

Vidalicia Lopez-St. John
Grade 12
Albany High School
Teacher: Pam Lim-McAlister
vidalicial22@ausdk12.org

Connection Is The Purpose

Because I am part of a Spanish-speaking family, the language was present throughout my childhood. My mom's family is from El Salvador, all fluent in Spanish. I picked up key phrases and pronunciation as I grew up, but I mostly spoke English. I remember my mom teaching me specific words or phrases in Spanish when I was little, such as "servilleta" and "dame permiso". But a language is so much more than scattered words, and I wanted to learn.

I started taking Spanish classes in middle school and the entry-level material was easy for me. But once I reached the extent of my preexisting knowledge, I ran into a learning block. The new material was much more difficult for me to understand and I was embarrassed for having assumed that it would all be easy. After that, I made a stronger commitment to my studies. For a long time, I felt like I wasn't making any progress. My speaking voice felt stiff and sluggish whenever I talked, and I wondered to myself, "Will it ever feel natural?"

Then in high school, I noticed a change. I was starting to become familiar with the words I was using and I was starting to communicate more smoothly. I remember a phone call with my grandma, where we were talking in Spanish. The conversation wasn't complicated and my speech was still a bit shaky, but my words were more confident. It was my first time speaking in only Spanish to my grandma and I was overjoyed. To this day, I remember that phone call as an important milestone. My grandma is fluent in Spanish and English, so it wasn't as if we couldn't talk before. My reason for studying Spanish isn't just to communicate. Communication is the goal, but connection is the purpose.

Last year, my grandma told me the story of how she learned English. She came to America in the 70s and became fully immersed in the language. She even went to night school and took English courses. Hearing about her experience was inspiring and it gave me confidence that my Spanish would get better with time. By practicing Spanish, I want to show my grandma and my family that I'm willing to put in the work to communicate with them better. It doesn't feel totally "natural" yet, but I'm proud of all the progress I've made since I started. I plan to continue my studies after I graduate because studying Spanish has enriched my life and become a way for me to connect with my family and show them my love.

