

**AN EXPLORATION OF LANGUAGE ACQUISITION
FOR HERITAGE SPEAKERS OF SPANISH**

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"Heritage Speakers have skills that distinguish them sharply from traditional foreign language learners."

UC Guidelines on Heritage Language Instruction

1- Background and Statement of Purpose

Heritage speaker is the term commonly used to refer to *"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"* (Valdés 2000). As stated in this definition, heritage speakers display a wide range of linguistic abilities. At Oxnard College, a high percentage of the student population is comprised of Hispanic heritage speakers with various degrees of ability in Spanish. Some have strong literacy skills and attend the specialized courses our college offers them, such as Spanish R140 and R141. Heritage speakers who can only speak or understand Spanish, but cannot read or write, attend beginning classes together with second-language learners, who have had no previous knowledge of Spanish before attending the class. Regardless of their level, heritage speakers have unique pedagogical needs and present a challenge to instructors, who have been mainly trained to teach Spanish as a second language. **The purpose of this sabbatical is to develop expertise in the area of Spanish heritage speakers' language acquisition, and to create teaching materials to meet these students' specific needs.** I propose that a better understanding of our students' linguistic and cultural profiles, and the materials best suited for them will greatly improve the quality of teaching in our discipline. As a direct outcome, students will have a more rewarding learning experience, whether they attend a specialized class or a mixed class with non-heritage speakers.

Please refer to Appendix A for a glossary of terms used in this proposal.

2- Rationale

- a) Professional Development: Since I started teaching full-time at Oxnard College in 2004, I have been researching the relatively new field of Heritage Speakers' language learning. Resources were few; textbooks with heritage speakers in mind were slowly making their way into the market. Since then, I have been progressively making changes to my curriculum, mostly by trial and error. There is still a strong need for more research in this field and development of new materials and training opportunities for instructors. **In the course of the sabbatical leave, it is my intention to gain a solid theoretical knowledge of heritage language acquisition, as well as to create suitable teaching materials for these classes.**
- b) Value to Department or Discipline: Heritage speakers do not fall neatly into the traditional categories of beginner, intermediate and advanced language learner. Therefore, all Spanish instructors at Oxnard College, regardless of the level they teach, are bound to encounter heritage speakers in their classes. I believe it is worth exploring ways to make some adjustments to our teaching strategies, in order to make the heritage speakers' time in class more productive, without compromising the learning experience of second-language learners. A "differentiated instruction" (Tomlinson 2000), which allows for some differences in pace, tasks, and assessment methods, could work well in a mixed-ability classroom. The writing of a traditional recipe from Latin America is an example of an assignment which allows for a degree of differentiation: beginner students could write a list of ingredients and simple directions using verbs in the infinitive form; more advanced students could use formal or informal commands, and write a brief cultural comment on the dish. The assignment could be followed up by a brief oral presentation. I believe that sharing this type of lesson with colleagues in my discipline will improve the quality of teaching and promote the attainment of student learning outcomes. The

example given above addresses the following course and program-level SLOs: students will write a paragraph in Spanish on a cultural topic; students will respond to a series of questions related to a selection in a written form; students will prepare a 3-5 minute oral presentation on a cultural topic; students will research a cultural topic from the target culture. I also envision the results of my research being useful for the creation of a placement instrument, which has been an ongoing effort in the Spanish Program at O.C.

- c) Value to College and /or District: Oxnard College and Ventura College are Hispanic-serving institutions, enrolling 63.3% and 44.6% Hispanic students respectively (O.C. and V.C. Fast Facts). My sabbatical research would help these students build on the linguistic and/or cultural literacy they already possess. Thus, the development of a heritage speaker curriculum will allow faculty to better serve the community, making classes more productive and satisfying for students with various degrees of proficiency in Spanish. In an effort to make this curriculum available to colleagues, specific lessons and PowerPoints would be posted on SharePoint, as an optional teaching tool for O.C. Spanish instructors. Materials could also be made available to colleagues in the other two colleges through ongoing professional associations and networking opportunities, such as the follow-up meetings of the Summer Institute for Teaching Excellence (SITE).

Please see Appendix B for website addresses.

- d) Value to Students: The majority of students taking Spanish classes at Oxnard College have had some exposure to the language and culture, either because they live in a Spanish-speaking community or grew up hearing the language at home. In some cases, students have had a

secondary or post-secondary education in Mexico. Our community offers countless opportunities for using authentic materials in Spanish relevant to students: advertisements, job announcements, transportation, medical and touristic brochures, radio announcements, etc. Elders in the community have lived through important social times for the county and state, such as the *Bracero* Movement, a migrant working program recently honored by UCCI. Incorporating these authentic materials and personal resources into the already existing materials for heritage speaker classes is very time-consuming. The resulting lessons, though, provide a more meaningful and culturally relevant learning context for students in this community.

- e) Value to Community: It has become increasingly important in our community to have bilingual skills. Heritage speakers, due to their linguistic backgrounds, are in a unique position to reach high levels of proficiency at a relatively fast pace (UC Guidelines on Heritage Language Instruction). After two semesters, many heritage speakers are equipped to start using their skills in a professional setting. Students who successfully complete Spanish courses at Oxnard College often receive better paying jobs in the community, in a variety of areas: teaching, nursing, translation services, the travel and food industries, etc. Furthermore, the teaching of Spanish and of the various Hispanic cultures encourage a better understanding between the African-American, Filipino, White and Hispanic groups in our community.

3- Implementation

- a) Implementation Procedure: Heritage language education is an emerging field, and at this point there are no graduate-level courses offered to faculty. As identified under section 8.6.C (2) of the AFT-VCCCD contract, I plan to start my sabbatical by attending the 2nd International Conference on Heritage and Community Languages, planned for January 2013 at UCLA.

Another excellent resource is the National Heritage Language Research Center (NHLRC), also based at UCLA. I plan complete the two modules of the online workshop offered by this institution, the first on theoretical research and the second on teaching strategies. After the completion of the workshop, I will follow the research leads and networking possibilities offered by the NHLRC to share my experimentation and results with professionals in the field. Next, I plan to create specific lessons on writing composition for heritage speakers. For that purpose, I have contacted two composition experts: Kim Potowsky from the University of Illinois and Cecilia Colombi from UC Davis, to collaborate as mentors for my research. Next, I plan to read books and articles, and extract practical applications for my lessons. Among the titles I plan to consult are *Heritage Language Education: A New Field Emerging*, *Differentiation and the Brain: How Neuroscience Supports the Learner-Friendly Classroom*, "Teaching Spanish to Native Speakers in Mixed Ability Language Classrooms", "The *Abuelos* Project: A Multi-Disciplinary, Multi-Task Unit for Heritage and Advanced Second Language Learners of Spanish", and "The Professional Development of Teachers of Heritage Language Learners: A Matrix."

Please refer to Appendix B for full citations.

- b) Projected Results: One result of this sabbatical leave will be to gain a better conceptual understanding of the way heritage speakers learn the language. Another, will be my writing of a curriculum that takes that knowledge into account to maximize students' learning potential. It is my intention to create lesson plans that acknowledge students' existing linguistic and cultural backgrounds, use a variety of activities to respond to different levels of proficiency, and provide opportunities for community involvement.

I anticipate the creation of the following materials:

- One survey to be given at the beginning of the course, to assess students' linguistic and cultural background, as well as their motivation for taking the course.
- A dozen “differentiated” lessons for the beginner and intermediate levels, with two or more levels of difficulty, followed by their corresponding assignments and assessments.
- Five lessons designed to teach composition techniques to heritage speakers of Spanish, with attention to the lexical and grammatical aspects that are more problematic for this group.
- One community-based project, which could consist of an interview of a Spanish-speaking community member and could be adapted for different levels of difficulty.

Additionally, I plan to revise the SPAN R140 and R141 course outlines, specifically their contents and methods of instruction, and change the course title from “Spanish for Native Speakers” to “Spanish for Heritage Speakers”, since the latter reflects the student population more accurately.

- c) Dissemination Plan: Benefit to Colleagues/Students/College: I will share the results of my research and my lesson plans primarily with colleagues in my discipline by means of a workshop offered during flex week or during the course of the semester. I will post online lesson plans and teaching strategies on SharePoint, to make them accessible for my O.C. colleagues.

Additionally, I see an opportunity to share the outcome of my sabbatical with colleagues in Ventura College through our continuous professional development connection, established during the Summer Institute for Teaching Excellence (SITE) in the summer of 2011. As mentioned previously, students will directly benefit from instruction that takes into account their linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

d) Projected timeline

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<u>Month</u>	<u>Resource</u>	<u>Task</u>
<u>January</u>	-Attend the 2nd International Conference on Heritage and Community Languages, UCLA, date to be determined.	-Research differences in language acquisition for heritage speakers and second language learners.
<u>February</u>	-Complete Online Heritage Teacher Workshop (NHLRC) <u>Module 1: Heritage Language Learners Profiles and Definitions.</u>	-Compare the profile of the average heritage speaker with the average heritage speaker at OC. -Create a survey to understand students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds.
<u>March</u>	-Complete Online Heritage Teacher Workshop (NHLRC) <u>Module 2: Strategies for Heritage Language Learners.</u>	-Develop 5 composition lessons for the heritage speaker classes and gather authentic materials with connection to the community.
<u>April</u>	-Research the data base of classes and programs and other institutions through the Heritage Language Research Institute.	-Adapt 10-12 lesson plans for the beginner and intermediate levels, to include some degree of differentiated instruction.
<u>May</u>	-Discuss and exchange findings and teaching materials with professors Potowski, Colombi and other professionals in the field.	-Develop one community-based project for the heritage speaker classes, which could be adapted for the beginner and intermediate levels, as well.

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- Submit written report to the President.
- Present sabbatical project results during Flex Week.
- Post lesson plans and community project on SharePoint.
- Share results with Ventura College colleagues through SITE.

4- Past Contributions to the District

- a) Scholarship: I continuously seek opportunities to expand my field. Since being hired by Oxnard College, I have completed a certificate in Translation and Interpretation, and a graduate level course on Mexican Literature, both from UCLA Extension. I have recently received a certification as a bilingual mediator from the Ventura Center for Dispute Settlement and Pepperdine University School of Law. I have designed and taught specialized courses, "Spanish for the Legal Profession" for the Ventura Courthouse, and "Spanish for Teachers" at Casa Pacifica. I have translated non-fiction books and poetry that have been published in the U.S. and in Argentina. I have attended distance education workshops at Oxnard College and been certified to teach online courses, which I am currently doing. Lastly, I have participated in the Summer Institutes at Oxnard College in 2009 and 2010 and in the Summer Institute for Teaching Excellence held in Ventura College in 2011.
- b) Service:
- i. Department/Discipline: I have chaired Spanish faculty meetings, sharing information about assessing and evaluating SLOs; created new curriculum for Native Speaker courses and expanded the NS program over the years; revised course outlines, created and assessed SLOs; collaborated with the Letters Chair in the writing of an SLO Assessment Cycle and the PEPC Report for Spanish; been a judge for the Speech Tournament; served on the Carlos M. Diaz Scholarship Committee and Peer Evaluation Committee; and directed Independent Study courses.
 - ii. College: I have served on the Professional Development Committee, Sabbatical Committee, Hiring Committees for staff and faculty and the Academic Senate Scholarship Committee; I have been a presenter for the O.C. Literature, Arts and Lecture

Series and at the Oxnard College Multicultural Day; I am currently one of the Letters representatives for the Academic Senate.

- iii. District: I have been working for the Ventura County Community College District for the past 14 years, regularly participating in trainings and in-service activities as my teaching schedule has allowed.
- iv. Community: I regularly volunteer at the Ventura Courthouse as a bilingual mediator/interpreter in Small Claims Court; I participate in the Mexican Consulate Program to provide free textbooks to the students and their families; I take my students on field trips to community events such as the "Mayan Exhibit" at The Getty Museum and the "*Bracero* Program" at the UCCI; and I connect present and past students with working and educational opportunities whenever possible.

5- Length of Service and Past Sabbaticals

I have worked for the Ventura College Community District since 1998, the first six years as adjunct faculty at Ventura College teaching Spanish and Latin America Literature in Translation. In 2004, I was hired as a full-time instructor of Spanish at Oxnard College and received my tenure in 2007. I have never received a sabbatical leave before.

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF TERMS USED IN THE PROPOSAL

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a set of strategies used to address the wide range of proficiencies found among students in any given classroom. Teachers might adjust the content, products, or processes of their lessons in order to provide flexibility for students at different levels of subject mastery.

Heritage Speaker

A heritage speaker is someone who grows up with a certain family language in the home which is different from the dominant language in the country.

Learner Profile

Anything that you can find out about a language learner's background - home language, years of instruction, travel abroad - that would help you understand more about the learner's proficiencies and interests.

Mixed Classroom

A classroom attended by both second language learners and heritage speakers. Since students do not learn at the same pace, and do not respond to the same teaching strategies, these classes present a challenge to instructors.

Native Speaker

Typically, a native speaker of a language is someone who speaks the language from early childhood, grows up in a community that speaks the language, and for whom the language is dominant.

Second/ Foreign Language Learner

A second or foreign language learner has no proficiency in a language before beginning to study it formally in an educational setting. In other words, a second language learner does not have the home context of speaking the language that a heritage language learner does.

Source: National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC).

APPENDIX B

Works Cited

- Brinton, Donna M., Olga Kagan, and Susan Bauckus, eds. *Heritage Language Education: A New Field Emerging*. New York: Rutledge, 2007. Print.
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- Sousa, David, and Carol Tomlinson. *Differentiation and the Brain: How Neuroscience Supports the Learner-Friendly Classroom*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree, 2010. Print.

Website Addresses Mentioned in this Proposal

National Heritage Language Resource Center <http://nhlrc.ucla.edu>

University of California Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching <http://uccllt.ucdavis.edu>