Title of Project:
Investigating the Construct of Topical Knowledge in a Scenario-based
Assessment Designed to Simulate Real-Life Second Language Use

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Project Summary:
Recently, there has been a call to broaden the construct of language proficiency to better represent the everyday language use in the modern society. Having an appropriate level of knowledge on the topic in all forms of communication has become one of the determining factors in second language (L2) learners' successful demonstration of their communicative language ability in real-life situations. Seeing the importance of including topical knowledge as part of the broadened construct of L2 proficiency, the purpose of this dissertation is to investigate the construct of topical knowledge in L2 communicative ability through a purpose-driven scenario-based assessment.

Building on the *CBAL*TM English language arts competency model, the current study assesses high-intermediate L2 learners' ability to build and share knowledge in a highly contextualized scenario. Test-takers will "collaborate" with two simulated characters to learn about a topic and write an informational text to convey what they have learned. Test-takers' L2 reading and listening comprehension is assessed as they build their knowledge of the topic, and their L2 writing ability is assessed as they fulfill the goal of the scenario. In addition, test-takers' topical knowledge is assessed both before and after the language tasks to identify what test-takers already know, and whether they develop relevant topical knowledge during the course of solving the scenario challenge. Given that the feature of having simulated characters to collaborate with test-takers is a novel test characteristic, this study also aims to evaluate the added value of embedding such a feature in an L2 assessment.