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It is said that events early in life will shape a person's future. Personal experiences in my youth motivated me to become a teacher. As a child, I was privileged to have had teachers who instilled in me an appreciation for learning. Their influence encouraged me to become a lifelong advocate of education. I believe that my background, experience as an educator, and ability to speak two languages have given me the opportunity to pursue my goal, which is to inspire students to learn a second language. All of these things have given me the ability and motivation to pass these values on to future generations.

One of the most trying challenges that a person can encounter is to integrate themselves into a region where they do not know the language. This was so for me when I first arrived in the United States. It is hard for a person not to understand the language and express thoughts and feelings. It is just as difficult to take advantage of employment opportunities, even if one is qualified. That was very much the case for me when job searching in the United States.

The lesson to take away from these experiences and life challenges is to recognize how important it is to be able to speak not only English but a second language as well. This very notion drove me to be an educator and would allow me to share the beauty of my first language—Spanish—with non-native Spanish speakers. My determination to pursue my lifelong goal of becoming a foreign language teacher was based not only in my desire to teach but also to help children and families facing similar challenges.

Being an educator for twenty years has provided me with great experiences and an opportunity to pass my knowledge of the Spanish language and Hispanic culture to my students. I consider myself fortunate to be able to teach in a multicultural city and at a school where I can guide the students through preparations in Advanced Spanish, Regents programs, and all other levels of Spanish courses. Always guiding me in my efforts, my desire to continue helping students to pursue their education in Spanish is of utmost importance.

Globalization and technological advances underscore the importance of understanding and speaking at least two languages, particularly Spanish. The United States now has the second largest Spanish-speaking population in the world, and knowing Spanish can open doors for people to pursue careers that demand bilingualism. As a mother of two college graduates, I have seen the benefits of being bilingual in their lives. Their knowledge of a second language has helped them succeed in the business and sports worlds.

I came with a dream not much different than many who immigrate to the United States and had to conquer obstacles to make the "American Dream" a reality. Ultimately, I overcame these challenges and became a secondary education Spanish teacher, accomplishing a part of my dream. My many years of diligence and dedication came to fruition in this past year. I was the first Hispanic New York teacher to win the AATSP Outstanding Teacher of the Year award. Moreover, in 2013, I was honored with the "Outstanding Teacher of the Year" award for the New York City AATSP Chapter. I am very proud to receive these awards. My motivation and dedication gave me the power to set and accomplish my goals. I would like to keep contributing to the success of the rising generation and society generally through the continuous teaching and learning of a second language—Spanish.



María del Pilar García is the AP Spanish Teacher at Bayside High School and also teaches in the College Advantage Program at St. John's University. She was the 2014 AATSP Outstanding Teacher of the Year (Secondary Level). One of her students wrote that Ms. García "makes her classes become like a family; we all share our experiences and make sure each one is equally appreciated."