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Fabiola Milla Kimble

Otterbein University, fabiola.milla@gmail.com

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DESIGNING A CURRICULUM TO ENGAGE HERITAGE SPEAKERS IN A
SPANISH CLASSROOM

Fabiola Milla Kimble

Otterbein University

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts of Education
degree

Dr. Daniel Cho
Advisor

Signature

Date

Dr. Kristin Bourdage
Second Reader

Signature

Date

Dr. Adele Weiss
Third Reader

Signature

Date

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ABSTRACT

The number of Heritage language learners (HLLs) is growing steadily in the United States. These students are not challenged by the foreign language curriculum. These students provide unique challenges that a Spanish foreign language(FL) classroom is not prepared for. The aim of this research is to provide tools to teachers who will have to teach HLLs to help develop a curriculum specifically designed to meet these unique needs.

SECTION ONE

Introduction

According to the United States Census Bureau, the population of U.S. Citizens that speak Spanish in their home has grown from 28 million (2000) to 41 million (2015) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). This growth has not shown to be limited to traditional locations of concentrated Spanish-speaking population. Spanish-speaking populations have grown across every state, with large population growth in the midwest (Russel and Kuriscak, 2015) and many southern states (Pascual y Cabo and DeLaRosa-Prada, 2015). This rate of growth is not expected to slow down with some estimates expecting 128 million Spanish speakers by 2060. With this growth in Spanish speakers comes a proportional growth in heritage Spanish learners.

Heritage Spanish speakers are defined by Valdes (2000) as “a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language” (pg.1). When these students enter a Spanish classroom and become heritage language learners (HLLs), they bring with them varying levels of language proficiency and different needs than traditional second language (L2) learners.

Defeo (2015) describes a generational shift in language proficiency among immigrants and descendants of immigrants. While the immigrants themselves tend to speak Spanish, their children are typically bilingual, and their grandchildren typically

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identify as English speakers. When asked these individuals, regularly describe feeling embarrassed by their lack of connection to their heritage language due to the close association of language and culture. Bayramova (2016) describes the connection between language and culture as inseparable, stating that the relationship to culture helps to facilitate understanding through non-verbal cues of communication.

All of these factors signify that heritage speakers will continue to come to our classrooms in greater numbers looking to deepen their language acquisition. This has been consistent with my experience teaching in a suburban high school. Each year, there seem to be more heritage speakers than the year before. Although the growth locally doesn't meet the rate of growth nationally, it is increasing at a significant rate. We need to be prepared to meet the needs of these students in a different way than a curriculum designed to introduce Spanish provides.

I have noticed during my time teaching Spanish that heritage speakers are not challenged by current curriculum standards. These standards are not designed to deepen or broaden the language of students who are exposed to Spanish at home on a regular basis. As a result, heritage speakers tend to be unmotivated to excel. Despite their advanced level of competence in the target language (Spanish), they typically underperform students that are new to the language. This lack of motivation can be attributed to the structure and purpose of the curriculum and the pace of advancement. These students are ready to advance before the rest of the class is.

Current methods of helping to motivate and challenge these students is simply to move them up a level in Spanish (from Spanish 2 to Spanish 3, for example). This does not account for all four phases of language learning: reading, writing, speaking, and

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listening. While these students are typically exposed to spoken Spanish at home, they are not regularly exposed to written Spanish. This leaves them at the same level as students who are new to Spanish in both writing and reading Spanish. As a result, moving them up a level in Spanish may cause more difficulty as they do not have the scaffolding necessary for written communication. It may be better to design a curriculum for these learners within the existing framework in order to differentiate their learning experience based on their high readiness levels for deeper Spanish language study.

A specialized curriculum utilizing specially tailored exercises and assessments to facilitate greater language acquisition in these students and facilitate a lifelong connection to their ancestors and their culture that cannot be overestimated. It provides validation to these students and their heritage in a rapidly shifting political environment where language debates often serve as a proxy to disguise the racism in discussions about national unity (Defeo, 2015).

As a native speaker whose children will become heritage speakers, this issue is very important to me. Providing these students with a challenging and engaging curriculum will help to build a classroom in which they feel more included.

The purpose of this capstone project is to create a curriculum that is designed for heritage Spanish speakers in a Spanish 2 classroom. The research question that guides this capstone project is: Heritage speakers are unchallenged in current high school Spanish classrooms. How do we develop a curriculum to meet the differing needs of these students?

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SECTION 2

Literature Review

Heritage Language Learners

Russel and Kuriscak (2015) define a heritage language learner (HLL) as a student who “is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language.” (pg. 414). While immigrants may choose to remain dominant in their native language and only use English when necessary, their children typically predominantly become speakers of the societal language (English). (Pascual y Cabo, D. and DeLaRosa-Prada, 2015).

Not including undocumented immigrants, the U.S is currently home to more than 55 million Hispanic people. This makes the U.S. home to the second largest Hispanic population in the world, trailing only Mexico. This growth is expected to continue. The U.S. Census estimates that by 2060, 1 in 3 households in the U.S. will be Hispanic and the U.S. will be home to 128 million Hispanic people (Raymond, 2012).

This growth is not isolated to the areas traditionally thought of as having a dominant Hispanic population like Texas, Miami, New York or Los Angeles County where nearly half of the population are Spanish speaking (Raymond, 2012). This growth is happening in areas that are not thought of as Hispanic cultural centers such as Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina (Pascual y Cabo, D. and DeLaRosa-Prada, 2015), and

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Indiana which saw an 89% increase in Hispanic population in the last census (Russel and Kuriscak, 2015). This growth makes addressing the varying educational needs of HLLs an issue a national issue rather than an isolated geographic issue.

While many first-generation immigrants are considered native speakers, they represent only 11% of the Hispanic population. Eighty-nine percent of all Hispanics are considered HLLs (Russel and Kuriscak, 2015). Spanish HLLs present unique challenges in a second language (L2) classroom. HLLs are not a homogeneous group, often times owing to diverse culture, differing cultural dialects, and varying levels of language proficiency (Pascual y Cabo, D. and DeLaRosa-Prada, 2015). They often exhibit gaps in language proficiency that traditional L2 language learners or native speakers may not have. These gaps lead to communicative difficulties (Raymond, 2012) including difficulties with noun gender, pace of grammatical development, and verb mood (Russel and Kuriscak, 2015).

Additionally, many HLLs speak a dialect that is not reflected in the standard L2 classroom where Castilian Spanish is largely considered to be more correct and proper. This has an unintended consequence of invalidating the dialects spoken in the HLL's home and disenfranchising them in the process (Cole-Ritchie and Lugo, 2010). Oftentimes, these students have grown up speaking a regional dialect with their elders and one more closely resembling Spanglish with their friends and similar age family members. For example, students in Los Angeles County, California largely speak a dialect unique to the area that has been shaped primarily by typical Mexican dialects with influences from Central America and even English (Raymond, 2012). In an L2 classroom, a typical Spanish teacher may consider this dialect improper or incorrect.

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These difficulties often lead to frustration for both teacher and student because the high school language classroom is designed for L2 acquisition and not for deepening the understanding and acquisition of the language.

Heritage Language Learners in Traditional Foreign Language Classes

No Child Left Behind emphasizes English-Only learning (Coles-Ritchie and Lugo, 2010). News media, lawmakers, and local political discourse often times describe bilingualism as problematic (Coles-Ritchie and Lugo, 2010). In the current shifting political environment, language debates often serve as a proxy for racism in discussions about national unity (Defeo, 2015). Additionally, Potowski (2010) lists several common misconceptions of bilingualism: immigrants don't learn English; immigrants don't try to fit into the American culture; and language diversity threatens national unity. These combine to create an environment where there is often a negative perception of Spanish speaking immigrants (Pascual y Cabo, D. and DeLaRosa-Prada, 2015).

Despite the fact that their needs that differ from L2 learners and native speakers, HLLs regularly share a classroom and curriculum with either or both (Pascual y Cabo, D. and DeLaRosa-Prada, 2015). While many post-secondary institutions offer classes created for and focused on the unique needs of HLLs, these classes are largely non-existent in the typical secondary school (Russel and Kuriscak, 2015). That is why it is important to construct a methodology for effectively aiding HLLs in heritage language acquisition.

Because HLL students have a wide variation in their familiarity and proficiency in the heritage language, HLL classrooms needs to be able to effectively test student

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language proficiency to best meet their needs. Russell and Kuriscak (2015) advocate for testing that encompasses both oral and written skills, uses authentic source material, reflects local culture, allows for varying dialects, considers the HLLs background, as well as cultural and linguistic issues.

HLL students need a curriculum that will highlight their strengths and strengthen the development of their reading and writing proficiency (Coles-Ritchie and Lugo, 2010). Classrooms should be modeled after English Language Arts classrooms where the objective is to deepen understanding and language acquisition rather than introduce the basic fundamentals of the language (Russel and Kuriscak, 2015). Teachers in an HLL classrooms should recognize dialectical differences and not insist upon one predominant dialect being correct (Coles-Ritchie and Lugo, 2010).

Heritage Language Learners Context in Language Instruction

In order to deepen heritage speakers' understanding and provide support for writing, instructors must understand that context is an important piece in determining how language is used for a given situation (Granfell, 2012). Because literacy is a cultural process it must be supported by appropriate social and cultural access to increase student engagement in acquiring the new language (Danzak, 2011).

Danzak (2011) asserts the importance of social identity and cultural acquisition. How the students identify themselves socially influences their literacy practice and their investment in an assigned writing exercise. Students are more receptive to texts and writing exercises when they feel they are closely related to their own interests. For example, a student who shows interest in sports will likely be more

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invested in a writing exercise that examines the history of the World Cup than in an exercise that has no ties to their personal identity. A student who shows interest in fantasy stories such as “Game of Thrones” may show more interest in a creative writing exercise. In essence, a one-size-fits-all approach to writing exercises is not an effective method to improve student writing. Students should be provided with a variety of options in order to gain their interest in the writing exercise.

Danzak (2011) highlights the importance of embracing a shift in literacy learning from an instructional practice to a cultural practice. In order to support this shift, writing exercises should have a connection to students’ background knowledge, interests, and lives. Classrooms should be culturally responsive and encourage the students to use their voice while providing choices for writing exercises. Educators should encourage student interaction, peer review, and questioning of written texts as regular classroom exercises (Hamann & Meltzer, 2004).

All of these can be accomplished through autobiographical writing exercises or student developed identity texts (Danzak, 2011). These texts can be presentational assignments or essays. They can involve fictional stories or autobiographical accounts of true events. Identity texts encourage engagement, involve active use of background knowledge, and incorporate student self-identities, thus, providing context for the writing exercise.

The common thread among all of these different studies is that the key to improving writing is student engagement. Gaining the students’ interest and investment in the writing is a critical piece of successfully improving writing. The studies all support

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the idea that a curriculum designed for a student to exercise choice and express identity can provide this engagement and investment.

Effective Cognitive and Memory Strategies

Effective instruction on how and when to use memory and cognitive strategies have been shown to benefit heritage speakers (Olivares-Cuhat, 2010). Some examples of cognitive strategies are summarizing and translating academic texts. Strong vocabulary reviews, placing new words in context, and highlighting key words as memory strategies. In a study of a Spanish class with a mix of second language (L2) learners and heritage/native speakers, Olivares-Cuhat (2010) found that students showed considerable improvement in academic writing using these strategies.

While these strategies substantially benefit students' ability to effectively use written communication, it is difficult to monitor which strategies students are employing as these strategies cannot be directly observed. Olivares-Cuhat (2010) recommends using think aloud protocols and self-report surveys. While Olivares-Cuhat (2010) utilized these strategies in order to determine what strategies were most effective, they can also be employed to highlight areas where the students may need explicit instruction on effective strategies.

These cognitive strategies are supported by a study conducted by Delor Mbeudeu (2017). In a study of a bilingual two-way class of both French and English speaking students, Mbeudeu found that introducing translation based activities, despite negative opinions held by language instructors, provided multiple benefits. Students' writing became more accurate, they developed more sociolinguistic competence, and students

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showed more motivation to learn the language to eliminate the need for L1 to be a gateway to L2.

Mbeudeu (2017) found that proper use of translation based activities aid in the development of L2 accuracy, clarity, and flexibility. He found that in written communication, the focus on accuracy becomes key, specifically when using specialized terminologies associated with academic writing. In the drive to improve accuracy, Mbeudeu (2017) concludes that translation activities are unavoidable if the goal is to have students successfully use written communication.

Applying L1 Skills to L2 Learning

According to Raheem (2018), one difficulty L2 learners face is the different relationship between phonemes and graphemes. Raheem indicates that a heritage student may have the correct academic vocabulary to use in a conversation, however, due to grapheme differences, they may not feel comfortable using the vocabulary in academic writing. He goes on to suggest that strategies used to improve L1 can directly be used to improve L2 writing. Raheem suggests that having many methods of input, reading heritage language texts, and relying on context for word meaning rather than a definition are skills that will help overcome heritage language writing difficulties.

When following these strategies, Raheem (2018) indicates that there will be a positive transfer of skill from L1 to L2 where the learner identifies these strategies as independent of language. To aid in this positive transfer, explicit instruction in these methods of deriving meaning from context is needed..

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A similar approach is taken by Munoz-Luna (2015). In a study of 200 English Language Learners at a Spanish university, she discovered that those students who were more successful writing complex sentences used strategies similar to those they would use writing in L1.

Pre-writing strategies play an important role in student writing in both L1 and L2. Students should be encouraged to create a list of key words, specialized terminologies, and concepts that they would like to include in their writing. This will help them to focus their ability to produce a text that expresses their information in an appropriate way.

Students should be encouraged to outline their product. The outline will allow them to organize the academic discourse so that related ideas are explored thoroughly and new ideas are connected in a logical way.

Finally, understanding that “writing is a cyclical process” (Munoz-Luna, 2015) is paramount to successful writing. Munoz proposes that students should not expect to produce a completed product on the first pass. Instead, they should expect to follow a process of drafting, proofreading, and revising. They should expect to continually shape and reframe their ideas to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the topic.

Munoz-Luna (2015) advocates for explicit instruction in these strategies in the L2 classroom. Instead of relying on these strategies being carried over from primary L1 instruction, targeting these strategies has shown to provide L2 writers with the tools necessary to produce deeper and richer written texts.

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Curriculum Development for HLLs

A review of literature surrounding curriculum development for HLLs provides a patchwork of difficulties. HL teachers must navigate these difficulties to successfully support these learners unique and various needs. Various proficiency levels, differing objectives, and unique student motivations of combine to create an environment where curriculum needs to be individualized to be successful (Kondo-Brown, 2010).

While a typical mainstream FL classroom has students of similar proficiency in all phases of communication (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), an HL classroom will have students with varying proficiency (Valdés, 2006). Some of these students may have near native-speaker level fluency when speaking but little instruction or competency in literacy skills (reading/writing) (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). The level of fluency has a direct correlation to when the dominant language, in this case English, was introduced (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). Generally speaking, the earlier an HL student was introduced to the dominant language, the less proficient they have in the HL. This combines to create an “unbalanced development of spoken and written language” (Kondo-Brown, 2010, pg. 30).

An HL focused classroom also has different objectives from a mainstream FL classroom. Where a FL teacher is typically focused on introducing new language, vocabulary and concepts to students, an HL teacher’s primary focus is deepening, enriching, and building on the existing linguistic and cultural competence (Valdés, 2006). Building linguistic and cultural competence is important to the classroom and to the HL community. When surveyed, HLLs typically have overwhelmingly positive opinions about the HL. Students and HL community members alike feel that competence

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in the HL provides them with an opportunity to form deeper connections with their family and the HL speaking community.

Additionally, students have different motivations for entering an HL classroom. Some students join the classroom due to familial pressure. Other students want to deepen their cultural connection to the HL by being able to explore literature and other media (Kondo-Brown, 2010). Others still are interested in deepening connections within their HL community and with family who do not speak the dominant language (Carreira & Kagan, 2011).

Enrollment of HLLs into FL classrooms has increased dramatically over the last several years. This increased enrollment is largely due to an unprecedented growth in immigration (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). Even conservative estimates project that the U.S. will have more people who identify as bilingual speakers than those that do not by 2060 (U.S Census Bureau, 2017).

The unique needs and motivations of HLLs combined with increased enrollment create an environment where a focused and informed pedagogical approach needs to be developed (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). In the United States, unfortunately, because research on HL acquisition has been stifled by cultural biases, little research on language acquisition exists (Kondo-Brown, 2010). Where research does exist, it typically falls into one of two categories: content-acquisition in two-way bilingual immersion schools or community-based afterschool HL instruction. Each of these offer unique challenges (Kondo-Brown, 2010).

In a two-way bilingual immersion school, HL speaking and English-speaking students are enrolled in a school that offers content instruction in both languages (Marian,

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Shook, & Schroeder, 2013). These immersion programs typically take place in elementary school only. Research surrounding these schools typically focuses on content acquisition instead of language acquisition (Kondo-Brown, 2010).

Kondo-Brown (2010) describes community-based HL instruction as typically conducted informally by members of the HL community. The curriculum in these settings varies widely. Additionally, there has been no correlation found between length of time in community-based instruction and language proficiency. This is believed to be primarily due to the teachers in these settings having little to no pedagogical background or instruction. Despite these flaws, parents express overwhelmingly positive impressions of a community-based approach to HL instruction. This is because parents feel that a community-based approach helps maintain and deepen a link to their heritage and culture.

On the other hand, HLLs express a feeling of being burdened by a pressure to participate in community-based HL learning. This is especially true of older students as the requirements of mainstream school and the demands of extra-curricular activities require more of their time (Kondo-Brown, 2010). This leads to students leaving the community-based instruction as they get older.

In the face of all these research challenges, some similarities of a successful HL curriculum emerge. Many features of a successful HL curriculum mirror those used in English Language Learner (ELL) classrooms. Others are similar to an elementary school classroom. Others still are similar to approaches used with students with learning disabilities.

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One suggestion made by Carreira and Kagan (2011) and Kondo-Brown (2010) is a multi-level teaching approach. This approach is typically found in both ELL and elementary classrooms. These methods provide teachers with flexibility and differentiation opportunities when teaching students with varying proficiency. Some examples include: grouping students for better engagement, offering independent study, electronic learning centers, culturally inclusive classroom content (Carreira and Kagan, 2011), project-based learning, and computer assisted instruction (Kondo-Brown, 2010).

Another suggestion is a community-focused approach to HL instruction (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). This approach is primarily in use in ELL and when teaching students with learning disabilities. Community focused classroom activities involve interactions with family and members of the community. This may be to collect cultural artifacts (i.e. stories, fables, lullabies, etc.) from parents or other members of the community. A community focused classroom encourages finding meaning in the community from which the student comes. This provides validation and acceptance of the community which, in turn, helps to provide a strong partnership between school and family.

Klee and Barnes-Karol (2006) advocate for incorporating content-based instruction in the HL with a focus on acquiring content instead of language acquisition. This approach is also recommended by Kondo-Brown (2010). Language acquisition, therefore, happens secondarily rather than directly in these settings (Klee & Barnes-Karol, 2006). This is especially successful when teaching historical, cultural, or identity content that is specific to the HLLs' own identity (Kondo-Brown, 2010). The belief is that providing a useful context for language use increases learner engagement (Klee & Barnes-Karol (2006).

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Additionally, a classroom that uses a learner-centered approach can help to overcome the challenge of varying motivations and proficiencies (Kondo-Brown, 2010). In a learner-centered classroom, the learner should be considered the center point and decision maker for both content and form of language teaching. Where there are disagreements in expectations between the learner and the teacher, the teacher should use negotiation to align the students' expectation with course requirements. When using this approach, it is critical that the teacher learn the background knowledge and goals of the students in order to align the curriculum with the students varying backgrounds and competencies.

Even without these approaches, evidence suggests that the most important part of an HL classroom is that it is separate from an FL classroom. Evidence from post-secondary HL classrooms and mixed HL/FL classrooms shows that even in scenarios where instruction is not individualized to meet the specific learner's level of competency, the HL classroom learners outperform their peers in a mixed HL/FL classroom (Kondo-Brown, 2010). Literacy and communicative acquisition are dramatically improved by separating HLLs from FLLs.

Throughout the literature review, a picture of a successful HL instructor formed as well. A successful HL instructor does not need to be someone who is from the HL community. Instead they simply need to be someone who emphasizes community importance, gets to know the community and its members, gets to know the HLLs, and finds a way to connect the HLLs and their community (Carreira & Kagan, 2011).

SECTION 3

Theoretical perspective

How to best support language acquisition for HLLs is an issue of national importance. With the rapid growth of Spanish speaking residents and a concurrent proportional growth in heritage language speakers, there is a need for a curriculum that meets the varying needs of these students.

This issue is very personal for me. As the mother of two heritage Spanish speaking children, I don't believe they will be engaged by today's Spanish language classrooms as they are not designed for deepening language understanding, but instead to introduce Spanish as a second language. Additionally, my experience as a high school Spanish teacher has demonstrated, with few exceptions, that HLLs underperform in that environment. Despite having more experience, greater motivation, and more linguistically immersive home environments, these students are typically less engaged in the coursework.

The presentation of this curriculum is the result of conclusions drawn from my own personal experience and supported by extensive research. My research focused on HLLs, their performance in a traditional L2 classroom, effective methods of language instruction, cognitive and memory strategies, and curriculum development for HLLs. I

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also drew on the experiences of my more tenured coworkers in the World Language department in gathering information from their perspectives.

Based on this research, my own experiences and the anecdotal evidence provided by others in the World Language teaching department, I feel it would be prudent to categorize the curricular needs into four categories. (1) identifying and acknowledging Spanish as a community language, (2) identifying and acknowledging student proficiency differences, (3) developing a culturally responsive classroom environment, and (4) community involvement and service learning.

1) Spanish as a community language

In today's Spanish language classroom, Spanish is predominantly treated as foreign. There is an emphasis on travel to foreign locations as motivation to acquire Spanish with focus largely directed at Spain as the source of legitimate language and culture. Emphasis is also placed on foreign cultural practices and artifacts.

Currently, there is an overwhelming and generally negative perception of Spanish (Pascualy Cabo and Prada, 2018) that suggests that the U.S. national identity is tied to the English language (Lacorte, 2013). Therefore, Spanish bilingualism and national pride or patriotism are treated as mutually exclusive. Additionally, there is a conflicting message in the political rhetoric surrounding discussions of Spanish language. For the middle and upper class, it is seen as beneficial. This is due to the opinion that it is useful for jobs, diplomacy, government positions and in the military (Lacorte, 2013). On the other hand, for the lower class, it serves to set them apart from English speaking students. For the Hispanic community, Spanish is seen as "the language of immigrants" (Pascual y Cabo

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and Prada, 2018, pg. 535) therefore, identifying these students as immigrants even when that is contrary to reality.

This attitude is compounded in the classroom into which students bring their community (Carreira and Kagan, 2011). The foreign language classroom largely treats the local Spanish dialects (or U.S Spanish) as incorrect, primarily identifying Castilian Spanish (from Spain) as correct (Defeo, 2015). This stigmatizes local dialects and variants of Spanish as incorrect or slang (Pascual y Cabo and Prada, 2018) and by extension, stigmatizes the culture and community as foreign. The FL classroom also emphasizes travel to foreign countries and understanding foreign culture as motivation to learn the language. This leads to the Spanish foreign language classroom ignoring the local Spanish speaking community as a whole (Pascual y Cabo and Prada, 2018). By treating Spanish as a foreign language rather than part of the community fabric, the idea of Spanish speaking or bilingual students as “other than” is reinforced.

This practice ignores the daily and domestic use of Spanish (Defeo, 2015). HLLs have daily interactions with Spanish in their own homes and communities. They do not need to travel to foreign countries to experience the language. When surveyed, HLLs overwhelmingly list the ability to communicate and connect with local family and friends as their primary motivation for learning Spanish (Carreira and Kagan, 2011).

HLLs feel their needs are subjugated to the needs of foreign language students (Pascual y Cabo, 2018) because the focus of the course is on introduction to Spanish instead of on deepening their acquisition. As a result, HLL students “identify the curriculum as inauthentic”(Defeo, 2015, pg 117). HLLs regularly express that they feel the failure to include the local Spanish speaking community in discussion about culture

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further highlights their exclusion thus identifying their language, culture, and the students themselves as foreign (Defeo, 2015; Pascual y Cabo and Prada, 2018).

All these factors further disenfranchise and demotivate students (Defeo, 2015). Additionally, HLLs express that they view this as an implicit endorsement of divisive political rhetoric and therefore, hurtful to their personal identities and their communities (Defeo, 2015). They perceive this as being out of sync with the demographic and linguistic reality of the United States (Pascual y Cabo, 2018). Their perception is supported and confirmed by recent Census polls that put the United States second only to Mexico in number of Spanish speaking residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

The solution to all of these issues is to recontextualize Spanish as a community language, rather than a foreign one. As a foreign language, Spanish classes regularly disenfranchise HLLs and fail to meet their varying needs. As a community language, they will demonstrate the usefulness of the language and therefore remotivate HLL student. The Spanish classroom represents an invaluable tool that can be used to counteract the reductive and damaging rhetoric that permeates political discourse (Pascual y Cabo, 2018). By engaging in academic discourse focused on eradicating commonly held misconceptions (i.e. that Spanish speakers are not foreign, but part of the community and that the Spanish language and national pride are not mutually exclusive), the Spanish classroom can be a powerful tool to empower HLLs (Carreira and Kagan, 2011; Pascual y Cabo, 2018).

To present Spanish as a community language, the class will need to emphasize local dialects over foreign dialects (Defeo, 2015; Pascual y Cabo and Prada, 2018).

While many students will never travel overseas, they will find opportunities to use the

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language and experience the culture in local neighborhoods. Being part of a “community of speakers” (Carreira and Kagan, 2011, pg. 59), should be emphasized as motivation to learn Spanish.

This paradigm can be supported by building a meaningful partnership between the educators, students, and community (Belpoliti and Fairclough, 2016). By inviting community members into the classroom as guest speakers, the local representation of the language in use can be showcased (Pascual y Cabo, 2018) and opportunities to use Spanish in the community can be highlighted (Defeo, 2015). This would validate the students, their experiences, their culture, and therefore, their identity.

To present Spanish as a community language, the teacher should acknowledge that there is not one “correct” academic version of Spanish point out that many dialects, including U.S. Spanish, are being used in all contexts including business, conversation, entertainment, and academia (Pascual y Cabo, 2018). These dialects, while built on the same basic linguistic structure, often use different words to represent the same thing or idea (Carreira and Kagan, 2011). For example, a person speaking a Mexican influenced dialect may refer to “popcorn” as “*palomitas de maíz*” where as a Peruvian inspired speaker may say “*canchita*” and a speaker with influences from the Dominican Republic may say “*rositas de maíz*” or “*cocaleca*”. A typical Spanish as a foreign language classroom would emphasize that “*palomitas de maíz*” is the correct way to say popcorn. By contrast, Spanish as a community language would teach that none of these are more valid than another. A flexible approach to language, allowing for local dialects to be recognized and validated, is a key factor to help HLL students engage with the material (Pascual y Cabo and Prada, 2018).

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2) Identifying and acknowledging student proficiency differences

Heritage language learners (HLLs), like all students, bring their experiences with them to the classroom. Linguistically, their proficiency would be affected by these experiences. HLLs come to the Spanish classroom with “high levels of functional proficiency and a cultural connection to U.S. Spanish” (Defeo, 2015, pg.111) They are likely to use Spanish in informal contexts and have very little formal education in Spanish (Carreira and Kagan, 2011). Many of them use Spanish exclusively or nearly exclusively in their home environment (Carreira and Kagan, 2011; Lacorte, 2013). HLLs have varying linguistic characterizations and cultural experiences (Defeo, 2015). All of this results in HLLs coming to the classroom with a varying degree of proficiency.

Despite the predominantly informal use of Spanish in their daily lives, when surveyed, many HLLs describe feeling near native like in literacy (Carreira and Kagan, 2011). This can be attributed to two factors: (1) Spanish is a very phonetic language where phonemes directly correlate to graphemes, thus making the sound-letter correspondence self-evident and (2) first- and second-generation immigrants’ personal experiences inform their opinions regarding the importance of education and literacy, therefore, literacy is valued and taught at home (Carreira and Kagan, 2011).

Due to these varying levels of linguistic proficiency, it is necessary for the educator to properly assess his or her students to identify areas of opportunity. Recent philosophical approaches to student assessment have advocated for the increased use of standardized language assessments, such as the American Council on Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and oral proficiency tests (OPI) but their effectiveness has been called into question when assessing HLLs (Kondo-Brown, 2010).

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Carreira and Kagan (2011) suggest an informal approach to student assessment may be sufficiently effective for determining area of growth opportunity for HLLs. An informal survey designed to help the educator get to know his or her students can provide substantial insight into student background and proficiency. The survey should include questions designed to identify student linguistic experience, such as: Did they immigrate here? If so, how old were they? Where did they immigrate from? If not, was it their parents or grandparents who immigrated? Was Spanish literacy taught at home? Do they speak Spanish in their home? Exclusively or Partially? Do they have any other regular community interactions that occur primarily in Spanish? (Carreira and Kagan, 2011). Additionally, questions about the students' goals and attitudes surrounding their Spanish knowledge can be used to inform curricular decisions.

From this information, it should be possible to use multi-level classroom techniques similar to those found in an ESL classroom. These techniques include the following: electronic learning center, multiple entry journals, independent studies, student grouping, and student portfolios to assess progress.

3) Developing a culturally responsive classroom environment.

In order to effectively teach language, it is critical to acknowledge the symbiotic relationship of language, culture, and personal identity (Pascual y Cabo and Prada, 2018). Vygotsy's view of constructivism indicates that every cultural development happens on a societal level first, then on an individual level (Carreira and Kagan, 2011). This means that societal attitudes towards a language can deeply affect an individual's personal view.

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As a result, a culturally responsive educator must be willing to engage in meaningful discourse with the students about how language and culture are perceived in the community at large. What happens in the classroom does not happen in isolation. It is shaped by dialogue and rhetoric from politicians, news media, entertainment media, and even other classrooms. Leading to HLL students devaluing their own language and dialect and often underestimating its usefulness (Defeo, 2015). When surveyed, HLLs often express that Spanish or their dialect of Spanish in particular were not appropriate for academic or business pursuits (Carreira and Kagan, 2011). By acknowledging these outside influences and disassembling their reductive arguments, they can be stripped of their ability to affect HLLs' views of their own identities.

An effective way to accomplish this would be to identify and discuss the historical and cultural significance of Spanish speaking communities throughout the U.S. How have they affected the development of the United States as it currently stands? What was the role of Hispanics/Latinos during the Civil Rights Era? How have they affected the local culture (i.e. music, food, etc.)? Identifying the impact that Spanish language communities have had, not just now, but throughout the history of the United States, can serve to validate the HLLs language and their culture.

By acknowledging and validating the students' experiences, culture, and language, an educator would, by proxy, validate the students' personal identities (Pascual y Cabo and Prada, 2018). This is a powerful tool to help HLL students reconcile their "awareness of their marginalization [in society] and ...[their] value and pride for their language" (Defeo, 2015, pg. 113).

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4) Community involvement and service learning

As previously stated, building a meaningful partnership between educators, students, and the community is a cornerstone of teaching Spanish as a community language (Belpoliti and Fairclough, 2016). There is a consensus among the research that this can be accomplished by placing emphasis on the community through service learning (Belpoliti and Fairclough, 2016; Defeo, 2015; Kondo-Brown, 2010; Lacorte, 2013; Pascual y Cabo and Prada, 2018).

By encouraging service to the community and encouraging exploration of the local Spanish-speaking community, HLLs will have a meaningful context in which to use the language. This will help to recontextualize the language by demonstrating its usefulness in many different scenarios. This will, in turn, assist in developing the students' linguistic confidence and self-esteem.

Service learning should include meaningful ways to connect with the community. Students can interview members of the community. They can interview family members about their families' history, their immigration story, or the history of their country of origin. These can be used to provide oral histories or essays on class (Carreira and Kagan, 2011; Pascual y Cabo and Prada, 2018). Information from these interviews can then be used to relate to historical context or literary works.

These interviews can also be used to build a meaningful dialogue between educators, HLLs, and the community (Pascual y Cabo and Prada, 2018). Through this dialogue, opportunities can be gained for deeper service projects. Many members of the Spanish speaking community have little proficiency in English. Opportunities to translate for non-English speaking members of the community can help to deepen student

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linguistic confidence and provide opportunities to discuss the historic marginalization of Spanish speaking communities.

Service learning, while supported by the educator, should be largely student driven. HLLs should be encouraged to identify and pursue areas within the community to find meaning opportunities for Spanish immersion (Belpoliti and Fairclough, 2016; Pascual y Cabo and Prada, 2018). This will allow the HLLs to engage in activities of their own choosing and interests which will allow more intellectual growth (Belpoliti and Fairclough, 2016). Additionally, students will be more able to identify how Spanish will fit into their future career goals and help them to identify language as a marketable skill.

Following these four strategies will help to create an enriching and engaging experience for the students. HLL students will gain a deeper understanding of their own heritage and heritage language through implementation of a curriculum that follows these guidelines. As a result, students will find themselves in a more inclusive environment that respects and celebrates their diversity rather than inadvertently minimizing and ignoring their presence and contributions.

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SECTION 4

Instructional Handbook

A Teacher's Guide to Curriculum Development for Spanish Heritage Language Learners:

An examination of useful methods and best practices.

Fabiola Milla Kimble

March 2019

Overview

A heritage language learner is defined as a student who “is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language.” (Russel and Kuriscak, 2015, pg. 414). This definition covers a broad base of students by design. It is intended to allow for varying degrees of proficiency and comfort with the target language while at the same time, recognizing that these students may have regular (sometimes daily) interactions in the target language.

Due to this varying degree of language proficiency, these students will present a range of difficulties in a typical Spanish World Language classroom. These students may be further ahead than other students or may have difficulty in some phases of language. They may have higher expectations for performance put upon them because of their heritage.

While we cannot assume anything about their use of language coming into the classroom, there are some traits that appear to be nearly universal among heritage Spanish language learners. These students are, to some degree, disengaged from the material taught in a Spanish World Language classroom (Pascaul y Cabo and Prada, 2018) where the emphasis is on introduction to a language they already have familiarity with. They regularly express feeling disenfranchised by a curriculum that does not include their local Spanish speaking community (Defeo, 2015). They recognize the demographical shift that has happened over the last few decades that has led to an explosive growth of Spanish language in all corners of the United States (Raymond, 2012).

These similarities are common enough that they can be prepared for. By preparing for these common issues that heritage Spanish language students face, you can provide an environment that will help these students with better outcomes.

The following guidelines are the result of an examination of multiple authors, expert voices in the language acquisition field, surveys of heritage language learners, and colleagues in the World Language education field. In this handbook, you will find suggestions for assessments, lessons, techniques,

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and advice on philosophical approaches. These details are not meant to be all inclusive, but rather, an outline of approaches, backed by research, that will help to develop a curriculum that will be engaging and productive for heritage Spanish language learners.

What is a heritage language learner?

The Ohio Department of Education (2017) states that heritage language learners are typically one of four categories of students:

1. *New arrivals/migrant students*
2. *Foreign-born students who arrived at a young age but have been in American schools for several years.*
3. *Ethnic students who were born in the United States to immigrant parents*
4. *Students who were born in the U.S., but have no one at home with whom they speak the heritage language. The students would like to strengthen their ties to their heritage language and culture. (Ohio Department of Education, 2017, pg. 2)*

If you were to conduct your own research, you would find that the definition for heritage language learners varies greatly by author depending on how broad or narrow it needs to be to fit their purpose. For the purpose of developing a curriculum for heritage language learners, it is best if we keep the definition narrow.

A heritage language learner is a student who has had some meaningful and regular interactions in Spanish and has a cultural connection to the language. For the purpose of the information to follow, the fourth example provided by the Ohio Department of Education (2017) will not be considered. While the student may have an identity, cultural, or familial tie to Spanish, they do not have the requisite language experience and may gain more from a typical Spanish World Language class.

Assessment

Due to the varying degree of linguistic proficiency, a pre-assessment of heritage Spanish language learners is critical to providing an adequate curriculum to meet their needs. An accepted proficiency testing standard, such as STAMP or AAPPL, to determine placement and an IPA to assess the student's proficiency across all four skills and 3 modes of communication is a good place to start but not entirely sufficient.

It is recommended that these proficiency tests should be supplemented by a personal survey (Carreira and Kagan, 2011). This survey can be written or oral and can be answered in either English or Spanish. The Ohio Department of Education (2017) suggests the following list of questions to learn about your students as both individuals and as members of a Spanish speaking community.

- Where were you born?
 - If born outside of the U.S.:
 - At what age did you move to the U.S?
 - Did you attend school in your heritage language?
 - If Yes:
 - Where?
 - For how long?
- What languages can you speak?
- What languages are spoken by your:
 - Mother?
 - Father?
 - Siblings?
 - Grandparents?
- Do you use Spanish in your daily life?
 - If yes:

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- How often? (Daily, Occasionally, Rarely, Never)
- With whom? (father, mother, grandparents, siblings, etc.)
- Do you read and write in Spanish regularly?
- Do you have interactions outside of your family in Spanish?
- Rate your own Spanish proficiency on a 0 (none) to 5 (fluent) in the following:
 - Listening?
 - Reading?
 - Speaking?
 - Writing?
- What is your motivation for learning Spanish?

An example survey questionnaire can be found in Appendix A. While the above questions are sufficient and recommended by the Ohio Department of Education, the attached questionnaire serves to meet the same need while also provide some assessment opportunity. Through the structure of the questions, students are encouraged to use various verb tenses and explore vocabulary knowledge.

The purpose of the personal survey is multi-faceted. It will help inform your curriculum and provide areas of focus. It will demonstrate how much support and background the student may have for language use. Finally, it will help identify potential resources you can draw from when seeking authentic sources.

For example, when it comes time to discuss Venezuelan culture, if you have a student whose parents immigrated from Venezuela, perhaps you can invite them into class to speak to the students. Beyond just providing background information about life in Venezuela, the use of these family members helps to highlight that, as a Spanish speaker, the students are part of a larger, varied, and vibrant community.

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Creating a connection between the heritage language learners and the Spanish speaking community as a whole can help overcome many of the obstacles that these students face in traditional Spanish classes. The feelings of boredom, lack of motivation, and potential behavioral problems can be eliminated by tying the lessons to the real world.

Below are some best practices to help engage heritage Spanish language learners.

Spanish is not a foreign language

Heritage language learners of Spanish would also benefit from a shift in attitudes regarding the idea that Spanish is a foreign language and that Castilian Spanish (from Spain) is the only correct dialect. This attitude and philosophy does not fit with their daily lives and experiences. To them, Spanish is not foreign. It is part of the fabric of their community. It is part of their daily lives. To treat it as foreign, and to treat their dialect as incorrect, can cause the students to feel disenfranchised and alienated by the lesson (DeFeo, 2015).

As a teacher of heritage language learners of Spanish, you should be aware of this perception and consciously make an effort to highlight the use of Spanish in local communities rather than focus on how it is used in foreign environments. A critical aspect of building a curriculum for these students is recognizing that while Spanish is used in many countries across the world and these countries cultures is varied and diverse, it is also used at home, in the supermarket, in church, at work, and in daily interactions in the local community.

How to highlight local use of Spanish

In order to highlight the local use of Spanish, local or regional sources should be considered before looking internationally. That is, look for sources that are from, currently live in, or spent a large portion of their time in the United States. By using these sources, you will demonstrate to these students

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that Spanish is all around them in all aspects of life. Below are some examples.

Authors:

At times, your lesson plan will provide an opportunity to present excerpts from books. In a mainstream Spanish World language classroom, the teacher may select El Cid or works by Miguel de Cervantes and Fernando de Rojas among others. While these are great works and have much to offer, HLL students would be better served by choosing authors who have spent a significant time in the United States. Here are some examples:



Isabelle Allende is a Spanish language author, born in Perú, raised in Chile, and an American citizen since 1993. Her books, such as *La casa de los espíritus* and *La ciudad de las bestias*, include aspects of magic and fantasy. Allende has won multiple awards including Chile's *Premio Nacional de Literatura*. She was awarded a *Presidential Medal of Freedom* by Barack Obama. (Source: <https://www.isabelallende.com/>)

Sandra Cisneros is an American born author whose work has been recognized with awards such as the *Texas Medal of the Arts*, a *MacArthur Fellowship*, and the *National Medal of the Arts*. Born in Chicago, and currently living in Mexico, Cisneros' works of fiction, poetry, and essays (among others) shows a unique perspective. In interviews and throughout her work, she expresses the feeling of "Always straddling two countries...but not belonging to either." This is a feeling many HLL students can relate to. (Source: <https://www.sandracisneros.com/>)



Gloria Anzaldúa was born to ranchers in Texas near the Mexican border. Her work expresses the feelings of marginalization, both socially and culturally. She describes herself as a "chicana dyke-feminist, tejana patlache poet, writer, and cultural theorist." Her seminal work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* uses multiple dialects of both English and Spanish. This was a deliberate attempt to make the book difficult for non-bilinguals to read so that others can experience the barrier of language. (Source:

<https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/167856/Anzaldua,%20Gloria.pdf?sequence=1>)

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Frederick Luis Aldama is a professor at the Ohio State University. He has authored or co-authored more than 30 books that focus on the Latino/a cultural representation in pop culture among other things. He has a monthly Spanish language editorial column in *El Sol de Ohio* called *Historias sin fin*. (Source: <https://english.osu.edu/people/aldama.1>)



There are many other authors whose lives have been shaped by the experience of being part of a Spanish speaking community in the United States. Authors who spent significant time in the many Hispanic communities around the country, including Puerto Rico, should be given priority over foreign authors. When there is an opportunity, HLL students will benefit from using these authors as authentic sources.

Magazines:

Many magazines offer a Spanish language variation that can be subscribed to, digitally downloaded, or in some areas, purchased at the news stand. These sources offer an ability to see Spanish language in use in the marketplace and many use an American dialect. Here are some examples:

People en Español: Originally developed as a Spanish translation of the magazine *People*, in recent years the magazine has shifted focus to Hispanic entertainment and Latino celebrities, along with health and fashion. *People en Español* has the distinction of being the most read Spanish language magazine in the U.S. (Source:



<https://peopleenespanol.com/>)



Hola! USA is a celebrity and lifestyle magazine. It offers articles on celebrities, royals, health & beauty, fashion, and lifestyle. The publication is available in both Spanish and English and offers digital subscriptions as well as print versions. (Source: <https://us.hola.com/magazine/>)

There are many other options for Spanish language publications including GQ, Vanity Fair, and National Geographic. Additional options can

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be found for purchase on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). These magazines can be used as authentic sources to demonstrate the use of Spanish in more casual and commercial settings.

Additional options for readings:

When selecting excerpts for reading, you may need to differentiate the assignment for students who are at different levels. Tools such as www.newsela.com. Newsela is a free service (you must register) that offers articles in both English and Spanish with the ability to change the article to the appropriate lexile level for your students. This will allow multiple students at different levels to read and discuss the same piece of news.

Television, Movies, and News:

Both Univision and Telemundo offer news and various forms of entertainment. Additionally, many mainstream networks offer a Spanish language option or have Spanish language programs on their streaming app. Universo shows Spanish language programs produce by SyFy Network, USA Network, and NBC. HBO has several Spanish language movies available.

Additionally, many of the streaming services have begun to make their own Spanish language content. Hulu, Netflix, and Amazon Prime all have Spanish categories including several award-winning movies.

While many of these programs listed above are not created in the U.S., they are readily available within the U.S. which makes them a part of the local culture.

Music:

The options for music in Spanish from the United States are almost too numerous to list. Latin music has become a staple of mainstream radio for several decades now. Beyond artist who perform in Spanish, there are also artists who release Spanish versions of their English language albums and artists who collaborate with English language artists to produce dual-language recordings.

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When selecting musical excerpts, whenever possible, focus on musicians who are local to the U.S. and discuss the musical style, where it comes from, what the major influences are. Music is an effective way to demonstrate how the local Spanish culture is influenced by the international Spanish culture.

Guest Speakers:

Part of every Spanish language curriculum is the study of cultures of other countries. As a teacher of heritage language learners, you have a unique advantage and the possibility to bring those cultures directly into the classroom. When it comes time to discuss a particular region or culture, review your student questionnaires. You may have a student who lived in that area. You can have them record a short video describing everyday life there. If there is not a student who immigrated from there, one may have relatives that came from that country or region. Bringing them into the classroom to provide a short Q&A session about the area can highlight the local existence of international culture. These Q&A sessions can be recorded for other classes and for use in future years.

Service Learning

Now that you have brought the community into the classroom, it is time to consider taking the classroom to the community. In many areas, the Spanish language community is marginalized by a lack of access. Many forms, documents, and official communications (among other things) are only available in English. The community and students can both be served by providing opportunities for service learning. Here are some examples of ways the students can help:

Food Bank/Pantry:

Food banks and food pantries provide nutrition to underserved and lower income families in many areas. Many times, the donated food has labels that are English only. Students can volunteer time to translate food labels for Spanish-only customers of the food bank.

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Recreation Centers:

Recreation Centers offer a multitude of services at reasonable costs. Recreational sports leagues, swimming pools, exercise equipment, and art classes are just some of the offerings at many facilities. In many areas, these community centers only offer information in English. Students can create a brochure in Spanish describing the offerings and costs.

Library:

For many, a library is a free resource to provide internet access, reading materials, and many other services. In some areas, it is largely inaccessible to Spanish-only residents of the community. Students can volunteer at the library to help design a brochure of library services in Spanish, provide Spanish language labelling for sections, translate the library card application form, or possibly provide a Spanish language “Hot Pick” for the libraries recommended reading section.

The above are just some examples. They may not apply to your particular community. The key aspect is to know your community. Encourage the students to learn where the Spanish speaking community is underserved and be creative with solutions.

There is no “proper” dialect of Spanish

A typical Spanish as a world language course has a mostly singular focus on Castilian Spanish. While some attention is paid to other dialects, many times those dialects are ignored or corrected as if they are unacceptable. Many heritage language learners who spend time in world language classes describe this approach to Spanish as alienating, isolating, and damaging to their own personal identity because of the indelible link between language, culture, and personal identity (Pasual y Cabo and DeLaRosa-Prada, 2015).

These students have grown up listening to a dialect that is not from Spain. The dialect they speak may come from Latin America or may be a unique local blend of Spanish and English, commonly referred to as Spanglish. They may use false cognates to represent words incorrectly. This provides a very unique problem for a teacher of heritage Spanish language learners.

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Despite vocabulary differences, syntax rules are the same in almost all dialects. Verb conjugations, word-gender agreement, adjective placement, etc. remain the same regardless of the dialect spoken.

Context and conversation are key when evaluating the spoken and written work. A student may use a word that is unfamiliar to you in a way that obscures the meaning of the word. In many cases, the definition can be determined through context. When context fails, don't hesitate to ask what the word means. A conversation about the word usage can provide an opportunity to discuss multiple options to express the same idea.

For example if a student were to say “Estaba manejando mi guagua cuando otra guagua me chocó”, the word “guagua” may be difficult to understand. Through context, you can determine that the student was driving something when another of the same item hit him, causing an accident. Through context, you can determine that “guagua” is a vehicle of some kind. While you know it is a vehicle, and can decipher the overall message, you would need to have a conversation with the student to determine exactly what a “guagua” is. The student can then explain that in Puerto Rico, a “guagua” is slang used to describe a small pick-up truck (along with a city bus).

Remember, the purpose of language is to convey an idea, a way of self-expression. It is not meant to be unchanging and static. It is a living, breathing, concept that changes with usage. Specific variations within dialects are too numerous to list. Rely on your context clues and conversations with the students to illuminate the definitions.

Create a culturally responsive classroom

Culturally responsive pedagogy can help guide lesson plans and curriculum. By using the questionnaire provided to students at the beginning of the term, you can begin to develop lesson plans that will not just teach a specific aspect of language, but can also tie to specific cultural artifacts.

For example, when teaching preterite, the lesson plan can be centered around legends from the students own cultural heritage. Students can be provided these legends and asked to summarize them using the preterite and

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imperfect tense. They can be asked to present the legend to the rest of the class. They can be asked to explain the significance of the legend. They can be asked to have their parents or grandparents tell them a legend and share it with their classmates.

In a unit about food, specific cultural dishes can be used to help guide the lesson. A student from Venezuela can be asked to provide a recipe for how their family makes arepas. A student with Peruvian heritage can provide a recipe for lomo saltado.

There are many options to tie lessons to the students' own culture. Be creative and know your students. A culturally responsive classroom allows the students to bring aspects of their culture into the classroom with them. Allow this philosophy to help guide you as you develop specific lessons.

Conclusion

The above is not intended to be an all-inclusive guide. It is to give you a place to start. Your state, district, and administration will have standards and guidelines that must be followed. The philosophies and practices above can help guide the specific way in which you deliver the necessary course requirements to the students. Through these best practices, examples, and philosophical ideas, you can provide an enriching and engaging educational experience to students who have historically been underserved by traditional Spanish world language classrooms.

SECTION 5

Conclusion

The final product of my research is a curriculum development handbook for teachers who wish to create a class for heritage Spanish language learners. This handbook, titled, “A Teacher’s Guide to Curriculum Development for Spanish Heritage Language Learners: An examination of useful methods and best practices” is the culmination of a detailed analysis of existing research and publications from several experienced researchers combined with my own personal experience.

It is my intent that this handbook be used by teachers who recognize and react to a need for a heritage language Spanish course in their district. The best practices, when implemented, should provide a theoretical framework and mindset for educators and administrators to design a curriculum that meets the needs of this growing and diverse population.

While I believe my research has shown that a specialized HLL course is necessary for heritage Spanish speakers, as it is with many best practices and ideological shifts, educators wishing to implement such a course will face challenges. Some of these challenges are external: 1) potential community backlash from those whose political ideology does not align with that of a multi-lingual population; 2) limited resources and time. Other challenges will be internal: 1) acknowledging that their own Spanish dialect is not the only acceptable dialect; 2) allowing the specific lessons and lesson plan to be student driven, based on their own needs, culture, and interest.

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Finally, convincing the administration and school board that such a course is necessary may be the most difficult challenge to implementing a heritage language Spanish course. Adding a course for HLLs would further strain already thin budgets. This course would require that another world language teacher be hired or that Spanish classes be cut to make room for the HLL class. Furthermore, additional funds to purchase specialized class materials may be needed as well. It is my experience, even in districts with better community and support, that education boards and administrators are hesitant to spend money unless the need for the expenditure is well proven.

Ideally, I would like to assist in implementing a heritage language course in my own district. This will allow me to revise and refine the best practices in an applied environment. Through careful revision and successful implementation, I hope to provide a framework for other educators that identify a similar need to have the difficult conversation with administrators and board members successfully.

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