

Savory PURL Grant Proposal

Student: Amanda Holland

Collaborating Instructor: Liza Speece

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Project Description:

With the collaboration of Professor Liza Speece and the non-profit organization L.E.E.R. Family Outreach I have created a language immersion program for heritage speakers of the Spanish language, called *Nuestro Lengua* (Our Language). A heritage speaker is someone that speaks a language in their home or community that is different than the dominant language of the country they live in. This program is for Latino youth ages 7 to 12 who speak Spanish as their first language. After piloting *Nuestro Lengua* last summer as a two-week summer program, we decided to change the format to a 10-week Saturday course, held from 9am to 2pm, which will last from March 17, 2012 to May 19, 2012. After collecting anecdotal data last year, we have reevaluated the format, and made certain changes, but it is our hope in the spring, and with the help of the Savory PURL grant, to more formally evaluate the program in an effort to add to the existing body of knowledge regarding bilingualism and heritage speaker programs.

The focus of the program is literacy and speaking skills in Spanish. The theme, “*Nuestro Mundo/Our World*” will guide the creation of activities and projects for the children to complete as well as creating environmental awareness. The weekly schedule will include silent reading, story time, various educational activities, games, and crafts, as well as a specific grammar or literature focus which will be woven throughout the activities. One important aspect of the program is to make it fun for these children to use their native language and to give them a reason to maintain their bilingualism. This will be accomplished through the fun and educational activities but also through short discussions regarding the importance of bilingualism and how they can utilize it and it will benefit them throughout their lives.

Literature/background review:

One of the over-arching issues in public education today, is the disparity between the academic achievement of students of color and students from diverse linguistic backgrounds versus students from White, middle-class families who speak Standard English in the home (NAEP, 2009). Although the White middle-class has long been seen as the majority, recent studies show that diversity is in fact the new majority (Southern Education Foundation, 2010) in our public schools. In fact, according to the 2010 U.S. Census report, there was an overall increase of the Hispanic population in the U.S. from 13 percent to 16 percent between 2000 and 2010. And more importantly to this study, the Hispanic population in the South has increased to 16 percent, making this group of people, a vital resource to our community in terms of rich cultural and linguistic heritage. However, the increase in diversity, also leads to potential challenges when an educational system is not ready to embrace the present reality with a

willingness to adapt and change to meet the varying needs of students from unique backgrounds.

As previously mentioned, a heritage speaker is a child who was born outside of their parent's country of origin or moved from the country of origin before the age of 8 (Benmamoun, Montrul, and Polinsky). Most often the term refers to children of immigrants who speak a different language such as Spanish as their first language. Typically, the children are learning English in school, not Spanish. This results in children who can speak both languages but often have weak or poor literacy skills in both, because these children are too often asked to leave their home languages at the schoolhouse door without consideration for the importance of home languages, the value that multiple languages could have in classrooms, and the impact of using home languages on students' academic achievement (Nieto, 2010; Cummins, 2000; Valdés, 1996; Gonzalez, 2001).

Because the public school systems have failed thus far to recognize the importance of these children's linguistic abilities, I decided to create *Nuestro Lenguaje* in hopes of not only bettering their academic performance but also encouraging the continuance of their bilingualism. Studies demonstrate that being bilingual has many benefits. The University of Granada recently published findings stating, "bilingualism not only improves attention span, but it also trains the person's memory, like a sort of 'mental gymnastics'" (Valerio, 2011). With the knowledge of two languages children are more prone to an active and healthy mind, leading them to further excel in their academics. Beyond the classroom, bilingualism sustains its importance through the rising need for bilingual workers. These jobs usually come with a higher salary therefore leading those who are bilingual to better jobs and higher wages (Weathers, 2011). Throughout this program I will focus on how bilingualism is important and how having that ability is something to be proud of. I want to help them maintain their native language and culture so that it not only stays with them for the rest of their lives, but so it can also enrich our communities and schools.

Research Questions and Methodology

In order to add to the existing body of knowledge regarding bilingualism and heritage speaker programs for elementary aged children, we will be using the following question to guide our research:

- How does a 10-week immersion program for elementary aged heritage speakers of Spanish improve their desire/motivation to use Spanish in daily life?
 - a. Furthermore, how will such a program improve their reading and writing skills in Spanish?
 - b. Will such a program affect their desire to continue and improve their bilingualism?

We will answer these questions by collecting data using the following methods:

- Entrance and exit survey
- Pre and post test on reading/writing skills in Spanish

- Descriptive data/notes
- Student reflections
- Staff/volunteer reflections

Expected outcomes:

We believe the students' desire to use Spanish will improve, as well as their reading and writing skills in Spanish. In such a short course, we expect that the largest increase will be in motivation, although spelling and grammar will also improve as well as written fluency.

Students' Roles and Responsibilities:

As the director of *Nuestro Lenguaje*, I will be overseeing everything regarding the program and regarding the work of the assistant director, Lea Stapleton. I will also be in charge of gathering the data for this research project. This includes collaborating with Professor Speece and Lea in creating a pre and post test and an entrance and exit survey for the participants of the program to complete. Both Lea and I will be responsible for writing short (1-2 paragraphs) reflections for each day of the program in order to have data from the view point of the program instructors. In regards to the actual program, I will be responsible for creating promotional material and Lea and I will distribute it within the schools and communities that have children who would most benefit from this type of program (with the permission of school administration). Not only will we be planning each day's lessons and activities, but we will also be the lead instructors for each day, with possible help and assistance from volunteers.

Faculty Mentor's Role and Responsibilities:

Ms. Speece will meet with me on a bi-weekly basis to discuss and monitor progress toward the completion of goals, and will be providing access to the non-profit organization L.E.E.R. Family Outreach. She will act as a proofreader for all correspondence regarding the program and will help design, develop, and administer all pre and post tests and entrance and exit surveys, as well as advise on other methods of data collection. Once the data has been collected Ms. Speece will help interpret the findings.

Itemized Budget:

Materials: **\$215.00**

*Set of supplies for 20 students
(crayons/scissors/glue/journals)
Craft Project Materials
Copies
(activities/worksheets/forms)*

Food: **\$200.00**

*Snacks or Lunch for 10 days
(Program is from 9am-2pm)*

Books: **\$150.00**

*Bilingual books/Sets of English/Spanish books
(will support the curriculum and the multiple
silent reading times)*

Advertising: **\$100.00**

Flyers/posters

Gifts for completion: **\$150.00**

*T-shirts
Recycle bags (Environmental theme)*

Transportation: **\$160.00**

*Gas (\$0.33 per mile)
@24 miles a day (10 days) for 2 people*

Digital Camera: **\$175.00**

*FUJIFILM - FinePix S2950
(Capturing photos for presentation)*

Total: \$1150.00

Works Cited

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