Pedagogical Content Knowledge in teacher writing tasks: A study of Spanish majors and preservice teachers

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Abstract:

This study discusses the presence of pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) in Spanish teacher writing versus Spanish majors’ writing on the same assessment tool. Specifically, knowledge of effective teaching and knowledge of learners, along with linguistic quality, were categories of interest in the assessment. Participants completed teacher writing tasks in Spanish and then reflected in English or Spanish upon what they had written.

The two groups of test takers produced differing levels of competence on this language for specific purposes (LSP) performance test. The findings show that the test takers with professional teacher education outperformed the Spanish majors on 16 of 18 items. Qualitative data demonstrated a profound difference between the two groups, pointing to the influence of teacher education on the preservice teachers’ performance.

Keywords:

Pedagogical content knowledge, second language teaching, writing, assessment
Teacher knowledge is an elusive concept that researchers have pursued for several decades. Delineating the teacher knowledge base is fundamental to the efforts of advancing the profession and developing appropriate assessments for preservice and practicing teachers (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 1991). With accountability at center stage in the public education debate, this issue is of primary concern. It is no different for teachers of second languages.

This study discusses one component of second language teacher knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), and its presence in preservice Spanish teacher writing versus Spanish majors’ writing on a language for specific purposes (LSP) test. The research questions addressed are:

1. Is there a difference in performance between preservice teachers and non-teachers on a PCK test of Spanish teacher writing?
2. How do preservice teachers and non-teachers demonstrate PCK in a performance test of Spanish writing?

This paper highlights the importance of teacher education in the development of Spanish teachers’ PCK. The following review of literature will explore the acquisition, development, and assessment of this aspect of teacher knowledge.

**Literature review**

Many models of teacher knowledge have been proposed. Recent attempts to categorize it have taken the form of teacher standards, such as the Interstate New Teachers Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2002), those of various states (e.g., Minnesota Board of Teaching, 1986; Iowa Department of Education, 2001), and other professional organizations (e.g., NBPTS, 2001). The most lasting and popular
definition of teacher knowledge is that of Shulman (1987), where he contends that there are at least seven categories that make up teacher knowledge.

Shulman’s paradigm has served as the starting point for a variety of researchers within the language teaching community as they strive to define language teacher knowledge (e.g., Lafayette, 1993; Wing, 1993; Freeman & Johnson, 1998). The most innovative component of this model and often the most discussed is PCK, a type of hybrid of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge (Freeman, 2002). Shulman (1987) calls PCK “that special amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the province of teachers, their own special form of professional understanding” (p. 8).

The first component of PCK, pedagogical knowledge, is derived from a variety of sources, such as formal collegiate instruction in psychology and second language acquisition and experiences in the classrooms of elementary and secondary language teachers (Wing, 1993). The other component of PCK is content knowledge, what Lafayette (1993, p. 124) defines as “subject-matter content.” He investigated past attempts at establishing guidelines for what a teacher should know and tells us that this component “in the field of foreign languages consists of proficiency in and knowledge about the language and culture to be taught” (p. 124).

Although numerous authors after Shulman have defined PCK (Grossman, 1989; Munby, Russell, & Martin, 2001), the general definition that most influences our construct of PCK is found in Cochran, DeRuiter, and Kind (1993):

The transformation of subject matter for teaching (Shulman, 1986) occurs as the teacher critically reflects on and interprets the subject matter; finds multiple ways to represent the information as analogies, metaphors, examples, problems, demonstrations, and classroom activities; adapts the material to students’ abilities, gender, prior knowledge,
and preconceptions (those preinstructional informal, or nontraditional ideas students bring to the learning setting); and finally tailors the material to those specific students to whom the information will be taught (emphasis in original, p. 264).

In the case of second language instruction, this transformation is not simply a matter of using target language skills effectively. Rather, the language teacher’s developed PCK is necessary to engage the students with the material and with one another (Freeman, 2002). Wing (1993) makes the case for second language teacher PCK by stating that

beginning foreign language teachers must demonstrate an acceptable level of proficiency in the target language and a broad knowledge of the culture(s) of the language, know how learners learn a foreign language in the classroom setting, and be able to choose from a basic set of strategies, techniques, and activities those that will create an appropriate learning environment for their particular students (p. 178).

Her definition of PCK suggests that foreign language teachers should be aware of how learners are likely to acquire a second language through knowledge of the language, curriculum, and pedagogy.

**Acquisition of PCK**

As can be seen, there are a variety of definitions of PCK, but how do teachers acquire this important component of their professional knowledge? The preparation of future foreign language teachers begins when they take their first step into the language classroom as young learners themselves (Wing, 1993). During the “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975), preservice teachers begin to form beliefs about second language teaching. Teachers draw on this fund of observations to formulate their later beliefs about what constitutes good teaching (Bailey,
The acquisition of PCK is thought to continue as preservice teachers take formal education courses that inform their manner of teaching second languages. PCK is also gained through experiences (Munby, et al., 2001), such as practicum within the schools and student teaching during the final semester of a teacher education program.

Cochran, et al. (1993) further point out that “PCK develops over time as a result of experience in many classroom settings with many students” (p. 264-265). The acquisition of PCK in the roles of both student and teacher suggests that there is a continuum of PCK development. The controversy surrounding teacher education in the preparation of teachers begs the question: how does teacher education contribute to PCK acquisition?

**Teacher education and PCK**

The debate over the value of teacher education in the development of PCK was fueled largely by the Holmes Group report (1986), which emphasized the need for profound reforms in teacher education. More recent critics of teacher education argue that strong preparation in subject knowledge and enthusiasm to teach are satisfactory for individuals to begin a successful teaching career (Paige, 2002). More specifically, former U.S. Secretary of Education Paige argues in his report titled, *Meeting the Highly Qualified Teachers Challenge*, that “there is little evidence that education school coursework leads to improved student achievement” (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, p. 19). He then proposes that education coursework be eliminated from certification requirements and that attending colleges of education be made optional (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).
Those in favor of teacher education argue that subject knowledge is simply not enough (Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002) and that coursework in pedagogy, as well as the subject matter area, is a necessary part of teacher education. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, and William (2004) contend that

a high level of qualification in a subject is less important than a thorough understanding of its fundamental principles, an understanding of the kinds of difficulties that students might have, and the creativity to be able to think up questions that stimulate productive thinking. Furthermore, such pedagogical content knowledge is essential in interpreting [student] responses (p. 17).

Advocates of teacher education believe that education courses are critical to the development of future teachers and that they are essential in the development of PCK.

Few researchers have compared the performance of individuals prepared for teaching in colleges of education to those who were not. In her seminal study, Grossman (1989) investigated the development of English teachers’ PCK, including teachers who completed a teacher education program and others who did not. She found that teachers without professional coursework in teacher education “found it difficult to re-think their subject matter for teaching” (p. 30). According to the study, the frameworks for understanding student learning and misunderstandings were presented in the pre-professional education courses. Those teachers without the knowledge of those frameworks had difficulty interpreting and organizing insights about student understanding (Grossman, 1989). Grossman’s study demonstrates the development of PCK through professional coursework at the university level and the advantage it offered the teachers who completed that coursework.
As has been highlighted, teacher education has been found to positively influence teacher knowledge, specifically PCK, in some instances. In certain circles, however, it has not been overwhelmingly accepted as a necessity. The collection of more conclusive evidence of its effectiveness is a necessary step and the assessment of PCK is one way to provide that evidence.

**Assessing PCK and challenges in its assessment**

The question of how to assess PCK is one that is currently receiving attention in the educational field. Currently used tests designed to measure PCK include the *The Praxis Series: Professional Assessments for Beginning Teachers* developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS, 2005) and some state licensure tests (e.g., New York State Teacher Certification Examinations).

Before initial certification in many states, new teachers are required to take a test in each of the areas in which they want to be certified to teach (Darling-Hammond, Wise, & Klein, 1999). Praxis II is the test in the ETS series that is used to “measure candidates' knowledge of the subjects they will teach, as well as general and subject-specific pedagogical skills and knowledge” (ETS, 2004a) before they are certified.

The Praxis Spanish pedagogy assessment, if required, is a one-hour test which consists of three 20-minute essays in which participants are asked to supply written answers in English to one question in each of the following categories: planning, teaching, and evaluating instruction (ETS, n.d.). In this assessment test takers reply to prompts in English instead of Spanish, the language that they will be teaching. This is problematic since current pedagogy promotes the near exclusive use of the target language in the classroom (Omaggio-Hadley, 2000).

For all practical purposes, PCK is ignored in the political arena. State legislatures decide which tests will be required for future teachers of the various subject matter areas, and they often
choose one Praxis II test for content area and one for pedagogical knowledge. In the case of future Spanish teachers, legislators are able to choose between two tests of content (Content Knowledge and Productive Language Skills) and two content-specific pedagogical tests (Spanish pedagogy and Foreign Language pedagogy tests) (ETS, 2004b) in addition to the pedagogical tests of general grade levels. Often, however, legislators choose to require only a general pedagogical test, ignoring the more PCK based tests.

The effectiveness of assessments of preservice teachers is still unknown. Some maintain that these tests are insufficient to evaluate the skills of teachers, are often decontextualized, and are written by professional test writers that may not have a background in the content area or in education (Darling-Hammond, et al., 1999). Further, tests of PCK often do not ask test takers to perform in a way that is authentic to the classroom.

Current trends in second language testing, such as Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) and performance testing, attempt to provide meaningful contexts for assessment. An LSP test is one in which “test content and test methods are derived from an analysis of specific language use situation” (Douglas, 2000, p. 1), in this case Spanish for teachers of Spanish. That is, the test takers are required to demonstrate their Spanish language skills in a way that is similar to the manner in which a secondary Spanish teacher would in the classroom.

Performance tests are assessments in which “the tasks involve a degree of abstraction from workplace reality” (McNamara, 1996, p. 14) and where “performance on the task is then used to predict performance on similar real-world tasks” (p. 14). The principles of performance assessment do not separate language skills and other skills necessary to complete the task at hand. According to McNamara (1996, p. 43), “adequate second language proficiency is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for success on the performance task.” Therefore, LSP
performance assessments accomplish two goals. They provide a more direct assessment of what the test takers would do in the given situation were it real life and they require that participants need to know more than just Spanish to adequately perform test tasks.

It should be noted, however, that questions as to the appropriateness of LSP tests, particularly for language teachers have been raised. For instance Elder, Iwashita, and Brown (1995) found that expert teachers of Japanese did not perform as well as recent graduates from a generalist Japanese language program on a test specifically designed for Japanese teachers. Although specifically created to assess Japanese language abilities combined with teacher knowledge, that test did not effectively allow the expert teachers to demonstrate their knowledge. Instead, Japanese language generalists outperformed the teachers.

The present study also explores the assessment of both language proficiency and PCK. More specifically, it addresses Spanish teacher PCK found in teacher writing. The next section explains the components of Spanish teacher writing proficiency.

**Defining Spanish teacher PCK**

Because of the lack of attention to writing in existing teacher assessments, the construct of Spanish teacher writing was selected for the purposes of this study to examine PCK. Writing was also selected because language teachers’ classroom writing still remains an overlooked and underappreciated component of assessing Spanish teacher PCK. Grant (1997), one of the few researchers who attempts to define language teacher knowledge, writes that teachers “need to be competent orally/aurally in different situations” and that “teachers need to be competent in writing” (Grant, 1997, p. 38), as well as speaking. On a weekly basis, teachers write tests, handouts, and comments that often blend into the background of a lesson. This written input is crucial to second language learners as it serves as a model for their own production (Krashen,
1985). Teachers need to be precise in their writing since the written artifacts are produced for the purposes of student learning and evaluation.

The complexity of language teacher proficiency cannot be denied. On the one hand, teachers should be expected to produce levels of language recommended by the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE, 2002). On the other hand, teaching is a special task that requires language users to tailor their level of language to the audience. Elder (2001) tells us that there may be

a fundamental incompatibility between the traditional notion of general proficiency in a context which assumes a developmental continuum involving an increase in range and complexity of the language use across situations where features of strategic competence such as simplicity, clarity and sensitivity to audience may be valued over and above elaborateness (p. 162).

Therefore, this attention to audience means that a teacher’s level of discourse must conform to what the language learners in front of him or her are able to comprehend, even though a higher level of discourse may be technically correct.

The two components that form the construct of Spanish teacher writing proficiency are foreign language writing proficiency and teacher knowledge. The *ACTFL Writing Proficiency Guidelines* (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2001) informed the development of the foreign language writing proficiency component of the construct. The description of the Advanced-Low level was selected based on the recommendation by NCATE that beginning teachers of commonly taught languages, such as Spanish, maintain at least that level of language ability (NCATE Foreign Language Teacher Standards Writing Team, 2002). It
must be noted here that the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* have received much criticism
(Valdés, Haro, & Echevarriarza, 1992; Chalhoub-Deville, 1997) although they are widely used.

Concerning the pedagogical component of Spanish teacher writing proficiency,
*Minnesota’s Vision for Teacher Education* (Minnesota Board of Teaching, 1986) informed the
construct for the present study. That document was developed to “redesign teacher education
programs to implement a research based, results-oriented curriculum” (Darling-Hammond, et al.,
1999, p. 5). The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Educators’ (AACTE)
*Knowledge Base for the Beginning Teacher* (Reynolds, 1989) was also used in the formulation of
the current construct. In particular, the “Knowledge of Effective Teaching” portion from the
former report and the “Knowledge of Learners” from the latter report informed the current
assessment tool.

This study builds on the work of Elder et al. (1995) comparing the performance of
teachers and non-teachers on a test of Japanese teacher proficiency. It is our goal to compare
Spanish majors’ performance to preservice Spanish teachers’ performance on an instrument
designed to assess the PCK of the latter group.

*Instrumentation*

This instrument is a LSP performance assessment and was designed to make inferences
about preservice teachers’ ability to write in Spanish in future jobs teaching Spanish in public
and private high schools within Iowa. Although the range of language teacher discourse possible
is potentially “infinite” (Elder, 2001, p. 154), this study used a needs analysis that effectively
limited the types of “test tasks and content that are authentically representative of the target
situation” (Douglas, 2000, p. 46). Before designing the instrument, the researchers gathered
information about what and how often Spanish teachers write, so that a test resembling authentic
Spanish teacher writing performance could be developed. Thirty-two high school Spanish teachers in Iowa completed a survey about the kinds of tasks they write in Spanish and with what frequency they carry out these tasks. These new and experienced teachers came from various school districts in the state and taught a variety of levels. The following, in order of frequency, were most commonly reported teacher writing tasks in Spanish: a) writing on the chalkboard, b) writing worksheets, c) writing test questions, and d) writing comments on students’ papers.

Writing on the chalkboard was eliminated as a task due to the inability to simulate classroom practice in a testing situation; that task is often done in response to students’ immediate needs which would be difficult to reproduce. Supporting this decision, Grant (1997) divided teacher language proficiency into two parts, spontaneous and planned. In a classroom, a writing task performed on a chalkboard is generally more spontaneous, whereas the other three test tasks are more planned in nature.

The final instrument contained a detailed scenario of a hypothetical teaching situation, including the demographics of the school and class, characteristics and potential motivations of the individual students, and information from a hypothetical textbook chapter. Providing “sufficient information about the context for and the goals of teaching decisions” allowed for a more authentic performance assessment (Darling-Hammond, et al., 1999, p. 52).

Each of the three items included on the test also contained a reflection section that could be written in either Spanish or English. In addition to the five sentences required to complete the Spanish writing task, test takers were asked to explain in five sentences why they wrote what they did, the decisions that they made, and how the responses to the other test sections demonstrate their knowledge of teaching and of students. This section was developed to simulate what might happen in reflective teaching in an authentic situation. Pak (1986) suggests
that teaching improves through self-analysis and self-evaluation, which can only come about through reflection. The information about metacognitive strategies in the reflection section was rated only on the rubric’s categories of effective teaching and knowledge of learners, not on linguistic content. (See Appendix A.)

Administration

Eighteen participants took part in this study; half of them were candidates for Spanish secondary teacher licensure and the other half were Spanish majors or minors at a public research university in Iowa. Of the nine preservice teachers, eight were female and one was male. This group, ranging in age from less than 21 to 29 years, was composed of undergraduate degree candidates and master’s degree candidates in the foreign language education program and none had experience in teaching K-12 Spanish. Two of the candidates were native speakers of Spanish from Spain and five had studied abroad in a Spanish-speaking country. A wide variety of study abroad experiences were noted, ranging from two weeks to one year, with most having studied in Spain.

Of the 9 Spanish majors, 4 were male and 5 were female, ranging in age from less than 21 to over 40 years old. Six had traveled to a Spanish-speaking country and one was a native speaker of Spanish from Colombia. None of the candidates had experience teaching Spanish at the K-12 level. All participants were given one hour to complete the instrument, which was administered in the first weeks of the semester. None of the participants had received previous explicit instruction about how to construct the three types of items on the test.

Rubric

A rubric was designed to ensure that scoring reflected the test design (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). Six points were possible for each task: one point for Vocabulary, Discourse,
Accuracy, Knowledge of Effective Teaching, and Knowledge of Learners; and one point for task fulfillment. Eighteen points were possible for the entire instrument.

The linguistic segments of the rubric were developed from descriptions of the ACTFL Guidelines at the Advanced-Low level, as suggested by NCATE (NCATE Foreign Language Teacher Standards Writing Team, 2002). Thus, performance matching the description of Advanced-Low for Vocabulary, Discourse, and Accuracy received three points. If the performance failed to meet the requirements, a zero was given for that component. Finally, the reflection portion of each item was considered for Knowledge of Effective Teaching and Knowledge of Learners.

As mentioned earlier, McNamara (1996) suggests that in language testing it is impossible to separate language from the task the test taker is performing. Therefore, for the purposes of this instrument, completion of a task was defined as fulfilling a length and content requirement. A minimum of five sentences for each of the two sections per task was required for the rater to consider the item ratable. Five sentences were selected as a sufficient number to elicit a ratable response and also for the need to place limits on writing tasks (Cohen, 1994). If the number of sentences was sufficient and the question was answered, one point was awarded for task fulfillment. If the number of sentences was insufficient or the question was not answered, a zero was given for task-fulfillment and the task was not scored.

**Quantitative Findings**

Four trained raters, two with state teacher certification and two without, rated each of the 18 tests independently. Each item was later discussed as a group and the raters were allowed to change scores after the discussion. After discussion the inter-rater reliability coefficients ranged from .88 to .97.
Out of a possible 18 points, the mean for the preservice teachers is 11.33 while the mean for the Spanish majors is 6.22. (See Table 1.) The standard deviations are very high and indicate much variability in each group. The extreme scores are the likely result of some test takers’ failure to complete one of the three tasks. As described above, if the test taker did not complete the task, he or she received zero points for the entire item.

An independent t-test was performed to verify differences between the two test taker groups. The t-test suggests that the groups are significantly different at the .05 level (p=.046). Not only did the preservice teachers outperform the Spanish majors in terms of average score but, more specifically, they outperformed Spanish majors on 16 of the 18 item components, as indicated by a 2 x 2 Chi-square goodness of fit analysis. The Spanish majors outperformed preservice teachers on Accuracy in the third task (writing student comments) and they performed equally well on Knowledge of Learners in the second task (writing a test question).

These findings are surprising because, based on Elder et al. (1995), Spanish majors could have been expected to outperform preservice teachers on the majority of the Spanish language components. The current study, however, found just the opposite.

**Qualitative findings**

To strengthen the findings of this study, data was analyzed from both the quantitative and qualitative perspectives. Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989, p. 259) tell us that, “triangulation seeks convergence, corroboration, correspondence of results from the different methods.” We believe that this triangulation strengthens the story that is told by our data.

For the qualitative analysis, two of the authors (one with a background in teacher education and one without) carefully examined the participants’ responses, using the analysis tool of “data reduction.” Data reduction is the “process of selecting, focusing, simplifying,
abstracting, and transforming the data” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10-11). Informed by the rubric, the researchers noted critical differences between the preservice teachers’ and the Spanish majors’ performance in the categories of linguistic discourse and format, knowledge of learners, and knowledge of teaching. The researchers reviewed the entire data set independently and later compared perceptions, which enhanced trustworthiness and strengthened the development of coding categories. To demonstrate pertinent differences in performance between the two groups, several completed items from randomly selected test takers, three of whom were preservice teachers and three of whom were Spanish majors, were compared. Responses from the participants in each group, or 33% of the data, were carefully reviewed in order to “maximize opportunities for comparative analysis” and carry out discriminant sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 211). This approach allowed the researchers to examine responses from members of both groups and form more robust comparisons of PCK in each group.

These test takers’ general characteristics are summarized in Table 2. As can be seen, one of the test takers within each group is a native speaker of Spanish and two from each group are native speakers of English. Two members of the Spanish major group are male and one is female, while all three of the preservice teachers are females.

**Linguistic discourse and format**

The participants’ writing was first analyzed with regards to task format and level of linguistic discourse. These categories proved to be important in distinguishing between the two groups of test takers. The Spanish majors in this study have more difficulty constructing a worksheet that was meant to assess knowledge of direct object pronouns within the described scenario. For instance, David does not include any blanks in the first activity and Felipe creates an activity that requires verbs and other vocabulary from the chapter instead of purely the
pronouns that the task requires. David also uses the future tense, which is too advanced for students at the second year level, as well as vocabulary that would be inappropriate for a secondary language classroom. David’s dialogue is below¹:

Marta: You brought the tickets and passports, right?

Juan: Yes, yes… Calm down, Marta. Both are in the suitcases.

Marta: We should go to the gate and get out the boarding passes.

Juan: No, Marta, we still have an hour until the plane takes off.

Marta: I understand, Juan, but we still have to go through security and you never know what delays we will have.

Juan: Son of a bitch, Marta! You make me crazy. Fine, let’s go to the gate.

Julie, Bev, and Carmen, the preservice teachers, do not have such difficulties constructing a worksheet for the classroom. They tend to include blanks in the worksheet and to focus on the language skill of interest, direct object pronouns. They also use language appropriate for the secondary classroom and they recycle previously learned grammar points, such as the preterit, in the worksheet task.

David, Felipe, and Sally, on the other hand, in addition to some problems with inappropriate language for the secondary classroom, also tend to use more English during the tasks. For example, one task requires feedback on student produced compositions in Spanish, but Sally includes Spanglish in her feedback. An example follows, with the italics indicating the words that she wrote in Spanglish:

¹ The researchers have included translations of test takers’ responses to aid the reader. If you would like to receive the original responses in Spanish, kindly send an email to one of the authors.
It is possible to organize the composition differently. The ideas are good, but put the same ideas together. He did a lot in his time and it is possible to expand his topic. I like that he used a lot of different vocabulary.

Preservice teachers, on the other hand, tend to write in Spanish and at a level appropriate to secondary students.

Thus far, our discussion has focused on the discourse and linguistic elements of the test takers’ performance. Pedagogical features were also a source of difference between the two groups of test takers. Knowledge of teaching, as defined by the rubric, consisted of knowledge of effective teaching and knowledge of learners.

**Knowledge of effective teaching**

Effective language teaching demands that teachers give students opportunities to demonstrate knowledge of a variety of linguistic features and that they use a variety of strategies, techniques, and methods for teaching. Therefore, in an activity created to evaluate student knowledge of direct object pronouns, it would be expected that a variety of these pronouns would be elicited from the students (there are eight direct objects pronouns in Spanish).

In the worksheet writing task, Julie, Bev, and Carmen, the preservice teachers, include at least four blanks in the worksheet that they create, thereby including within their five sentences four opportunities for students to practice pronouns. Julie and Bev also create a dialogue that would elicit at least three different direct object pronouns and included pronouns placed both before the conjugated verb and attached to the infinitive. As an example, Julie creates the following dialogue:

Marta: Have you called the travel agent to confirm the plane tickets?

Juan: Yes, I called her and confirmed them.
Marta: Very good, thank you. Do you have my passport?

Juan: Yes, I have it. Where is the suitcase?

Marta: I think it’s in our room. I put it there to arrange the clothes.

Juan: Hurry up! The flight leaves within four hours. I don’t want to miss the flight.

Marta: Calm down. We aren’t going to miss it!

The Spanish majors, however, have more difficulty providing opportunities to practice and elicit multiple pronouns. For instance, Felipe asks students to fill in blanks that require information beyond direct object pronouns, including verbs and nouns and David neglects to include any blanks whatsoever.

A second area of distinction between the two groups within knowledge of effective teaching is the goal of helping students gain proficiency in a language. In the majority of reflections, preservice teachers mention that they are keeping in mind the larger overall goal of helping students learn a language. Julie, for example, wrote:

I think the frequent use of D.O. pronouns will also help the students to see how commonly we use them.

Similarly, Carmen exemplifies her broader thinking with her reflection on the test writing task:

I have tried to present it in the most faithful way possible to a situation from real life so that the students are prepared for the future since it’s very probable that they will find themselves in a similar situation.

David, a Spanish major, also demonstrates that he is trying to model for the students, although he is one of few majors to do so. His focus on student learning is on a narrower level, thinking of the classroom and not lifelong language learning. His response demonstrates a concern about the text instead of a larger perspective of language use. He writes:
I tried to use as mucho of the vocabulary from the text as possible – so that the students can see examples of how the words are used in context.

Although many areas delineate the distinction between the two groups, knowledge of effective teaching includes a component that documents the similarities between the groups. Both groups are able to demonstrate evidence of principles of evaluation to an equal extent. More specifically, the groups similarly demonstrate an understanding of the importance for both positive and constructive feedback. David, a Spanish major, writes, “I tried to provide a good mix of positive comments and constructive criticism—there is always room to improve.”

Likewise, Bev, a preservice teacher, writes:

If I wrote something they did not do well on, I tried to balance that with a positive comment. I wanted them to have more positive comments or encouraging questions, rather than negative or discouraging comments and/or questions.

Both groups seem to recognize the need for providing an area for improvement while simultaneously encouraging students.

**Knowledge of learners**

A final area that highlights the distinction between the two groups is evidence of knowledge of learners; that is, evidence of individual development, awareness of student needs and learning styles, and personal connection with students. These differences resonate when both groups are asked to provide students with feedback in Spanish on compositions. The Spanish majors often fail to address the students, writing impersonal comments that focus on grammar solely. Sally, for example, never personally addresses the students; instead, she uses the third person to talk about them:
The student used a lot of different verbs like to go, to work, to cut, to visit, to save, to prepare, to leave and to be.

Felipe, another Spanish major, does not personally address the student either. Further, he tends to not write in complete sentences and instead provides disjointed lists of comments, which are generally brief and do not form a cohesive set of feedback. For instance, Felipe’s comments on student compositions consist of a combination of lists and vague comments:

-- Intrusion of English in some words.
-- Conjugation of the verbs
-- The use third person instead of first (Timmy) all the time.
-- Correct punctuation and reduce the first paragraph.

A little longer and improve the ideas.

David also organizes his comments with abbreviated words and English, although he does attempt a personal connection with the students.

Vocab – too much repetition of verbs
-- a lot of conjugation errors

Org – decent organization
-- a few random sentences thrown in the mix

Content – good

Pers. Comments – muy bien, sounds like a good break and some exciting summer plans.

I’d love to hear more about your college plans for next year!! Where in CA??

In David’s reflection for this section, he explains his comments:
Show interest in the students school work as well as their life so they will feel comfortable to come to me w/ any questions about their work, concerns, or life in general.

David expresses his intent to develop a relationship with the student, but his example of feedback is impersonal, short, and leaves room for interpretation.

In contrast to Spanish majors, preservice teachers tend to address the students as individuals by trying to connect with them on a personal level through their comments. These participants also write in more complete sentences, in Spanish, and in paragraphs. For example, Bev writes:

The word for “vacation” is “vacaciones.” Try to organize the events about each topic in a paragraph, together. For example, you can talk about your job at “Gardening Specialists” in one section, and then go on to the next topic. Which movies did you see? Why didn’t you like soccer? It seems like you had a very good summer. Are you going to work at Garden Specialists and at the university next summer? Are you going to be very busy? In her reflection for this task, she explains her comments:

By asking content questions like these, it encourages the students to write more and expand. It also lets them know that I am interested in what they wrote and that I want to know more about them.

Both Bev and David are attempting similar actions. Bev, however, incorporates relationship-building comments throughout her feedback and addresses the student directly instead of referring to the student in the third person.

Although preservice teachers seem to connect with learners better than Spanish majors in general, there is one area where Spanish majors exceed preservice teachers. The Spanish majors
show a greater connection with the students’ affective feelings than preservice teachers. For example, David wants to ensure that students are enjoying themselves while learning. In one of his reflections he writes:

I tried to make [the worksheet task] somewhat entertaining and funny so that the students could enjoy it.

Felipe is also concerned about using the right level of language for the students on the tasks. He expresses an understanding that too high a level of language can be intimidating and frustrating. In his worksheet reflection he writes:

They can also be frightened by the language.

Preservice teachers, on the other hand, do not demonstrate as much evidence that they are thinking of student affective needs.

**Conclusion and Implications**

The testing of foreign language teachers, and specifically the testing of their writing, is an overlooked endeavor. Researchers, teachers, and students have failed to recognize the importance of second language writing proficiency in teaching and in the evaluation of teaching; teachers write tests, worksheets, and comments on a weekly basis and in so doing serve as model writers for their students. This study documents the richness and depth found in preservice teachers’ writing.

Second language teacher writing expresses language ability while at the same time revealing knowledge of teaching and learners; that is, it is a manifestation of PCK. The instrument in this study successfully assessed preservice teachers’ and Spanish majors’ PCK as demonstrated in writing for the classroom. It effectively discriminated between groups while at the same time demonstrating degrees of respondents’ PCK. Each participant in this study
articulated a different stage of PCK, which was expected since the development of PCK is thought to be continual (Cochran et al., 1993; Wing, 1993). That is, PCK is not an “all or nothing” phenomena; it develops over time and may develop due to powerful forces along the path to becoming a teacher.

Teacher education programs are one such force, although their effect on the development of teachers continues to be a contentious issue. This study implies that teacher education programs could very well assist in the development of PCK and, therefore, may be a critical contributor to teacher knowledge.

In a quantitative analysis, preservice teachers in this study outperformed the Spanish majors in 16 of the 18 items. Qualitatively, they also outperformed the Spanish majors. These findings suggest that preservice teachers have more fully developed PCK. Not only did the preservice teachers outperform the Spanish majors quantitatively on the assessment overall, they performed as well, if not better, on the Spanish language section, a surprise given the findings of Elder, et al. (1995). These findings reinforce that “PCK is tied directly to subject matter concepts but is much more than just subject matter knowledge” (Cochran et al., 1993, p. 264). Thus, adequate second language proficiency is a necessary component of PCK but not sufficient.

**Limitations and Future Research**

There are limitations to the present study that must be considered. The quantitative results are tentative due to the small numbers of Spanish majors and preservice teachers that participated in the study. Further, the fact that the students involved in the study were from the same university limits the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the large standard deviations indicate the need to revisit the rubric and, more specifically, the task fulfillment
portion of the scale. This study needs to be replicated with a larger sample and a revised rubric to strengthen the findings reported.

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the current understanding of Spanish teacher PCK and to document how PCK is manifested in Spanish teacher writing tasks. Future research is needed to further explore not only the general development of PCK, but its development within the field of language teaching. More research is also needed in second language teacher writing and speaking, the other productive language skill.

Additionally, it would be interesting to further understand how practicing teacher PCK compares to preservice teacher PCK. Questions worthy of investigation include: How does PCK differ in first year practicing teachers from that in more experienced teachers? How does previous teacher education and professional development activities influence (or not influence) the development of PCK in practicing teachers?

Finally, teacher testing is a complex endeavor that continues to grow in importance as the political atmosphere calls for increased accountability. It is hoped that the much-needed research into foreign language teacher testing, including alternative assessments, will be conducted to inform future test development.

This study has attempted to answer the call for meaningful assessment of language teacher performance. The results, when compared with Elder et al. (1995), are somewhat surprising. It would be of great benefit to both the language teaching and teacher education communities to continue to investigate the effectiveness of tests designed specifically for teachers, especially given the current political environment of accountability.
Appendix A: Sample test task

Task one: Writing a worksheet

Section I

You are preparing a worksheet on direct object pronouns to hand out to your class. The worksheet will contain one exercise in the form of a dialogue. The dialogue must contain five full sentences in Spanish. The speakers, Marta and Juan, are preparing for a trip. Be sure to provide an appropriate answer that corresponds to the overall theme of this test.

Here is an example of a possible dialogue. This example consists of two full sentences.  
Marta: Did you pack my shirt?
Juan: Yes, I packed ______________.

Write five full sentences in Spanish in the form of a dialogue for a worksheet.

Section II

Reflect in English or Spanish on what you have written. Explain why you wrote what you did, decisions you made, and how your response to Section I demonstrates knowledge of learners and effective teaching.

Write five full sentences in English or Spanish to explain your pedagogical choices in writing the worksheet.
Table 1: Descriptive statistics

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Table 2: Characteristics of selected test takers

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References


