (which included morphology, syntax, lexicon, and phonology), sociolinguistic competence (social appropriateness for the context), discourse competence (coherence and cohesion to hold together language beyond the single sentence), and strategic competence (verbal and nonverbal strategies to compensate when breakdowns in communication occur due to a speaker’s lack of grammatical or discourse skill). In an article (1983), the authors stated that they did not know how learners achieved grammatical competence, nor what the precise rules of sociolinguistic appropriateness or discourse were, only that these four were the main components of communicative competence. In addition, where Chomsky theorized that the ideal native speaker’s linguistic competence is complete, lacking no knowledge of the language, Canale & Swain theorized that speakers controlled the four competences to varying degrees. Not only nonnative speakers, but also native speakers, might have excellent control of several of the competences but fail to control one or more of the others. These theories all have potential interactions with language teacher candidates’ oral proficiency studied in this investigation.

Bachman (1988, 1990) proposed his own theory which he called Communicative Language Ability (CLA). Instead of four components, CLA had three components. Each was subdivided into several subcategories. The first component, language competence, was divided into organizational competence and pragmatic competence. Organizational
competence, in turn, was divided into grammatical competence (knowledge of rules of lexis, morphology, and syntax) and textual competence (knowledge necessary to join utterances into texts), while pragmatic competence includes illocutionary competence (knowledge of language functions) and sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of rules of appropriateness). The second component, strategic competence, was divided into assessment (assessing the context and evaluating whether the communicative goal has been achieved), planning (retrieval of necessary items from language competence), and execution (use of psychophysiological mechanisms to carry out the plan). The third competence was comprised of modality (receptive and productive) and channel (audio and visual) (Bachman 1988, pp. 155-157). As with Hymes’ and Canale and Swain’s theories, Communicative Language Ability can be used to describe both written and oral language. In addition, all three theories place written and spoken language in a social context.

The description of speaking formulated in the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* does not overtly espouse any of the above theories. The *OPI Tester Training Manual* (1999) does not explain why the test is organized around the four assessment criteria of global tasks/functions, context/content, accuracy, and text type (Swender, 1999). Articles written by ACTFL and ETS officials including Swender (2003), Liskin-Gasparro (2003) or Henning (1990) also do not explain how these four criteria were chosen or on the basis of which theories of speaking the choices were made. Nonetheless, a reader can infer the influence of Hymes and Canale and Swain, in particular. As will be shown in the next section, the four main assessment criteria of the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* include a
number of elements listed in the theories described thus far: control of syntax, lexis, morphology and phonology (grammatical competence), text structure and complexity (discourse competence), social setting and content (sociolinguistic competence), and strategic repair (strategic competence). Lack of a theoretical base for the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines is one of the criticisms made against the Guidelines and the OPI.

The ACTFL Speaking Guidelines and the Oral Proficiency Interview

The ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview is a 20- to 30-minute oral interview conducted by a tester certified by ACTFL. Based on the four assessment criteria of the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines, it measures speaking performance against a set of standard tasks performed by the interviewee. It is criterion-referenced, meaning it is scored against those norms and not by comparison with other OPI test-takers. It is standardized but also interactive and organic. The OPI follows standard stages, but the interviewer does not ask a standard set of questions. Questions intended to elicit the tasks, content, and text types under observation are formulated on the spot as the conversation unfolds. After a warm-up, the interviewer estimates a general level and then probes, or presents more difficult challenges, in order to find the upper limits of the speaker’s oral skills. The points of breakdown, where the speaker can no longer perform the tasks, or cannot provide more complex discourse or communicate accurately or with social appropriateness, help to reveal the speaker’s oral proficiency level. This latter is defined as the level at which the speaker performs consistently (Swender, 1999).
The OPI is based on the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines*. These were adapted from the U.S. government’s Interagency Roundtable scale of oral proficiency, known as the ILR or FSI (Foreign Service Institute) scale. General levels of oral proficiency were originally articulated “based on the experience of FSI Washington staff and in-field service officers concerning typical language use requirements and degrees of language performance demonstrated by FSI graduates in the field” (Clark & Clifford, 2008, pp. 130). The FSI/ILR rating system has been used by the U.S. State Department, other federal agencies, and by the Peace Corps.

Use of the ILR/FSI in academia posed problems, however. The oral proficiency skills of most adult (college-age) second language learners fell at “0-1” on the “1-5” ILR point scale, demoralizing test-takers and yielding little information. A student rated at “1” after one year of high school foreign language study “would not show further progress on the FSI scale over the next one or even two years” (Clark & Clifford, pp. 132). Moreover, even college foreign language majors were unlikely to progress beyond “2” or “2+” by the end of college (Carroll, 1967). To allow finer distinctions at the low levels, the authors of the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* expanded and subdivided the “0-1” levels. They also collapsed the “3-5” levels, whose distinctions were irrelevant to the college audience, into a single Superior level. Consequently, the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* do not measure the highest levels of oral proficiency originally conceived to describe the level of oral proficiency required in government service. ACTFL’s Superior level corresponds to “3” on the ILR scale; its Advanced level corresponds to “2” on the ILR scale (Swender 1999, p. 20). In relation to ACTFL’s *Standards for Foreign*
Language Learning in the 21st Century, they provide a measure of the Interpersonal mode (Swender 1999, p. 6).

The current (1999) version of the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines represents revisions since the Provisional ACTFL Speaking Guidelines of 1982 and the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines of 1986. Revisions were based on response to feedback from researchers and teachers and analysis of the speech of OPI test-takers. The Advanced level, originally divided into two parts, Advanced-Low and Advanced-High, was divided into –Low, -Mid, and –High like the other three levels. Presentation on the page was reversed from showing Novice at the top and Superior at the bottom in 1986 to Superior at the top of the page and Novice at the bottom in 1999 (Swender, 2003). Otherwise, the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines have retained their four component divisions: global tasks and functions, context and content, accuracy, and text type. A brief overview of the meaning of the four components at the four major levels is given below:

Table 1 The ACTFL Speaking Guidelines (1999)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>Discuss topics extensively, support opinions and hypothesize, deal with a linguistically unfamiliar situation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>Narrate and describe in major time frames and deal effectively with an unanticipated complication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Create with language, initiate, maintain, and bring to a close simple conversations by asking and responding to simple questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice</td>
<td>Communicate minimally with formulaic and rote utterances, lists and phrases (Swender, 1999, p. 22).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued on next page)
### Context and Content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior:</td>
<td>Most formal and informal settings</td>
<td>Wide range of general interest topics and some special fields of interest and expertise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced:</td>
<td>Most informal and some formal settings</td>
<td>Topics of personal general interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate:</td>
<td>Some informal settings and a limited number of transactional situations</td>
<td>Predictable, familiar topics related to daily activities and personal environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Accuracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior:</td>
<td>Errors virtually never interfere with communication or distract the native speaker from the message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced:</td>
<td>May make occasional errors, but speaks without patterns of errors. Can be understood without difficulty by speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-native speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate:</td>
<td>Can be understood, with some repetition, by speakers accustomed to dealing with non-native speakers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice:</td>
<td>May be difficult to understand, even for speakers accustomed to dealing with non-native speakers (Swender 1999, p. 28).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Text type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior:</td>
<td>Extended discourse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced:</td>
<td>Paragraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate:</td>
<td>Discrete sentences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Novice:</td>
<td>Individual words and phrases (Swender 1999, p. 30).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* and the OPI have been criticized on the grounds of validity and reliability. Critics claimed that the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* lay out a narrow definition of communication (Bachman & Savignon, 1986; Lantolf, 1988; Lantolf & Frawley, 1985; Shohamy, 1988), that the entire framework was unsupported by any empirical evidence (Bachman, 1988; Chastain, 1989) and that interview ratings confounded the traits being tested with the testing method (Bachman, 1988; Fulcher,
Salaberry asked, “Why these particular tasks and functions and not others?” “Where is the empirical evidence that assigns them to the designated levels?” (pp. 301-302). Raffaldini (1988) criticized an overdependence on sentence-level grammatical accuracy and an assumption that descriptors at the same level on the rating scale were somehow related to each other, that is, that “learners with rudimentary linguistic competence are incapable of handling complex speech acts in sociolinguistically appropriate fashion.” Other critics held that the interview situation did not represent authentic interaction (Lazaraton, 1998; Savignon, 1985; Shohamy, 1988) or favored cultural groups whose nonverbal strategic interactions are culturally more familiar to the OPI interviewer (Jenkins & Parra, 2003; Jungheim, 2001).

These criticisms sparked research aimed at testing the construct validity of the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines and reliability in the administration of the OPI. As one part of a multi-part study involving the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines/OPI and the ACTFL Writing, Listening and Reading Guidelines (Dandolini and Henning, 1990), the same audio tapes of OPI interviews were rated by ACTFL-certified testers and ranked for proficiency by naïve native speakers. Correlations between the two sets of evaluations showed means of .934 for English samples and .929 for French samples. Dandolini and Henning also found interrater reliabilities of .85 to .96 for tests based on all four sets of ACTFL Guidelines. The authors concluded that their study had “provide[d] considerable support for the use of the Guidelines as a foundation for the development of proficiency tests and for the reliability and validity of the Oral Proficiency Interview,” (p. 230). Other studies that supported interrater reliability were those by Magnan (1987) and Thompson
Thompson’s study, while it found high correlations among raters in general, showed discrepancies between raters who had conducted face-to-face interviews and those who listened to tapes. Face-to-face interviewers assigned somewhat higher ratings than raters who listened to tapes, suggesting that face-to-face nonverbal communication from test-takers could help their scores strategically (p. 416).

Other studies also lent support to the validity of the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines*. Halleck (1995) confirmed that ratings at different levels on the OPI correlated to syntactic maturity as defined by length of T-units. That is, an objective measure confirmed that the levels on the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* are distinct, with one exception: no significant difference in syntactic maturity was found between the Intermediate and Advanced levels (p. 227). Glisan and Foltz (1998) found that teacher judgments concurred with OPI ratings given high school students by certified OPI testers. Lisken-Gasparro (1986) analyzed transcripts of Oral Proficiency Interviews and found that the use of circumlocution did distinguish between the Intermediate, Advanced and Superior levels, as the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* implied. Salamone and Marsal (1997) further explained that speakers rated at the Superior level used little circumlocution; they knew the words they wanted and did not need circumlocution. Watanabe analyzed OPI transcripts and found that distinctions among text types in the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* held true. Moreover, she identified specific techniques of coherence, cohesion and embedding that distinguished speakers who had been rated at different levels. Bearden (1998), in contrast, identified increasing attempts at cohesion within the discourse of speakers rated at the Novice level, a characteristic that the *ACTFL*
Speaking Guidelines did not recognize. This confirmation of the validity of text type as a criterion that differentiates levels of speakers stood in contrast to a study by Lee and Mesumeci that, according to Spolsky, did serious damage to the validity of text type in differentiating second language reading levels (Spolsky, 2000, p. 547).

**Literature on Typical Proficiency Levels of College Foreign Language Students**

Liskin-Gasparro (2003) observed that, in addition to the function of evaluating the oral proficiency of individuals, OPI samples could provide “rich data” that aid research in second language acquisition (p. 488). A large number of studies analyzing scores and tapes from OPIs have addressed the issue of “reasonable expectations” and usual speaking proficiency levels among college-level students at the end of one, two, or more years of language study of the commonly taught Western European languages. One group of studies (Chalhoub-Deville, 1997; Glisan & Foltz, 1998; Halleck 1995; Tschirner, 1992; Tschirner, 1996; Tschirner and Heilenman, 1998) focused on student achievement at the Intermediate Level, typically the level set for language requirements for undergraduate college non-majors. While all of the studies acknowledge a range of scores within each group, that is, first-year, second-year students, etc., the studies agree on some general levels of oral proficiency that are typical after a given time spent studying a foreign language in college. Wing and Gayeski (1984), Magnan (1986, 1987), Klee & Lange (1986), Tschirner (1992), Thompson (1995), Chalhoub-Deville (1997), Tschirner and Heilenmann (1998), and Garrett (2000) found that college students tended to cluster at
the Intermediate-Low level after one year of study, at the Intermediate-Mid level after two years and at the Intermediate-High level after three years.

For college seniors nearing graduation, that is, a population that includes teacher candidates, there is also consistency in the findings. Carroll’s (1967) is the oldest, and an often-cited study of the oral proficiency of college juniors and seniors majoring in foreign languages. Carroll oversaw the administration of oral interviews to 2,782 seniors majoring in French, German, Italian, Russian, or Spanish at 203 U.S. institutions, in fact twenty percent of the graduating foreign language majors in the U.S. during the study, and found that “a median graduate with a foreign language major can speak and comprehend the language only at about an FSI Speaking rating of “2+”, that is, somewhere between a ‘limited working proficiency’ and a ‘minimum professional proficiency’” (134). The FSI score of “2” to “2+” is considered today to be equivalent to Advanced-Low on the ACTFL OPI (Swender 2003, 525). Clark and Clifford (1987, p.132) and Fulcher (1996, p. 163) connect the decision to limit the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines to the range of “1-3” on the IRL/FSI scale Carroll’s findings.

Another large-scale study published by Hiple and Manley in 1987 reported two years of OPI results for college juniors and seniors in Texas. Forty-two percent of college juniors were rated Advanced while 55.4 percent of seniors were so rated. The students included both education and non-education majors (p. 149). In another study, Grosse Uber (1992) asked certified raters who also taught in foreign language departments for data on ratings they had given to college seniors in 1990-91. With data from 31 raters for 271 students, the raters reported scores of Advanced or above for 57%
of students in Spanish, 35% of students in French, 82% of students in Russian, 64% of students in German, 73% of Japanese majors and 20% of Italian majors (p. 6). This set of ratings stands alone among studies conducted so far and reported in the professional literature. As in the other studies described below, students were usually clustered at the Intermediate-High/Advanced borderline on the ACTFL/ETS speaking scale.

Swender’s ACTFL study published in 2003 compared OPI scores for 501 students in the third and fourth years of study. She found that only 47% of third- and fourth-year foreign language majors were rated at Advanced-Low or higher on the ACTFL/ETS scale. Fifty-six percent were rated Intermediate-High or lower. Intermediate-High and Advanced-Low together constituted a cluster that comprised 55.8% of the students (Swender 2003, 524). Ratings were also given for seven individual languages. The results for Spanish and French are given below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Spanish n=220</th>
<th>French n=210</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sup</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-High</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Mid</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Low</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-High</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-Mid</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-Low</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Low and above: 42.2%</td>
<td>A-Low and above: 52.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-High and below: 57.5%</td>
<td>I-High and below: 47.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Spanish, French, German, Mandarin, and Japanese, Intermediate-High was the most frequent rating. In Italian (n=12) Advanced-Low was the most frequent rating, with 42% of students so rated, while in Russian (n=7), Advanced-Mid, Advanced-Low, and
Intermediate-High, each had two students (29%) rated at that level (Swender 203, p.524).

In the same article, a table comparing expected proficiency levels after years of study and minimum proficiency required for different job types stated that: Advanced-Low is a minimum oral proficiency requirement for K-12 language teachers, physicians, police officers, military linguists, and billing clerks. Table information further indicated that Advanced-Low is typically achieved by “undergraduate majors with year-long study abroad experience,” while Intermediate-High, a minimum for aviation personnel, receptionists, and missionaries, was typically achieved by “undergraduate majors without a year-long study abroad experience” (Swender 2003, p. 525). The article did not report any studies that included data on study abroad, but rather, the data were “compiled from collaborations between ACTFL and academic, government, and commercial agencies” (Swender 2003, p. 524).

One other recent study reported on the oral proficiency of foreign language majors in their senior year at Weber State University in Utah (Mathews & Hansen, 2004). The instrument, however, was a locally created SOPI based on the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines, rather than an official OPI. The researchers report on SOPI results for 35 graduating foreign language majors. The results of all three languages that were tested were as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>German</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sup</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-High</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A-High</td>
<td>A-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Mid</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>A-Mid</td>
<td>A-Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Low</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>A-Low</td>
<td>A-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-High</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I-High</td>
<td>I-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-Mid</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>I-Mid</td>
<td>I-Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-Low</td>
<td></td>
<td>I-Low</td>
<td>I-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sup</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-High</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A-High</td>
<td>A-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Mid</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>A-Mid</td>
<td>A-Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Low</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>A-Low</td>
<td>A-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-High</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>I-High</td>
<td>I-High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-Mid</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>I-Mid</td>
<td>I-Mid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-Low</td>
<td></td>
<td>I-Low</td>
<td>I-Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-Low and above: 60%</td>
<td>A-Low and above: 17%</td>
<td>A-Low and above: 25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-High and below: 40%</td>
<td>I-High and below: 83%</td>
<td>I-High and below: 75%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, in this study, 48.6% of graduating foreign language majors were rated at the ACTFL Advanced-Low proficiency level or above, and 51.4% were rated at Intermediate-High and below. There were differences between the languages. Spanish was the only language in which a majority of the graduating seniors received ratings of Advanced-Low or higher. The standard that the Weber State faculty had themselves set for teacher candidates was Intermediate-High. The authors of the study reported that Weber State was, at time of the publication in 2004, the only postsecondary institution in Utah that had set a standard (p. 633). It is noteworthy that at Weber State University, most foreign language majors were returned Mormon missionaries; most of them had had, not a year of study abroad, but two years of recent experience living abroad in a situation that required them to have frequent communicative experience with native speakers (639). Thus, their oral proficiency levels might have been predicted to be higher than that for students at other institutions. Even with this somewhat atypical student population, however, the foreign language department found that not quite half of their graduating seniors in foreign languages were rated Advanced-Low. The results of this
study were limited, however, by several unknowns. The authors did not distinguish between teacher candidates and other foreign language majors, and they expressed some reservations about the grading of the German tests (p. 635). They did not offer reliability data for their SOPI. However, previous studies had reported that SOPI scores comparable to OPI scores (Stanfield, 2000).

**Literature on the Role of Oral Proficiency as Part of Foreign Language Teacher Knowledge**

It might seem uncontroversial to say that a teacher should know the subject area she teaches. Writing in what she acknowledges to reflect a view of the late 20\(^{\text{th}}\) and early 21\(^{\text{st}}\) century, Schrier commented, “It is understood that teaching languages, or for that matter any other discipline, involves mastering knowledge about a discipline and developing pedagogical content knowledge,” (2008, p. 283). A review of the literature on foreign language teacher knowledge reveals, however, how much the profession’s own notions of teacher knowledge have changed over the past century.

In the 1940s, a candidate for certification as a foreign language teacher in the schools did need to know much about the language she taught, compared to today’s expectations. A 1945 article published in the *Modern Language Journal* as of 1942 reported on teacher certification by U.S. states in 1942:

- Nineteen states certified a person to teach a modern foreign language if he had studied the language for two years; ten more states required less than three years.
- Most states accepted high-school years to count toward the minimum. In half the
nation, a teacher with two years of high-school French was regularly authorized to teach second-year French as a minor subject (Paquette, 1966, p. 4).

These requirements, very low by today’s standards, reflected attitudes within the public and the language teaching profession. The 1929 Coleman report, issued by the Carnegie Foundation Modern Language Study, supported the idea that two years was the maximum time available in a student’s schedule for language study; that a learner could not learn to speak in two years; that, therefore, the proper goal of foreign language learning was reading knowledge only. Consequently, “teachers were advised that it was unnecessary for them to learn to speak the language, since there would be little occasion for them to use it in class,” (Paquette, 1966, p. 3).

Later in that decade, teacher shortages caused by World War II made it difficult to maintain even those requirements. “Temporary or emergency certificates were issued to almost anyone who could be found to sit in a teacher’s chair; and state boards agreed to forget requirements and standards for the time being,” (Paquette, 1966, p. 4).

In 1966, the National Federation of Modern Language Teachers Associations published a work that was the result of over ten years of meetings among leaders of language associations, university language departments, and state departments of education. In the 1966 Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs in Modern Foreign Languages (Paquette, 1966) insisted on knowledge of a language and necessary teacher knowledge much greater than conceived of in the 1920s and 1940s. In particular, the Guidelines promoted oral proficiency as a necessary skill for foreign language teachers.
The 1966 Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs recommend that teacher candidates be able to “talk with a native with a command of vocabulary and syntax sufficient to express his thoughts in conversation at normal speed with reasonably good pronunciation,” (Paquette, 1966, p. 21). The document also recommended that candidates pass oral language proficiency tests before entrance into the program, at the end of the junior year, and near the end of the senior year.

Overall, the Guidelines emphasized subject area knowledge as the primary components of the knowledge of a foreign language teacher. Of seven competencies listed, four are language competencies (listening, speaking, reading, writing). The other three were knowledge of linguistics, culture and teaching methods (Paquette, 1966, p. 24). Thus, in a list of seven competencies, only one is related to teaching knowledge. Single-sentence descriptors were given for general competencies in listening, speaking, reading, writing, language analysis, culture, and professional preparation (Paquette, 1966, p. 50-52). The 1966 Guidelines for Teacher Education were tied to a set of Modern Language Proficiency Tests administered by Educational Testing Services. The battery of tests covering the seven competency areas totaled 190 minutes (Paquette, 1966, p. 73-75).

As the proficiency movement of the 1980s brought new definitions of what it is to learn and to teach a foreign language, it also led to renewed efforts to define teacher knowledge and the bases of foreign language teacher education. Bernhardt and Hammadou (1987) found that what had been written to date on foreign language teacher education was full of received wisdom, craft knowledge, and opinion and “[drew] from a relatively small pool of references” (Bernhardt & Hammadou, 1987, p. 293). They
deplored the publication of a mere 78 articles in ten years, of which only eight were based on research. They found that what was written contained “no theoretical framework for the statements they contain,” and bemoaned a lack of attention to general teacher education research (p. 293). In short, they found that little work had been done to address questions like, “What should a foreign language teacher know and be able to do?”

A widely-cited framework for describing foreign language teacher knowledge was laid out by Lafayette (1993), in a book on foreign language teacher education published in conjunction with ACTFL. Lafayette defined the necessary teacher knowledge as falling into three categories: general education, (a college general education program), specialist education (subject area knowledge), and professional education (pedagogical knowledge) (p. 125). He further divided subject area knowledge into language proficiency, knowledge of civilization and culture of the language to be taught, and language analysis (p. 126). Like other foreign language professionals, (Tedick & Walker, 1995), Lafayette strongly criticized college foreign language programs as focusing too heavily on literary analysis and thereby neglecting oral proficiency.

Lafayette’s contribution appeared in an ACTFL publication (Guntermann,1993) aimed at filling the definitions gap on foreign language teacher knowledge. The publication ends with ACTFL’s 1988 Provisional Program Guidelines for Foreign Language Teacher Education. The 1988 Guidelines covered the three areas described by Lafayette. In the document’s own terms, they were:
1) personal development, based on the knowledge and skills derived from a strong liberal arts education; 2) professional development based on knowledge and skills derived from education and experience in the art and science of pedagogy; and 3) specialist development, based on knowledge and skills associated with being a specialist in the language and culture to be taught in the classroom (*Provisional program guidelines*).

Today, ACTFL documents carefully distinguish between standards for novice teachers and standards for program offerings. The 1988 document, however, mixed descriptions of competencies expected of teacher candidates as individuals and content areas to be covered in the teacher education program. **Personal Development** and **Specialist Development** described the candidates’ competencies, while **Professional Development** laid out areas of study that programs should offer. The three areas can be summarized in this way:

**Communication** included effective communication skills and strategies in English, strong interpersonal skills, and leadership (1988, pp. 3-5). **Professional Development** emphasized the program’s responsibility to provide a rationale for foreign language study, as well as theories of child development, curriculum development, theories of instruction, field experiences, study of instructional settings and of foreign languages in the elementary schools, and instruction by competent faculty (1988, pp. 5-9). Finally, **Specialist Development** listed language proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, knowledge of culture and civilization, and language analysis (1988, pp. 9-11).
Compared to the 1966 Guidelines for Teacher Education Programs, the 1988 Provisional Program Guidelines retained, and even added more detail to, requirements for language proficiency. They also put much more emphasis on curriculum and instruction and general knowledge of educational systems and settings. The full description of speaking competency in 1966 Guidelines was that a novice foreign language teacher be able to “talk with a native with a command of vocabulary and syntax sufficient to express his thoughts in conversation at normal speed with reasonably good pronunciation” (Paquette, p. 21). In the 1988 ACTFL Provisional Guidelines, the description of speaking was

a. Satisfy the requirements of a broad variety of everyday, school and work situations;

b. Discuss concrete topics relating to particular interests and special fields of competence;

c. Display some ability to support opinions, explain in detail and hypothesize;

d. Use communicative strategies, such as paraphrasing and circumlocution;

e. Use differentiated vocabulary and intonation to communicate fine shades of meaning (1988, p. 11).

This more detailed description referred implicitly to elements of at the Advanced Level on the 1986 ACTFL Speaking Guidelines. The document went on to state, “It is incumbent on foreign language teacher education programs to provide the kinds of experiences, both in and out of the classroom, which will permit the candidate to development functional performance in the language at a level equivalent to the

The 1986 *Provisional Guidelines for Foreign Language Teacher Education* reflected an important trend in the foreign language profession’s definitions of what goes into teacher knowledge. Schrier has written,

> The years from 1980-1999 mark two full decades of a changing view of what the teacher brings to instruction…Concepts that are now taken for granted—teaching as decision-making or the role of beliefs and assumptions in teaching; notions of the ‘hidden’ pedagogy and curriculum; the ‘apprenticeship of observation,’ of ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ were all generated and took root during this time,” (2002, p. 13).

The period since 1980 has seen teaching skills assume a much bigger role in the profession’s concepts of teacher knowledge. In the 1993 ACTFL-sponsored compilation book, *Developing Language Teachers for a Changing World*, Lafayette’s chapter on subject knowledge was the only chapter (among eight) that analyzed foreign language knowledge or language proficiency. All of the other chapters addressed language policy and professionalism, the structure of teacher education in general, methods of teacher inquiry and self-reflection, in short, pedagogical knowledge. Bernhardt and Hammadou’s 1987 literature review has already been reported. Védez-Rendón’s 2002 updated literature review discussed 17 articles published since Bernhardt & Hammadou (1987). Fifteen of them were devoted exclusively to the development of teachers’ pedagogical knowledge. The remaining two were Lafayette (1993) and Richards (1998). In one
particularly influential article from the field of English as a Second Language, Freeman and Johnson (1998) argued that helping novice teachers understand their decision-making and thought processes merited the greatest attention from teacher educators. While this time period coincided with the proficiency movement and its focus on what language learners could do with the language, research into what foreign language education was adopting a focus on teachers’ pedagogical knowledge.

This shift has no doubt been beneficial. According to Schrier, “During the 1970s and 80s in foreign language teaching, learning to teach was largely viewed as a matter of mastering content on the linguistic and meta-linguistic levels, practicing teaching methodologies and techniques, and learning the theoretical rationales for their use,” (2002, p. 11). The more recent trend in defining teachers’ knowledge base has tended toward pedagogical knowledge. This includes close analysis of teacher cognition and decision making and what is happening in the moment during a class (Freeman and Johnson, 1998) and an increased emphasis on reflection as a source of self-awareness. This trend toward research in pedagogical knowledge has, however, greatly increased the volume of knowledge that novice teachers are expected to acquire. Teacher candidates are still expected to master linguistic content and knowledge of culture and at the same time to focus on what is happening in their class while a lesson is underway.
The 2002 Program Standards for Foreign Language Education, developed for use in NCATE accreditation reviews, represent a leap forward for the foreign language teaching profession. In 1991, the NCATE Approved Curriculum Guidelines, with submissions by fifteen specialty organizations including the National Council of Teachers of English and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, included no document representing the foreign language education (Lafayette, p. 129). In part, this was because each separate language organization—the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, the American Association of Teachers of French, etc.,—had written its own set of teacher education standards in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Lafayette, p. 133). A decade later, the profession was able to articulate a unified explanation of its expectations of teacher candidates and preparation programs in all languages. The 2002 National Standards for Foreign Language Education set out six standard areas, against the three standard areas from 1988, and described them in more detail than in 1988. Almost three times as long as the 1988 Provisional Standards, the 2002 Program Standards for Foreign Language Education also correspond to ACTFL’s “5Cs” (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities) that guide the National Standards for the 21st Century in K-16 language teaching. Thus, teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions, goals for student learning, and college program goals are interconnected. A brief overview of the 2002 Program Standards is given in the following table:
Table 4  Summary of Foreign Language Teacher Preparation Standards (2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARD 1: Language, Linguistics, Comparisons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 1.a.        Demonstrating Language Proficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 1.c.        Identifying Language Comparisons (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARD 2: Cultures, Literatures, Cross-Disciplinary Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 2.a.        Demonstrating Cultural Understandings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 2.b.        Demonstrating Understanding of Literary and Cultural Texts and Traditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 2.c.        Integrating Other Disciplines in Instruction (14)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARD 3: Language Acquisition Theories and Instructional Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 3.a.        Understanding Language Acquisition and Creating a Supportive Classroom.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARD 4: Integration of Standards Into Curriculum and Instruction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 4.a.        Understanding and Integrating Standards in Planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 4.b.        Integrating Standards in Instruction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARD 5: Assessment of Languages and Cultures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 5.a.        Knowing assessment models and using them appropriately.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 5.b.        Reflecting on assessment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 5.c.        Reporting assessment results (30).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STANDARD 6: Professionalism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 6.a.        Knowing the Value of Foreign Language Learning (35).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the 2002 framework, an enforcement mechanism, an official OPI or TOPT, is added to ensure a higher standard of oral proficiency for teacher candidates. However,
oral proficiency is one among many skills that teacher candidates are expected to master. Language proficiency is but one of the 16 subareas, and the interpersonal oral proficiency tested by the OPI (or TOPT) is one part of language proficiency. Sub-areas of Standard 1.a are Interpersonal Communication: Speaking; Interpretive Communication: Listening and reading; Presentational Communication: Speaking; Interpersonal and Presentation Communication: Writing. In short, the list of required skills is long. The Program Standards assume that Novice teachers have developed relatively a high level of language proficiency and at the same time acquired a long list of teaching and professional skills. In her discussion of the teacher knowledge base that informs the National Standards for Foreign Language Education, Schreier commented that, “In particular, the standard required for oral proficiency will challenge departments to assure that their teacher education program candidates progress in their language proficiency throughout the curriculum” (2002, 12).

**Conclusion**

The theoretical understanding of speaking and the evaluation of speaking in the field of foreign language education have seen great changes in the past twenty years. The ACTFL Speaking Guidelines and the Oral Proficiency Interview based on those guidelines have reflected changes in our understanding of what it is to know a language. Though both the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines and the OPI have been criticized, they have had a great influence teaching and testing. Lafayette called their influence on the profession “staggering and widespread” (1993). Swaffar (1989) summarized their role
this way: “Whatever the shortcomings of the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, they represent the research community’s most fruitful entry into influencing change in instructional practices in adult language acquisition in the American academy” (308). Graduates of foreign language teacher preparation programs today are educated with much greater depth of pedagogical knowledge than in the past, and at the same time held to higher standards of language proficiency.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This descriptive study involved two main types of research: a survey and interviews. Additional data came from published information such as University catalogs and websites, program descriptions, and descriptions of study abroad programs. An online survey was first administered to the target population, namely, foreign language educators in all of Ohio’s colleges and universities with foreign language teacher preparation programs. The survey provided a snapshot of Spanish and French teacher candidates’ oral proficiency across the whole state of Ohio, as estimated by the foreign language education faculty. This overall view allowed the researcher to situate the four institutions studied later in relation to general trends within Ohio and provided background for interviews and examination of documents. Following analysis of the survey, case descriptions were conducted in four selected institutions. Sites for follow-up case descriptions were selected in a purposeful sample (Merriam, 2009, p. 78) to provide variety in size and type of institution. Two were large, public universities, while two were small, private institutions. Two offered initial licensure programs to undergraduates only. One had initial licensure programs for master’s level students only. One had both types of program.
Each type of research required computer analysis. The survey results were analyzed with the tools available in the survey software Surveymonkey. This analysis produced a report of returned responses from the whole population. Interview data, field notes, and document data were analyzed on a daily basis as new data were collected. Qualitative data from interviews and observations, as well as information from documents such as University catalogs and websites, course descriptions and syllabi, were coded using NVivo8. When possible, interviewees at the four case description sites were consulted on early versions of the study concerning themselves.

This chapter also includes a description of sampling procedures, a discussion of methodological theory, ethical issues, and procedures for data analysis. The chapter concludes with a description of the pilot study.

**The Survey Population**

The survey population included the entire population, or census (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 71) of all of the institutions of higher education in Ohio that offer one or more teacher preparation programs leading to initial licensure in foreign languages. Endorsement programs were not included. It was possible to include the entire population because the group is not large: 29 institutions in all as stated on the Ohio Department of Education’s list of approved programs (Institutions of Higher Education Programs). The survey included all institutions in the census.

The institutions ranged from small to large. All 29 offered initial licensure programs in Spanish. Twenty-four offered initial licensure programs in French. Not
considered in the study were initial licensure programs in less commonly-taught languages: 18 in German, two in Russian, two in Italian, two in Japanese, one in Hebrew, one in Chinese, and one in Hebrew. While most of the licensure programs in LCTLs were found at the state’s largest research University, some were also found in smaller institutions. In many cases, teacher candidates in the less commonly-taught languages are native speakers. These candidates do not face the problem of achieving the Advanced-Low level in the language they will teach. One institution that offered initial licensure only in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) was excluded from the study because TESOL is subject to a different set of NCATE standards, written by the specialty organization Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages. In addition, most teacher candidates seeking licensure in TESOL in a U.S. setting are also native speakers of English.

While there is great variation in size and program structure among this population, all of the institutions are charged by the Ohio Department of Education Department of Teacher Licensure with meeting the same requirements outlined in the Ohio Administrative Code (http://codes.ohio.gov/oac/3301-24). Among the requirements is approval based on accreditation by NCATE. This requirement means that teacher education programs are to be developed according to specialized professional association guidelines. In the case of foreign languages, the specialized professional association is ACTFL.
Survey Data Collection

Several preliminary steps were necessary before the survey could be conducted. Indeed, as Schonlau, Fricker and Elliott advised, care must be paid to the entire survey process, not only to the design of the instrument (p. 6). First, the researcher created a list of foreign language educators from the 29 institutions to be surveyed. To confirm accuracy of the list, she made phone calls to the appropriate departments in the colleges and universities. In large institutions that had different foreign language educators who worked with candidates for initial licensure in Spanish and French, both were included. The main body of survey questions themselves re-stated the descriptors of ACTFL’s Advanced-Low, and Superior levels and asked the foreign language teacher educators the extent to which teacher candidates seeking licensure in 2008-2009 were able to perform the tasks described. Other questions asked for background about the responding institutions. A pre-survey pilot study of the survey was conducted with a volunteer foreign language teacher educators from a university outside of Ohio. Revisions made to the survey were based on the pilot tester’s feedback. The survey was designed following expert recommendations regarding readability, question type, question layout, and length (Sue & Ritter, 2007; Schonlau, Fricker & Elliott, 2002; Dörnyei, 2003). Since the survey was to be administered online, the researcher tested it for technical functioning and appearance in different computer platforms, e.g., Mac and PC, and on different web browsers.

When the list of survey participants and the survey itself were ready, pre-survey e-mail invitations were sent to participants. These e-mail invitations preceded the survey
by five days. Survey data were collected using the online survey host SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com). The announced survey period was for three weeks. Three days before the announced end date, participants who had not responded were sent an e-mail reminder. One week later, those who still had not responded were sent an additional reminder. One more reminder was sent one week later. When, after several reminders, the response rate was still low, the researcher made eight phone calls to potential respondents. Several contacts to potential respondents were made by the researcher’s dissertation adviser and a committee member. The final survey response was received on July 6, 2009. The pre-survey invitation, the survey, and each reminder included a thank-you comment to participants and an offer to share the results of the study when completed.

In the case of the college and three universities that were to be visited later for the case descriptions, the survey participant for each site was also the faculty member who was the first faculty interviewee and the faculty recruiter who recruited one or two student interviewees. This faculty recruiter was given an announcement to share with students whom she or he considered good interview candidates, along with a set of guidelines for recruitment. These included written stipulations concerning what potential teacher candidate interviewees should be told, whether an incentive would be offered by the researcher, and how interviewees could be assured of privacy rights and fair treatment. (See Appendix D).
Analysis of Survey Results

Results were analyzed using the tools available in SurveyMonkey. SurveyMonkey allows tabulation of results for each question, cross tabulation of different questions for comparison, and calculation of means. These features were sufficient for the present study. Results were exportable into Microsoft Excel to allow analysis to continue off line. This practice was recommended (Sue & Ritter, 2007) in order to protect against possible data piracy online. The data were stored on an external hard drive that was not connected to the Internet. All data were backed up regularly on an additional external storage disk that was not connected to the Internet.

Case Description Sampling

A multiple case method was selected here. While the research in question was not that of long-term case studies, case study principles were used to provide a protocol for the case description process. Yin and Merriam agree in calling a case study a bounded system (Merriam, 1998,p. 19; Yin, p. 13). As “an intensive description and analysis of…an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community, ” it can examine one low-income single mother or Punjabi students in an American high school, or of an entire high school (Merriam, 1998,19) or a new science curriculum, a small family business, or the national health policy of a country (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Yin advised that care must be taken in to defining the unit of study. “If the phenomenon you are interested in studying is not intrinsically bounded, it is not a case…If there is no end, actually or theoretically, to the number of people who could be interviewed or to
observations that could be conducted, then the phenomenon is not bounded enough to qualify as a case study” (Yin, p. 46).

In this research, the unit of study for each case was the foreign language department, its foreign language educator, and teacher candidates nearing graduation and licensure. The case descriptions did not require examination of the entire department and its members at all levels, rather of that subgroup within the department of teacher education candidates in the last year of studies and the teacher educator who was familiar with those students. Selection of interview subjects proceeded in a snowball design. That is, the researcher first consulted the primary teacher educator who was the contact at that program and asked him or her for recommendations of an additional faculty member if that member could provide information or a viewpoint that the first faculty member did not have. Similarly, the primary contact faculty member was asked to recommend one or two students based on whether several different students would have different experiences achieving Advanced-Low on the OPI. This is in keeping with Merriam’s principle that interviews are considered to be sufficient when participants no longer give new information (Merriam, 1998, p. 63). Whenever possible, the interviews were conducted onsite in order to draw additional information from the site visits: observation of physical layout, physical and human resources, human interactions, and atmosphere (Merriam, 1998, pp. 96-100). This additional information added to the multiple-source data necessary to triangulation and included in field notes (Yin, pp. 97-100).

A case illustrates the complexities of a situation, brings to light differences of opinion, explains the reasons for a problem, and illuminates alternatives not taken
(Merriam, 1998, p. 31). This descriptive power is true of all basic qualitative research in general (Merriam, 2009, p. 38). According to Yin, a multiple case study may serve the purpose of replication, that is, to discover whether conclusions drawn from one case will prove the same in others that share a similar characteristic (Yin, p. 47). Merriam concurred in the power of multiple case studies to confirm or disconfirm the information found in a single case: “The more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be…The inclusion of multiple cases is, in fact, a common strategy for enhancing the external validity or generalizability of your findings,” (Merriam, 1998, p. 40).

**Case Description Data Collection and Analysis**

To provide comparability, interviews in the four cases followed a standard protocol. According to Yin, a standard protocol in case studies is a way of increasing reliability (p. 67) and should be described in advance (pp. 68-70). In the current study, the protocol included the following:

1. A timeline for completion of the survey. The timeline was originally estimated to be April 14-May, but due to the extension of the survey deadline, it proved to last from April 19 to July 6.

2. A contact letter (in this case, an e-mail) requesting participation by the primary faculty member at each site.

3. A schedule for the four campus visits (April 25-June 6).

4. A prepared set of documents to be used at each site:
a. A set of written instructions to the primary faculty member giving the language to use in recruiting student interviewees.

b. Standard interview questions.

c. Consent forms for interviewees.

d. A list of questions for document analysis.

5. A timeline for data analysis.

Data from interviews, observations, and field notes were entered and analyzed continuously as they were collected. Thus, data collection and analysis were concurrent form the start and are discussed here as a single topic. Merriam suggested 1) Write many observer’s comments as you go. Stimulate critical thinking about what you see and become more than a recording machine. 2) Try out ideas and themes on subjects (Merriam, 1998, pp. 132-133) and 3) in data analysis, start with categories, properties and hypotheses in mind, but continually refine them as you collect new data (Merriam, 1998, pp. 190-191).

Digital audio recordings were made of interviews. Recordings were transcribed verbatim (Qvale, p. 163) and typed. To aid in organization and shaping of the analysis, observational notes were both theory notes and operational notes. Theory notes involve interpreting data as it is being entered and coded, while operational notes refer to the practicalities of data management (Ryan and Bernard, 2000, p. 783). All typed data were imported electronically into NVivo8, the standard software for coding and analysis of qualitative data. NVivo8 allowed the researcher to collect and keep relational links between textual information and audio files. It allowed the inclusion of documents in
multiple file formats, including those with tables. Its search engine facilitated queries that located similar and contrasting comments across data sources. The primary method of meaning-making was meaning categorization (Qvale, p. 192), that is, assigning numbers to recurring topics and ideas and grouping information into numbered categories. While the interview protocol used a set of standard questions, these were open-ended questions that invited differing viewpoints and respondents’ personal meanings.

The interviews were the central piece of the data collected at the onsite visits. Additional data collected included: information about the number of students in the University or college, number of faculty in the department, number of teacher education students in the foreign language program, courses that made up the foreign language education major and course descriptions, study abroad programs, and on-campus opportunities for language practice outside of class (language house, conversation groups, international TAs). Much of this information was available from published sources, for example, undergraduate or graduate catalogs and departmental websites.

Methodological assumptions and constraints

Both survey research and case research are subject to limitations and should be understood within those limitations. Dörnyei states that there is no such thing as a perfect survey. All research instruments include measurement error (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 122). Additional constraints on generalizability of the survey results to the whole population existed due to less than 100% response. In qualitative research, including case research,
a major limitation is the researcher as the research instrument. It is assumed that the researcher possesses certain personal and professional qualities such as listening skills and empathy that will encourage interviewees to open up and share information (Merriam, 1998, p. 23; Qvale, p. 147). Qvale asserts that good interviewing requires practice and experience:

The interviewer must continually make quick choices about...which aspects of a subject’s answer to follow up—and which not; which answers to interpret—and which not. Interviewers should be knowledgeable in the topics investigated, master conversational skills, and be proficient in language with an ear for their subjects’ linguistic style (p. 147).

It should be assumed that the researcher’s own subjectivity played a part in her questioning and analysis. For this reason, data analysis included researcher self-reflection.

**Ethical Issues**

Both survey research and case research raise potential ethical issues. Dörnyei advises researchers to respect four basic principles. Principle 4, relating to research with children, is omitted here.

Principle 1: No harm should come to the respondents as a result of their participation in the research. This is the primary ethical principle governing data collection and it overrides all other considerations.
Principle 2: The respondent’s right to privacy should always be respected, and no undue pressure should be brought to bear…Respondents are perfectly within their rights to refuse to answer questions without offering any explanation, and they have the right to decide to whom and under what conditions the information can be made available. No information can be published about identifiable persons or organizations without their permission.

Principle 3: Respondents should be provided with sufficient initial information about the survey to be able to give their informed consent concerning participation and use of the data…

Principle 5: It is the researcher’s moral and professional (and in some contexts legal) obligation to maintain the level of confidentiality that was promised to the respondents at the onset. We need to make sure that we do not promise a higher degree of confidentiality than what we can achieve (Dörnyei, 91-92)

In accordance with these principles, both the e-mail invitation and cover page to the survey itself explained the purpose of the research and assured participants that respondents could suspend participation at any point. Participants were told in the same documents that the individual respondents and institutions would be assigned number codes and never identified by name in the dissertation or in subsequent reports or published information based on the research. For the purposes of this research, however, it was decided that the researcher herself, and only herself, should have access to the names of people and institutions. SurveyMonkey offers the option of “tracked” or “anonymous” responses (SurveyMonkey user manual, p. 35). Thus, despite some claims
that online surveys necessarily prevent anonymity (Schonlau, Fricker & Elliott, 2002, p. 51), a researcher has a choice about maintaining and promising anonymity. It was decided that identification of the participants might be necessary for follow-up contacts. For instance, a survey might be incomplete in a way that suggested the respondent had had technical trouble or inadvertently stopped halfway. Identification of the four institutions where interviews were done would also allow later comparison of survey data and interview data. Accordingly, participants were not promised anonymity in their original electronic responses but were promised that no one except the researcher would have access to those identifications.

Dörnyei’s ethical principles accord, overall, with ethical considerations for any basic qualitative research. As in the survey research for this study, participants were informed of the purpose of the research and how their information will be used, had the right to refuse or suspend participation, to have their privacy respected, and to assume that the researcher would keep her promises. Regarding case study research, Merriam discussed the possibility that since this type of research engages participants in lengthy interviews, it can lead them to re-examine their beliefs and practices and possibly to discover job dissatisfaction or draw discomforting conclusions (Merriam, 1998, p. 214). On the other hand, Qvale warned of possible negative consequences to informants if they felt later they had revealed too much (Qvale, 116). However, both authors agreed that positive consequences were also possible. The self-examination that arises from interaction with the researcher can have a “beneficent” impact on participants (Qvale, p.
The impact on participants’ lives and careers may be long-lasting (Merriam, 2009, pp. 214-216).

**The Pilot Study**

In the pilot study, two foreign language teacher educators outside the survey population were sent an e-mail invitation to take the survey as a test only. The educators chosen were themselves teacher educators in other states and were referred to the researcher by a mutual acquaintance who had been a colleague of both teacher educators. The participants were asked to comment on readability, clarity and wording of the questions, and the survey length. They were asked to point out questions whose meaning seemed unclear or wording that seemed awkward, pages that seemed overloaded with text, questions they felt could be eliminated or added, and finally, how much time they had spent taking the survey. In the end, only one of the pilot testers completed her evaluation of the survey. The other decided she did not have the necessary information and referred the researcher to another faculty member. After two requests, this second faculty member did not reply. Like the study participants, the pilot testers were offered a thank-you and the opportunity to learn of survey results.

**Conclusion**

The dissertation research included two main research types and two additional sources of data. For each of them, methodologically-based requirements for study design, data collection, and data analysis were observed. Choices in each part of the
research were based on standard works in survey and qualitative research. At each stage, the researcher attempted to follow procedures recommended by experts in the field for efficacy and ethics. The next chapter analyzes the data and is divided into two parts. The first part of Chapter Four analyzes the numerical and narrative survey data in the order of the research questions stated in Chapter One. These reported on foreign language teacher educators’ evaluations of their teacher candidates’ oral proficiency, the existence of data concerning the teacher candidates’ oral proficiency and teacher licensure recommendations being made during the 2008-2009 academic year. This section is organized around the research questions presented in Chapter One. The second part of Chapter Four describes the institutions where the interviews took place and their foreign language education programs. It also presents the experiences and views reported by faculty and teacher candidates in the four selected institutions. Each case is described in terms of setting, program description, and both faculty and student estimations of teacher candidates’ strengths and weaknesses in oral proficiency. The discussion is organized by site and discusses findings in a hierarchical order based on factors judged by the researcher to be most important at each site.
CHAPTER FOUR

DATA AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The first part of this chapter reports on the data collected from faculty members in foreign language education or a foreign language department of the 29 Ohio colleges and universities that grant initial licensure in French and Spanish. The section provides background information on the faculty who participated in the survey, the educational institutions and teacher education programs they represent, and subsequently on the survey responses that address each of the research questions of this study. Results are presented for the six research questions. The results given include both survey data and the respondents’ subjective evaluations of the oral proficiency of their teacher candidates in French and Spanish.

The second part of the chapter presents responses taken from interviews with faculty and students from four Ohio colleges and universities that provide teacher education programs leading to initial PreK-12 licensure in French and Spanish in Ohio. These faculty were among those who had previously responded to the study survey. The teacher candidates were nearing graduation and looking towards beginning their teaching careers. This section describes each of the four institutions and its foreign language teacher licensure program, then discusses the personal and subjective responses to the
research questions reported by the interviewees at that particular institution. Where it is relevant, interviewees’ responses to research literature related to the topics they discuss. Finally, there is a summary of the chapter.

The Survey Respondents

Of the 29 Ohio colleges and universities contacted to participate in the survey, responses were returned by faculty from 16, or 55% of the institutions. In most cases, the faculty who responded were those who had received the survey by e-mail. They were foreign language education faculty or department chairs whom the researcher had identified through phone calls or e-mails as the person best suited to have information about teacher candidates’ oral proficiency or know them well enough to offer an estimate of their language proficiency. In two cases, faculty forwarded the survey to a colleague whom they considered better able to answer the questions. In one case, the researcher made inquiries herself at an institution to identify the best respondents for the survey.

The aggregate of respondents’ self-identification of their positions were: Assistant/Associate/Professor of Spanish (4), Assistant/Associate/Professor of French (5), Assistant/Associate Professor of Education (4), and faculty members with joint appointments in Spanish and Education (2). One respondent did not identify his or her department or rank. The survey guidelines allowed respondents to skip questions, with the result that on a number of questions, some respondents gave no answer.

Most of the faculty reported more than one type of direct interaction with their teacher education candidates. Ten of fifteen respondents (66.7%) reported that they had taught a foreign language course in which teacher candidates were enrolled. Nine (60%)

72
reported that they had taught teacher candidates in a methods course. Eight (53.3%) reported that they had observed candidates in one or more PreK-12 setting field experiences, while an equal number (53.3%) reported that they had spoken in the target language informally to candidates outside of class. Four respondents (26.7%) reported that they had administered a speaking exam to teacher candidates and two (13.3%) reported that they had spoken with candidates during a study abroad experience. One respondent did not respond to this question. These responses supported the necessary condition that faculty who responded to the survey had a basis for judging their teacher candidates’ oral proficiency. However, faculty survey respondents had less experience with the OPI than they had with their students. Of the fifteen respondents, nine (60%) reported that they had never taken an OPI workshop. Four of those (26.7) had taken the basic 4.5 day workshop, and three (20%) had also taken a refresher workshop. Two (13.3%) reported that they were currently certified OPI testers.

**Characteristics of Institutions Represented**

The sixteen respondents represented eight public universities and eight private colleges and universities. Three were campuses with an enrollment of 2,000 or under. Five were schools with an enrollment between 2,000 and 5,000. Three were University campuses with between 10,000 and 20,000 students. Five were campuses with over 20,000. Types of teacher licensure programs added up to more than 16, since some of the institutions offered undergraduate and one or more types of Master’s or post-Baccalaureate teacher education programs in French and Spanish. The sixteen
institutions offered in total 13 undergraduate licensure programs, two 5th year programs, five Master’s programs and one Holmes-type program, all leading to initial Ohio PreK-12 teacher licensure in the two foreign languages Spanish and French. Since faculty might work only with candidates in French or only in Spanish, or with students working toward licensure in a number of different languages, faculty were given the option of responding for one language only, or for both French and Spanish. Four indicated that they were responding for French only, four for Spanish only, and eight for both Spanish and French. In summary, the data set, while small, was designed to be distributed across different sizes and types of institutions, types of teacher education programs, and the two target foreign languages.

Characteristics of Teacher Candidates

With fourteen responses per language, respondents indicated that they expected their institutions to recommend a total of 60 candidates for PreK-12 licensure in Spanish and 21 candidates in French during the 2008-2009 academic year, the year of data collection for the present study. The mean number of candidates per institution was 4.29 in Spanish and 1.5 in French. Table 5 shows the number of candidates expected to be recommended for licensure in 2009 from the 14 institutions whose faculty responded to this question. The small number of candidates graduating and nearing licensure is an interesting statistic, both in total and per institution, especially considering that half of the respondents were located at universities with enrollments of 10,000 students or more.
Table 5  Reported Number of Candidates Recommended for Teacher Licensure in 2008-2009 at Participating Ohio Colleges and Universities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>French</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>7</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only a small percentage of teacher candidates were reported to be native speakers of the languages they planned teach. In this data set, faculty from 15 institutions responded to the question. Responses are presented below in Table 6.
Table 6 Percentage of Native vs. Nonnative Speakers Among Teacher Candidates at Participating Institutions

| Percentage of native speakers expected to be recommended for initial licensure in 2008-2009 | Responses |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 25% or less | 26-50% | 51-75% | more than 75% | 14 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 15 |

Proximity of an NCATE Review

To gauge faculty members’ familiarity with the NCATE requirements, respondents were asked when their institution had most recently completed an NCATE review. Table 3 shows the responses to the open-ended question. Sixty-four percent of the respondents reported that their teacher education programs were in the process of an NCATE review in 2009 or had undergone one the previous year. 42.86% reported that their next NCATE review was the one currently underway in 2009 or one that was coming in 2010. The figures reflected some respondents’ varying interpretations of the open-ended questions, “When was your last NCATE review?” and “When will be your next NCATE review?” and an overlap placing “currently in progress” in both the past and future. Respondents’ varying interpretations of time notwithstanding, it can reasonably be inferred that faculty from universities and colleges undergoing NCATE review in these years had some degree of familiarity with the evidence and data NCATE required for their SPA (Specific Program Area) report, including the requirement that programs teacher candidates were expected to demonstrate Advanced-Low oral proficiency on the ACTFL/ETS scale for Ohio teacher licensure.
Table 7 Proximity of Survey Dates to NCATE Reviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most recent NCATE review</th>
<th>Next NCATE review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Responses</td>
<td>Responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Currently in progress”</td>
<td>“Currently in progress”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Questions**

With this general background in mind, how did the responding faculty members describe their teacher candidates’ oral proficiency as candidates were ready to graduate from their programs? Data for related research questions are examined together, based on survey items that address the questions.

**Research Question 1:**

To what extent do respondents believe that their students who are graduating during the current academic year have achieved the Advanced-Low level of speaking proficiency called for by ACTFL and NCATE?

Questions were framed in language taken from the *ACTFL ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* (1999) and divided into separate sentences. These questions formed the largest part of the survey. As a reminder to readers, the complete *Guidelines* description of Advanced-Low proficiency is as follows:
ADVANCED LOW

Speakers at the Advanced-Low level are able to handle a variety of communicative tasks, although somewhat haltingly at times. They participate actively in most informal and a limited number of formal conversations on activities related to school, home, and leisure activities and, to a lesser degree, those related to events of work, current, public, and personal interest or individual relevance. Advanced-Low speakers demonstrate the ability to narrate and describe in all major time frames (past, present and future) in paragraph length discourse, but control of aspect may be lacking at times. They can handle appropriately the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar, though at times their discourse may be minimal for the level and strained. Communicative strategies such as rephrasing and circumlocution may be employed in such instances. In their narrations and descriptions, they combine and link sentences into connected discourse of paragraph length. When pressed for a fuller account, they tend to grope and rely on minimal discourse. Their utterances are typically not longer than a single paragraph. Structure of the dominant language is still evident in the use of false cognates, literal translations, or the oral paragraph structure of the speaker's own language rather than that of the target language. While the language of Advanced-Low speakers may be marked by substantial, albeit irregular flow, it is typically somewhat strained and tentative, with noticeable self-correction and a certain
grammatical roughness. The vocabulary of Advanced-Low speakers is primarily
generic in nature. Advanced-Low speakers contribute to the conversation with
sufficient accuracy, clarity, and precision to convey their intended message
without misrepresentation or confusion, and it can be understood by native
speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, even though this may be
achieved through repetition and restatement. When attempting to perform
functions or handle topics associated with the Superior level, the linguistic quality
and quantity of their speech will deteriorate significantly (1999).

ACTFL’s paragraph-length description of Advanced-Low proficiency was
divided into 17 separate questions shown in Tables 7-14. Responses represent the faculty
members’ reports of the percentage of their teacher candidates graduating in 2008-2009
who could perform the task or function described in the question. Questions in Tables 7
and 8 describe these educators’ report about global tasks and functions in their teacher
candidates’ speech, while questions in Table 9 describe the educators’ reports of their
candidates’ probable success with context and content. Questions in Table 10 and 11
address accuracy, while questions in Table 12 address text type. This order differs from
the order in which questions were presented in the survey, which followed the order of
statements in the original Speaking Guidelines description of the Advanced-Low level.
However, a different order was chosen here by the researcher to highlight topic affinities
between questions during the data analysis in the study. In addition, besides the 17
questions related to Advanced-Low descriptors, three additional questions (Table 15)
adressed functions from the Superior level. A group of additional questions asked for
the foreign language educators’ reports of candidates’ ability to perform presentational teaching tasks described in the *Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers* as another component of the candidates’ oral proficiency.

**Candidates’ Success with Global Tasks and Functions of Advanced-Low**

Results are shown in Tables 8 and 9 for questions relating to the faculty members’ reports of how many of their candidates nearing graduation can perform the global tasks and functions of Advanced-Low level of proficiency. In order to calculate mean scores for comparison purposes, the researcher assigned scores of 1 (25% or fewer candidates able to perform this task), 2 (26-50% of candidates able to perform this task), 3 (51-75% of candidates), and 4 (more than 75%). She then multiplied the score by the number of responses and calculated the mean. For the questions in Table 8, most faculty (8 to 10 out of 14) reported that over 75% of candidates were able to handle the global tasks and functions expected of Advanced-Low speakers. The means for questions 1, 8, and 9 ranged from 3.36 to 3.57 out of a possible 4 points. A set of lower responses for Question 14 may reflect respondents’ reaction to the negative language aspects of the description of Advanced-Low proficiency. Though the wording was taken directly from the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines*, respondents might have interpreted it as unacceptable or a sign of weak oral proficiency.
Table 8 Questions Related to Global Functions and Tasks at the Advanced-Low Level of Proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score=1 (25% or fewer of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=2 (26-50% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=3 (51-75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=4 (more than 75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions 13 and 14 concern candidates’ ability to handle the most difficult global task that candidates must complete in order to obtain an Advanced-Low rating. In the administration of the test, the unexpected situation or complication is used as a probe for final confirmation that candidates are performing at the Advanced-Low level. It is the point where test candidates have already demonstrated that they can narrate and describe in paragraphs, and the point in the test where candidates are pushed to linguistic breakdown if they are not genuinely Advanced-Low speakers (Swender, 1999).

Consequently, faculty responses to this question are of critical importance in showing whether respondents are confident that their teacher candidates can perform the tasks and functions required for an Advanced-Low rating. The lower mean score of 3.0 for Question 13 suggested that the respondents may not be confident about their answers.

The mean score for Question 14, shown below, was 2.14. Respondents seemed to hold the view that teacher candidates would not produce minimal and strained discourse.
when attempting to handle a complication. However, according to the *Speaking Guidelines*, it is permissible for Advanced-Low speakers to do so. The *Speaking Guidelines* recognize that Advanced-Low speakers can make their way through an unexpected situation, but with a lesser quality of language than they otherwise display.

### Table 9 Handling a Complication or Unexpected Situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score=1 (25% or fewer of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=2 (26-50% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=3 (51-75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=4 (more than 75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Candidates’ Success with Context and Content of Advanced-Low

Responses to questions concerning Advanced-Low context and content seemed to show a high level of confidence by teacher educators that a majority of teacher candidates were able to perform as required at the Advanced-Low level. A score of 4, the highest possible score, was the most frequent response to the four questions. For questions 2, 3, and 4, nine out of 14 respondents reported that over 75% of their graduating teacher candidates could participate in informal and formal conversations in their target language. Means ranged from 3.57 to 3.50. Respondents expressed less confidence regarding question 5, which expanded the content and context to work, current events, and public interest topics. That is, respondents indicated slightly less confidence in their candidates’
ability to participate actively when the context was more formal, likely requiring more precise vocabulary, more organized argumentation and reasoning, and a more elevated language register. According the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines, “limited” handling of the topics reported in question 5 characterizes the Advanced-Low level. To do so “with ease and confidence” is a task of the Advanced-Mid level (1999).

Table 10 Questions Related to Context and Content at the Advanced-Low Proficiency Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score=1 (25% or fewer of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=2 (26-50% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=3 (51-75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=4 (more than 75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Candidates’ Success with Linguistic Accuracy for Advanced-Low Proficiency

Responses to the questions related to linguistic accuracy showed a similar pattern to that shown in the questions about tasks and context/content. That is, respondents reported their candidates to be proficient in the highest numbers in response to questions whose wording emphasized positive achievement. When questions included negative language, even though describing weaknesses that are typical and acceptable at the
Advanced-Low level, respondents reported that the question described a much smaller percentage of their teacher candidates. For questions 7, 10 and 15, the most frequent response indicated that over 75% of a program’s graduating teacher candidates in French and Spanish could perform as required at the Advanced-Low level, and mean scores ranged from 3.4 to 3.77. Question 15, though it includes the words “may not control aspect” also included the qualifier “at all times,” lessening the negative impact. The mean score for this question was 3.77. In contrast, the mean scores for questions 6, 16, and 17, whose language included words like “generic vocabulary…not precise,” “false cognates,” “literal translations,” “irregular flow,” “strained and tentative,” were all 2 or lower.

Faculty respondents seemed to reject suggestions that candidates’ speech displayed weaknesses, even weaknesses that are part of performing at the Advanced-Low level.

Table 11 Questions Related to Accuracy at the Advanced-Low Level of Proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score=1 (25% or fewer of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=2 (26-50% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=3 (51-75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=4 (more than 75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table below presents the scores given to responses to two questions regarding weaknesses in accuracy at the Advanced-Low level of proficiency. The table categorizes responses into four groups based on the percentage of candidates who achieved each score:

- **Score=1**: 25% or fewer of candidates
- **Score=2**: 26-50% of candidates
- **Score=3**: 51-75% of candidates
- **Score=4**: More than 75% of candidates

### Table 12 Questions Related to Weaknesses in Accuracy Permissible at the Advanced-Low Level of Proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score=1 (25% or fewer of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=2 (26-50% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=3 (51-75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=4 (more than 75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Candidates’ Success with Text Types of Advanced-Low Proficiency

Responses to questions 11 and 12, shown in Table 13, were 3.14 and 2.9. Questions included both positive achievement and limitations on that achievement. In both questions, candidates are credited with the ability to create paragraph-length narration or description, but no more. The language in these questions distinguishes speaking in paragraphs (Advanced level) from speaking in extended discourse (Superior level) and is not intended as a negative appraisal. Nonetheless, it is possible that the survey participants may have interpreted the questions as reflecting negatively on their candidates’ oral proficiency. If they did, their responses in the survey for this study might have been affected.
Table 13 Questions related to text type for the Advanced-Low proficiency level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score=1 (25% or fewer of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=2 (26-50% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=3 (51-75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=4 (more than 75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions Related to Proficiency Higher than Advanced-Low

The survey included five questions concerning teacher candidates’ possible oral proficiency higher than the Advanced proficiency level. These questions included wording from the Advanced-Mid to Superior levels. However, in the interest of keeping the survey at a reasonable length, the researcher decided to include a limited number of questions. Mean scores for all five questions ranged from 2.36 to 2.64, one quartile lower than most of the means for questions describing tasks, contexts and content, accuracy, and text type of the Advanced-Low level. However, faculty respondents did not report that the level of performance described was beyond the capacity of their teacher candidates. They estimated that a minority of their candidates about to graduate were able to perform in some ways better than is required for Advanced-Low proficiency speakers.
Table 14 Questions on Competencies Above the Advanced-Low Proficiency Level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score=1 (25% or fewer of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=2 (26-50% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=3 (51-75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=4 (more than 75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Questions on Presentational Teaching in the Target Language

While this study focused on teacher candidates’ interpersonal speaking as measured by the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview, and it is not within the scope of this research to examine candidates’ use of the target language in the language classroom, interpersonal speaking is not the only requirement for oral proficiency of teacher candidates. The *Program Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers* also specify that teacher candidates should be able to “present information, concepts, and ideas orally to an audience of listeners…Presentations may consist of literary and cultural
topics as well as topics of personal interest to the presenter...Candidates are able to communicate successfully in the three modes of communication—*interpersonal*, *interpretive*, *presentational*—in the target language they intend to teach,” (2002).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Score=1 (25% or fewer of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=2 (26-50% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=3 (51-75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Score=4 (more than 75% of candidates)</th>
<th>Mean score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proficiency in presentational speaking is not measured by a standard test like the OPI, but would likely have been observed—and assessed—in upper-level French or Spanish courses and/or in educational field experiences, including student teaching. Faculty who responded to the survey indicated that they were familiar with their teacher candidates’ oral proficiency from teaching them in foreign language courses, supervising field experiences, speaking with them in informal conversation, and other professional experiences. Questions 44, 45, and 46, asked respondents to estimate the percentage to which their graduating teacher candidates could explain a grammar point, conduct a reading lesson, or present a lesson on culture in French or Spanish. The mean scores ranged from 3.00 to 3.42.
In summary, in this section of survey questions, respondents were asked to report their teacher candidates’ ability to perform specific spoken tasks, text types, or to speak in certain contexts, on certain content, and with specified degrees of accuracy. The questions did not ask participants to verify their responses with data. Rather, the faculty members reported their perceptions of teacher candidates’ oral proficiency based on personal acquaintance with the candidates. Responses seemed to suggest that, in the faculty members’ opinion, a majority of graduating teacher candidates in French and Spanish at their institutions could speak at the Advanced-Low level.

Taking a mean of responses for the questions, the reported success rate was estimated at 51-75% for 13 of 17 questions elaborating “can-do” statements for the Advanced-Low level. Respondents awarded a mean score of 3.5 or more for six of seventeen questions and between 3.0 and 3.5 for seven of the seventeen. The four questions that received mean scores of less than 3.0 identified limitations on specific speaking abilities that are by definition expected as part of Advanced-Low performance, but which respondents might have interpreted as reflecting poorly on the candidates’ skills. However, this positive assessment seems to be at variance with the OPI data presented in the next section of the present study and in the narrative responses given in interviews reported in this chapter. As reported earlier, 60% of the respondents reported that they had never taken an OPI training course. Of those who had taken one, they had taken a course over five years ago. Therefore, they might not have been completely familiar with the application of all of the factors included in a description of the Advanced-Low speaking proficiency.
Research Questions 2, 3, and 6:

2. What data do their departments have to show the oral proficiency of students recommended for teacher licensure by the individual institution?

3. How were these data obtained? When were they obtained? Where were the data observed?

6. Were there differences between French and Spanish?

Survey participants were first asked whether, in 2008-2009, teacher candidates in French and Spanish were required to take a standardized test to assess their oral proficiency, and if so which test, and at what point during candidates’ teacher education programs. Responses showed that 12 of 16 (75%) programs required a standardized speaking assessment, two (12.5%) did not, and respondents from two institutions (12.5) reported “Not sure.” The formats used, in which respondents could select multiple answers, were the OPI phone interview: eight (53.3%), online OPIc: one (6.7%), OPI with in-house certified tester: two (13.3%), a certified tester hired to test students: none (0%), the Texas Oral Proficiency Test: none (0%), the DELF for French or DELE for Spanish: none (0%), other: three (20%), none: three (20%). Five (33.3%) participants reported having student results from the OPI or TOPT for this year. Eight (53.3%) reported having no results for this year. No respondents reported knowing of OPI or TOPT results that were pending but not yet received, while two (13.3%) reported “not sure.”

Responses to different questions on OPI ratings received by graduating teacher candidates may seem contradictory in the raw numbers, but they are consistent in the
percentages of candidates at different OPI levels. Fifteen survey participants responded to the question, “Do you have OPI or TOPT results for this year.” For this question, only five of the fifteen reported having available OPI or TOPT results for “this year.” Eight respondents (53.3%) reporting having no results available. No respondents reported knowing of OPI or TOPT results that were pending but not yet received, while two (13.3%) reported “not sure.” However, in subsequent questions, more than five respondents reported details of OPI results that their teacher candidates had received for “this year.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you have student OPI/TOPT results for this year?</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pending</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Responses</strong></td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To the question shown in Table 12, five respondents (33.3%) reported having OPI results available. However, in subsequent questions, more than five respondents reported detail of OPI results that their teacher candidates had received. Eight faculty reported OPI results for the question shown in Table 13, “How many graduating teacher candidates in Spanish/French who are not native speakers have received the following OPI categories of ratings this year?”
Table 17 OPI Scores Reported for Nonnative Speaker Teacher Candidates in 2008-2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>French</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of Candidates</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number of Candidates</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv-High</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>Adv-High</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv-Mid</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>Adv-Mid</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv-Low</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>Adv-Low</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int-High</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>Int-High</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>66.67%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int-Mid</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.3%</td>
<td>Int-Mid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Faculty responding to the question: 8

It is difficult to explain how eight respondents could list OPI ratings for their graduating teacher candidates when only five respondents had replied “yes” to the question, “Do you have student results from official tests such as the OPI or TOPT for this year?” Perhaps the wording, “this year” was not clear, and some respondents may have interpreted it to mean “calendar year 2009.” However, previous questions had used the wording “2008-2009 academic year.” Alternatively, could respondents have interpreted the “Do you have….?” question to mean, “Do you have copies on your files” of the candidates’ OPI scores? Or could they have interpreted the “you” in that question to mean themselves individually, as opposed to their department’s having the records?

Differences between Spanish and French were observed. As shown in Table 16, 33.3% of nonnative speaker candidates for licensure in Spanish were rated at Advanced-Low or above, while this was true for only 11% of nonnative speaker candidates in French. The level where most candidates in both languages were reported to be was Intermediate-High, with 66.7% of nonnative speaker candidates for initial licensure in
French and 58.5% of initial licensure candidates in Spanish. There was also a difference between Spanish and French at Intermediate-Mid. Eight percent of nonnative speaker teacher candidates in Spanish were rated at Intermediate-Mid, while 22% of candidates in French were so rated.

Reports of the OPI levels of teacher candidates that faculty expected would be recommended for initial Pre-K-12 licensure are given in Table 17. One respondent’s answers were thrown out when the researcher discovered that the respondent had given mathematically impossible answers and must have misunderstood the question. As a result, the data represent seven responses regarding teacher candidates for licensure in Spanish and eight responses regarding teacher candidates for licensure in French.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Number of Candidates</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>Number of Candidates</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Superior</td>
<td></td>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>Superior</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv-High</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Adv-High</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv-Mid</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>Adv-Mid</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adv-Low</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>Adv-Low</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int-High</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>Int-High</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int-Mid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>Int-Mid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Faculty responding to the question: 7 Faculty responding to the question: 8

These data showed expectations that the ACTFL Intermediate-High level was again the predominant level. Within the particular set of data in Table 14, they made up 71% of candidates for licensure in French and 64% of candidates in Spanish. Only 25% of candidates for licensure in French and 32% of candidates for licensure in Spanish were
rated at the ACTFL Advanced-Low level or higher. Table 17 also demonstrates that the programs whose faculty members responded to the question expected to recommend candidates below the ACTFL Advanced-Low level for licensure. In fact, candidates rated at Intermediate-Mid and Intermediate-High made up 68% of the candidates in Spanish and 75% of the candidates in French that these programs reported they would recommend.

However, the small sample size places an important limitation on the generalizability of these figures. Of 29 Ohio licensure programs surveyed, only 16 responded to the survey, some of those 16 respondents omitted questions, and only seven or eight respondents offered valid figures on their teacher candidates’ OPI scores and their programs’ intentions to recommend candidates for licensure. This lower response rate to the data-based questions, in particular, might have been due to respondents’ not actually having the information. As noted earlier, only five respondents to “Do you have student results…?” reported that they did have such results. Failure to answer might also have been due to the sensitivity of the information. The requirements for NCATE accreditation were publicized in a statewide meeting of Special Professional Associations in 2006, and faculty respondents were likely to be aware that the ACTFL Advanced-Low level had been set as the standard for teacher candidates’ oral proficiency in Spanish and French.
Research questions 4 and 5:

4. What do respondents believe are teacher candidates’ strengths in oral proficiency?

5. If respondents believe that students have weaknesses in oral proficiency, what do they consider to be the students’ weak areas?

Data for these questions were derived from the response to four open-ended questions that came at the end of the survey. Faculty were asked to name their teacher candidates’ strengths and weaknesses in oral proficiency and reasons for those strengths and weaknesses. All questions received 14 responses, of which 13 were usable. Six of the 13 responses mentioned specific descriptors from the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* (1999) or from the *Standards for the Preparation of Foreign Language Teachers* (1999).

Faculty responses were grouped as follows:

**Strengths Stated in Terms of the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines or Standards for Preparation**

- Good balance of fluency and accuracy, roughly Advanced level according to ACTFL; knowledge of target culture supports appropriate language usage.
- An ability to maintain informal conversations.
- Informal situations, personal information
- They can communicate at ease, and they can organize their thoughts and ideas coherently.
- Presenting lessons and explanations
Most study abroad or student teach abroad so they have some of the everyday language they need in the classroom.

More general linguistic strengths

- Most have great pronunciation, fluency.
- Near if not native accent
- Communication skills

Strengths derived from personality

- Enthusiasm
- Willingness to learn to improve language skills

Reasons that faculty provided for their teacher candidates’ perceived strengths centered on study abroad. Eight of the 13 respondents specifically reported study abroad. Three cited college courses taught in the target language. Two reported small classes that give students frequent opportunities to speak. One cited an annual portfolio review, one reported methods instruction and field experiences, and one respondent cited teacher candidates’ enthusiasm.

With respect to teacher candidates’ weaknesses in oral proficiency, faculty respondents indicated:

Weaknesses derived from the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines language

- A difficulty having long, extended conversation about literature or abstract ideas.
- Lack of precise vocabulary; flow of language; extemporaneous speech
- Lack of meta-language and circumlocution abilities needed to maintain class completely in target language, including grammar explanations
• Some verb tense usage, limited vocabulary

• The skills they bring with them are not strong. Very limited vocabulary.

• Grammatical inaccuracy

• They are sometimes inaccurate.

**Weaknesses related to general world knowledge**

• Talking about topics that they do not usually discuss in their first language (e.g. politics)

• Sometimes their lack of knowledge of current events, or the lack of effort in seeking opportunities to practice their oral skills, can become a disadvantage

**Weakness due to personality**

• Lack of confidence

**Weakness due to the nature or length of a college program**

• For undergraduates, 4 years is a short time to acquire practical classroom language even if they study abroad. Most advanced level classes are conducted in the target language, but it is done in academic language.

**No weaknesses noted**

• None

According to the faculty respondents, the reasons for the above weaknesses centered around lack of practice (five responses), study abroad time that was too short (three responses) and insufficient speaking practice in upper-level courses (three responses). Three remaining responses were: fear of making a mistake (one response), grammatical inaccuracy (one response), and “not fluent” (one response).
The responses to these open-ended questions displayed, first, a common orientation toward understanding oral proficiency in terms that ACTFL has promoted through the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines*, and second, a strong perception about study abroad as a means to improve students’ oral proficiency. On respondents’ list of strengths and weaknesses, terms from the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* were the most frequent answers. Study abroad was cited most frequently as the reason for students’ strengths in speaking, and was one of the two most frequently-cited reasons for students’ weaknesses in speaking. In these comments, respondents demonstrated that they believed in the terms of the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* and used them in rating candidates’ oral proficiency. Furthermore, they reiterated Swender’s statement (2003) that lengthy study abroad was likely to be a key factor in candidates’ development of oral proficiency.

**Interview Data**

In all, thirteen interviews were conducted at the four colleges and universities selected to create a balance between large and small, public and private institutions offering initial Ohio licensure in French and Spanish. The interview data are reported below in a series of narratives, one institution at a time. Data in the next section of the chapter are presented as follows: a short description of the four institutions, for each institution a narrative of the faculty responses, followed by a narrative of student responses. The choice to group together all the responses from each institution was made in order to offer the reader a profile of each institution’s foreign language teacher.
education program. This, of course, is not an entire view of that program, but the complementarity and occasional contradictions between comments from faculty and student interviewees help to create a description of each program. The section on each institution ends with a summary.

**Great Lakes University**

Great Lakes University is a small, comprehensive private University offering Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees and one doctoral degree. Besides the main campus, the University has four satellite campuses located in other cities in Ohio and Michigan. These sites offer evening and weekend programs almost exclusively in the fields of Education and Business. Including all campuses, enrollment is approximately 6,000 students. However, undergraduate foreign language licensure is available only at the main campus, where the total enrollment is around 2,000 undergraduates and 2,500 graduate students. The foreign language licensure program graduates between one and four students per year, in French and Spanish. In 2008-2009, one student graduated in Spanish Education and two in French Education. All upper-level language courses except for two methods courses are taught in the target language. Teacher education candidates make up about half of the French and Spanish majors at the University. Almost all foreign language majors, both those in teacher education and those not in teacher education, study abroad for at least one semester. It is common for Spanish majors to do a short-term summer study abroad early in their studies and a later a full semester, usually during their junior year. French majors usually study abroad for a full semester. The undergraduate
program in French and Spanish includes 45 semester hours of language courses, including both 100 level courses and upper-level. Great Lakes University also offers a 5th year program that grants teacher licensure to students who already have an undergraduate degree in either French or Spanish. This program is run separately from the main campus undergraduate program. Combined numbers of graduates at the satellite campuses vary, with approximately ten graduates per year at the largest satellite campus and two or fewer graduates per year at all other campuses. This study included the undergraduate foreign language teacher education program at the main campus only. Parenthetically, where an institution included multiple campuses, all the programs included in this study focused on the initial teacher licensure program at the main campus only.

**Eastern College**

Eastern College is a private liberal arts college that offers Bachelor’s degrees and three Master’s degree programs. Total enrollment, including off campus night and evening programs, is approximately 3,100 students. Enrollment on the main campus is approximately 1800 students. The undergraduate teacher licensure programs in French and Spanish graduate two to four candidates per year combined and is available only at the main campus. Teacher education candidates make up about half of French and Spanish majors. In 2008-2009, Eastern College graduated three candidates in Spanish and none in French. The major programs in both French and Spanish education require 45 quarter hours of language courses, excluding 100-level courses. Most French and Spanish majors, both those in language teacher education programs and those not in
teacher education programs, study abroad for four weeks, though a small number study abroad for ten weeks.

Valley University

Valley University is an urban, public research University that offers Bachelor’s, Master’s, and doctoral programs. Total enrollment is around 39,000 at four campuses. These include two main campuses in the city and two smaller campuses in the suburbs. Enrollment at the two main campuses is approximately 30,000 students. In 2008-2009, initial teacher licensure in French and Spanish was offered only in a graduate level M.Ed. program. However, at the time of the present study, plans were underway to shift licensure to an undergraduate teacher education program that would include about half the credits for an M.Ed. degree. The plan was to encourage graduates to spend several years teaching before returning to complete the M.Ed. In most years, the M.Ed. program graduates a total of about ten to fifteen candidates in French and Spanish. In 2008-2009, ten candidates in Spanish and two in French were expected to graduate. Since Valley University’s initial licensure program is a Master’s degree program, students must already have a Bachelor’s degree, and thus they do not usually take language courses during their teacher licensure program. Study abroad is not usually a required part of the student’s teacher education program.

River University

River University is a large, public research University. It offers Bachelor’s Master’s, and doctoral degrees. Total enrollment at the main campus and six regional
campuses is about 63,000. Enrollment at the main campus is about 55,000. Initial teacher licensure in foreign languages is offered only in a M.Ed. program that follows the Holmes model. In most years, the initial licensure programs in French and Spanish graduate about 20 candidates. In 2008-2009, the program was expected to graduate nine candidates in Spanish and two in French. Since River University’s initial licensure program is a graduate Master’s program, students must already have a Bachelor’s degree, and they usually do not take language courses during their teacher licensure program. Entrance requirements include 68 quarter hours of language coursework, using a list based on River University’s own undergraduate language programs. Study abroad during the student’s undergraduate program is a prerequisite to admission. Most of the students in the M.Ed. program did their undergraduate studies at River University and choose to continue there after finishing their Bachelor’s degree.

The next section of Chapter 4 examines thirteen interviews conducted at the four institutions.

**Great Lakes University**

**The Research Questions—Faculty Views**

Two faculty were interviewed at Great Lakes University, a small, public, comprehensive university with a total enrollment of about 4,500. Its Foreign Language Education program at the main campus is an undergraduate program. One, Professor Engstrom, was a Professor of Spanish and the department chair. Her Ph.D. is in Foreign Language Education, and she teaches Spanish language courses including Intermediate Spanish I and II, Civilization of Spain, Spanish Phonetics, third-year Grammar/
Composition, and a foreign language teaching methods course. She often has teacher education students in her Spanish courses. The other, Dr. Hirst, was an Assistant Professor of French. Her Ph.D. is in French Literature, and she teaches Intermediate French I and II, two civilization courses, two literature courses, third-year grammar/composition and conversation, and a fourth-year topics course. Students majoring in French take most of their third and fourth year French courses from her.

Students in foreign language education are required to take the OPI and usually do so during their senior year. Before the OPI, all foreign language majors take an in-house SOPI (Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview) that is digitally recorded on computer and assessed as part of their sophomore and junior year portfolios. The in-house SOPI has been in place for about ten years and is based on the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines*. In their interviews, the two faculty interviewees referred to specifics of the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines*. They knew which students were that year’s graduates and knew their OPI results. In separate conversations, the two faculty members agreed that reaching the Advanced-Low level had been difficult for their students, more so in French than in Spanish. In 2009, for example, Great Lakes University’s one graduating Spanish candidate received an Advanced-Low rating on her second try, but both of the French candidates were rated Intermediate-High.

The two professors reported that they were glad to see the Advanced-Low requirement imposed because it provided a standard requirement by which to encourage students to study abroad for at least a semester. According to Dr. Engstrom, Advanced-Low as an endpoint was an issue that all department faculty discussed with their advisees.
during portfolio review meetings and in advising students at the time of course registration. At Great Lakes University, students must have their advisers sign off electronically before the registrar’s site permits them to register for courses. It was reported to have been discussed with prospective students and their parents when they came for a campus visit (Interview 4, 5/7/2009).

Both professors also reported that they considered that accuracy was the obstacle that kept some students from reaching the Advanced-Low (Interview 4, 5/7/2009; Interview 11, 6/6/2009). Dr. Engstrom noted that “usually by the end of the sophomore year they can speak in multiple, you know, paragraphs at least” (Interview 4, 5/7/2009). She explained that phenomenon this way: “We are so concerned about encouraging them and lowering the affective filter and having them put themselves out there and not be afraid to speak and all that, then some students just go for it. And that’s good, but they aren’t being accurate. So that’s the last piece, and maybe that’s normal, and that’s what comes [later]” (Interview 4, 5/7/2009).

All upper-level courses are taught in the target language, and both professors reported that faculty emphasize continued language development in junior and senior level courses. The French program has an active weekly conversation hour, hosted by Dr. Hirst. Due to low attendance, there is no longer an out-of-class conversation hour for Spanish. One main difference between the language preparation of the candidates in French and Spanish is that most of the Spanish candidates travel and study abroad twice, while the French candidates do so once.
Fewer students majored in French than in Spanish, including teacher education students. Dr. Hirst stated her opinion that the smaller numbers affected candidates’ achievement on the OPI. “Part of the problem, I think, or part of the challenge is that we’re a small program, and there is not a group of peers to emulate. We have some very strong students that come through, but they tend to be folks who do very well alone. They don’t need the reinforcement of the group. Students look at classmates and think, ‘Well, I’m as good as she is,’ and that establishes a norm,” (Interview 11, 6/6/2009). She also stated that the difference in study abroad with two experiences abroad yields important results for Spanish candidates.

The department has taken a position that the Licensure Officer in the College of Education at Great Lakes University should not recommend students for licensure if they do not receive an Advanced-Low rating. Professor Engstrom reported that the issue had been a point of contention. Against the Foreign Language Department’s recommendation, the Licensure Officer had recommended students for licensure who were not rated Advanced-Low. In the graduating group of three in 2008-2009, one of the French students, who was from out of state, decided he would seek licensure in his own state and not in Ohio, but first would return to France for an English-teaching internship. The Spanish student, who had received a rating of Intermediate-High the previous year, studied and held several practice sessions with one of the Spanish professors, then took the test again. The second French candidate, who received a rating of Intermediate-High, was recommended for licensure by the Licensure Officer against the Foreign Language Department’s recommendation.
Dr. Engstrom said, “I think it’s really hard to get Advanced-Low, but we’ve seen that by pushing students, they can get it. I would have hate to see us back off from it because…if a K-12 well articulated program gets students into an intermediate level, then that’s expecting the teacher to be only a little bit above what the students are supposed to be. And I don’t think that’s right. I don’t think that’s going to be good for the profession, and I don’t think it’s going to help students become proficient,” (Interview 4, 5/7/2009).

In addition to the two faculty members, a student recommended by Dr. Engstrom was interviewed. Data from that student’s interview are reported below.

**A student view: Rachel**

Rachel graduated from Great Lakes University in December, 2008, with a B.S. Ed. degree and teacher licensure in Spanish. Since then, she had been working as long-term substitute teacher in a high school near her hometown.

Rachel reported that she started studying Spanish in the 8th grade. She reported that she “always loved Spanish.” She arrived at the University having finished Spanish I-V and placed into third-year grammar/composition as a freshman. As a graduate looking back on her college studies, she reported that college was wonderful…I liked all the people that were Spanish majors, too, like we all got along. It was very open, I felt free to converse in class. I liked that it’s a smaller department, so you really got to know all the professors and the other majors. So it was just very comfortable, and very focused on, I don’t know, I just feel like they know you personally. They know your abilities personally, and just
they could help you more on a one-on-one level. Yeah, I really liked that about it... people in our classes got more opportunities to talk because it was such a small group. So you had to pull up your end of the conversation more often (Interview 1, 4/25/2009).

Rachel named numerous course activities that helped her with her speaking proficiency. “There were those little role-play things, like he had us do that in our conversation classes. And that really helped because you have to do that on the Oral Proficiency Test, with the [unexpected complication] with a partner, and I enjoyed those, too, because you can have fun” (Interview 1, 4/25/2009). In her senior seminar, Golden Age Theater, students had to lead the class three times, summarizing that day’s reading and preparing discussion questions. In other courses, she also had to do presentations. She also found phonetics class helpful. “And then how they had you practice taking a practice OPI every year, too. That helped,” (Interview 1, 4/25/2009).

Rachel studied abroad in a twelve-week summer program in Alicante, Spain. She went alone, that is, with no other students she knew from Great Lakes University. She called the first day terrifying: “I met my family, and they took me around to, um, the bus stops and they tried to explain to me how to get to school. And I was just so overwhelmed like hearing all this Spanish and trying to communicate back cause it was like a new place, and everything was new. It was all like being thrown at me. And I just remember, I thought I was going to be lost for like three months.

However, she reported that by the end of her time in Alicante, she considered everyday life in Spanish “natural” and “fun.” She also noted that few of the other
students in the language school where she studied were Americans or English speakers. Many were Chinese and Japanese, so she had to speak to them in Spanish. “I like meeting people and talking to new people, and in order to do that, I had to speak Spanish. And so that was really fun, and then also just getting around traveling, you know we had to get tickets and just do all the basic things” (Interview 1, 4/25/2009)

Rachel also reported that she found Spanish friends with whom she socialized. She described two American friends from New York. “The brother that they lived with, he was 20, and we were like 20 at the time, too. And one of my friends had a huge crush on him, so we went out with his family, and I went over there for dinner a lot, and we would play poker, and I don’t know, it was fun. And he showed us around and introduced us to his friends and so we just did a lot with them,” (Interview 1, 4/25/2009). In all, she estimated that she spent 65%-70% of her time when she was in Spain speaking Spanish.

Rachel frequently used the word “fun” to describe her college Spanish courses and her study abroad experience. Her comments suggest that she benefitted in these language experiences from a lowered affective filter (Krashen, 1980). Although Rachel entered college in junior-level courses and had taken two years of courses at that level before she went abroad, she did not initially get an Advanced-Low rating on the OPI and had to retake it. She was successful the second time.

Rachel said that she saw her failure to get an Advanced-Low rating on her first OPI as being related to two factors. The first was losing proficiency by waiting over a year after her return from Spain before taking the test. The second was her general strengths and weaknesses as a Spanish speaker. “My strengths are definitely talking about
myself and things that like I do and I like and experiences that I’ve had. But when it goes
to talking about like other things, same with in English, though. When I start talking
about hypothetical things or I think some other topics, I just really don’t know what to
say. And so I get more hesitant.” On her first OPI,

I remember, they were asking me about something with, I don’t know, teacher
standards, or something. I’m just bad at talking about that kind of stuff in English,
and anything with the government and like problems in the world. It’s sad to say,
but politics doesn’t interest me.

Researcher:  You mean questions like, “What is the greatest problem in the
world today?”

Rachel:  Yes. That one. No idea. Right now, I could say the economy, but I really
have no idea how I would fix it. They say, “Well, give two solutions” or
whatever. All I can say is, it’s bad that people are out of work (Interview 1,

Rachel was only the first student interviewee who made this observation. It
recurred in almost all of the student interviews. Gee theorized that a major function of
schooling is to help (or force) learners to acquire additional both d/Discourses (with small
“d” and big “D”) beyond the discourse of home, family, and self (2010, 201-202).

Rachel reported that she considered herself competent on the discourses of home, family
and self but incompetent on discourses that required knowledge of the world outside
those boundaries, and reported that difficulties in reaching Advanced-Low were due to
that distinction. However, some of the tasks on which Rachel faulted herself are actually
at the Superior level of the ACTFL scale. She described experience in her course work attempting tasks of both the Advanced and Superior level, and did not distinguish them. Rachel’s observation points to the fact that Superior and Advanced levels are aimed at a model of the educated native speaker (Kagan & Friedman, 2003, p. 537) that counts world knowledge and certain levels of information and critical thinking as a part of language skill. Implicitly, the Advanced-Low requirement for language teachers means that teachers should be prepared to educate their students about the world and should care about Discourses outside of those of home and self. This expectation goes beyond even the strategic, discourse, and sociocultural competencies of Communicative Competence (Canale & Swain, 1981).

Rachel repeatedly reported that affective factors negatively affected her proficiency in Spanish but also in English. Earlier, she explained that she had enjoyed her college Spanish classes because they were small, she knew the group well, and therefore felt comfortable talking. “When I was in Spain, it was hard for me to talk to my family, but once I got comfortable with them, I was living with them for a while, it was really easy. Same with the friends and things we met there, it was just easier. It’s hard for me to talk to people I don’t know. And it’s always easier for me to talk with nonnative speakers, too, because they have the same, they’ve had to learn it,” (Interview 1, 4/25/2009). Rachel reported that, when she started her second OPI, “I started like shaking” and ran through scenarios of failure as she heard the questions coming. “If you don’t pass I have to take it again, and you can’t take it for 90 days, and ‘What if this happens?’ and ‘What if this happens?’” (Interview 1, 4/25/2009).
Similar comments from two other student interviewees come later in this chapter.
In Rachel’s case, it is easy to see how lack of anything to say on topics like current events and politics, when added to the strong way that affective factors impacted on her and might have prevented her from getting the desired Advanced-Low rating. At the same time, she blamed her failure on her first attempt at the OPI on waiting too long after returning from her study abroad.

In contrast, Rachel reported no fear of speaking Spanish in class to students when she was in the teacher role. “They think I’m awesome in Spanish” (Interview 1, 4/25/2009). She noted a difference between the Spanish she reviewed while preparing to re-take the OPI and the Spanish she used daily in class with her high school students. To teach Spanish I, II, and III, she had to “step down for teaching purposes” from her out-of-school OPI review. She stated that she had struggled with her Spanish II and III students, who were not at the level she thought they should be because “they had a Spanish teacher there for five years that did absolutely nothing with them. She just had them watch movies in English,” (Interview 1, 4/25/2009). She reported that students resisted her speaking Spanish in class. As a compromise, early on she said she limited the Spanish she spoke in class to review and warm-up activities at the beginning of class and directions to partner activities, mainly information gap activities where the students spoke to each other. Over time, she reported that she was able to increase the amount of her own Spanish in class. She did this by “using a lot of examples” and “circumlocuting around words the students don’t know” (Interview 1, 4/25/2009). In these examples, she
was indeed using her Spanish like an Advanced-Low speaker. She reported that she was proud of having taught a grammar lesson recently all in Spanish in her Spanish III class.

**Conclusion**

Foreign language faculty interviewed at Great Lakes University demonstrated awareness of the Proficiency Guidelines and expressed a commitment to requiring teacher candidates to be able to speak at Advanced-Low. The student who was interviewed described course work that had overtly offered practice in tasks and strategies required at the Advanced level and pushing into the Superior level: narration and description, unexpected complications, and circumlocution, and hypothetical situations. Even so, candidates’ success on the OPI was not guaranteed. Candidates in Spanish had more success overall, though Rachel’s story demonstrates that it may still be difficult for some Spanish teacher candidates to get an Advanced-Low rating even when they have had a twelve-week study abroad and overt practice in tasks and strategies they will need on the OPI. In Rachel’s case, her strong reactions to affective factors may have affected her success in getting an Advanced-Low rating. She also may have lost oral proficiency a year after her return from study abroad, but she was able to succeed on the test by practicing.

**Eastern College: Faculty views**

Two faculty members were interviewed at Eastern College, a small, liberal arts college. Total enrollment, including off campus night and evening programs, is
approximately 3,100 students. Enrollment on the main campus is approximately 1800 students. The undergraduate teacher licensure programs in French and Spanish is available only at the main campus and graduates two to four candidates per year combined. The first faculty member interviewed, who was the initial contact faculty member, was Dr. Allen, Associate Professor Spanish and Chair of the Department of Foreign Languages. Dr. Allen’s Ph.D. was in Spanish literature. He taught upper level courses in Spanish literature and civilization. The second was Dr. Gerber, Associate Professor of Spanish. Dr. Gerber’s Ph.D. was in Foreign Language Education. She taught the methods course for Spanish and French teacher candidates and supervised most of the candidates in student teaching. She also taught the three quarters of first-year Spanish, Business Spanish, and a Reading/Writing literature course. Dr. Allen had taken the basic 4.5 day OPI training workshop. Dr. Gerber had not. Teacher candidates took an OPI as part of the methods course in their junior year, and not in their senior year when they were approaching graduation and licensure. At the time of the study, the department did not yet have results for 2008-2009 but had results for 2007-2008. The group of candidates that took the OPI in 2007-2008 was comprised of the eight students enrolled in the foreign language methods course, of whom three graduated in 2009. Throughout the interviews, when the Eastern College faculty reflected on their teacher candidates’ oral proficiency they referred to the group of eight. One additional candidate was reported to have taken the OPI in 2008-2009, with a rating of Intermediate-High. For both years, all teacher candidates were Spanish majors.
Dr. Allen

When asked if, in his estimation, all the graduating teacher candidates in Spanish could describe and narrate in the three major time frames, Dr. Allen stated that they could. However, there were some contradictions in his appraisal: “They’re all speaking in paragraph sentences. For the most part you don’t see a consistent pattern of errors, but there are some people who still have consistent patterns of errors. The issue for most of them is that they can’t not [sic] make mistakes in those areas. So they’ve reached them all, but they can’t do them all the time,” (Interview 3, 5/4/2009). To be rated Advanced-Low, the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* require that a candidate be consistent and not have a pattern of errors when performing those tasks. Dr. Allen used the terminology of the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines*, but in discussing candidates’ skills, he did not hold candidates to the requirement that Advanced-Low means consistent performance. His description is that of Intermediate-High.

Dr. Allen explained that the Intermediate Spanish course was pivotal in improving candidates’ speaking proficiency, “to communicate things that are outside of their regular realms of communication.” The course uses audio-visual materials to bring in topics such as politics and family life “that push candidates beyond speaking about their own work situations or school situations or immediate family” (Interview 3, 5/4/2009). It was reported that students in some courses were also required to attend a conversation hour once a week with a native speaker of Spanish or a native speaker of French.

Researcher: Do you do any teaching that’s kind of moved by, or driven by the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines*? Do you have students practice, “Speak in
paragraph length,” or practice narrating in past, present and future. Do you do that in classes?

Allen: Yes. Yes, we do.

Researcher: In which classes?

Allen: Pretty much all of the classes, because again we’re doing a communicative approach. And so all the classes require the students to participate in an oral form in class. And mostly we don’t allow them to speak in single sentences. They have to have usually paragraph kind of speech. And depending on the nature of whatever the interaction is, we do emphasize the time in which they’re giving the response, and so on (Interview 3, 5/4/2009).

On the other hand, Dr. Allen spoke of deficiencies in Eastern College students’ study abroad experience, which he said was too short. About 50% of foreign language majors, including students in the teacher education program, studied abroad. In 2008-2009, that was 14 out of 28 Spanish majors. Of those 14, ten had studied on a four-week program. Four were reported to have studied for ten weeks. “We take them down as groups, so they’re usually together as a group, which means that when they’re not in a controlled situation probably the chance of using the target language is lower…I think that they see it more perhaps as a vacation than a study program,” (Interview 3, 5/4/2009).

As preparation for the OPI, Dr. Allen also reported that he met with the candidates and explained to them “what it means to take a OPI and… what the OPI is
looking for” and held mock OPIs with candidates. He commented that stress over the high-stakes test and the OPI format caused problems for candidates.

When students make mistakes, it tends to stop their progress [during the OPI interview]. One of the big issues that we find when students speak, and this again ties back to that [Intermediate Spanish] class, a lot of students don’t use language…because they’re ashamed of their spoken language, and so they just don’t even make the attempt. And when they reach a problem area, rather than try to work through it and try to continue using the target language, they revert to their native language or a simpler form of language. And so the trick is of course to try to get students to understand that, like in your normal language, when you have a word and you don’t know how to use it, it doesn’t stop you from speaking, but in a second language, it does (Interview 3, 5/4/2009).

Dr. Allen reported that the preparation sessions were done out of a desire to prevent against nervousness and stress. The description he gave above suggested that the mock OPI session included advice on circumlocution. On the question of circumlocution, the data are unclear whether candidates were told about circumlocution during a single mock OPI session or whether they practiced numerous times during their Spanish courses. This reflected a gap in the information that the researcher collected.

The Guidelines specifically mention circumlocution as a strategy normally expected at the Advanced-Low level. That is, when a speaker does not know a word or expression that is needed, she or he can explain or define it to get the idea across and keep the communication going. For instance, if a speaker does not know the Spanish
word for “apron,” he might say something like, “you know, it’s that piece of clothing you put on in the kitchen when you’re cooking. You put it over your other clothing so that you keep them clean.” The necessity for circumlocution is tied to the fact that speakers at the Advanced-Low level do not always have specific vocabulary and depend on generic vocabulary to express their ideas (Breiner-Sanders et al., 2000).

An important theme in this interview was that Dr. Allen expressed a belief that a four-year college language program did not offer enough time for candidates to reach the Advanced-Low level. “The number of courses, multiplied by the contact hours of the courses, is insufficient to get you there” (Interview 3, 5/4/2009). Consequently, in his experience, he reported that “the people in our program who actually passed the OPI came with the knowledge previous to arriving to our school.” By this description he seemed to mean heritage speakers or candidates who had some other extensive experience in the language before coming to college. “They did not get it from our program. They got it from somewhere else,” (Interview 3, 5/4/2009). Here, he was repeating an idea that has had some currency in research on the time necessary for learners to reach the Advanced level (Rifkin, 2003; Rifkin, 2005), an idea that was sometimes expressed in the 1990s (Lafayette, 1993), though at that time not in research studies. In his interview here, Dr. Allen commented that his belief was supported by an article he had read (Interview 3, 5/4/2009). It was not clear to which article he referred. However, the basis of Rifkin’s figures has been disputed (Glisan & Donato, 2004) and there appear to be some flaws in the logic of Rifkin’s study (2003).
Given the four-week study abroad experiences most candidates at Eastern College had had, Dr. Allen stated the opinion that longer study abroad would improve candidates’ speaking proficiency. However, he expressed a fear that requiring a longer study abroad experience would pose a financial burden on candidates. Not only, he explained, would candidates have to bear such costs as tuition and travel, but they would be forfeiting a summer job that they needed to finance their schooling. This financial consideration would lead to fewer students studying Spanish and pursuing a teaching license, possibly causing Eastern College’s Spanish program to close. He acknowledged that some universities require study abroad for a specified period, but stated that instituting such a requirement at Eastern College would take time and education to prepare the student body to accept the idea. In addition, he outlined what he saw as a particular curricular problem at Eastern. By studying abroad longer, teacher candidates would be off campus and miss required core courses unique to that college. He suggested that a U.S.-based immersion program such as a summer-session at the Middlebury language schools might be a better choice than the four-week study abroad programs in which students were currently participating.

Indeed, some current research has shown that college students experienced improved OPI scores based on instruction in a specially designed course in their home institution (Weyers, 2010), and that many college students did not see improvements in their OPI scores after a semester of study abroad. Segalowitz and Freed compared students who spent a semester abroad and a semester in a course in their home University. They found that gains in OPI ratings were independent of context (semester
at home or abroad) and correlated more closely with specific factors in students’ oral proficiency at the beginning of the semester (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004). Galonka (2006) and Magnan (2007) confirmed that language gain that pushed learners across an OPI boundary correlated most strongly with the level of grammar and reading skills the learners possessed before studying abroad, rather than with social interaction during study abroad.

For all the reasons he cited, Dr. Allen said that requiring Advanced-Low for teacher licensure was an untenable goal and likely to reduce the number of licensed foreign language teachers in Ohio. He described the speech of teachers he knew this way: “The level of [candidates’] errors, I have seen that in other people, not foreign languages, that have speech patterns that make mistakes, and it doesn’t preclude them from being teachers of whatever subject they’re actually teaching. I wouldn’t go below Intermediate-High, but I think they can be good teachers in middle school or high school,” (Interview 3, 5/4/2009). He stated that Advanced-Low was a standard for which foreign language departments should strive, but not a litmus test that determined which candidates should be allowed to teach.

For NCATE certification of Eastern College’s teacher education program in French and Spanish, Dr. Allen commented that Eastern fits under NCATE’s exception for small programs. He said that he was not worried that Eastern would lose its accreditation because it graduates fewer than ten foreign language teacher candidates in three years. “Still, the big issue that’s going to be for us in Ohio again, it’s going to be the fight between ACTFL and the state of Ohio, where the state of Ohio has set the certification
at Intermediate-High, but ACTFL for accreditation of the programs has asked for Advanced-Low. So it will be interesting to see how that dynamic plays out in the state in our program and in other programs,” (Interview 3, 5/4/2009).

**Dr. Gerber**

Dr. Gerber began her discussion of the Eastern College teacher candidates’ oral proficiency with the fact that three out of eight in her 2007-2008 methods class had obtained ratings of Advanced-Low a year earlier. She reported that candidates’ achievement on the OPI depended on their overall knowledge of the language, including grammar, reading and writing, and to effort. Speaking of two of the candidates who were rated Advanced-Low, she said, “Those two students have a very good command of the language in terms of their grammar. They do well with reading. They do well with their composition writing.” By comparison, “Five of them that did not pass it have studied abroad for about a month on the Chile trip, and their basic grammar is fairly good, their reading skills are good, their writing skills of those particular students, I’d say three out of the five of them have good writing skills, too. But again, they are kind of shy about carrying on a conversation,” (Interview 7, 5/18/2009). She also estimated that the three who were rated Advanced-Low spoke comfortably in paragraphs and that six of the eight candidates from her 2008-2009 methods class could speak in past, present, and future time frames. She reported that reading, writing and conversation were integrated in the courses at Eastern College, as she believed they should be. One limitation that Dr. Gerber had observed was in discussing abstract issues or topics like politics or current events.
She remarked that her Spanish students were in general reluctant to discuss these topics and more eager to talk about themselves.

However, she noted that some students took more opportunities to benefit from their courses. The two candidates previously reported who did well on the OPI “have a drive and perseverance that led them to just practice more and use it more and talk with people. One of them reported she listens to the radio in Spanish,” (Interview 7, 5/18/2009). Dr. Gerber stated that Business Spanish and her literature course offered opportunities to speak at paragraph length to narrate or describe abstract topics. Some students took those opportunities, and others did not.

Dr. Gerber reported that, since she also supervised most of the teacher candidates in student teaching, she saw examples of drive, or lack of it, in the field: “Two of them, the other two, it was kind of hard to impress on them that as a Spanish teacher, if you teach in the language, you have to know tons more than what you’re teaching the students. And I think they were a little bit satisfied just to be able to learn enough to be able to teach that level, and maybe lacked a little bit of the drive there,” (Interview 7, 5/18/2009).

Dr. Gerber explained that she recommended candidates for teacher licensure based on what she had observed in the classroom during student teaching, not on OPI ratings. She expressed the opinion that an acceptable job, though possibly not an ideal job, of novice teachers using the target language was if the teachers focused on certain important skills starting with giving directions in Spanish. “One of the things we do in the methods that they had, they knew the phrases to use to say, ‘Be seated,’ ‘Stand up,’
‘Work in groups,’ and some of that classroom language. They did teach in the language, you know, explain things, give directions, show things and talk about them,” (Interview 7, 5/18/2009). Dr. Gerber observed that when candidates used this defined set of classroom language, they could set up communicative activities in which the middle school or high school students would do the speaking, creating a class that was 80% in the target language. Dr. Gerber reported that almost all the candidates were strong at doing this, regardless of OPI scores. She also commented that in one or two cases, candidates had improved their speaking from the previous year, when they had taken the OPI, through the act of teaching during their student teaching internship. In assessing whether candidates should be recommended, Dr. Gerber also spoke of factors such as the candidate’s use of developmentally-appropriate activities, for example “having lots of kinesthetic activities so that students can move around and manipulate them” in middle school classes. She explained that the department’s final evaluation form was aligned with the *Standards for Teacher Preparation* (2002), and that the students did well graded on that basis.

In her comments, Dr. Gerber did not use the terms or orientation of the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines*. While she did speak of accuracy, she did not refer to text types or speaking proficiency as the ability to carry out certain functions or tasks. Dr. Gerber mentioned that she knew Dr. Allen had taken the basic OPI training, but she had not, and was not entirely convinced that the OPI was a good measure of oral proficiency. In the course of the interview, she asked several questions that showed she did not know what kind of questions students would be asked during the interview. She asked, “Does it take
into account the background knowledge of each candidate? Or is it just assumed that every University level candidate has more or less the same experience, and so the questions or the levels are based on kind of a typical student’s experience?” (Interview 7, 5/18/2009). She did not know that a tester formulates questions based on information a candidate has shared in previous answers. For example, if a candidate has reported that he is on the track team, the tester will likely ask, “When did you start running? Can you tell about that?” in order to elicit past tense narration, or will ask “Tell about one special experience you had in Spain,” if the student has reported study abroad in Spain. She also asked for explanations of the tasks and contexts and content included in the OPI.

**Student views: Lauren**

Lauren started studying Spanish in the 9th grade and took Spanish I-IV. As a freshman at Eastern College, she reported that she had placed out of the first four courses. Her first course was a conversation course. She also went on a four-week study abroad in Chile. In assessing her speaking skills, she stated that her she could hold a conversation well, but needed to improve her vocabulary. She reported that she was good at “talking my way around things” when she didn’t know the right word. Thus, she showed an awareness of the importance of circumlocution. She said her weakest speaking skill was not being able to roll her ‘r’s. She added that her conversation course had given her confidence in speaking in front of people she didn’t know, particularly by requiring students to prepare dialogues and perform them in front of the class. “That gives you the
confidence just to go out and speak without having the dialog in front of you,”

Asked about her strengths and weaknesses in speaking Spanish, Lauren stated that she was successful at talking about familiar topics, for example, talking about herself, but uncomfortable discussing politics and current events because of the vocabulary demands that such topics make. “If it was something that I had thought about before, I think it would probably be easy because then I probably would have looked up some different words and had that available,” (Interview 2, 5/4/2009). She said that she could narrate in past, present, and future but encountered trouble due to vocabulary problems. She reported that her low rating on the OPI had come from vocabulary problems in dealing with unfamiliar topics.

I picked bad topics to talk about [during my OPI] because when she asked me to talk about a daily routine, I picked things that I wasn’t familiar with talking about, so I didn’t have the vocabulary for that. So then it kind of got me on this downward spiral of, “Well, I don’t know what I’m saying. I don’t know what I’m trying to say.” And so from there I think it just went downhill because I was just not comfortable with what I was talking about. (Interview 2, 5/4/2009).

Lauren provided this analysis of her OPI experience as an unfortunate sequence of events: She started with a topic she did not know well. Then the interviewer set Lauren’s proficiency level lower than it should have been and did not ask questions that would have allowed her to show her capabilities. “I knew that I hadn’t reached the high level,
and I was, ‘I could do better.’ I just wanted to tell her like, ‘Ask me a different question. I could do better,’” Interview 2, 5/4/2009).

This assessment contrasted with her assessment of her speaking as a teacher. “I’m really more confident in the job than I am out in everyday conversation with like a native speaker. I try to speak Spanish like when I’m in front of the class, and I’m pretty, I’m confident when I do that.” She reported that the reason for her confidence was her sense of control. As the teacher, she stated, she set the agenda and selected the topics under discussion: “In the classroom you can kind of gear where the conversation goes, like I’m in control of that as the teacher,” (Interview 2, 5/4/2009). Lauren’s comments repeated her earlier comments that she felt confident when she had been able to rehearse what she was going to say.

On the other hand, Lauren expressed anxiety about speaking Spanish with native speakers: “If I make a mistake in front of my students they’re probably not going to catch it, or if they do, I’ll be just like ‘Oops, you know, I make mistakes just like you do.’ But when it’s a native speaker, a lot of times, I’m afraid that they won’t correct me, but they will realize it, and they’ll be like, ‘Oh well, she doesn’t know Spanish,’ so it’s just, it’s a different dynamic, I think,” (Interview 2, 5/4/2009). Overall, Lauren said that she was confident as a Spanish speaker. However, the contexts and content she excluded do not match the requirements of Advanced-Low. Lauren had her own set of definitions of what it meant to be a good Spanish speaker, particularly as a Spanish teacher.

Angela

125
Angela reported that she had Spanish-speaking in her heritage. Angela was born in the U.S. to a Mexican mother and a U.S. American father who “spoke Spanish fluently” but was not a native speaker. Her family home was still with her mother in Ohio. Angela reported that she did get an Advanced-Low rating on the OPI. She described her childhood background in Spanish this way: “I grew up with it, but it wasn’t, I mean I completely understood the language, at least my mom when I was growing up. I spoke here and there, not so much, like I could like somewhat hold a conversation, but it was very like not that great,” (Interview 8, 6/2/2009). Angela said that her main source of Spanish language was her mother, and she described the language the two of them spoke together as “Spanglish.” Both Angela and her mother code-switched. “She’ll be speaking Spanish most of the time and she’ll switch to English. So it’s like English, Spanish, English, Spanish, or I’ll be saying, speaking Spanish and then say an English word, or something like that,” (Interview 8, 6/2/2009). When she took Spanish in high school, Angela was first introduced to formal analysis and instruction in the language. In the interview, she reported numerous times that she valued this experience for teaching her to improve her Spanish. She explained that even as a college senior, she still sometimes knew what to say but had trouble identifying the name of the verb tense. As a college freshman, she requested being moved from Spanish IV, where she had placed, into Spanish III, so that she could review grammar. At the end of her freshman year, she said she decided to major in Spanish and become a Spanish teacher. Recent research on heritage learners indicates that heritage learners, who learned a language as children at home but were not schooled in the language, make many of the
same second language learners mistakes in grammar as nonnative speakers (Lynch 2008; Montrul, 2009).

Angela described speaking to be her strongest skill. She used negative words to describe the Spanish that she knew as defective. At the same time, she expressed an apparently self-imposed pressure that she should be the best in the class because she was, or should be, a native speaker of Spanish. At each point when she was asked to assess her speaking skills in Spanish, she responded with a discussion of her writing, vocabulary, and knowledge of grammar.

Other comments on her speaking skills were, nonetheless, similar to those of the other students interviewed here. She said that she felt most comfortable talking about personal experiences, “relationship kind of things, daily life types of things like, you know, how my day went, things that I talk about all the time” and felt uncomfortable talking about politics or current events because she was not interested in them and lacked background. “I don’t really watch the news that often, so it’s hard for me to take a personal view of that even in English,” and wouldn’t know the vocabulary (Interview 8, 6/2/2009). At home, in conversation with her mother, she reported that for more complicated topics, she reverted to English.

This did not mean that she felt she could not perform well academically. “Sometimes I feel like I’m one of the better prepared people in the classes, sometimes,” (Interview 8, 6/2/2009). She did not make any special preparations for her OPI, and reported feeling comfortable during the interview, except for the tester’s accent.
Angela stated that she had not studied abroad because she could not afford to do so. To compensate, she asked her mother to start speaking exclusively in Spanish with her and to hold Angela strictly to speaking Spanish back, with no Spanglish. She also asked her mother to correct her mistakes and teach her any vocabulary she didn’t know. She reported that the course work she found most helpful was Business Spanish, where she had to prepare an article on current events in a Hispanic country and present it to the class. She said that she had found it helpful to her Spanish to look up vocabulary and rehearse before class, and then to take part in an impromptu discussion using the material she had prepared.

We would go around a circle and say what we thought about the event, or what was being said. And sometimes it was really heated, sometimes it was about a topic that no one really cared about. Um, but when it was an issue that we really cared about, like what I was trying to say is that we had so much to say, but it was hard for us to say it in Spanish. And so our teacher would help us… we would just ask her, “How do you say this?” or we would say it in English and have her translate it back to us in Spanish. And then we would say it, and then go off of that. That kind of helped us like zero in on what we should be saying (Interview 8, 6/2/2009).

In other words, Angela was expressing the idea that advance rehearsal and vocabulary development were the factors that she considered most helpful to improving her spoken Spanish. Over her entire experience in Spanish, Angela felt that her years of language exposure at home, plus the study of grammar and “being pushed to write papers” were
the tasks that had improved her Spanish the most. While Angela agreed that she had experienced valuable speaking practice in her upper-level Spanish courses, she also said that overall, “we could have done more speaking in class,” (Interview 8, 6/2/2009).

Angela said that she felt well prepared linguistically to be a teacher. However, the part of her teacher preparation that she considered most valuable was seeing her mentor teacher’s grasp of both English and Spanish grammar. “He helped me a lot. Cause he was like a, how do you say it, he was…gungho about English. Like he knows English very, very well grammatically, and so that helps him be able to explain the Spanish grammar aspect of it…Because in order to be able to present Spanish language, you have to understand the English language to be able to differentiate between the two and to be able to explain it to the students exactly what the difference is and what you should and what you should not do,” (Interview 8, 6/2/2009). Her opinion here clearly connects to statements she made implying that knowing Spanish is knowing Spanish grammar. In this opinion, she expressed a theory of what it is to speak a language that is not the Canale and Swain (1980) theory of communicative competence.

She observed that she was hesitant to speak too much Spanish in lower level classes because it might be too difficult or confusing for the students. “I think it’s important to be able to integrate [Spanish] and have them learn certain commands and certain things in Spanish like ‘Hola como estás’ and typical things that they should know, like how to say “desk” or “pencil,” like or certain words like if I want to tell them like “Take out your books,” or “To this certain page,” I would say that in Spanish. And I would say it every day so that they would know what it is. And so that kind of just like
helps them remember, but if I were to actually teach a lesson, I would just teach it in English,” (Interview 8, 6/2/2009).

In addition, Angela talked about feeling prepared for teaching in other ways besides linguistically. She reported that she felt excited to begin teaching. She said that she thought for some high school students, Spanish was “a blow off class,” but she intended to make it lively and interesting, “make it fun for the students so that they actually pay attention,” (Interview 8, 6/2/2009).

Conclusion

Faculty and students at Eastern College expressed a variety of personal perspectives about oral proficiency. There were some inaccuracies or gaps in faculty descriptions of what the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* mean. Students gave personal interpretations of what they had learned in methods class about being prepared to teach in the target language, interpretations that only partially matched their professor’s version. Finally, OPI scores discussed in the interviews at Eastern College were a year old and were not used as the basis for recommending teacher licensure.

Valley University

A Faculty View: Dr. Irving

Valley University is an urban, public research University that offers Bachelor’s, Master’s, and doctoral programs. Total enrollment is around 39,000 at four campuses. Enrollment at the two main campuses is approximately 30,000 students. In 2008-2009 the foreign language teacher education program was an M.Ed. program. At Valley University
only one faculty member and one student were interviewed. The student was recommended by Dr. Irving.

Dr. Irving was a Visiting Assistant Professor of Education at Dr. Irving’s visiting appointment was in the College of Education, though she reported regular contact with the Department of Romance Languages through which she confirmed collaborative goals between the teacher education program and the language department. A longtime Professor in the Department of Romance Languages had retired as that department’s Teacher Education specialist, and a search was underway for her replacement. Dr. Irving was on a short-term appointment while the search went on, but had applied for the fulltime position. Dr. Irving taught the M.Ed. teacher candidates in their three-course series of methods courses and in their student teaching internship. She supervised candidates in French, Spanish, and German during their internships.

Dr. Irving remarked that she was impressed with candidates’ oral proficiency and with their ability to use the target language in class effectively in class. She had filled out the online survey for this study and had looked up figures for candidates’ OPI scores but did not recall them at the time of the interview. Her own estimations of candidates’ proficiency were based on her observations of students in their internships. In her comments, she often expressed judgments comparing the M.Ed. students to foreign language instructors she had seen in other situations. “These [candidates] have very good oral proficiency. At the college where I was before, I saw some TAs that didn’t speak French well. I thought they shouldn’t be teaching. The department hired them because they needed teachers. These M.Ed. students are actually better at speaking French than
that,” (Interview 5, 5/15/2009). Moreover, she reported that in the methods courses, the M.Ed. candidates at Valley University grasped the principles of language teaching taught in standard textbooks like Omaggio-Hadley’s *Teaching Language in Context* (2000) better than the college TAs had done. According to Dr. Irving, the M.Ed. candidates focused their thinking more on creating communicative contexts for their classes, while the college TAs focused on memorizing Omaggio-Hadley’s “rules” and the research articles that the author referenced.

In field observations, Dr. Irving reported observing only one of the M.Ed. candidates who did not use the target language well in class. This candidate taught mostly in English. Apart from that student, who was in French, Dr. Irving stated that the M.Ed. candidates gave directions, explained vocabulary and grammar, told stories and gave impromptu responses on the fly in the target language. These are the skills that Dr. Irving said she considered essential in a foreign language teacher’s repertoire. The French candidate who taught her classes in English had skipped one of the methods courses. “I told her she was going to be in big trouble [in our program]. I gave her some books to read, like Omaggio-Hadley, and assigned her to write a paper.” Observing the candidate twice more, Dr. Irving reported that the candidate found her teaching in the language, giving directions, but I could see it was painful,” (Interview 5, 5/15/2009). However, since the M.Ed. program had only two candidates in French in 2008-2009, it would be difficult to say that this candidate’s performance constituted a difference between French and Spanish candidates.
Again basing her judgments on comparisons with another teaching situation, Dr. Irving praised her M.Ed. candidates for demonstrating better skills than she believed were seen among high school teachers. “I’ve observed some high school teachers, and you can tell when they’ve got a fear. The language doesn’t come out easily,” (Interview 5, 5/15/2009).

Dr. Irving stated that Advanced-Low proficiency is necessary for classroom teachers because this is the level that allows a teacher to give directions, explain vocabulary and grammar, tell stories and give impromptu responses in the target language comfortably and with an acceptable degree of accuracy. In choosing these descriptors, Dr. Irving was citing skills reported in the Program Standards (2002), using some of NCATE’s descriptors. She did not use descriptors from the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines to describe candidates’ ability shown on the OPI, but as functions a teacher displays while teaching. She said that candidates who did not receive the Advanced-Low rating should not be recommended for licensure. Dr. Irving recommended that if candidates failed to get the Advanced-Low rating, they would have to take additional courses or take steps to improve their speaking. Asked about the opposing argument, “You can’t refuse the student licensure after he or she has completed all the coursework and passed their courses,” she held that universities and the state could not grant licensure as a convenience to the student. “If he wants to be a teacher, he has to have a certain level,” (Interview 5, 5/15/2009).

Dr. Irving stated that the candidates had all studied abroad at some earlier time, and that study abroad experience had contributed to the candidates’ oral proficiency.
Since Valley University’s teacher education program was an M.Ed. program, it did not include required study abroad within the program. Overall, the program was set to undergo major changes in 2009-2010, when Valley University would be changing its teacher education program from a graduate to an undergraduate one. The new undergraduate program would include about half the credits of the M.Ed. Dr. Irving reported that the College of Education at Valley University had decided it wanted candidates to graduate and teach for several years before returning for their M.Ed. in order to have more teaching experience before finishing the degree.

Dr. Irving’s appraisal of Valley University’s teacher education program and its candidates was very high. She reported that she considered it stricter in its requirements and more focused in connecting coursework with pedagogy than some other universities that she had known. In her interview responses, she also strayed off the topic of candidates’ language proficiency to talk about their ability to design lesson plans and deliver lessons. As a result, while Dr. Irving said that she felt teacher candidates were able to speak, and to function in their internships, as Advanced-level speakers, this interview produced the shortest discussion of candidates’ oral proficiency. That may be the case also because Dr. Irving did not dispute the necessity of requiring candidates to speak at the Advanced-Low level or offer comments on why candidates experienced difficulties reaching that level.

**A student view:** Natalie
Natalie was an international student, a native of Uzbekistan, who had a Bachelor’s degree in French philology from her home country. She had started studying French as a foreign language in middle school. She already spoke Uzbeki, and Russian, which she learned at school as a foreign language but which was widely used in the media, by the government, and by the large number of Russians present in the country. The language of instruction was schools was Uzbeki. After graduation with her Bachelor’s degree, she had been a high school French teacher in Uzbekistan for six months. She then went to study in France for two years. At Valley University, Natalie was simultaneously pursuing an M.A. in French literature and the M.Ed. in French for teacher licensure. She came to the U.S. to join the French program at Valley University.

Natalie reported that during her University studies in Uzbekistan, she had been selected to be one of several students who worked in the state tourist bureau as a tour guide for French tourists. She stated that this experience gave her the opportunity to speak French. She said that her University courses were conducted in Uzbeki, and students generally graduated without developing oral proficiency in French. “We did a lot of linguistics, phonetics, linguistics. Grammar, we did a lot of grammar. When it comes to speaking, literature, we had some courses, but most of the time, most of the courses were concentrated on grammar,” (Interview 6, 5/15/2009). However, in her job as a tour guide, Natalie reported that she had had to learn long passages describing places shown on the tour and historical events that had taken place at those locations, and she had to respond to questions in French. She said that she also gained experience making
impromptu conversations. She credited this combination of rehearsed speech in long
passages and impromptu conversation with developing her spoken French.

In France, she began her studies in economics but switched to a program in International
Relations so that she could use the languages she knew. She did not complete this
program, but came to the U.S. and enrolled in a graduate program in French. In the spring
of 2009, she had completed everything except her student teaching internship. She had
not yet taken the OPI.

Natalie reported that, while in France, she had lived with two French families, one
each year. She stated that her contact with these families had helped her in everyday
conversation and with vocabulary. However, even after two years in France, including
course work at French universities, she still considered that her M.A. course work at
Valley University was challenging her to learn to use very advanced discourse and
vocabulary. She described her oral facility in French as very good for all types of
everyday events. She said that she mastered narration and description in all time frames.
Nonetheless, she reported that in order to participate in class discussions in her graduate
literature courses, she had to prepare. She said that the topics discussed and precision of
vocabulary required meant that she could not count on participating spontaneously.
Rather, in order to have something to say, she had to read carefully, use her dictionary,
and mentally rehearse comments that she wanted to say. Otherwise, she feared getting
lost as discussions flew past. The topics that she did not feel comfortable talking about
were those with which she did not have previous experience.
She also commented that, even with the level of language proficiency she described, a similar phenomenon affected her teaching. As a TA, she had been teaching a variety of courses from level 101 to 103.

Now, when I’m teaching, the first year, I had some in the books, they give you topics for each chapter. And some chapters were harder for me than other chapters. And I would say that, we had a chapter about ecology. And there were a lot of things I had to explain, and this is not something that I had discussions on or I worked on previously, so I had to work ahead, to prepare to be able to teach that. So there are some topics where I don’t have practice, and I don’t feel comfortable talking or teaching that without previous preparation.

Researcher: Uh-huh. Is that mainly a question of vocabulary?


All signs pointed to Natalie’s oral proficiency being much higher than that of the other students interviewed in this study: more years studying the language, several years training as a tour guide for French tourists, two years studying in France, and two years as an M.A. student. Yet, she still said she found it necessary to prepare and rehearse in order to teach a lesson in French 103.

She reported feeling confident teaching a grammar point in French, but again, doing it well depended, to Natalie’s way of thinking on preparation. “What I do in my classes is I prepare a lot of visuals. I prepare transparencies, I prepare a chart, I put it in a chart, and I explain it in French,” (Interview 6, 5/15/2009). One major way in which
Natalie was different from the other teacher candidates interviewed here is that, as a non-native speaker of English, she felt more comfortable explaining French grammar in French than in English. “That’s the way I learned it. It’s easier for me to talk about it in French than in English,” (Interview 6, 5/15/2009). Natalie considered the language input her students were getting in their French course to be better than the classroom input she had as an undergraduate French philology major. “When I was taking French classes, everything was taught in Uzbeki, and at the end, we weren’t able to speak. And whatever they explained, I was good, I understood. But I would prefer them to speak French because I would get to hear a lot of French, and I would be able to speak,” (Interview 6, 5/15/2009).

She said that her students’ reaction to a teacher who taught more comfortably in French than in English was initially fear, “but by the end of the quarter, they’re used to it. They like it,” (Interview 6, 5/15/2009). Her college students had told her that their high school teachers did not speak much in the target language, “but they think that it wasn’t a good thing. They like to hear French in class, and this is the only time, 50 minutes every day. This is the only time that they get to hear French and to speak it, and if they don’t use all 50 minutes, then after class, they don’t have as much possibility to use the language,” (Interview 6, 5/15/2009).

**Conclusion**

The interviews at Valley University were shorter and yielded less information than at the other research sites. Neither the faculty interviewee nor the teacher candidate
framed their discussion in the terms used in the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines*. Perhaps both interviewees took the skills of the Advanced-Low level to be a given, not as a level towards which candidates struggle. In addition, the student selected by Dr. Irving was very different from most students seeking teacher licensure. She was a non-native speaker of the language she planned to teach, but had much more experience in the language than most U.S. teacher candidates in foreign languages. However, some of the strategies and needs that she reported were similar to those reported by the U.S. students: lesser skill at talking about unfamiliar topics and rehearsal and preparation as good ways to improve their speaking on those topics. Even at her apparently higher level of oral proficiency, she spoke of strategies to develop her oral proficiency similar to those used by other candidates interviewed in this study.

**River University**

Two faculty members were interviewed at River University, a large, public research University that offers Bachelor’s Master’s, and doctoral degrees. Total enrollment at the main campus and six regional campuses is about 63,000. Enrollment at the main campus is about 55,000. Initial teacher licensure in foreign languages is offered in a M.Ed. program that follows the Holmes model. One faculty member, Dr. McHenry, was an Assistant Professor of Foreign and Second Language Education and Coordinator of the M.Ed. program. Her Ph.D. was in Language Education. The other, Dr. Kantaris, was a visiting assistant professor who taught a series of three methods courses for the
M.Ed. students. Her These included separate courses for teaching at the secondary level and at the elementary school level. Ph.D. was in Foreign/Second Language Education.

Responses to the research questions: Faculty views

The M.Ed. program at River University is an 11-month program. Students begin in the summer term, ahead of the coming academic year. This starting time allows candidates to complete the program and graduate the following June, with four quarters of study and concurrent field experience and student teaching behind them. Most of the M.Ed. students were nonnative speakers of the languages they intended to teach.

At River University, the official OPI was not in use in 2008-2009. Though one faculty member discussed adopting it in the future, the M.Ed. program evaluated its candidates’ oral proficiency through an in-house face-to-face exam that most students in the program took early in the fall, their second quarter of study. Faculty associated with the program, who had a variety of language backgrounds, administered the exam. For example, one faculty member whose language specialty was Spanish conducted the Spanish interviews. Another whose language specialty was German conducted the German interviews. The timing of the exam was chosen because of faculty schedules since faculty might not be present on campus during the summer. Since many students entered the M.Ed. program upon completion of a bachelor’s degree at River University and were on campus then, some students took the oral exam the previous spring.
Dr. McHenry, the coordinator of the M.Ed. program in Foreign and Second Language Education, explained that the oral interview was based on the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines and described it:

What we have done in the past is incoming students will sit for a 20-minute in-house oral proficiency interview that we’ve designed. And it’s kind of a mock, MOPI, you know, Mock Oral Proficiency Interview. We get a sense, can they talk about daily, basic needs, how are you, what’s your name? Why did you decide to study Spanish? Tell me about your overseas experience with German. And then we’ll increasingly try to ramp it up a little bit, maybe ask them some more difficult questions related to tell me about any research you’ve done or any literature you’ve read in the foreign language to try to see if they’re able to hold a conversation at a higher level than just basic day-to-day, you know, based on the graduated ACTFL oral proficiency interviews. We try to base [the interview questions] on some of ACTFL’s OPI guidelines (Interview 13, 6/9/2009).

The faculty members who conducted the interviews were not certified OPI testers and had not taken OPI training workshops, a fact that both of them pointed out immediately when asked to give their views on the teacher candidates’ oral proficiency. Although she did not question the validity of the in-house test, Dr. McHenry said that she hoped the M.Ed. program could move toward having its students take an official OPI instead. In addition, Dr. McHenry stated that the task of conducting these interviews was time-consuming and especially burdensome for the faculty member who conducted all of the Spanish interviews. Spanish teacher candidates comprised about 85% of the M.Ed.
students in 2008-2009, which meant that that person had to conduct about ten interviews. McHenry herself had conducted two German interviews. McHenry observed, “We feel that a certified tester would be a better assessor of our students’ language proficiency and relieve us of the burden of having to spend potentially 10 hours in a 60 hour work week, on top of our 60 hour work week, to spend interviewing students. We would like to see that at the beginning of the program they have an OPI,” (Interview 13, June 9, 2009).

The two M.Ed. faculty members expressed somewhat differing views of M.Ed. candidates’ oral proficiency, basing their comments on different factors in the candidates’ program. Speaking of the oral interviews done in the fall, Dr. McHenry noted, “We have a range of proficiencies. Often it’s based on how much time the student has spent overseas. Comparing today’s teacher education students’ oral proficiency with the proficiency level in the past, she stated that, “we’re finding that students are less proficient and/or have less knowledge of [the culture in which a target language is spoken].” She went on to explain that, in the past students typically spent a year in study abroad, but nowadays they were spending less time overseas. She stated that this change had come about due to cost. “They just can’t afford to be overseas for a whole year and finance it on their own,” (Interview 13, 6/9/2009). On the other hand, she reported that certain older candidates had come to the program after long periods of living abroad and had very high proficiency levels.

In contrast, in her interview, Dr. Kantaris focused on observations of candidates during the methods course work and in the field. Although she had conducted all the
Spanish interviews, she did not mention the in-house oral proficiency test as the basis on her judgments. She commented, “I’ve been impressed with the language skills of the interns here… I do have a sense of their oral proficiency, and given that they are teaching, their oral proficiency from my point of view is high, Advanced to Superior. And keeping mind that most of them teach novice level classes, Spanish I, French I, German I, II, III, maybe an occasional IV or V where it gets into literature, it seems to me that their oral proficiency is certainly adequate to the task,” (Interview 12, 6/8/2009). She reported that she had observed candidates multiple times when they taught mini-lessons in methods classes and observed them personally once or twice during their internship. She also received regular reports from the Ph.D. student Graduate Assistants who supervised the candidates weekly in field experiences and the internship. Dr. Kantaris explained that in 2008-2009, one supervisor was a native speaker of Spanish and stated that another GA was very fluent in French (Interview 12, 6/8/2009).

Dr. Kantaris’ comments were limited to candidates’ oral proficiency. In contrast, Dr. McHenry repeatedly turned discussion towards other topics other than the M.Ed. candidates’ oral proficiency alone. For example, in explaining why teacher candidates should have strong target language skills, she stated twice that “teachers should be good representatives of the target culture.” She spoke at length on the importance of candidates’ passion for teaching, interest in working with children, and the College’s commitment to urban education.

Asked for an explanation of the candidates’ proficiency, Dr. Kantaris spoke of their educational background: “They get a full degree, and most of them have come from
River University. So they get a full degree in their, in the language. Plus they’re required to have study abroad experience. And so when they come back, they’re pretty proficient. They have the time to really study the language, to study phonology.” However, in the flow of the interview, she observed that she was thinking out loud as much as articulating a previously formed assessment. “Except that for oral proficiency, I don’t know how much it’s affected because, I don’t know, I’m just talking off the top of my head here. Because as you reach the more advanced levels of language study, it’s often literature. You spend time in class talking about it in the target language, but you’re not studying about oral language. You’re not working on phonology, you’re not working on oral accuracy necessarily,” (Interview 12 6/8/2009).

**Student views**

The two students who were interviewed reported that they had not taken the OPI. However, both reported that they could perform the tasks and functions, in the contexts and content and text types, and had the accuracy, needed for the Advanced-Low level. Both said they had the oral proficiency that they needed to be teachers. The two student interviews are discussed separately below.

**Sonia**

Sonia had graduated from River University in winter 2008 with a Bachelor’s degree in French and entered the M.Ed. program that summer. She reported that she had studied French from 9-12 grade and at River University placed into French 103,
Intermediate I. She reported that at that time, her spoken French skills were weak, and that this fact was why she had placed in a third-semester course after four years of high school study. As an undergraduate, she had studied abroad in the summer of 2007 in an eight-week program in Dijon, France. She made this decision because she had decided to apply to the M.Ed. program, which stipulated study abroad as an admissions requirement. She explained that it was the shortest study abroad she could do in order to meet the requirement (Interview 13, 6/3/2009).

In assessing her own oral proficiency, she raised a theme that is now common among the student interviewees:

I could probably talk about my past, my history, things I do now, things I’m going to do. I’m getting married, so I could talk about that…I could talk about some differences we have [with the French]…I’m sure I can talk about, pretty much most everything I can talk about in English, with the exception maybe that I wouldn’t be able to make as strong as [sic] arguments, in certain cases. I could say, ‘Well, this is what I think, and this is why,‘” but I don’t think I would be able to use that necessarily always to incorporate the flow and the progression that I would be able to do in English, with “for instance,” or something like that (Interview 13, 6/32009).

In other words, she reported that felt that she knew the language for activities or functions she had experienced. She gave the example of having recently learned the word for “knit” when a classmate brought her knitting to class: “I’m just thinking, ‘Well, I never knit. So that’s why I never knew [that word],’” (Interview 13, 6/3/2009).
Asked what had helped her develop her oral proficiency, Sonia spoke of several particular courses she took as an undergraduate. She reported doing a lot of speaking on a variety of tasks in her conversation course. These included preparing to talk about readings, making presentations, and participating in impromptu skits. Even more than the conversation course, Sonia said that two courses in French history improved her speaking by requiring her to prepare for written essay exams. Her description of the process suggests training in preparing connected paragraphs: “I would write my notes in French and try to memorize all this stuff in French….Our teacher, the day before the written final, would ask us something, and since I had read it so much, the same thing happens to me when I would study for my 100 level history class here…I could spit out the whole answer that I had stored in my head without having to write it. So maybe it doesn’t come out the exact same way I’ve written it, but I know the material and I can pull it out,” (Interview 13, 6/3/2009). She reported that she used the same technique of rehearsal to prepare for a difficult phone call—“a phone call where you have to argue with someone”—or a difficult conversation—“When you’re apologizing, ‘What do you need to say here?’”--in English (Interview 13, 6/3/2009). She also contributed to a radio show, which she said improved her French by forcing her to find topics to talk about on the show and prepare what she was going to say.

She also reported that large doses of listening helped her speaking. In addition, she reported that in most of her upper-level French courses at River University, students gave presentations.
Sonia had less to say about what she gained from study abroad. During her study abroad experience, she lived in a dorm on a floor of American students, many of them from River University. She explained that it was sometimes socially awkward to speak French with other American students outside of class. She called it “rude” to speak French at a meal, even when there were native speakers there, when other students at the table had much lower levels of proficiency. She reported that, in encounters with French people in Dijon, she and her friends sometimes asked their French counterparts to speak French with them, but the French partners spoke better English than the U.S. students spoke French. Therefore, the group would revert to English. Sonia also stated that social considerations prevented her from speaking French with classmates in the M.Ed. program: “Sometimes you’re sitting in the program with other people, and you’re wondering, ‘OK, you know, who’s at what level?’ and you’re basically nervous,” (Interview 13, 6/3/2009). She claimed that in France, she did not speak French sometimes because she did not want to be rude, and in a group of peers who were more advanced speakers, she held back for fear of having her language skills judged.

As a teaching intern, Sonia said she felt comfortable using the target language in the classroom. Her description of what it was to use the target language in the classroom echoes some comments made by other students interviewed in the study. She stated she was comfortable “with anything such as basic teaching commands. Because that’s what I use just about every day, like ‘get out your book,’” and ‘turn to this page.’” She added, “I can talk a lot, very well in the past. That’s because most of my students, French I and
French II, they both came back up with past towards the end of this year, but that’s ‘OK, I could do that anyway,’” (Interview 13, 6/3/2009).

She reported finding it difficult to speak in simplified language in French I and II, and hoped to teach French IV so that she could speak naturally. Asked if she felt she could speak in paragraphs to narrate and describe, she responded, “If I have to, I can probably speak in a paragraph, maybe not an extended paragraph.” However, she stated that she might not use this ability while teaching: “If I’m explaining something, it will be structured sentences but not quite a paragraph because students don’t want to sit and listen to you speak a paragraph,” (Interview 13, 6/3/2009).

Sonia commented that she had heard in her M.Ed. program that the teacher’s use of the target language in class is important, and said she agreed. She stated that, during her internship, she had been observed eight times, and each time she received an assessment that said, “Good target language use.” She said that she was aware that she made sometimes made language errors while teaching in her internship, but considered it best to keep going rather than back track and point out to students that she had just made an error. She summarized, “In terms of teaching a high school class, I wouldn’t consider myself unprepared at all,” (Interview 13, 6/3/2009).

Fred

Fred graduated from River University in 2008 with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish. When he started University, he had planned to become an English teacher. However, he changed his major to Spanish after taking Spanish 103, Intermediate
Spanish I, to fulfill a language requirement. That was in the spring quarter of his sophomore year. He reported that he had taken Spanish in grades 8 and 9 and hated it. “I despised Spanish with a passion and took a vow never to take a class again,” (Interview 10, 6/4/2009). While he was in Spanish 103, Fred took full advantage of a weekly conversation table, which students were required to attend twice a quarter. Fred explained that he attended almost every week. He stated that he had particularly enjoyed talking to his own instructor, who encouraged him to study abroad and continue his Spanish studies. That summer quarter, he went on a ten-week study abroad program to Ecuador, where he completed Spanish 104 (Intermediate II) and two additional courses.

As Fred related his story, he presented the study abroad experience as a turning point for him and a deeply meaningful experience. He reported many hours of contact per week with his host family and with three Ecuadoreans who tutored at the language school. In a typical quote, Fred explained, “My host, the host family I stayed with had three daughters and a son. And so we would eat dinner together, eat breakfast and lunch, you know we were hanging out a lot. So that provided lots of opportunity to you know, negotiate meaning around the dinner table, and all these kind of things, and really trying to understand each other,” (Interview 10, 6/4/2009). This comment concerning “negotiating meaning” was one of several in which Fred used terminology from second language acquisition commonly taught in foreign/second language theory and methodology courses (Omaggio-Hadley, 2000; Shrum & Glisan, 2010). In this and other instances in the conversation, Fred analyzed his experiences in light of concepts he had learned in teacher education.
These activities were reported to have occurred most often with his host parents. Fred reported that the family’s two adult children and nine-year-old child had less time for him. With his host family and with his Ecuadorean friend, he said he talked about politics, religion, poverty and corruption. He acknowledged that he sometimes stumbled with the language, but his friends would help him. “It was just so cool to think that I am communicating with somebody else in another language,” (Interview 10, 6/4/2009).

Fred spoke of a love of communicating with people and a sense of service. While recounting his discussions in Ecuador, he volunteered that he was a “committed, Bible-believing Christian,” (Interview 10, 6/4/2009). He explained that by becoming a Spanish teacher he hoped to “make a difference in this world and give something to people that could help them, really help them” by sharing the “beautiful things…and unfortunate things like poverty and corruption” he had seen there. “I felt like Spanish could be a useful tool to a lot of people here, a lot of English speakers,” (Interview 10, 6/4/2009). When he returned to University, he became a Spanish major in order to become a Spanish teacher.

However valuable the out-of-class experience was in Ecuador, in Fred’s opinion the classroom work was more valuable to his language development. At another point in the interview, Fred used the terms “learn” and “acquire” in the sense he had learned in his M.Ed. courses. In this exchange, he used it again to explain the value of his classroom learning in Ecuador:

Fred: I think it is important to have that so that you know that what you’re learning is grammatically correct. You can really start to acquire the grammar and
the vocab. I think you’re exposed to a lot more in that setting, in a classroom setting.

Researcher: And you just used “acquired” deliberately, in the Stephen Krashen sense that we know.


Researcher: So if you learn instructed language in class, that sets you up to acquire better.

Fred: Well said! (Interview 10, 6/4/2009)

This theory of Fred’s seems to match a growing consensus in the research of the past ten years into language proficiency gain during study abroad. That is, the strongest predictor of students’ language gain in a semester’s study abroad is not how much time they spend talking with their host families or speaking the target language among themselves, or whether they live in a dorm with other U.S. students or in a host family, but the proficiency in grammar and reading that they bring in at the start of study abroad as a base to make gains in their study abroad experience (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Golonka, 2006; Magnan, 2007).

Fred reported giving his subsequent upper-level Spanish courses at his home campus less credit for improving his speaking. His observation was that professors wanted students to talk, but the students did not respond. He attributed the students’ silence to course material that was too abstract and not engaging. “Maybe they felt like at that level…they just want to give you the information, so you have it. I probably experienced, I felt a little more engaged in some of the lower level classes…Yep up in
the 500s I remember some very dry linguistic classes, and while some of that may be the responsibility of the teacher, some if it could just be the material, just getting through it, learning it and having the knowledge,” (Interview 10, 6/4/2009).

Fred did not know of, or simply did not recall, the ACTFL Speaking Guidelines. When presented with some of the criteria for the Advanced-Low level, he felt confident that he had that much proficiency, or maybe more. “I could think there’d be a little bit more that I could do, maybe some more complex ideas, a little bit more in formal situations,” (Interview 10, 6/4/2009). Fred rated himself as 98% accurate in grammar, though not able to push out language as quickly or automatically as he does in English. His reference point for judging his skills was his English, not the Spanish spoken by non-native speakers. “Just like we’re talking now, I’m not thinking about formulating sentences, it’s just coming,” (Interview 10, 6/4/2009). He reported that in his teaching internship, he found it frustrating when he felt he could not speak rapidly, slur syllables and speak naturally to students. He reported that his students were especially resistant to his use of Spanish in class in a Spanish II class whose entire population had failed Spanish II the year before and were repeating the same class. Even in Spanish III, he said that speaking as a teacher was causing his Spanish skills to deteriorate. Less than a week before graduation, Fred had reported that he had already gotten a job teaching at the urban school where he had done his teaching internship.

**Conclusion**

Students and faculty at River University seemed to agree overall that candidates graduating from this program in 2008-2009 had Advanced-Low oral proficiency, even
though the candidates had not been rated on an official OPI. The two students reported
very different experiences in their classes on campus and in study abroad, but reported
that they felt prepared to use the language in the classroom as teachers. One candidate
described her oral proficiency in the classroom in terms of using basic commands, as
several other interviewees did in this study. Both candidates reported that they found it
difficult to simplify their language when speaking to students in lower-level language
classes. The two faculty members evaluated candidates’ oral proficiency from different
points in the instructional process, one from an interview in the second quarter, and one
from classroom observations. The faculty member seemed to base her evaluations on
classroom observations that gave the teacher candidates in Spanish and French more
positive evaluations across the board.
Chapter Discussion

In response to Research Question 1, survey respondents seemed to indicate that, in their opinion, a majority of 51-75% of graduating nonnative speaker teacher candidates in Spanish and French for 2008-2009 were able to perform the individual tasks and functions, speak in the required content and contexts, with the required accuracy and in the text types expected at the Advanced-Low level. On the other hand, this assessment seemed to be contradicted by the actual OPI data reported by faculty who answered the survey questions related to Research Questions 2, 3, and 6. It should be noted that these figures were reported for the most part by only eight respondents out of 16.

One set of the survey responses showed that the OPI ratings of nonnative speaker candidates for that year were at the ACTFL Advanced-Low level or higher for 33.3% of candidates in Spanish and 11.1% of candidates in French (Table 13). The same set of responses reported that the Oral Proficiency Interview level where the majority of teacher candidates fell was the Intermediate-High level. Survey respondents reported that, according to official OPI scores, 58.5% of nonnative speaker candidates in Spanish and 66.7% of nonnative speaker candidates in French were rated at Intermediate-High. Moreover, responses to questions concerning the OPI levels of candidates that were expected to be recommended for licensure showed that only 32% of candidates for initial licensure in Spanish and 25% of candidates for initial licensure in French were rated at the Advanced-Low proficiency level (Table 16). Faculty participating in the interviews also seemed to indicate that, overall, their teacher candidates for 2008-2009 did not meet the Advanced-Low standard and offered a variety of views on candidates’ strengths and
weaknesses in oral proficiency. Reasons most frequently cited were short study abroad and weaknesses in grammar and vocabulary. In contrast, selected teacher candidates stated in their interviews that they felt they were prepared to use the target language competently as teachers despite perceived weaknesses in topics outside daily life. Three out of six candidates had not taken the OPI at that time. Only two of the six candidates had demonstrated Advanced-Low proficiency on an official OPI, and two of the six had OPI scores that were a year old.

In summary, both survey and interview data demonstrated an uneven implementation of the ACTFL/NCATE Advanced-Low standard for the oral proficiency of teacher candidates in Spanish and French. Faculty responses based on personal observation seemed to be more positive concerning candidates’ oral proficiency levels than those based on OPI scores. In interviews, selected faculty seemed to confirm that their own teacher candidates were experiencing difficulty meeting the standard, and available data on the OPI levels of teacher candidates graduating and nearing licensure in Spanish and French appeared to show that only a minority of candidates were achieving official OPI ratings at Advanced-Low or above. However, a relatively low sample size presented a limitation in the interpretation of the data in this study.

Chapter 5 summarizes and analyzes the results of data reported in Chapter 4 and concludes the present study with implications for foreign language teacher education programs and teacher candidates and recommendations for further research related to this study.
CHAPTER FIVE
FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study investigated the views that teacher educators for French and Spanish teacher education licensure programs in Ohio held of the oral proficiency of their graduating teacher candidates. It examined this topic specifically in terms of Advanced-Low proficiency as defined by the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* and measured by an official rating of Advanced-Low on the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview. This proficiency level was selected because it was established in the *ACTFL Program standards for the preparation of foreign language teachers* (2002) as the level expected for graduates of teacher education programs in French and Spanish, the two languages in which colleges and universities in Ohio have the largest number of programs for initial PreK-12 teacher licensure. The Advanced-Low level is described by ACTFL as having four characteristics: 1) global tasks and functions, 2) contexts and content, 3) text type, and 4) accuracy that a speaker demonstrates in a 20-to 30-minute interview. In brief, the candidate demonstrates that he or she 1) can narrate and describe in major time frames and deal effectively with an unanticipated complication, 2) can talk in most informal and some formal settings on topics of personal and general interest, 3) can speak in paragraphs, and 4) be understood by speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-native
speakers. The *ACTFL Program standards for the preparation of foreign language teachers* (2002) specified this interview (or alternatively, the Texas Oral Proficiency Test) as the measure of candidates’ proficiency in interpersonal speaking to assure that teacher candidates are able to speak the target language in the classroom spontaneously, flexibly, at some length when needed for a lesson, and without reading a prepared script (*Program Standards*, 4). This skill is important because in the foreign language classroom, the teacher is typically the main source of spoken language that students hear. It is part of the teacher’s role to be a model of spoken language input to students (Shrum & Glisan, pp. 80-81).

The main purpose of chapter 5 is to report how foreign language educators’ viewpoints of teacher candidates’ oral proficiency related to the research questions in the study and to present the main conclusions and contributions to the field of foreign language education that the study produced. The first part of the chapter summarizes and provides discussion of the study’s findings in light of the research questions. These are grouped the same way as in Chapter 4 for the discussion of the survey findings: 1) findings related to research question 1 concerning the teacher educators’ overall perceptions, 2) findings related to research questions 2, 3, and 6 related to OPI or other data to which the teacher educators had access, and 3) findings related to research questions 4 and 5, focus on the teacher educators’ assessments of candidates’ strengths and weaknesses in speaking a foreign language. To this grouping are added the comments from teacher educators and teacher candidates stated in the interviews. In the next section, implications for foreign language teacher education programs are discussed. In
the last part of the chapter, overall recommendations are made, with a focus on curriculum. Recommendations for further research are also made.

**Summary of results**

**Research Question 1:** To what extent do respondents believe that their teacher candidates who are graduating in 2008-2009 have achieved the level of speaking proficiency called for by ACTFL AND NCATE?

This question was motivated by Ohio’s adoption of a standard across the board for all teacher candidates of a higher level of speaking proficiency than has historically been true of all college students majoring in foreign languages in their undergraduate junior and senior years. Starting in the same time period, the field has seen research into what college and university foreign language programs can do to increase the numbers of students reaching that level. Clifford’s call to ACTFL (2008) to make research on Advanced-Level language proficiency part of its agenda is reflected in research investigating teaching methods and programmatic plans to push students to achieve Advanced level proficiency (Brown, 2009; Byrnes, 1998; Bueno, 2006; Donato & Brooks, 2004; Weber-Fève, 2009; Lindseth, 2010; Pearson, Fonseca-Greber & Foell, 2006; Weyers, 2010). Previous studies have shown that around 50% of undergraduates were rated at Advanced-Low as juniors and seniors (Carroll, 1967; Cramer & Terrio, 1985; Grosse Uber, 1992; Hiple & Manley, 1987; Matthews and Hansen 2004; Swender, 2003). Swender found that 22% of college seniors in French and 20% in Spanish received
Advanced-Low ratings, while 32% in French and 39% in Spanish were rated at Intermediate-High (2003, p. 324).

Data for Research Question 1 came from the survey and from interviews. Subjective responses to the survey questions credited more teacher candidates with Advanced-Low oral proficiency than was found in the responses based on actual OPI scores. On the survey, a score of “4” was required as an estimate that more than 75% of candidates who were about to graduate and receive PreK-12 licensure in Spanish or French could perform as required to receive an Advanced-Low rating. The teacher educators’ responses to survey questions stated as positive “can do’s” did not reach a mean of 4 on any single survey question, but ranged from 3.31 to 3.57. The only exception was a mean score of 3.0 for candidates’ ability to handle a complication or unexpected turn of events, the phase in the Oral Proficiency Interview where candidates who have met the other criteria of the Advanced-Low level may experience linguistic breakdown and thus fail to achieve the Advanced-Low rating. The faculty did not place their estimate near the 80% mark. However, through these responses, faculty respondents who have observed teacher candidates said that more than 50% but fewer than 76% of candidates could perform at the Advanced-Low level. It was interesting that respondents reported enough confidence in their teacher candidates to reject suggestions of candidates’ weaknesses in oral proficiency, even when the weaknesses reported were expected and acceptable at the Advanced-Low level.

In contrast, actual OPI scores that were reported in the present study showed that 33.3% of candidates for initial PreK-12 licensure in Spanish and 22% of candidates for
initial PreK-12 in French were rated at the Advanced-Low level. Intermediate-High was reported as the most frequent rating for candidates in both languages. Candidates in Spanish received stronger ratings. (See Table 17.)

In the present study, typical answers from the faculty interviews to the question, “Have your graduating candidates for 2008-2009 achieved the level of speaking proficiency called for by ACTFL and NCATE?” are presented below in abbreviated form. Comments have been condensed and paraphrased in order to represent the speaker’s response briefly but accurately.

**Great Lakes University:**

Dr. Engstrom reported that the graduating candidates did not reach the required level in 2008-2009. Their one Spanish graduate met the standard. Their two French candidates did not. Candidates achieved fluency, but it was difficult for them to achieve accuracy. Dr. Hirst also answered “no.” She reported a difference between Spanish and French candidates because Spanish majors study abroad more, and because the smaller numbers in French established a lower standard in what the students expect of themselves. However, in her view, candidates’ linguistic development does not end at graduation. The two French candidates were likely to continue to improve their language skills.

**Eastern College**

Dr. Allen also answered “No.” Three of eight candidates were rated at Advanced-Low the previous year. However, in his view, Advanced-Low is an unrealistic standard, and ACTFL/NCATE requirement should not be a cause for worry.
Dr. Gerber reported the same results as Dr. Allen. She explained that the candidates who did not reach Advanced-Low the previous year did not demonstrate the drive necessary to reach that level of oral proficiency. However, candidates may show in their internship that other factors still may make them good teachers, for example, the ability to design age-and developmentally-appropriate lessons and to connect with kids.

**River University**

Dr. McHenry reported that the M.Ed. program did not ask students to take an official OPI and that the in-house mock OPI showed that candidates varied in their oral proficiency upon entry into the program. Unsatisfactory results on that test would mean that candidates were asked to take some additional language courses. However, other qualities besides oral proficiency may make a candidate a good teacher: passion for teaching and commitment to the program’s desire to promote quality urban education.

Dr. Kantaris stated the candidates met the required level. Her observations of the candidates and reports from field supervisors gave her confidence that they can perform at the Advanced-Low level.

**Valley University**

Dr. Irving reported that, with the exception of one candidate, the M.Ed. candidates had demonstrated the required proficiency in an OPI and in their coursework and field experiences.

Five of the seven faculty interviewees answered, “No, in this year, we cannot say that most of our candidates have reached the ACTFL/NCATE standard of Advanced-Low. Five of seven interviewees seemed to have based their yes/no answer on OPI
scores. However, one faculty member expressed the view that Advanced-Low is an unrealistic goal, while three added qualifiers suggesting factors other than Advanced-Low oral proficiency at graduation that might balance a candidate’s classroom performance. This set of responses demonstrates that overall, the faculty interviewees understood the Advanced-Low standard but some did not fully support applying it to their own candidates. These viewpoints, while important to understand, could have an impact on the accreditation of the licensure programs by ACTFL and NCATE. Thus, while they may reflect valid viewpoints, they may negatively impact their program accreditation if they impact program decisions.

All of the student interviewees expressed confidence that they had the language skills necessary for a beginning teacher. However, they did not necessarily describe their proficiency in the terms that the Program Standards specify. Their self-evaluations are summarized as follows:

**Great Lakes University**

Rachel stated that she could teach in Spanish and had the skills to explain and circumlocute in Spanish III. However, she reported it was a challenge to speak simply enough in Spanish I.

**Eastern College**

Lauren said that she could teach in Spanish, especially since, as the teacher, she could choose the topics and direct where the conversation was going.
Angela reported that she could teach in Spanish, though with some classes she might choose to teach mostly in English and limit her use of Spanish to classroom commands. She made this choice because she thought speaking Spanish in class might be too difficult for students in lower level classes.

**River University**

Sonia answered that she could teach in French and that she was comfortable with basic classroom commands. She explained that it was difficult to simplify her language for students in French I and II and that she would like to teach French IV so that she could speak naturally.

Fred stated that he could teach in Spanish, though the hardest thing was to speak in simplified language to students at the lower levels.

**Valley University**

Natalie reported that she could teach in French. She had to put in a lot of preparation, though. She planned, and even rehearsed, what she was going to say when she was teaching.

Several themes related to what it means to teach effectively in the target language recurred in the candidates’ interview responses as to whether they had the oral proficiency necessary to be a French or Spanish teacher.

Three candidates reported that they found it difficult to simplify their language for the benefit of their students in first or second year classes. As part of developing their own oral proficiency, they reported that they had become used to trying to speak in more complex ways. The *Program Standards* specify that a teacher candidate should be able to
tell a story unscripted or explain a culture lesson, for example (Program Standards, 6). It was an interesting finding that, now, in the classroom, candidates spoke of seeing their greatest problem as speaking simply, as opposed to using more complex language. There seemed to be a gap between their efforts to raise the level of their own speaking, on one hand, and speaking at a simplified level for their students, on the other hand. The most commonly-used texts in teaching methods offer strategies for doing “teacher talk,” include repeating and paraphrasing, using gestures and using language that is familiar to the students, as well as somewhat slower and more careful pronunciation, while still not sounding contrived. Omaggio-Hadley explained that successful teacher talk of this type does not have to consist just of giving classroom commands like “Open your book,” and “Listen carefully.” It can include longer pieces of speech such as telling anecdotes and stories (Omaggio-Hadley, 2000, p. 190).

The candidates’ views on their use of the target language in class also seemed connected to feelings of identity. Several candidates seemed to express pride and a sense of control in comments like “My students think I’m awesome in Spanish!” and “[I]n the classroom you can kind of gear where the conversation goes, like I’m in control of that as the teacher, and I kind of know what I want to say in front of my class,” suggest that speaking Spanish to middle school or high school students created a space in which the candidates felt respected and in control of the situation. They seemed to appreciate their role as a teacher as a means of being looked up to. The same candidates also spoke of their nervousness speaking in front of native speakers. They volunteered the contrast between confidence in speaking to young American students, who respected the
candidates’ skills at speaking the language, and anxiety at speaking in front of native speakers, who might notice mistakes and judge them. One candidate recounted her fear that she might be making mistakes without knowing it: “I’m afraid that they won’t correct me, but they will realize it, and they’ll be like, ‘Oh well, she doesn’t know Spanish,’ ” (Interview 2, 5/4/2009). In this situation, she would lose the respect and control she mentioned as part of speaking Spanish in class to young students. One of these candidates achieved an Advanced-Low rating, but with some difficulty, while the other did not receive an Advanced-Low rating.

At the same time, some candidate comments appeared to express idealism and altruism. One candidate spoke of becoming a Spanish teacher because he thought that through this profession he could “make a difference in this world and give something to people that could help them, really help them, both economically and to kind of broaden their horizon.” He seemed to see language teaching as a way of making Americans more globally aware. In discussing his teaching internship, he extended this hope not just to Americans in general, but specifically to the young high school students he was teaching in an urban school (Interview 10, 6/4/2009). Another candidate spoke of her determination to make Spanish class fun and lively for her students, not a “blow off” class, as she said some high school students perceived it. It may be significant that these two students appeared to be very confident in their speaking abilities overall. One described spending a lot of time speaking with native speakers and no fear of inadequacy when talking to them. The other was a heritage speaker who seemed to express feelings of inadequacy concerning writing in Spanish, but not in speaking. Perhaps these
candidates were able to concentrate on an idea of teaching as doing good because they were not anxious about their spoken language skills.

**Research Questions 2, 3 and 6:**

What data do departments have to show the oral proficiency of students recommended for teacher licensure by the individual institution? How were those data obtained? When were they obtained? Where were the data observed? Were differences observed between Spanish and French?

In the survey, it is somewhat difficult for the researcher to interpret the responses concerning candidates’ OPI ratings for 2008-2009. Five faculty respondents (33%) indicated that they had available OPI or TOPT results for 2008-2009. Eight (53.3%) indicated that they did not have such results, and two (13.3%) reported they were “not sure.” However, for the next question, eight respondents provided OPI scores. The scores reported for teacher candidates who were not native speakers showed that only 33% of the candidates in Spanish received ratings of Advanced-Low or above, while 22% of the candidates in French were rated at Advanced-Low. In Spanish, two candidates (8.5%) were reported at Advanced-Mid, six candidates (25%) at Advanced-Low, 14 candidates (58.5%) at Intermediate-High and two candidates (8.5%) at Intermediate-Mid. Thus, it can be seen that, in the data reported here, Intermediate-High predominates. Intermediate-High was also the predominant score in data reported for candidates in French. Two candidates (22.2%) were reported at Advanced-Low, six candidates (66.7%) at Intermediate-High, and one candidate (11.1%) Intermediate-Mid.
These OPI data indicated that, for the respondents who shared their data, only a minority of candidates in Spanish and French met the standard of Advanced-Low. However, the questions about specifics on candidates’ actual OPI scores elicited a low response rate. Sixteen faculty members out of 29 who were contacted responded to the survey; fourteen answered most of the questions; only eight responded to the questions that asked their candidates’ OPI scores and the department’s intentions to recommend or not recommend candidates for licensure. As a researcher, it is possible only to speculate about why these questions were not answered by respondents. However, two respondents did indicate that they were not sure what form of oral proficiency testing their program was doing or whether their program was doing it at all. Lack of information might account for why the questions were unanswered. Another explanation might be respondents’ unwillingness to share data that showed that their candidates were not reaching the Advanced-Low level of proficiency.

Two examples suggest that information concerning candidates’ OPI status may be compartmentalized and difficult to locate. Foreign language teacher education may involve a Modern Languages Department, or Department of Romance Languages, and also the College of Education. The following e-mail comment came from one faculty member who received the survey but reported she was unable to answer the questions. She identified three people in her department had contact with teacher candidates, but none of whom in her estimation, would know about the candidates’ OPI results:

I tried to answer your survey about our FL teacher candidates, but discovered that I had limited knowledge of the candidates. I can only
answer for the single French major who is graduating this year and earning a teaching license. I have asked the Spanish teacher responsible for giving OPI exams to our Spanish majors to answer for the Spanish teacher candidates, and forwarded your message to him. However, he is not the one who teaches the methodology courses, and may not know which Spanish majors are seeking licensure. Our methodology teacher is not the one who gives the OPI, so you can see that communicating between ourselves about this, gathering the information and reporting it to you will take considerably more time than the 15 minutes indicated on the form. I'm not sure if you took this into consideration when you developed the survey. It also points out to me the bookkeeping difficulties we are having in compiling this information and having it available (personal communication).

As described here, each person in the chain of instruction might know part of the information, but the parts were not being put together. At one of the four interview sites, the researcher contacted six faculty members, distributed between the language departments and the College of Education, before finding the person who could respond to the survey and be the primary contact for the interviews. In addition, during the pilot phase of the survey, one of the experts identified as an out-of-state teacher educator reported that her knowledge of the teacher candidates did not extend to knowledge of their oral proficiency or OPI results. This difficulty should inform future research on this topic.
Data obtained in the interviews also indicated that not many candidates in the four college and university programs involved in the study were reaching the required Advanced-Low level. As described earlier in this chapter, the faculty interviewee at Valley University recalled feeling confident that her M.Ed. candidates had been tested and rated Advanced-Low, but she did not report figures or breakdowns during the interview. The four faculty members at Great Lakes University and Eastern College reported their candidates’ OPI scores, one out of three Advanced-Low at Great Lakes and three out of eight at Eastern. At Eastern College, all candidates were Spanish majors, so no differences between Spanish and French were reported. At Great Lakes University, the one Spanish teacher licensure candidate received Advanced-Low, while the two French teacher candidates did not. The program at River University did not report OPI scores for their candidates. These mixed results at the various institutions included in the study left many unanswered questions for the researcher.

It was clear that programs whose representatives answered the questions, “How many of these candidates will you recommend for licensure in French and Spanish?” planned to recommend candidates who had not been rated Advanced-Low, including candidates whose OPI ratings were as low as Intermediate-Mid. This will pose an interesting dilemma at the Ohio Department of Education, the agency that awards licenses in Ohio and also requires teacher education program accreditation from NCATE.

At Eastern College and Great Lakes University, the teacher candidate interviewees knew their OPI ratings and shared them with the researcher. The information they reported agreed with that reported by the faculty.
the student interviewee had not yet taken the OPI, so she could not share her score. The
two candidates at River University had also not taken the OPI. These findings revealed a
weakness in the timing of the present study, which assumed the availability of OPI scores
as part of the needed data set.

**Research Questions 4 and 5**

4. What do respondents believe are teacher candidates’ strengths and weaknesses in oral
proficiency?

5. If respondents believe that students have weaknesses in oral proficiency, what do they
consider to be the students’ weak areas?

In the survey component of this study, these open-ended questions elicited a wide
variety of responses. Candidates’ strengths that were reported pointed to some skills
specifically listed in the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* namely: the ability to speak in
informal situations, communicative ease, and fluency. The most frequently reported
weakness was a weakness in grammar and vocabulary, reported five times in the data.

These comments were congruent with current research from study abroad that
reported that learners developed communicative ease and fluency in less time than they
develop accuracy (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; DeKeyser, 2010) and that they made more
improvement in fluency during a semester of study abroad, but more improvement in
grammar and vocabulary in an at-home course during the same time period (Collentine &
Freed, 2004). The researchers found that most of the subjects in their studies improved in
fluency during a semester abroad, as measured by speed of vocabulary retrieval, pauses,
and words per minute, but they did not raise their OPI scores (Segalowitz & Freed, 2004; Collentine & Freed, 2004).

The second most frequently made comment in the open-ended survey questions was that candidates lacked the ability to speak at length on literature or abstract ideas, or to discuss topics such as politics, which they also do not do in their L1 in everyday life. The Advanced-Low level requires speaking “in most informal and some formal” situations and paragraph-length speech but not extended speech, so these expectations ask candidates to perform above an Advanced-Low proficiency level. As noted earlier in the present study, most of the survey respondents had not completed an OPI workshop. Moreover, survey respondents answered questions about weaknesses that are acceptable at the Advanced-Low level (e.g., candidate may not control aspect, may use generic vocabulary rather than specific vocabulary) in such a way as to indicate that their candidates did not have these weaknesses. In short, the faculty survey respondents did not demonstrate in the present study that they were clear about the expectations of the ACTFL Advanced-Low oral proficiency level themselves. Therefore, this researcher concluded that this lack of knowledge might also be representative of teacher candidates at the participating institutions.

Various reasons for the weaknesses cited included a lack of practice (five responses), study abroad time that was too short (three responses), and insufficient speaking practice in upper-level courses (three responses). During the interviews, faculty reported strengths and weaknesses as demonstrated in the following condensed list. As
with previous lists of interviewee comments, these may be paraphrased and condensed to allow readers a quick review of comments made in Chapter Four.

**Great Lakes University**

Dr. Engstrom reported that candidates had fluency but not accuracy.

Dr. Hirst stated that candidates can get their ideas across but are influenced by a group ethic that makes them set their own expectations, which are below the level they should be.

**Eastern College**

Dr. Allen stated that candidates could do the tasks and functions of the Advanced-Low level but not consistently.

Dr. Gerber expressed the view that the successful candidates studied harder and were more willing to take opportunities to speak, while the weak candidates were unwilling to speak and practice.

**River University**

Dr. McHenry reported that candidates did not have any specific types of weaknesses, but that there was a range of proficiencies.

Dr. Kantaris stated that candidates did not have any weaknesses in oral proficiency. They could do everything that is required for the Advanced-Low level.

**Valley University**

Dr. Irving stated that candidates had good oral proficiency and could speak at the Advanced-Low level.
From the candidates’ self-evaluations, several themes emerged. These mostly concerned content and context of the discourse; that is, what they could talk about and in what situations. A condensed listing of interviewees’ comments concerning their strengths as speakers is given below.

**Great Lakes University**

Rachel stated that she could speak easily to her students. She knew that her Spanish was better than theirs, and they perceived her Spanish very positively. In Spanish III, she was good at using strategies like circumlocution.

**Eastern College**

Lauren reported that she could hold a conversation well and talk about familiar topics. She stated that she could narrate in past, present, and future, except for vocabulary problems and that she felt comfortable talking to my students because she knew her Spanish was better than theirs.

Angela reported that speaking was her strongest skill. She said that she felt comfortable talking about personal experiences.

**River University**

Sonia stated that she could talk about her own life. That included most anything she could talk about in English, including past tense narration and description. She said that she felt comfortable talking to her students.
Fred reported that he could do all the things described as criteria of Advanced-Low: describe and narrate, speak in paragraphs, speak in informal and some formal situations, maybe even a little more than that.

Valley University

Natalie stated that she could narrate and describe in all time frames. She expressed the view that in France, she became quite comfortable with everyday conversations, and now she was more advanced than that.

The teacher candidates who were interviewed also described their weaknesses in oral proficiency. Candidates spoke most often of context and content and of vocabulary.

Great Lakes University

Rachel explained the she could not talk about things she did not usually talk about in English and that it was also hard for her to talk to people she didn’t know well.

Eastern College

Lauren commented the she was weak in vocabulary and that she was nervous about speaking in front of native speakers.

Angela stated the she could not speak well about topics outside daily life, like politics or current events and that she did not usually discuss these topics in English.

River University

Sonia observed that she did not speak as well in French as in English when making an argument. She reported that she did not use connectors well enough in that type of speaking and did not speak well enough on unfamiliar topics.
Fred stated that he could not speak in Spanish with the automaticity he had in English. He said he would like to be better at speaking on more complicated topics.

Valley University

Natalie commented that the vocabulary demands of speaking in her graduate courses were difficult. She had to look up words and rehearse to prepare for class.

It was evident from this summary of findings that the area on which candidates agreed most strongly was their strength in speaking about everyday topics, subjects related to personal experience and their own daily lives. In the same way, seven out of eight respondents (87.5%) considered themselves to be weak when talking about abstract topics or subjects that they said were not part of their daily life, such as politics, current events, or literature. Their self-assessments seemed to overestimate the content and context requirements of the Advanced-Low level. The ACTFL OPI Tester Training Manual gives the following description of Advanced-Low speakers: “this language…is of the anecdotal and descriptive kind rather than the more sophisticated and precise language needed to support opinion, to hypothesize, or to maintain discussion of an issue in the abstract. The Advanced level is that on which much communication is handled routinely and effortlessly among first-language speakers,” and “Advanced-Low speakers summon all linguistic energy to sustain reporting in the past or telling a basic story in the past; they do not hypothesize nor support their opinions, though they may produce sporadic flashes of these higher-level features,” (Swender, 1999, pp. 98-99). These candidates’ expectations for themselves seemed to be more demanding than “most informal and some formal” contexts required by the ACTFL OPI standards.
In contrast, faculty reported candidate weaknesses in grammar and vocabulary. Performing the global tasks and functions of the Advanced-Low oral proficiency level makes some demands that seem obvious. Skill in using verb tenses is a requirement for narrating and describing in past, present and future time frames. Control of verb tenses and sufficient vocabulary are necessary for maintaining the level of accuracy that distinguishes Advanced-level from Intermediate speakers, who “are not generally able to stay in the past when telling a story, or….because they are concentrating on the verb forms of the past, lose both fluency and connectedness,” (Swender, 1999, p. 103). No students reported difficulties in using verbs in the necessary time frames, though they did mention weaknesses in vocabulary. This different in viewpoint between faculty and candidate respondents is interesting, but it is difficult for the researcher to interpret without a follow-up study.

In summary, almost all candidates focused on features of content and context in discourse that were above the ACTFL level required. Three respondents (37.5%) reported weaknesses in vocabulary, one feature necessary for text type and accuracy, but none identified grammar, another feature necessary to text type and accuracy. In two of three areas, the candidates’ assessments agreed with those of the faculty, both the faculty who responded to the survey and those who were interviewed. In one area, faculty perceived a weakness that the candidates did not perceive, namely a weakness in grammar when speaking French or Spanish. A difference in viewpoint was described above as a challenge to the researcher.
Implications for Programs

In the programs represented by survey respondents and the four colleges and universities involved in this study, a minority of teacher candidates in French and Spanish seemed to be receiving OPI ratings at the required level of Advanced-Low in 2008-2009. Intermediate-High predominated as reported data. Given the somewhat low response rate to the survey and to some questions in particular, and to the small number of universities where interviews were conducted, these results cannot be generalized to all foreign language teacher education programs in Ohio. However, that was not the purpose of the present study. The results of the present study are in line with most of the previous studies on the oral proficiency of college foreign language majors at the junior and senior levels. This fact points to a need for additional research into teaching methods and curriculum design that will help more students to achieve the required Advanced-Low level of oral proficiency.

In addition, the research experience suggested that knowledge of candidates’ oral proficiency could be so compartmentalized that faculty did not always know if their teacher candidates took the OPI or where that information could be found. It seems an obvious suggestion that faculty should have a greater sense of the whole in teacher candidates’ education. At a minimum, a department involved in teacher education—whether that be a language department or an education department—should compile a list or set of procedures that shows up in advising handbooks, print or web-based departmental information pages, or a “save this” memo by e-mail that explains the NCATE Advanced-Low requirement, how testing is done at that university to fulfill it,
and the contact people who can provide more information. Beyond such basic steps, the OPI process could be addressed in department meetings or retreats. Wider, and clearer, dissemination of information might also lead to interest in curriculum changes.

Both faculty comments and candidate comments reflected beliefs about the value of study abroad for improving oral proficiency. Candidates mentioned gaining in vocabulary and confidence through study abroad. Faculty mentioned study abroad periods that were too short as an important reason for candidates’ weaknesses in oral proficiency. Research done in the past decade provides insight into both the limitations of study abroad in promoting gains in oral proficiency and curricular designs to boost proficiency that can be carried out both in foreign language programs at home (Brown, 2009; Bueno, 2006; Pearson, Fonseca-Greber & Foell, 2006; Weyers, 2009) and in study abroad (Tschirner, 2007; Lindseth, 2010). This research needs to continue and should be expanded. Moreover, departments of foreign languages and foreign language teacher education should consider these studies carefully as examples of courses that successfully moved undergraduate students to the next higher level of oral proficiency. Several of these studies are discussed here in order to illustrate varied approaches. Some elements of these courses respond to themes that emerged in the present study.

Brown (2009) and Weyers (2010) designed courses with the specific goal of giving students repeated practice in and awareness of the skills needed at the Advanced-Low level (Weyers) and Superior level (Brown). In both studies, the researchers found that most of their students improved one sub-level on the OPI. Weyers’s (2010) study, aimed at undergraduates who needed to reach Advanced-Low, focused on noticing and
awareness. Brown’s (2009) study emphasized large doses of language input and multiple assignments at the same time, scaffolded by the instructor and graduate assistants. Both courses also included criteria of the targeted oral proficiency as part of the course grade.

In the present study, teacher candidates reported confidence that they could perform all of the elements required for the Advanced-Low level. They focused on shortcomings in content and context but did not report difficulties with accuracy, successful narration, or text type. They did not self-assess weaknesses in grammar or vocabulary as strongly as faculty did. Their self-assessments suggest they were not aware of these elements of their speaking. Weyers’s (2010) approach required students to notice grammar errors, use of coherence and cohesive devices, and the nature of their discourse as paragraphs or sentence strings.

Weyers (2010) based his course called “Speaking Strategies” on Schmidt’s noticing hypothesis. In addition to the requirement that students notice their own discourse, students were also given explicit instruction about what proficiency entails in ACTFL’s terms. It was communicated to each student that he or she was to improve by one sub-level between the initial and final OPI, and progress toward that goal comprised part of the grading rubric for the major assignments. In the first class sessions, students took an initial OPI and learned about the ACTFL proficiency scale and the general structure of the OPI. Their first assignment was to transcribe their initial OPI in its entirety, that is, 20-30 minutes of speech, in order to notice their own discourse. Class sessions were devoted to activities that focused on ACTFL Advanced-level skills in the first half of the semester and ACTFL Superior-level skills in the second half of the
semester. Students practiced circumlocution, studied periodic grammar reviews, practiced using discourse markers, learned techniques of narration, practiced organizing ideas around a hypothesis, expressing and supporting an opinion, and participating in a conversation with multiple viewpoints (Weyers, 2010, pp. 388-389). At the same time, they completed five more assignments to record and transcribe themselves speaking for 3-5 minutes, again done to force students to hear and see the characteristics of their speech. Tasks included narrating in the past, expressing and supporting an opinion, and participating in a dialogue where they must negotiate opposing points of view. Topics to be recorded and transcribed were given out two weeks in advance and were tailored to students’ proficiency levels as found in the initial OPI. After each transcription assignment, students received instructor feedback on the accuracy of their transcription and progress toward improvement in oral proficiency. A class session was held to review the principles of proficiency and students’ recent work. Then the students wrote a reflection paper about what they had observed in their transcription.

Weyers’s argument that making students understand what proficiency is and notice their own proficiency seemed to work, since his data showed that 71% of the students did improve by one sub-level on the OPI in a semester. Of those students, one-third were students whose initial rating at the beginning of the course was lower than the Advanced-Low level and who achieved an Advanced-Low rating at the end of the course. In Brown’s study, students already at the Advanced level improved to the Superior level after a one-semester course. Students who did not improve their OPI score were already
rated at Superior level, the top of the ACTFL scale. Bueno (2006) found that students self-assessed improvement in their speaking skills after a one-semester course.

Another noticeable characteristic of the course designs is the number of assignments. Weyers’s (2010) and Brown’s (2009) course designs, along with Bueno’s (2006) included frequent homework and practice targeted at narration and description in multiple time frames, in coherently organized paragraphs. For example, Bueno’s third year composition and conversation course was organized around two films. Class time consisted of a mix of lectures by the instructor and jigsaw and other communicative activities based on readings and outside work. Outside of class, students were expected to spend 100 minutes per week on language lab assignments. These included viewing a 10-18 minute segment of the film and recording a weekly video journal in which they spoke for ten minutes on an assigned question about the film. For instance, students were assigned to relate in the past what happened in the film’s first act from the point of view of one of the characters. In so doing, they were required to make comparisons with viewpoints of other characters and persuade viewers to sympathize with their assumed “character.” Students also participated weekly in asynchronous online discussions about the film segments. Questions included discussion of symbolism or metaphor. Students also had additional readings related to each film and its historical period. Students reported that the electronic record from these discussions helped them retain language necessary for the class discussion. For example, students participated in panel discussions on topics like the consequences of characters’ actions. After these discussions, students wrote compositions that further explored ideas presented during the panel discussions.
Students completed a SOPI (Simulated Oral Proficiency Interview) at the end of the course, but Bueno did not report SOPI results in this study. Her research questions focused on students’ strategies in comprehending the film segments, using chat to rehearse and explore ideas, and in preparing the weekly videos.

Although Bueno’s investigation focused on how students used media, her course design required students to complete multiple assignments that gave them spoken and written sources of language to put to use in class. These assignments required them to produce spoken and written language that correspond to functions and text types at the ACTFL Advanced and Superior levels. In this course, written texts and video, reading, writing and speaking supported each other. It would be valuable to collect pre- and post-OPI scores in a future iteration of the course in order to discover whether students improved in oral proficiency through this multi-skill approach.

Brown’s (2009) course for third and fourth-year undergraduate students of Russian was designed to help students to improve from ACTFL Advanced levels to the Superior level. Students selected for the course from applications the previous semester were rated at the Advanced-Mid, Advanced-High, or Superior levels on the OPI at the beginning of the course. The course was centered around two debating formats. Assignments included a weekly reading in Russian on the week’s topic, articles in English on principles of debating, a weekly two-page position paper on the week’s debate question, a weekly video recording of a five-minute persuasive speech on that week’s topic, a set of pre-recorded debates from Russian television to view, an assignment to watch an additional hour per week of Russian television, and a weekly set of vocabulary.
idioms and proverbs, and connecting phrases to memorize. The weekly position paper was graded using criteria from the *ACTFL Writing Guidelines*. If the paper met the criteria for the Superior level, it received an A or A-. If it met only the criteria for the Advanced-High level, it received a grade of B+, and so on. On the weekly video recordings, students received written feedback using the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* from a graduate assistant who was a native speaker of Russian. Students took a quiz each week on the week’s set of vocabulary, idioms, proverbs, and connecting phrases. The class met once a week for a two-hour class, of which one hour was the week’s debate.

Students were assigned to argue one side of an issue, and then four weeks later, to argue the opposite side. All of the materials were supplied by the instructor. Brown based his design on the theory of scaffolding in Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development. As with Weyers’s (2010) course, students’ course grade was tied in part to success in meeting the ACTFL criteria for the target level.

While the three courses just described set out to impact undergraduate students’ oral proficiency in a one-semester at-home course, Tschirner (2007) designed a study abroad course to test the progress students could make on a four-week study abroad in Germany. Students completed assignments and participated in class activities specifically targeted at the proficiency skills of Advanced-Low speaking. There were also repeated explanations of the criteria of Advanced-Low, and supervised out-of-class language experiences and field trips. Eight out of 11 students improved by at least one sub-level on the OPI at the end of this course.
These studies show that college students can improve on their OPI levels if their course work and language experiences are specifically targeted toward that purpose. This research also contradicts arguments made for a “ceiling” of how much undergraduates can advanced in their oral proficiency due to the limited time available in a four-year college program (Rifkin, 2003; Rifkin, 2005). This notion was advanced by one of the faculty members interviewed in the present study as a justification for not expecting teacher candidates in foreign languages to reach Advanced-Low. The studies on curricular design in at-home courses also challenge the traditionally held belief that study abroad per se is the solution to the problem of undergraduates with low oral proficiency. Research must continue into curricular designs that work, and college and University faculty should be made more aware of them in order to improve their foreign language teacher licensure programs.

Finally, while curricular changes at the college and university level can have a significant impact on teacher candidates’ oral proficiency, a continued push for long, articulated sequences beginning in K-12 would surely improve the proficiency of teacher candidates leaving college if students enter college with higher proficiency levels than many currently do. The Passport to the Future report (Ohio Department of Education, 2007) named a series of programs underway in Ohio to improve proficiency in PreK-12. These include the Foreign Language Academic Content Standards to guide K-12 programs, the Visiting Teachers Program for Spanish and Chinese, summer Regents’ Academies for high school language students, and paths of alternative licensure for native speakers and speakers with high levels of proficiency. They also include
recognized proficiency assessments that can be used at all levels, K-16. The OPI is one of these. Assuming that these program measures and assessment measures are adopted, Ohio schools should produce high school graduates who arrive in college with higher levels of oral proficiency and who may go on to become language teachers.

**Implications for Teacher Education Candidates**

Feedback by the teacher candidates in this study showed that they needed to understand better what is expected of them to meet the requirement of speaking at the Advanced-Low level before receiving their PreK-12 teaching licensure. Candidates presented ideas of their strengths and weaknesses compared to the requirements of the Advanced-Low proficiency level, but they expressed those ideas in an imprecise manner. The research and experimentation described in the previous section all included explicit teaching of what the OPI criteria are and ways to achieve the required proficiency levels. Several researchers (Bueno, 2006; Weyers, 2010) also required students to self-assess multiple times against those criteria as a strategy to improve their proficiency.

In addition, the candidates’ comments showed that they needed a better understanding of how to use the target language successfully when teaching foreign languages at different instructional levels. Candidates interviewed in the present study did not seem to connect the skills of the ACTFL Advanced-Low level with classroom teaching. Aside from the standard texts in foreign language teacher education (Omaggio-Hadley, 2000; Schrum & Glisan, 2010), several articles exist that lay out this connection more explicitly (Phillips, 1998). Foreign language teacher candidates may be more likely
to embrace the necessity of reaching the Advanced-Low level if they see such connections more clearly. This means explicit attention to the OPI and related techniques in both methods classes and field experiences. Candidates need specific instruction in using the target language with students from beginning to advanced levels. This goal could be accomplished by analyzing video and demonstration lessons taught by experienced teachers in classroom discussion and in follow-up reflection essays or other assignments. Teacher educators should also design assignments during field experiences that are aligned with the requirements of speaking to classes at different foreign language proficiency levels, including the Advanced level.

Finally, teacher educators could also frame course work to appeal to candidates’ sense of identity and pride. As discussed earlier, some candidates in this study reported feeling respected in the classroom as experts who knew the target language better than their students, and at the same time experienced anxiety about speaking with native speakers who might judge them for making mistakes. A more thorough understanding of and training in how to use the target language in the classroom could be pitched to candidates as pride in achieving professionalism as recognized by important institutions such as ACTFL.

**Recommendations for further research**

A more complete study is needed to establish the oral proficiency levels achieved by non-native speakers (perhaps contrasted with samples from native-speakers) of the OPI levels of foreign language teacher candidates attained in languages such as French
and Spanish after teacher candidates complete their undergraduate foreign language major, with teacher education minor where appropriate, in a state such as Ohio. This study should be a quantitative, data-based analysis of oral proficiency levels reported by ETS/ACTFL to the Ohio Department of Education or to particular institutions with approved PreK-12 foreign language teacher licensure programs after students complete the required oral proficiency assessment test that is submitted to the Ohio Department of Education. It is recommended that this data set include scores reported for all Ohio teacher licensure candidates during a given year or years (e.g., 2009-2010 and 2010-2011) for deeper analysis. It will provide important data on the proficiency levels of Ohio teacher candidates as they move into their induction year of teaching. One of the limitations of using the ETS or Ohio Department of Education data base, however, is that some teacher licensure programs have fewer than ten candidates whose scores are reported which might conflict with US Privacy Act regulations. If that is the case, some alternative source of candidate OPI scores where numbers are less than ten would need to be devised, for example, asking candidates to supply their score for research purposes. However the data are obtained, there needs to be a quantitative assessment of the levels attained in order to have a clearer understanding of the degree to which Ohio colleges and universities are producing foreign language teachers who meet the established OPI level. To date, these important data are not available for analysis.

Researchers should also study the implementation of oral proficiency standards in the foreign language teacher education programs in other states. If it is found that other states are more successful than Ohio, or less successful, in implementing ACTFL’s
proficiency standard of Advanced-Low speaking, research can uncover factors that have contributed to those results. A starting point would be in states that adopted NCATE as their accrediting body earlier than Ohio. Researchers could address such questions as: How long did it take for colleges and universities in a given state to produce a greater proportion of teacher education graduates with oral proficiency at the Advanced-Low level? Did that result come immediately, or did it take some years? What requirements did the state’s Department of Education set for the licensure of teacher candidates as individuals, as compared with NCATE’s requirements for institutional accreditation? Has the state succeeded in implementing long K-12 sequences of language study that send students to college at higher levels of oral proficiency?

In addition, the promising research into curricular design at the university level that can help foreign language teacher candidates measurably improve their oral proficiency must be continued for curriculum at candidates’ home U.S. university and during study abroad. Researchers must be encouraged to include pre- and post- OPI scores in their study design in order to ensure that conclusions about changes in candidates’ oral proficiency can be drawn. Moreover, university researchers should investigate the levels of oral proficiency of high school graduates in order to see if the programs outlined in *Passport to the Future* (2007) are having the desired impact. Finally, funding and resources must be allocated to support this research.
Conclusion

Findings from the survey responses and comments in interviews in this study have uncovered several key themes. One was the need for increased awareness on the part of foreign language teacher education faculty about research in curricular design that can promote Advanced-level oral proficiency. Another was a need for better understanding by candidates about how Advanced-level speaking proficiency connects with PreK-12 classroom teaching. Much information from research and practice in the field of foreign language education is available in the professional literature. It needs only to be more widely read, understood, and appropriately incorporated into foreign language teacher education programs and foreign language curricula.

This study has provided baseline data that can provide a foundation for further research on the current oral proficiency of teacher candidates in Spanish and French. Making connections between these data and current research already underway can also help language education programs meet language proficiency requirements for their approved PreK-12 foreign language teacher licensure programs.

Epilogue

Some of the findings in this study surprised me. Before conducting the study, I had a stronger sense that the foreign language educator network in Ohio were more closely knit and shared more common information. It was surprising to learn how fragmented and compartmentalized information about the teacher candidates’ oral proficiency would prove to be. Would this compartmentalization also be true in other
academic disciplines, for example, math education or science education? I was also surprised to find the variety of understandings that different faculty held concerning the *ACTFL Speaking Guidelines* and the OPI. In retrospect, this should not be surprising. When the field is engineering, the professionals can standardize tolerances of ball bearings to $n$ millimeters. It’s much more difficult to standardize how human beings read documents and carry out policies as they understand those policies. As we know from our Second Language Acquisition study of reading, much of the sense a reader makes from the text comes from what is behind the eyes, not what is on the page before the eyes. The teacher candidates’ self assessments were also intensely interesting, as was the experience of talking to them. They were all vital, charming, and interesting people.

In the time since I began thinking of this study, some issues have changed. In the summer of 2009, after I had collected my data, the Ohio Department of Education changed its policy with an announcement that all teacher candidates in Spanish, French, and other languages excluding languages such as Chinese, Korean, and Arabic were required individually to take the OPI and to get a rating of at least Intermediate-High. This announcement resolves part of the ambiguity that previously plagued faculty and students in foreign language teacher education but still leaves a tension between a requirement of Intermediate-High for teacher candidates and the NCATE accreditation requirement that programs demonstrate their candidates can speak at Advanced-Low. Tantalizing possibilities remain for a follow-up study: How do institutions and departments interpret this new policy? Do they interpret it to mean that a few candidates can be admitted at Intermediate-High, but 80% still need to demonstrate Advanced-Low?
Have programs or departments changed requirements that they formerly imposed on teacher candidates? From a personal perspective, the study answered a few questions but raised just as many new ones.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

E-mail to Intended Survey Respondents
Text of proposed e-mail invitation to participate in the survey

Dear foreign language educator,

As part of my dissertation research in Foreign/Second Language Education at the Ohio State University, I am asking you to participate in a survey on the oral proficiency Ohio’s candidates for initial teacher licensure in Spanish and French. I believe that this is a topic of high interest to teacher educators nationally and in Ohio at this time.

I am sending the survey to a foreign language teacher educator at each college or university in Ohio that offers initial teacher licensure in those two most commonly taught languages. I hope to gain an overall estimation of the oral proficiency of the newly licensed French and Spanish teachers for the entire state at this time.

The survey will take about 20 minutes. I will gladly share results with participants next fall when the study is completed.

Your identity will be known to me through your e-mail address in the response. However, all names of persons and institutions will be immediately changed to coded numbers for the data analysis. No one else, including my dissertation director and committee members, will see personal or institutional identities during the process of the dissertation writing and revisions. In the dissertation and in any article or presentation based on it, code numbers will appear as the only identifiers. And since data collection is being done online by SurveyMonkey, I can assure you that SurveyMonkey uses VeriSign Secure Socket Layer encryption to secure the data on their server. Data analysis will be done offline to avoid any security problems related to being connected to the Internet.

You also have the right to withdraw or refuse participation at any time.

The survey will remain open until [...] two weeks from now. Three days before that date, I will contact you with a reminder.

Please follow this link to add your valuable input. If you feel that another faculty member at your institution is better placed to know the oral proficiency of foreign language education students who are seeking initial licensure in Spanish and French, please forward this e-mail invitation to that person.

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=dAjf1aCJ4dXx_2bEMCxzIxlw_3d_3d

Thank you for your participation.

Mary Ball
Ph.D. Candidate
Foreign/Second Language Education
The Ohio State University
APPENDIX B

Survey Questions
Part A. Background—your institution

1. What is your institution? (Please note: institution names will be changed into anonymous code numbers immediately on reception of the survey.)

2. What is the total enrollment at this campus?

3. Which program model for initial teacher certification does your institution offer? Do not include alternative licensure programs or endorsement programs.
   ________ undergraduate program
   ________ 5th year program
   ________ Holmes program

4. When did your institution last undergo NCATE review?

5. Does your institution require teacher candidates to take the OPI or another speaking test in order to demonstrate their speaking proficiency?

6. If so, at what point during their program of studies?
   ________ as an entry requirement
   ________ at entry, as advisory assessment
   ________ at midpoint
   ________ at exit

7. Which speaking assessment and format are teacher candidates at your institution using in the 2008-2009 academic year?
   ________ phone interview
   ________ online OPIc
   ________ OPI with in-house certified tester
   ________ a certified tester hired by to come and test all our students
   ________ TOPT
   ________ other test such as DELF (French) or ...........(Spanish)
   ________ other

8. Do you have from official tests such as the OPI or TOPT for this year?
   ________ yes
   ________ no
9. How many graduating teacher candidates who are not native speakers have received the following OPI scores this year?

In Spanish

_______ intermediate-mid
_______ intermediate-high
_______ advanced-low
_______ advanced-mid
_______ advanced-high

In French

_______ intermediate-mid
_______ intermediate-high
_______ advanced-low
_______ advanced-mid
_______ advanced-high

10. How many of these candidates will your institution recommend for teacher licensure?

In Spanish

_______ intermediate-mid
_______ intermediate-high
_______ advanced-low
_______ advanced-mid
_______ advanced-high

In French

_______ intermediate-mid
_______ intermediate-high
_______ advanced-low
_______ advanced-mid
_______ advanced-high

Part B. Your background

1. What is your rank or job title? For example, “Associate Professor of Education,” “Professor of Spanish,” “Graduate Teaching Assistant?”

2. Have you taken ACTFL’s OPI training?

_______ no, none
_______ basic 4.5 day workshop
_______ refresher workshop
_______ certification
_______ other

3. Are you trained in rating the Texas Oral Proficiency Test?

_______ yes
_______ no
4. In what capacity have you had a chance to become familiar with teacher candidates’ foreign language speaking proficiency?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>taught a foreign language course</td>
<td>0-25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>taught a foreign language methods course</td>
<td>26-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>observed candidates in one or more field experiences</td>
<td>51-75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spoke with candidates informally outside of classes</td>
<td>more than 75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>administered a speaking exam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spoke with candidates during a study abroad experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part C. Your estimation of teacher candidates’ speaking proficiency.

Think of the teacher candidates at your institution with whom you have worked and who have graduated or will graduate during the 2008-2009 academic year.

1. What percentage, approximately, of teacher candidates who are not native speakers and who have graduated or will graduate during the 2008-2009 academic year are native speakers of the language they will teach?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In your estimation, what percentage of those teacher candidates graduating this year and who are not native speakers can **consistently** perform the speaking tasks described in the questions below? Please keep in mind that **consistent** performance is important to each question.

2. Teacher candidates can handle a variety of communicative tasks, although somewhat haltingly at times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 75%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

3. Teacher candidates can participate actively in most informal and a limited number of formal conversations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Teacher candidates can participate actively in informal and formal conversations related to school, home, and leisure activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 75%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Teacher candidates can participate actively in formal conversations related to events of work, current, and public interest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 75%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. Teacher candidates can participate actively in informal and formal conversations related to events of personal or individual relevance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 75%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Teacher candidates can narrate and describe in all major time frames (past, present, and future).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 75%</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8. Teacher candidates can narrate and describe in paragraphs, that is, in a way that presents strategically sequenced ideas and information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 75%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9. Teacher candidates can narrate and describe in paragraph length discourse, but may not control aspect at all times.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Score</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-50%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-75%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 75%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Teacher candidates can handle appropriately the linguistic challenges presented by a complication or unexpected turn of events that occurs within the context of a routine situation or communicative task with which they are otherwise familiar; at times, candidates’ discourse may be minimal and strained in handling the complication or unexpected turn of events, and candidates may use circumlocution or rephrasing.

0-25% 26-50% 51-75% more than 75%

11. While teacher candidates can link a narration or description into paragraph length, they may grope and rely on minimal discourse when pressed for a fuller account.

0-25% 26-50% 51-75% more than 75%

12. Teacher candidates’ utterances are not typically longer than a single paragraph.

0-25% 26-50% 51-75% more than 75%

13. Structure of the dominant language (L1) is still evident in the use of false cognates, literal translations or the oral paragraph structure of the speaker’s own language.

0-25% 26-50% 51-75% more than 75%

14. While teacher candidates’ language may be marked by substantial, albeit irregular flow, it is typically somewhat strained and tentative, with noticeable self-correction and a certain “grammatical roughness.”

0-25% 26-50% 51-75% more than 75%

15. Teacher candidates’ vocabulary is primarily generic in nature. That is, candidates generally lack precise vocabulary.

0-25% 26-50% 51-75% more than 75%

16. Teacher candidates contribute to a conversation with sufficient accuracy, clarity, and precision to convey their intended message without misrepresentation or confusion.

0-25% 26-50% 51-75% more than 75%
17. Teacher candidates’ speech can be understood by native speakers unaccustomed to dealing with non-natives, even though this may be achieved through repetition and restatement.

0-25%  26-50%  51-75%  more than 75%

18. When teacher candidates attempt to discuss a topic from both concrete and abstract perspectives, the linguistic quality and quantity of their speech will deteriorate significantly.

0-25%  26-50%  51-75%  more than 75%

19. When teacher candidates attempt to provide a structured argument to support their opinions, the linguistic quality and quantity of their speech will deteriorate significantly.

0-25%  26-50%  51-75%  more than 75%

20. When teacher candidates attempt to provide lengthy and coherent narrations, the linguistic quality and quantity of their speech will deteriorate significantly.

0-25%  26-50%  51-75%  more than 75%

21. When teacher candidates attempt to construct and develop hypotheses, the linguistic quality and quantity of their speech will deteriorate significantly.

0-25%  26-50%  51-75%  more than 75%

22. When teacher candidates attempt to use extended discourse, they will exhibit lengthy hesitation.

0-25%  26-50%  51-75%  more than 75%
23. Teacher candidates can explain a grammar point in the target language.
   0-25%  26-50%  51-75%  more than 75%

24. Teacher candidates can conduct a culture lesson in the target language.
   0-25%  26-50%  51-75%  more than 75%

25. What do you consider to be the teacher candidates’ strengths in oral proficiency?

26. What do you consider to be teacher candidates’ weaknesses in oral proficiency?

Thank you for participating in this survey. If you would like to be informed of the results of this survey, please e-mail mball@ashland.edu. Results will not be available immediately; but when they are available, I will be happy to share them.
APPENDIX C

E-mail to Intended Faculty Interviewees
Dear Dr. a;lsklfhsdl,

I am conducting research for my dissertation at OSU on FL and FL Education faculty's expectations for the oral proficiency of teacher candidates in Spanish and French, in light of Ohio's adoption of the ACTFL/NCATE standards for student licensure and program accreditation. I will be sending out a survey statewide to all the colleges and universities in Ohio. In addition, I am looking for several Ohio institutions, a mix of small colleges and large universities, where I can visit onsite to interview 1-2 faculty and 1-2 teacher candidates as a follow-up to the survey. Would you be willing to be one of the interviewees and to allow me to conduct interviews of about 1 hour per interviewee regarding the transition to the OPI as our state standard? This would be in late April or early May.

My dissertation adviser is Dr. Charles Hancock. Should you wish to check on who I am or the validity of my request, you can contact him.

I would like to submit my request for human subjects research board approval soon, so I would appreciate a reply at your earliest convenience. In addition to my work coordinates listed below, my cell phone number is 419-606-3759.

Dr. a;lskfjl, Director of Undergraduate Studies, referred you to me as an appropriate person, that is, a faculty member who knows students in Spanish and French Teacher Education and is acquainted with their skills. Cincinnati was recommended to me as among the better teacher ed programs, so I am particularly interested in interviewing a couple of people at aslfjl University. My doctoral adviser is Dr. Charles Hancock.

Yours sincerely,

Mary Ball
Ph.D. Candidate
Foreign/Second Language Education
The Ohio State University
APPENDIX D

Instructions to Faculty Who Will Recruit Student Interviewees
To faculty who will recruit student interviewees:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study on the oral proficiency of foreign language teacher candidates in Spanish and French. In order to make the process clear, I am providing the following guidelines:

- The interviewee should be a teacher candidate who has graduated or is graduating or seeking licensure in the 2008-2009 academic year. That could include students who finished in December, for example, if they are available and you have contact information.
- Student interviewees should be volunteers. Arm-twisting should not be employed, nor should students feel that they will get extra points in a class for participation. However, you may inform student interviewees that they will receive a modest thank-you gift.
- A short announcement is attached. This is to save you trouble and to ensure that information is communicated clearly and in the same terms at different institutions.
- Please share it with all of this year’s teacher licensure candidates in Spanish and French. I am sending it as an electronic attachment so that you can e-mail it or print it out.
- One volunteer will suffice.
- If only one student volunteers, please accept that volunteer.
- If several students volunteer, please choose one that you feel represents well the experience of teacher candidates in your program.
- A reason to select a second volunteer would be that the second student has a significantly different experience or insight concerning oral proficiency as a soon-to-be teacher.
- If, in your judgment, there is an additional faculty member who could add more to a discussion of the current teacher licensure candidates’ oral proficiency than you can yourself, please recommend that person to me. Would it be best for me to contact that person myself or for you to contact him/her?

Finally, scheduling several interviews and possibly a class observation is a bit of a chore. Please let me know how you would like to handle that. I do not wish to impose unduly on your time. Would you prefer to make up a schedule yourself or have an assistant do it, or would you like to give me contact information and have me handle the scheduling myself? We have already agreed on a general date of _____________. If you would like me to handle the scheduling, I will need contact information for other interviewees.

If you have questions, here is my contact information:
Mary Ball
mball@ashland.edu
office: 213 Bixler Hall, Ashland University, tel (419) 606-3759
home: tel (419) 606-3759
APPENDIX E

Interview Questions
Interview questions

1. Describe your program for Spanish and French majors. Is it the same for teacher education students as for BA students? How many majors do you have? How many teacher candidates?

2. You have already commented in the survey about the oral proficiency of the students in your department who are seeking teacher licensure in Spanish and French during the 2008-2009 academic year. Can you comment in more detail on their strengths in oral proficiency?

3. Can you tell more about how you assess the oral proficiency of your students who are teacher education candidates, seniors who are about to graduate and apply for licensure? How many of them achieve an Advanced-Low rating on the OPI?

4. On what do you base your estimation?

5. To what do you attribute these successes?

6. Please tell in more detail about any weaknesses in oral proficiency that you have observed among students from your department seeking teacher licensure in Spanish and French during the 2008-2009 academic year.

7. To what do you attribute these weaknesses?

8. Would you say that the proficiency level of today’s teacher candidates is about the same as in the past, or is it different from the past?

9. What kind of study abroad do students usually do? How long? What type of programs?

10. Opportunities for students to speak TL outside of class? Ask here about resources.

11. Have students found it difficult to achieve an Advanced-Low rating on the OPI? If so, what do you advise them to do?
For teacher candidates

1. Please tell about your career as a learner of Spanish/French.
   a. How long have you studied Spanish/French?
   b. Have you studied or lived abroad? If so, please describe your study abroad experience in some detail. What type of program, ie., language school, program that offered content courses in TL? Live with a host family?
   c. At what point in your French/Spanish studies were you when you studied abroad? How many advanced Spanish/French courses had you taken before you studied abroad? Did you continue taking Spanish/French courses after you returned?
   d. Besides study abroad, have you had opportunities to use your language outside of class, such as conversational exchanges with native speakers? Please describe them in detail.

2. When you think about your oral proficiency in Spanish/French, what do you see as your strengths? Follow up with Qs on: topics can discuss well, situations can function well, ability to narrate in different time frames, accuracy

3. On what do you base your estimation?

4. To what do you attribute your strengths as a speaker of Spanish/French?

5. Do you feel you have any weaknesses in oral proficiency in Spanish/French?

6. To what do you attribute these weaknesses?

7. Do you have plans to improve in these areas? What do you think will help you improve?

8. Have you taken the OPI? Tell about the experience. Were there any things you found difficult about the test? If so, what did you do to deal with these difficulties?
APPENDIX F

Interview Consent Form
CONSENT FORM FOR INTERVIEWEES

You have volunteered to be interviewed as part of a research study concerning the oral proficiency of teacher licensure candidates in Spanish or French in Ohio colleges and universities.

The interview will take about one hour. During that time, you will be asked to reflect on your own oral proficiency (student) or on the oral proficiency of teacher candidates that you know (faculty). The interview will be audio-recorded in order to allow the researcher to focus on talking with you during the interview time. Later, the recording will be transcribed and analyzed.

The results of this study will contribute to one part of a Ph.D. student’s dissertation. The research will contribute to our understanding of the oral proficiency of students soon to become Ohio teachers of Spanish and French. Condensed versions of the study may be published in a journal article or presented at an academic conference.

Your anonymity in the project will be protected. Names of individuals and of their college or university will be replaced with pseudonyms in the dissertation and in any article or presentation derived from it. In fact, all names will be replaced immediately in the initial transcriptions of the interviews and not written into the initial notes materials. Participants’ real names will be known only to the researcher and not to her dissertation director or committee members. Recordings and written transcriptions will be kept securely for three years after the study is completed and then destroyed. Electronic data will be stored on an external hard drive that is not connected to the Internet.

You may withdraw at any time. You have the right to skip questions if a question makes you uncomfortable. If you are a student, your acceptance or denial of participation will not have any effect on your grades or your academic program. You will receive a copy of this form.

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact:
Principal Investigator Dr. Charles Hancock, 149 Arps Hall, 1945 N. High St.,Columbus, OH 43210-1172 (614) 292-8047.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

I agree to participate in this project. ________________________________
Co-investigator ________________________________

__________________________ (Name) ____________________________ (Name)