2005

Maintaining and nurturing the language and culture of heritage Spanish-speakers at the elementary level

Amanda Amarotico
School for International Training

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MAINTAINING AND NURTURE THE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
OF HERITAGE SPANISH-SPEAKERS
AT THE ELEMENTARY LEVEL

Amanda Amarotico

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Master of Arts in Teaching degree at
the School for International Training,
Brattleboro, Vermont

July, 2005

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This project by Amanda Amarotico is accepted in its present form.

Date ________________________________

Project Advisor ________________________________

Beatriz Fantini

Project Reader ________________________________

Mariana Achugar
ABSTRACT

In many schools across the United States native Spanish-speakers are enrolled in Spanish foreign language classes in order to fulfill a foreign language requirement. The Spanish foreign language class is inappropriate for the native Spanish-speaker’s needs. It is essential that these students be given opportunities to expand their linguistic skills to become fully bilingual and biliterate. Spanish classes for native Spanish-speakers exist at the high school level in many parts of the country, but elementary students are rarely given such opportunities.

The author of this professional paper and report on the creation of an after school Spanish Club discusses the rationale behind the need to give linguistic and cultural support to elementary aged heritage Spanish speakers in her school community. She describes the club she and a group of mothers created and implemented together. Included are materials developed by the group, feedback from participating families and reflection on how to further develop a model that can be reproduced in Spanish and other heritage language communities.

ERIC Descriptors: Bilingualism, Biliteracy, FLES, Heritage Education, Language Maintenance
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CHAPTER I

THE RATIONALE

Validating my students, who they are and what they know, is at the forefront of my teaching.

I started out as a teacher eager to share my knowledge and experiences with my students. With this approach I often became frustrated with students who were not interested in what I had to say and teach. After all, I had so much to give them - why wouldn’t they be respectful and listen?

Over the past several school years I have learned to listen to my students and to hand over the learning to them. I learned this new approach through my teachers and colleagues in the Summer Master of Arts in Teaching coursework at the School for International Training. Since my first summer of studies in 2002, my motto has been, “Give the student what she needs.” This means listening to her carefully and asking her many questions to find out what she knows, and how she feels. Through this deeper listening I can “start from the strength of each individual” (Shakti Gattegno, The Silent Way Approach to teaching second languages). With this in mind I ask, “What can I give to my heritage Spanish speakers?” I believe they need opportunities to enrich their first language.

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1 More can be read about the Silent Way approach, founded by Caleb Gattegno, on line at “Une Education Pour Demain” viewed 30 June 2005: <http://assoc.wanadoo.fr/une.education.pour.demain/sw/swprese.htm>
Encuesta sobre El Club de español
inviero, 2005

Encuesta para los padres de niños que tienen contacto con el español en casa (Favor contestar estas preguntas con su hijo o hija. Nos ayudará a mejorar el club de español. Favor de devolverla a Amanda Amarotico)

1. ¿Cómo ha estado la experiencia de su hijo/hija en el club de español?

2. ¿Qué le ha comentado? ¿Qué le ha llamado la atención?

3. ¿Cuál es la actitud de su hijo sobre hablar español en la casa? – ¿antes del club?
   ¿durante el club?

4. ¿Cómo estuvo la comunicación entre el club y la casa (la carta para introducir la idea del club; otras cartas/anuncios)?

5. ¿Cómo podemos mejorar el club y/o la comunicación?

6. ¿Tienen otras ideas para un club que apoye el idioma español y las culturas diversas de nuestra comunidad latina?

Nombre (opcional):__________________________________
Survey for The Spanish Club Winter, 2005

Please take a moment to respond to these questions with your child (Your answers will help improve the Spanish Club. Please return to Amanda Amarotico).

1. Rate your child’s experience in the Spanish club?
   _____ excellent    _____ good    _____ fair
   why?____________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________

2. Does your child like the Spanish club?
   ___ Yes    ___ no    Why? __________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________

3. Were our notes home helpful? Timely? Received? Would you prefer a phone call? or e-mail?

4. Would you like to see any other activities added to the club? Which ones___________________________

Name (optional):____________________________________
APPENDIX C

Post Club: Feedback and an Article
Una encuesta para los padres de niños que tienen contacto con el español en casa

Favor de contestar estas preguntas con su hijo o hija. 
Nos ayuda mejorar el club de español.

1. ¿Cómo ha estado la experiencia de tu hijo/hija en el club de español?

Mamá de Isabel, 5to grado:  Muy entusiasmada, Una experincencia muy diferente a otros clubs.
Victor, 5to grado:  Buena lo que más me gusta es que aprendy de los paises latinoamericanos.
Diana 5to grado:  que conocio a niños de otros paises.
Ana, 5to grado:  excelente y animada
Mamá de Andrew, 5to grado:  Muy buena

2. ¿Qué le ha comentado? ¿Qué le ha llamado la atención?

Mamá de Isabel, 5to grado:  El poder compartir con otros niños que hablan español.
Victor, 5to grado:  Que los paises latinoamerica hablan el mismo idioma pero con acentos diferente y algunas palabras diferente.
Diana 5to grado:  Que las mamas de los niños presentan algo de sus paises.
Ana, 5to grado:  la diversidad de culturas
Mamá de Andrew, 5to grado:  Siempre comentaba de las actividades. Le llamó la atención que tuvieran algo nuevo y entretenido cada semana.

3. ¿Cuál es la actitud de su hijo sobre hablar español en la casa? – ¿antes del club? ¿durante el club?

Mamá de Isabel, 5to grado:  Antes del club NO quería hablar nada – Ahora trata de contestarme bastante en español.
Victor, 5to grado:  Igual porque en nuestra casa ablanos español.
Diana 5to grado:  emocionada. -feliz.
Ana, 5to grado:  diversidad y educativa.
Mamá de Andrew, 5to grado:  Generalmente prefiere hablar inglés, después que empezó el club comenzó a querer hablar más y leer en español.
4. ¿Cómo estuvo comunicación entre el club y la casa (la carta de introduciendo la idea del club; otras cartas/anuncios)?

Mamá de Isabel, 5to grado: *Muy adecuada*
Victor, 5to grado: *Muy bien.*
Diana 5to grado: *que se ponía a hablar de lo que iso en el club de español.*
Ana, 5to grado: *Buena*
Mamá de Andrew, 5to grado: *Muy buena comunicación, muy buena organización, un trabajo increíble por parte de maestras y voluntarias.*

5. ¿Cómo podemos mejorar el club y/o la comunicación?

Mamá de Isabel, 5to grado: *Tener más tiempo/sección*
Victor, 5to grado: *Tomar una prueba y nos separan en grupos de quien sabe más y menos español.*
Diana 5to grado: *Compartiendo mas ideas*
Ana, 5to grado: *Uniéndose mas padres y niños. Que sea 2 veces por semana el club.*
Mamá de Andrew, 5to grado: *Andrew disfrutó mucho de la experiencia y se anotaría otra vez el año que viene.*

6. ¿Tienen otras ideas para un club que apoye el idioma español y las culturas diversas de nuestra comunidad latina?

Mamá de Isabel 5to grado: *Continuar con esta gran idea, añadir refranes y dichos de cada país que resaltan nuestras culturas.*
Victor, 5to grado: *Que el club sea largo para que aprendamos más.*
Diana 5to grado: *Enseñar mas español y aprender mas español o tener mas actividades en español.*
Ana, 5to grado: *Conoser mas países hispanos y que los niños hablen de sus propios países y cultura.*
Mamá de Andrew, 5to grado: *No, el club abarcó la música, la literatura, el deporte . . .. ¡muy positivo!*

*Todos los nombres son pseudónimos*
A survey for parents whose children have contact with Spanish at home
(translation from the original Spanish)

Please answer these questions with your child.
Your answers will help us to improve the Spanish Club

1. How has your child’s experience been in the Spanish Club?

   Isabel’s mother (5th grade): Very enthusiastic. A very different experience from other clubs
   Victor, 5th grade: Well, the part I liked most was that I learned about Latin American countries.
   Diana, 5th grade: knowing children from other countries
   Ana, 5th grade: excellent and inspiring (or energizing)
   Andrew’s mother, 5th grader: Very good

2. What has he/she mentioned to you? What grabbed his/her attention?

   Isabel’s mother (5th grade): To be able to share with other students who speak Spanish
   Victor, 5th grade: That even though the people of Latin America speak the same language accents are different and some words are different.
   Diana, 5th grade: That the mothers of the children present something from their country.
   Ana, 5th grade: The diversity of cultures
   Andrew’s mother, 5th grader: He always commented about the activities. Having something new and entertaining each week grabbed his attention.

3. What is your child’s attitude been towards speaking Spanish in the house?
Before the club? During the club?

   Isabel’s mother (5th grade): Before the club she did NOT want to speak Spanish at all. Now she often tries in Spanish.
   Victor, 5th grade: The same, because we speak Spanish at home.
   Diana, 5th grade: excited. – happy.
   Ana, 5th grade: fun and educational
   Andrew’s mother 5th grader: He generally prefers to speak English, after the club started he began to want to speak and read more in Spanish.
4. How has the communication been between club and home (introductory letter about the club, other letters and announcements)?

Isabel’s mother (5th grade): *Very adequate*
Victor, 5th grade: *Very good*
Diana, 5th grade: that she began to talk about what she did in the Spanish Club.
Ana, 5th grade: *Good*
Andrew’s mother, 5th grader: *Very good communication, very good organization, an incredible job done by the teachers and volunteers.*

5. How can we make the club and/or communication even better

Isabel’s mother (5th grade): *To have more time and sections*
Victor, 5th grade: *To take a test and separate us into groups as per who knows more and who knows less.*
Diana, 5th grade: *Sharing more ideas.*
Ana, 5th grade: *Uniting more parents and children. That the club be twice per week.*
Andrew’s mother, 5th grader: *Andrew enjoyed the experience a lot and will look for such an experience next year.*

6. Do you have other ideas for the club that would support the Spanish language and the diverse cultures of our Latino community?

Isabel’s mother (5th grade): *Continue with this great idea, add proverbs and sayings from each country that represents our cultures.*
Victor, 5th grade: *That the club be longer so that we can learn more.*
Diana, 5th grade: *Teach more Spanish and learn more Spanish or have more activities in Spanish.*
Ana, 5th grade: *To know more Hispanic countries and that the children talk about their own countries and culture.*
Andrew’s mother, 5th grader: *No, the club included music, literature, sports . . . very positive!*
MEDIA RELEASE

March 21, 2005

Students at Millstone River School, a grades 4-5 school in the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District, enjoyed themselves at the culmination activity of the district’s first-ever Spanish Club celebration. Students and their families, along with teachers, gathered together to enjoy a meal and to get a taste of all that the students had learned and enjoyed during the eight-week Spanish Club.

Amanda Amarotico, a Grades 4 and 5 Spanish teacher, started the Spanish Club for the purpose of celebrating and extending the language and culture of Hispanic students in the West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District. The club enhanced student understanding of the Spanish language and inspired them to enjoy the written word and to understand the diversity of Latino cultures.

During the eight weeks of the club, mothers visited the students to share stories and/or cultural items from their heritage, which included Colombia, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Chile, and Argentina. The students learned dances, poetry, and stories as parents shared images and experiences from their cultures.

The World Languages program is under the direction of Rosanne Zeppieri, supervisor for World Languages Grades K-8.

Photograph

Millstone River students celebrate with teacher Amanda Amarotico.
Spanish Club Descriptions, Spring 2005
Millstone River School

Club de lectura y escritura en español: Te invitamos a disfrutar de la lengua escrita española. A través de juegos muy entretenidos vamos a leer y escribir historias, cuentos, poesía y obras de teatro. La maestra es hablante nativa de español y solamente se hablará español durante las clases.

Language arts Spanish Club: Come and enjoy the Spanish language in the written form. We are going to read and write stories, poetry and plays in a fun way. Classes will be conducted in Spanish only by a native Spanish speaker, students are expected to use Spanish only as well.

Baile Folklórico: ¡Ven y conoce un poco más de la cultura hispana a través de sus bailes! Maestras con la experiencia de baile te enseñaran los pasos y movimientos. Las maestras son hablantes nativas de español. Solamente se hablará español durante las clases.

Traditional dances of Latin America: Come learn more about Hispanic cultures through its dances. Teachers are experienced dance teachers and will conduct classes in Spanish.

Art Around the World: Latin America! Discover the arts and crafts of Latin American Cultures in Mexico, Central and South America. We will create papermache sculptures and do Mexican style paper cutting (papel picado) this session. As we work we will listen to music and stories from this part of the world. This class will be conducted in English.


Fútbol: ¿Dónde se juega el fútbol más alegre y vistoso del mundo?... Si acertaste, en Latinoamerica. Ven y disfruta con nosotros todo el colorido y brillo de nuestro futbol. Aprenderas de una manera muy sencilla y dinámica, muchos de los secretos acumulados por años de experiencia de nuestro instructor; a la vez que podrás reforzar tu idioma español a través de la práctica de este espectacular deporte. Y si no hablas mucho español, no te preocupes; nuestro instructor es también profesor de español en el distrito. Así que no tienes excusas para no disfrutar con nosotros! Te esperamos!

Soccer: Instructed by very experienced coach and Spanish teacher. Come learn all the secrets that he has learned over the years for a great game of soccer... and practice your Spanish too! We hope to see you there!


Two mothers, including our teacher, Sandra, introduce the day’s theme, Chile.

Marcela and student volunteers show the Huaso traditional dress.
One group of students in the Spanish club playing Bachillerato, a word game.

Students from another group come up to read their answers to the Neruda question (riddle) “Who cried for joy when the color blue was born?”
Students presenting on Mexico: “And finally, we will close tonight’s presentation with Mexico. Thanks to Sra. Treviño we learned to play the Mexican Lottery and to Sra. Vasquez who delighted us with the famous dance, the Jarabe Tapatio, which some of us practiced for weeks. Tonight we want to present this dance to you.
Un juego de palabras

Nombre ________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOMBRE</th>
<th>PAIS o CIUDAD</th>
<th>FRUTA o VERDURA</th>
<th>ANIMAL o COSA</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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Bachillerato Chart
Site words included in program (printed on cardstock)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>apenas</th>
<th>decía</th>
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<td>los</td>
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<td>por supuesto</td>
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<td>muchas</td>
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<td>sí</td>
<td>si</td>
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Students kept track of amount of words per week on this chart

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Número de palabras
nombre: _______________________
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<th>N° de palabras</th>
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<th>día 3</th>
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Bingo de la diversidad

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>un niño que habla más de dos idiomas</th>
<th>un niño zurdo</th>
<th>un niño que es tío</th>
<th>un niño que toca un instrumento</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>un niño que tiene más de tres hermanos</td>
<td>un niño que ha ido a ver un partido de beisbol</td>
<td>un niño que ha nacido en algún país de Latinoamérica</td>
<td>un niño que juega al hockey en hielo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un niño que le gusta la música clásica</td>
<td>un niño que le gusta el hip hop</td>
<td>un niño que tiene más de dos mascotas</td>
<td>un niño que ha estado en más de cinco estados</td>
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<tr>
<td>un niño que ha ido a la escuela en otro país</td>
<td>un niño que ha participado en una obra de teatro</td>
<td>un niño que ha esquiado en las Rockies</td>
<td>un niño que toma lecciones de baile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un niño que le gusta el baile hindú clásico</td>
<td>un niño que juega al ajedrez</td>
<td>un niño que toma clases de chino</td>
<td>un niño que nunca ha volado por avión</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>un niño que le gusta la comida picante</td>
<td>un niño que no tiene hermanos</td>
<td>un niño que le gusta montar a caballo</td>
<td>un niño que no le gusta la comida picante</td>
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</table>

*The children played this game in the first class. The volunteers and I helped the lower level students.*
**Thematical Calendar we created through the second of three meetings and e-mails**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fecha</th>
<th>Tema</th>
<th>Actividades</th>
<th>Lectura/Escritura</th>
<th>materiales</th>
<th>comidas</th>
<th>maestras</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 de enero</td>
<td>introducción general ¿De dónde somos?</td>
<td>juegos geografía</td>
<td>juego con tarjetas de fluidez</td>
<td>mapa, tarjetas</td>
<td>empanadas (María Fernanda)</td>
<td>Sandra Ruiz Leniz Camacho Amanda Amarotico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1° de febrero</td>
<td>México</td>
<td>escritura Baile o Lotería Mex. (los niños escogen)</td>
<td>tarjetas de fluidez (site words) Poesía acrostica</td>
<td>“site words” tarjetas mapa canastas lotería mexicana</td>
<td>flautas (Claudia Mendoza de Herrera)</td>
<td>Sandra Ruiz Dinora Yoli Josefina Claudia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 de febrero</td>
<td>Colombia Poema de Rafael Pombo</td>
<td>Leer, dramatizar con disfraces el poema</td>
<td>tarjetas de fluidez Leer</td>
<td>Copias del poema disfraces</td>
<td>pan de bono/yuca (Leniz Camacho)</td>
<td>Sandra Ruiz Leniz Camacho Liliana ?</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 de febrero</td>
<td>Chile Poesía de Pablo Neruda</td>
<td>Un juego Escuchar y contestar adivinanzas poéticas Escribir</td>
<td>tarjetas de fluidez Lectura de poesía</td>
<td>Libro de Pablo Neruda Papel, lápices Pizarra/papel grande</td>
<td>canapés (Sandra Ruiz)</td>
<td>Sandra Ruiz Marcela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1° de marzo</td>
<td>Argentina Fútbol</td>
<td>Hacer dulce de leche Conocer a Maradona, un futbolista, juego de fútbol?</td>
<td>tarjetas de fluidez Lectura sobre Maradona</td>
<td>Pelotas lectura</td>
<td>dulce de leche (Mate?)</td>
<td>Sandra Ruiz María Desiree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 de marzo</td>
<td>Ensayo Preparaciones para una presentación final</td>
<td>Los niños escogen lo que quieren presentar</td>
<td>tarjetas de fluidez</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sandwiches</td>
<td>Sandra Ruiz Dinora otras madres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 de marzo</td>
<td>Presentaciones</td>
<td>Invitamos a todas las familias</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Platos (todas las familias)</td>
<td>Sandra Ruiz y todas las voluntarias</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX A

Preliminary Work: Raising Community Awareness
What an Amazing Heritage!

43% of our students at Millstone River School are Heritage Language Speakers (HLS), meaning they speak languages other than English at home. They represent 35 different languages. What an amazing heritage! If our HLS not only maintain but also become proficient in their first language, they will be doing themselves, their community and the nation an enormous favor. Students will benefit cognitively, making them better problem solvers. When they are ready to choose a career they may have more choices and better salaries for being bilingual. HLS will enrich their communities by understanding their heritage more fully through their first language. Knowing two or more languages helps us to understand our world and the diverse perspectives more fully. On the national level we need bilinguals who are proficient in English and another language. As you can imagine our government is deficient in English speakers who are also proficient in Central Asian and Middle Eastern Languages.

Language is power and gives us freedom – the ability to understand spoken language and to speak, read, and write the language proficiently gives individuals the power and freedom to understand and express their world, to make career choices, and to have a voice in their community. If knowing how to read, write and speak fluently in a language gives us power and freedom, then imagine how much more power and freedom we can experience by being fluent in two or more languages!

It is my hope that as a community we can embrace, encourage and enhance our HLS use of their first languages. There are very successful community language and cultural organizations and schools already helping to nurture our HLS. I would like to begin to explore more ways in which we can support our HLS so that they can reach proficiency in their first language as well as in English. If you are interested in a study or working group on this issue please send me a note, email me at amanda.amarotico@ww-p.org or call 609-716-5577.
Written in school year 2002/2003 to be shared with school administrator and families interested in helping to organize a program. Administration gave me permission to look into meeting informally with my native Spanish speaking students if I could find a common free time for such meetings. Due to scheduling constraints this proved impossible.

Supporting our Heritage Language Students
Amanda Amarotico

1. Objectives

- To educate parents, staff and community about fostering bilingualism

- To find ways in which our Heritage Language Students (HLS - Speakers of languages other than English at home) can become proficient in their heritage language.

- Find out what the needs of the community are.
  - Language classes?
  - Cultural classes?

- To establish programs for HLS of Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, or wherever else there is enough interest and/or need.

2. In order to establish programs

- Need parent involvement
- Volunteers
- Working group/committee
- Funds for language teachers, curriculum development, materials and space (rent).

3. Next step – flyer to go home to families

- Purpose of flyer
  - to discuss the benefits of bilingualism and the fact that there are many students who have the advantage of communication skills in a heritage language other than English.
  - to ask for family input into what are the needs of HLS and to find members to form a working group/committee.

- Flyer for MRS families only? At the start, then involve other elementary schools? middle schools? high schools?
There are several ways to define what we mean by *heritage language learners* (HLL). Overall, in the United States, it refers to a learner who has a personal connection to a language other than English and a culture related to that language. As teachers we need to call on HLL perspectives to guide their learning and their sharing with the learning community.

**Agenda**

1. **Welcome**
2. **My Objective** - To raise awareness of the gifts our heritage language learners (HLL) bring to our learning community

3. **Two definitions for “Heritage Language Learner”**

   **Broader meaning**
   - A term to embrace all students who have some kind of connection to a non-English language.

   - HLLs bring a valuable resource to the learning environment.

   **Meaning in FL context**
   - Students who understand and/or speak the Target Language of the FL classroom.

   - HLLs bring a different set of needs to the FL classroom than traditional FL learners. They also are a valuable resource.

4. **The Varying degrees of linguistic proficiency of a HLL**

   1. Students who understand oral language, but are unable to speak the language.

   2. Students who can speak the language fluently but have no literacy skills.

   3. Students who have recently immigrated understand and speak the their HL fluently, but reading and writing skills are limited due to a lack of formal education.

   4. Fluent bilingual students who understand, speak, read, and write another language very well.
5. A short description of some of my HLL students

**Broader Meaning:**

A: Drew from his own language. Shared a custom from his culture relating it to what I was teaching.
B: Overwhelmed by having to learn English and Spanish. Struggles cognitively.
C: Student is ashamed to speak in his own language. Family wants to forget where they came from or believes child cannot become proficient in English if he reverts to his first language.

**Meaning in FL Context:**

A: Student is eager to participate, is proud of language abilities and cultural background, yet patient and sensitive towards other students needs.
B: Student is eager to participate and wants to show how much she knows. She doesn’t have sensitivity towards other learners.
C: Student is withdrawn in class, will not answer audibly when asked a question. Is possibly afraid of sticking out and being different.

6. Your experiences

a. Jot down some challenges and delights. Frustrations? “Aha” moments?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

b. Share with a neighbor or two
c. Any for the group?

7. A vision and a project – My vision for all our HLL is that they have the resources (such as classes and activities) to help them to reach full proficiency in their first language. This is a huge vision so I am starting small and am, with the help of our Latino families, providing an after school activity, The Spanish Club. The first session will focus on the arts of the Latino countries where our students families come from. I am hoping to bring in the written language in a playful way so that the students can discover the joy of the written word in Spanish.

*The sum of human wisdom is not contained in any one language, and no single language is capable of expressing all forms and degrees of human comprehension.*

- Ezra Pound
APPENDIX B

Creating the Club: Connecting with Parents and Creating Materials
Mini-Grant Application 2004 – 2005
This template is designed to be completed in Microsoft Word.
If you have any questions, please contact us for assistance. We are here to help!

Name: Amanda Amarotico
Position: Spanish Teacher
School: Millstone River School
Grade Level: 4th & 5th
Work Phone: 609-716-5577, ext. 5577
Home Phone: 215-257-2457
Work E-mail: amanda.amarotico@ww-p.org
Home E-mail: aamarotico@comcast.net
Home Address: 1020 Old Bethlehem Road
City, State, Zip: Perkasie, PA 18944
Target Group: 4th and 5th grade participants in the Spanish Club with main emphasis on Native Spanish-speakers.
Number of students directly impacted: 90
Principal(s): Mary Ann Isaacs & Brian Stevens
Supervisor(s): Rosanne Zeppieri

€ Both my principal and supervisor(s) have received a copy of this application. YES
€ I have previously received a grant from the WW-P Education Foundation. NO
If yes: Title of Project
Grant Amount: $
Date of Grant Award:

Title: *Spanish Clubs*

Amount Requested: $510

Applications must be RECEIVED by 4 p.m. on Friday, April 15, 2005. Applications must be completed on this form and submitted as an attachment to e-mail to info@wwpef.org. If you are unable to submit electronically, sent your completed applications to: WWPEF c/o WW-P Board Office via inter-office mail or mailed to: WWPEF, P.O. Box 280, Princeton Junction, NJ 08550-0280
**Project Title** – Spanish Clubs: Enrichment of Spanish Language and Hispanic Culture

**Executive Summary:**
This project provides 4th and 5th grade students with more opportunities to learn and communicate in Spanish in a practical real-life setting.

The Spanish Clubs include Spanish Language Arts, Soccer, Latin American Arts and Crafts and Latin American Traditional Dance. All but the Arts & Crafts club are being conducted in Spanish.

The primary outcomes for this program are 1) Native Spanish-speakers’ language and culture will be affirmed by classmates, staff and the community. 2) All participating students will expand their Spanish vocabulary and/or have a better understanding and appreciation of Latino cultures and all the diversity therein. 3) More home and school connections for both parents who struggle to stay connected because of language barriers, and parents who have many talents and resources to share with our children, staff and each other.

**Needs Statement**
Native Spanish-speaking students need to know how important their first language is. They need to be challenged with opportunities to expand their Spanish vocabulary and literacy skills. It is important to begin this learning now. Research shows that the optimal time for language acquisition is before puberty.

**Project Description – What do you want to do?**
Give students the opportunity to learn or practice an activity using Spanish as the language of communication. We are implementing the following clubs:

1. Spanish Language Arts: Enjoy Spanish language through the written word.
2. Latin American Traditional Dance: Expand Spanish language and learn about Latin American cultures while learning traditional dances of Latin America.
3. Soccer: Expand Spanish language while learning the game of soccer and
practicing skills.
4. Latin American Arts & Crafts: Create beautiful art while learning about its significance in the land where it comes from and hear their stories and music.

Measurable outcomes will include observations of student performances, student morale and student and parent responses to questionnaires.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefits</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Spanish clubs benefit our students’ linguistic skills and understanding of the cultures of Latin America. They benefit our families by giving them more connections to their children’s school life. They benefit our school by bringing the talents of our parents to our learning community, and enriching connections between school and community. They benefit our district by increasing: 1) our students’ motivation to learn; 2) their linguistic skills in a second language; and 3) by the example of their parents and peers in sharing so much of themselves. It enhances communication between home and school, a very important key to a child’s education.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Budget/Itemized Costs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Through Community Education students pay $90 each to cover the cost of overhead, materials and teacher’s salary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$360 - Scholarships for 4 low-income students. These scholarships will help to cover material costs and teacher salary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150 – Chapter books in Spanish for the Language Arts class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Minutes from 1st meeting sent to all volunteers via e-mail.

From: Amanda Amarotico [mailto:amanda.amarotico@ww-p.org]
Sent: Tuesday, November 23, 2004 3:32 PM
To: Las madres voluntarias
Subject: Update/Poner al día

Hola todos,
Quiero mantenerme en contacto con ustedes para que sepan como desarrollan nuestros planes para la actividad de español después de la escuela.

Reunimos ayer Leniz, Josi, Josefina y yo, para planear la actividad de español después de la escuela. La vamos a llamar "El club de español."

Aquí es la descripción como va a salir en la pamfleta de Community Education:

-----------------------------------------------------------

Club de español/Spanish Club

los martes/Tuesdays
$50.00
grupos de 15/class size:15

Te invitamos a participar en diversas actividades artísticas, culturales y recreativas para disfrutar del idioma español. Cada familia puede traer un plato típico o merienda típica para compartir con una clase.

Come enjoy the arts, culture and recreational activities in Spanish. Families are asked to take turns providing a dish or snack to the class.

-----------------------------------------------------------

Tenemos la idea de planear cada clase así:

1. 10 minutos de una lectura o poema - los niños escuchan y después charlamos de lo que leemos o, es posible que ellos dibujan o pintan un escenario de la lectura (10 minutos más).

2) 20 - 40 minutos de una actividad de baile, ronda, juego(s), artesanía o, dependiendo en el nivel de los estudiantes, escritura de un poema o obra de teatro.

3) Durante los últimos 5 minutos los niños escriben una reflexión de que hicieron/aprendieron y que les gustaría hacer en la próxima clase.

El club empieza el 18 de enero y dura 8 semanas. En el fin queremos tener una presentación para las familias que participan en el programa.

Si tienes preguntas o ideas favor de mandármelas.

Gracias a todos por su interés y el ofrecimiento de su ayuda, conocimiento y experiencias.

cordialmente,
Amanda
29 de noviembre, 2004

Estimados padres,

¿Están interesados en que sus hijos sean totalmente bilingües? Actualmente en los Estados Unidos, y en todo el mundo, es muy importante que todos sepamos dos o más idiomas. Saber hablar dos idiomas no es suficiente. Manejar dos idiomas no significa solamente hablarlos. Saber dos idiomas implica también leer en dicho idioma y vivenciar sus situaciones culturales. Lo ideal es ser bilingüe, bi-alfabetizado y multicultural.

Un niño que está criándose en una familia que habla otro idioma ya tiene ventaja. No solo tiene la ventaja de saber comunicarse en dos lenguas pero, también tiene una ventaja académica y el desarrollo cognitivo.

En Millstone River School y con la colaboración de “Community Education of West Windsor-Plainsboro” vamos a tener un Club de español una vez por semana para los niños de cuarto y quinto grado. Los niños tendrán la oportunidad de disfrutar de la lengua española escrita. Vamos a leer y escribir poesía, obras de teatro, y cuentos del mundo hispanohablante. Podemos compartir juegos, canciones, bailes y otras tradiciones de España y Latinoamérica.

En esta actividad están involucrados padres voluntarios y maestras que van a facilitar esta tarea.

Si quiere que su hijo o hija participe en esta actividad, favor completar el siguiente formulario y devuélvelo a Amanda Amarotico, oficina C-114. Si tiene preguntas o comentarios puede escribirme un e-mail – aamarotico@comcast.net o llamarme – 609-716-5500, ext. 5577. También, tiene que registrar a su hijo con Community Education. Busque el anuncio y formulario de inscripción de Community Educacion en diciembre.

También hay la opción de ofrecer su asistencia como voluntario, de materiales o comidas/meriendas.

El club va a tener un precio nominal para pagar nuestros gastos. Si su familia tiene dificultad con el costo, hay asistencia financiera.

1. Quiero que mi hijo/hija, _____________________, de la clase de ___________________ (nombre) (maestro/madrastra) asista al Club de español después de la escuela de 3:30 a 4:30 los martes.

2. Quiero ser voluntario durante el club ______
3. Quiero compartir una cosa cultural con los niños ______
4. Puedo ayudar con materiales (libros, artesanías, comidas, música, juegos, etc.). ______
5. Llámeme por teléfono # __________________

Nombre de padre/madre/persona encargada: _________________________________

Por favor devuélvele el formulario a la Sra. Amarotico.
Agenda

Reunion para la creación de un programa de español
después de la escuela
22 de noviembre, 2004

1. **Introducción** - ¿Quiénes somos? ¿Cuáles son nuestras expectativas con los estudiantes nativos hispanohablantes (NSS)?

2. **El desarrollo cognitivo y los intereses de los niños de 4º grado** (9 y 10 años) y **5º grado** (10 y 11 años)
   Repaso del papel adjunto

3. **Lluvia de ideas de temas, lecciones, actividades, libros y otros materiales para las 10 semanas**

4. **Establecer contacto con todas las familias latinas/hispanas**
   Por carta?
   Por teléfono?

5. **Propaganda del programa para la organización Community Education** (Marci Ruben)
   Descripción de la actividad/ ¿una fiesta o presentación en el fin?
   ¿Qué día de la semana?
   ¿Cuánto cobrar?
   ¿Cuántos niños en la actividad?
   ¿Uno o dos grupos/clases? ¿Dos niveles?

6. **Voluntarios**
   Comida/meriendas
   Compartir artes, música (baile, arte, artesanía, cuentos, canciones, etc.)
   Hacer copias, organizar los materiales.
In this first chapter I will illustrate who these students are and why I believe we should find ways for them to use and enjoy their first language. In Chapter II I describe the creation of an after school program, initially developed to maintain and Nurture the language and cultures of heritage Spanish speakers at the elementary level.

THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

There are approximately 825 fourth and fifth grade students at Millstone River School in Plainsboro, N.J., where I teach. According to attendance office records, more than forty percent of our students speak a language other than English at home. Ten percent of those speak Spanish. There are 132 staff members, including teachers, administrators, secretaries and custodians. Nine percent speak a language other than English at home, two of whom speak Spanish. Our district has a strong, mandatory FLES program. Students begin Spanish as a Foreign Language in the second grade. Classes are thirty minutes, three times per week. Once they reach fourth grade they may choose to switch to Mandarin Chinese.

The majority of our heritage Spanish speakers have chosen to stay in Spanish class. From my observations of students, their report cards, and anecdotes from grade teachers and the Chinese teacher I notice that heritage Spanish speakers who take Mandarin generally do very well academically and their families are of a higher economic status. Many of the heritage Spanish speakers who are in my classes have lower literacy skills in both English and Spanish. During school year 2003/2004 I had thirteen heritage Spanish speakers. All could communicate well with me in Spanish. Five were literate in Spanish, at least at a third grade level, and could write full sentences
and spell correctly. In an attempt to meet their needs I took advantage of what knowledge and experiences they brought to class. I let them know that they were an integral part of Spanish class and that I appreciated their active participation. They helped me model the language, and could answer questions I had as a non-native Spanish speaker. They often had different ways of saying what I was teaching but all ways were validated.

Since classes are content-based the material I teach is interesting to all levels of language. Students can show what they know through drawings, games, and role-play. During school year 2003/2004 I gave several of my 4th grade heritage Spanish-speaking students the opportunity to read children’s books together and to answer questions in writing and draw a picture of what they had read. At the fifth grade level I offered several students fourth grade level workbooks that had readings and questions on the same theme the non-native Spanish-speaking students were learning about. They enjoyed these activities and I was able to see what their strengths and weaknesses were in literacy, however, they preferred to join in the larger group activities. They preferred to be with their peers.

Even though the heritage Spanish speakers enjoy Spanish class I believe they need more challenges in their first language to meet their needs, both in academics and personal development. I would like to see them become fully bilingual and bi-literate. Their communication skills, at the level of use in our classes, are very good but they are challenged by spelling. This leads me to believe they are not reading in Spanish. When I offer them challenges they invariably opt out, preferring to participate in the larger group lesson.
HOW OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM FAILS OUR HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNERS

In search of resources to meet the needs of my heritage Spanish speakers I happened upon The 2nd National Conference on Heritage Languages in America in October of 2002. At the conference, I found support for my belief that heritage Spanish speakers need more linguistic support to attain full proficiency in their first language than the school was offering them. I also returned with a fuller understanding of the needs of all heritage language learners, and the value of heritage language to our society as a whole.

At The National Heritage Languages in America Conference, with the first anniversary of 9/11 having just passed, while a deadly sniper roamed the Washington, D.C. area, the issue of heritage languages and heritage language communities was discussed as it pertained to community, commerce, education, legislation, diplomacy and the Department of Defense. It was through this discussion (and the international climate of terror) that I understood more clearly the irony of our country’s lack of support for foreign languages. Our country needs to make bilingualism a priority for all school-aged children. There is valuable human capital in the languages our heritage students have been acquiring from infancy, and a senseless waste to let them lose it.

I am most concerned with my students’ self-image and self-esteem as it pertains to living between two cultures but a heritage language program has broader social value as well: “in an era of globalization, a society that has access to multilingual and
multicultural resources is advantaged in its ability to play an important social and economic role on the world stage.”

Our education system is set up such that it ignores the languages that our heritage language learners already speak and requires them to have at least two years of foreign language in secondary school for college acceptance. In a best-case scenario a heritage Spanish-speaker can take Spanish as a foreign language and possibly get an easy A, if he doesn’t lose motivation. Spanish as a Foreign Language does not serve the needs of a student who already communicates in Spanish in other parts of his life. This student needs a class in Spanish for Native Spanish Speakers (NSS’s). The NSS is in a very different place cognitively with language skills than the foreign language learner. He knows how to communicate in the language but might not have any reading or writing skills. Although no standards for the teaching of heritage languages have been established, “Heritage Language educators are concerned with such questions as the acquisition of a standard dialect, the expansion of bilingual range, the transfer of reading and writing abilities across languages, and the maintenance of immigrant and other heritage languages.” With this in mind the curriculum for the NSS should not serve as “communication basics” but as a Language Arts class. Change is occurring in this direction in many areas of the country. The high schools in my district have started a Spanish class for native speakers in school year 2004/2005.

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Most heritage languages are not taught in schools (Hindi, Russian, Polish, Portuguese, etc.) as we still hold onto the traditional “classics” (Italian, German, Spanish, French and Latin). As hard as it is to find teachers of the less commonly taught languages, some of these communities have found ways to support their heritage languages. Some are providing their children and youth with formal language and cultural enrichment programs but there is a general lack of such programs in our Latino community.

My heritage Spanish speakers should have the same opportunities. Parents of NSS have expressed interest that their children be more proficient in Spanish and worry that with age they tend to become increasingly insistent on speaking English at home. For the past five years a group of Latino mothers has been meeting informally, with their young children, once or twice per week to seek company, establish friendships, connect to those with similar experiences and to give their children opportunities to socialize with their peers in Spanish. They meet with other mothers who have children of the same age. Once a week they meet in someone’s home and then each Friday they all meet in the basement of St. Paul’s Church in Princeton, N.J., for their children to play games and watch videos in Spanish. The group started out with six mothers and has grown so much that not everyone knows all who are part of this network. These mothers know the positive impacts these gatherings have on their children. Unfortunately, by the time the children reach the fourth grade they often prefer to speak English, the language of their school peers, at home.

During the school year 2003/2004 I tried to set up a meeting schedule with my heritage Spanish speakers once a week for twenty minutes, but due to scheduling
constraints it was impossible to find a common time to meet. Grade teachers are already frustrated due to a lack of time for the “basic skills” they need to teach. The No Child Left Behind bill has left some schools strapped for money so that the money they do have is put into English literacy, mathematics and the sciences. Even though world languages was mandated to begin at the elementary level in the state of New Jersey, many schools have cut back on their programs in order to put more time and money into basic skills. There is a need to educate teachers and administrators to fully understand the value of learning a second language at the elementary level. Many are unaware of how bilingualism can enhance children’s cognitive development and therefore have a positive effect on their reading and writing skills in both languages.

Recent research has shown that “fluency in a foreign language could help master reading faster” in one’s own language. More importantly, the skills learned in one language are transferable to another. Cummins and Mulcahy (1978) found that “Ukrainian-English bilingual students who spoke Ukrainian at home and received 50 percent instruction through Ukrainian were better able to detect ambiguities in English sentence structure than were monolingual English-speaking students.”

The gains for proficient bilinguals don’t stop at language. Duncan and DeAvila (1979) found that “language minority students who had developed high levels of L1 and L2 proficiency (proficient bilinguals) performed significantly better than monolinguals

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and other sub-groups of bilinguals (partial and limited bilinguals) on a battery of cognitive tasks.\textsuperscript{7}

Students will be more likely to value academics if they have the opportunity to be successful at reading, writing and expressing themselves in their first language. Learning to read and write fluently in their first language will aid them in transferring these skills to the same ones in English at school. Heritage Spanish-speaking students will benefit greatly by learning literacy skills in Spanish and by building their vocabulary. Through literacy they can become completely proficient in Spanish. A language arts class would help them improve their vocabulary and ability to express themselves. Such a class should have the same guiding principles as does that of language arts curriculum in English for English speakers. Valdés lists two in her vision for teaching Spanish as a Native Language. They are: “1) the development of language power is an integral part of the total pattern of a student’s growth, and 2) that language power must be developed in the social situation in which it is used.”\textsuperscript{8} Without such classes heritage Spanish-speaking students tend to only hear Spanish spoken at home and that which is taught and used in Spanish as a Foreign Language class. As in any language arts class we need to give them meaningful, authentic literature and writing tasks to help them develop a joy and purpose for reading in their first language, full biliteracy and a higher register of language for more mobility within society – especially in a workplace where bilingualism is valued. With only exposure to Spanish in the home and in the Spanish as a foreign language class

\textsuperscript{7} Cummins (1984), p. 39
students will tend to choose English over Spanish as their language of choice. “English is the high-status language; it is the societal language. Although young children neither know nor care about prestige and status, they do care about belonging and acceptance.”

There are many social, political, and economic forces that inhibit the development of heritage language programs. One is the increasing push to teach and test immediately measurable basic skills, as I mentioned above.

The need to educate educators about cognitive development is critical. Among this group there is a common belief that students should gain some mastery of English before developing their heritage language. I often hear comments from staff about “certain students” who “shouldn’t be learning Spanish when they can’t even speak English.” Some even say that students shouldn’t be allowed to take music lessons “if they can’t even read and write.” Although such comments demonstrate a lack of understanding of childhood cognitive development, they do form an obstacle to heritage language program development because they represent beliefs commonly held, even by professional colleagues. Jim Cummins, of the University of Toronto, points out that “the research is very clear about the importance of bilingual children’s mother tongue for their overall personal and educational development. In his article, “Bilingual Children’s Mother Tongue: Why Is It Important for Education?” he explains the following six points: 1) Bilingualism has positive effects on children’s linguistic and educational development; 2) The level of development of children’s mother tongue is a strong predictor of their second language development; 3) Mother tongue promotion in the school helps develop not only the mother tongue but also children’s abilities in the

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majority school language; 4) Spending instructional time through a minority language in the school does not hurt children’s academic development in the majority school language; 5) Children’s mother tongues are fragile and easily lost in the early years of school; and 6) To reject a child’s language in the school is to reject the child.\textsuperscript{10}

The sad news for my school is that the school day is so busy with mandatory minutes allocated for required courses that we cannot implement extracurricular meetings and activities in Spanish or any other of our heritage languages. Therefore we must look to time outside of the school day to provide linguistic support in the heritage language. It is important to give elementary aged students a variety of ways to use their first language. Why let all the hours of language learning from infancy through childhood go to waste? It is important to start now. If the heritage language is not nurtured and used regularly, the child loses the desire and ability to communicate in her heritage language.

In Lily Wong Fillmore’s study published as, “When Learning a Second Language Means Losing the First,” in Early Childhood Quarterly she points out that:

When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences. They cannot teach them about the meaning of work, or about personal responsibility, or what it means to be a moral or ethical person in a world with too many choices and too few guideposts to follow. What is lost are the bits of advice, the consejos parents should be able to offer children in their everyday interactions with them. Talk is a crucial link between parents and children: It is how parents impart their cultures to their children and enable them to become the kind of men and women they want them to be. When parents lose the means for socializing and influencing their children, rifts develop and families lose the intimacy that comes from shared beliefs and understandings.\textsuperscript{11}


Public school administrators and educators need to have this deep understanding so that our heritage language learners’ education does not interfere with their relationship to their parents, grandparents and heritage culture. We would be wise to give them spaces in school to share this part of themselves and therefore be fully valued.

To help my learning community understand the importance of maintaining a child’s first language I have written an article for the school newsletter, “Eagle Excellence,” designed a plan and shared it with my principal and several parents, and held a share session with colleagues (see article, plan and share session outlines in appendix A, pages 33-36)

A PROJECT TO PROMOTE BILINGUALISM AND BICULTURALISM

An after-school language and cultural enrichment program can help students succeed in their education, career, communities and personal life. Such a program would help a child or adolescent communicate in his first language with parents and grandparents. It would help familial relationships, and help to bridge communication gaps that often occur in bi-cultural families where children and parents cannot fully communicate because of language barriers. If supported by the school, the program could facilitate positive communication between the school and immigrant families. Ultimately we should offer the space for such programs to all immigrant languages and cultures.

Time and time again I read and hear of children of immigrants feeling sad that they cannot communicate fully with their parents or grandparents. In the film “I speak
Arabic,” (2003)\(^\text{12}\) by Spanish teacher Diana Scalera, Arabic youth also express their desire to be able to communicate with their parents and grandparents fully.

Keynote speaker at the Heritage Languages Conference, Claudio Sanchez, pointed out that there is a “tug of war between immigrant parents and children, as the children are trying to fit in. The children become more educated and then ashamed of their parents and background.” (from my notes, Keynote Address, Nat’l Conference, October, 2002). Understanding the culture and traditions of their parents will help them to better integrate into their parents’ world and the world of their classmates.

On a personal note, my Italian grandmother came to live with us when I was five years old and she sixty-eight. She had lived most of her adult life in New York City surrounded by her culture and language. For our first five years together we lived in an Italian neighborhood in Philadelphia. Then we moved to the country where she only had us and the television for her social life. There was a big gap between us by then as I integrated myself with my new surroundings and friends. There were many barriers to my fully understanding who she was and how she felt. There were times when I was ashamed of my grandmother’s ways in front of my friends. Since her decline in old age with Alzheimer’s disease I have regretted not knowing her thoughts, dreams, needs and desires. I wish I could have a better picture of what her childhood was like and how she learned to cook so well. I wish I had spent more time with her in the kitchen. Despite those regrets I have gained much from her presence in our home. Hearing Italian spoken between her and my father helped me to learn Spanish more easily as well as to have an insatiable interest in other cultures and perspectives.

WHY FOCUS ON THE LATINO COMMUNITY

I am focusing on the design of a program specifically for the Latino community, not because it is my area of language expertise, but because of the urgent need there. Asian communities already have language and cultural schools in place. The Indian community has classes in Hindi, classical dance and drumming available for their children. There are Urdu classes offered at an Islamic cultural center. The most well established schools are the Chinese schools, which have been in existence in the area for over 20 years. Their schools in NYC and on the West Coast have been in existence since the early 1900’s. When I first started teaching at Millstone River School it struck me that the Chinese community has well-established language and cultural schools and the Latino communities do not. There are several very important factors that contribute to this difference – economic, education and the cohesion of the heritage language community.13

Much of the information on the local Latino community in this paper is found in a comprehensive study called “Latinos in Mercer County.” It was done by Lillian Escobar, MHS, for the United Way of Greater Mercer County (UWGMC). The study includes statistics on the composition of the Latino population of Mercer County, N.J., by nationality. It also reports on surveys given to Latinos and agencies who offer them services.

The Chinese and Indian communities are more affluent and depend less on their children for income or childcare than Latinos. The Asian communities have generally higher educational levels and are able to more easily access services available through the school system. Many Latinos have a difficult time supporting their child’s education

13 Latinos in Mercer County, pp. 5-11 – 5-12
because of language barriers or difficulty in leaving work to come to parent/teacher conferences. There is little cohesion in the Latino community, in part because of the difficulty organizing among the different nationalities and/or socioeconomic classes. Community centers have been established in the larger Latino communities in Princeton and Trenton which mostly meet the immediate and sometimes survival needs of working parents – housing, childcare, health care, counseling, legal advice and support groups. There is no time or expertise to be preventive and do long term planning.

The high school drop out rate for Latino students in Mercer County is 44% compared to 8% for Asian students. There is a strong correlation between the drop out rate for Latinos and the amount of cultural and linguistic support provided to the community. Latino families come here with varying degrees of education and income. As you will see in the next section most come here for economic reasons and take on low-paying service jobs, work long hours and have little chance to learn English. They are therefore unable to create the types of linguistic and cultural support programs as other heritage language communities.

WHO ARE THE LATINOS IN OUR AREA?

My school district, The West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional Area School District straddles two counties in New Jersey, Mercer and Middlesex. In the last ten years the Mexican population grew by 335% in Middlesex County, one of five of the fastest growing counties. The total Latino population for Mercer County as counted in the 2000 census was 33,898, making it 9.7% of the total population. The total for Middlesex

\[14\] Latinos in Mercer County, p. 2-7.
County was 101,940, 13.6% of the population. This does not count the high numbers of undocumented immigrants from Latin America. In Mercer County it is estimated that 50 – 60% of Latinos are undocumented. This is an estimate from Latino and non-Latino service providers in Mercer County (Latinos in Mercer County, p 5-3).

Latino immigrants in the area are relatively new. The Puerto Rican population has been in the area since the late 1940s, coming here under the auspices of Operation Bootstrap. Their migration to the US was facilitated by being given citizenship in 1917. As citizens, they are able to access social services more easily than other Latino groups.

Mexican migrant workers began arriving to the area in the 1970’s mostly for farming work. Over time the percentage seeking permanent residence has steadily increased. Since Mercer County is an affluent area it is relatively easy (for migrants, documented or not) to find service jobs (landscaping, painting, waiting tables, washing dishes, housecleaning, etc.). In the 1980’s many Guatemalans arrived here, seeking asylum as political and economic refugees. They settled primarily in Princeton where the first-comers received legal help for political asylum status. Colombians have come here to flee “instability and lack of security” in their country. In general the families who come from Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Venezuela and Colombia are well educated and have come here following a parent’s employment relocation.

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15 “Operation Bootstrap” was designed to industrialize and urbanize the island by utilizing low wages and tax concessions to promote investment. For the next 20 years, the economy boomed. Operation Bootstrap promoted out-migration to the mainland (particularly New York) to provide labor for U.S. industry. After 1945, over a million Puerto Ricans, including many women, immigrated to the U.S. (World History Encyclopedia online: http://www.bartleby.com/67/3729.html)
16 Latinos in Mercer County, p. 3-1.
17 Latinos in Mercer County, p. 3-9.
WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

The families of the heritage Spanish speaking students I am working with this year (2004/2005) are of a variety of educational levels and socioeconomic classes from Guatemala, Mexico, Puerto Rico, The Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina and Colombia. Their educational levels and socioeconomic classes generally coincide with the descriptors for the areas sociocultural context above. There are, however, two Mexican families who are from the middle and upper classes in Mexico. The middle class family is well educated but has had to take service jobs here. Their daughter is doing well academically. The upper class family came here for the father’s employment relocation in New York City. Their son is doing well academically.

The students who seem to struggle the most academically are Guatemalan and Mexican. I have spoken with several of their parents, who don’t speak English. They are frustrated by their children’s low achievement and their own difficulty in communicating with their children’s teachers. I am sometimes asked to translate at parent/teacher meetings. Often, because of their work schedule or a lack of transportation, they cannot attend these meetings. In general the Guatemalan and Mexican parents have difficulty working with the school for the benefit of their children, because of long working hours, the language barrier, and their own limited schooling. The school has not set up a consistent and effective strategy to make itself more accessible to the parents. My Spanish-speaking colleagues and I have freely offered our services to call parents, translate letters and interpret at parent conferences. If the Latino population grows any larger, our district will have to hire a full-time interpreter. Another anticipated benefit of our after school program will be to improve communication between heritage parents and
the school. It is a way to invite parents into an environment where their culture, language and needs are affirmed and accepted.

In the “Latinos in Mercer” survey, Latinos expressed awareness that low education levels “negatively affect the progress of the Latino community.” One respondent replied, “In my opinion the lack of education, in many cases, is the reason why two or three jobs are needed to support the household.”

Another important factor contributing to a lack of heritage Spanish programs for our Latino children is the apparent lack of cohesion within that community. The Latino community is comprised of many different nationalities and socioeconomic levels. Those who need the services most are overworked and underpaid. In general, those who have the education and time to volunteer are middle and upper-middle class and do not, for whatever reason, get involved with low-income families. Economic differences tend to correspond with nationality. For example, in Mercer County, Colombians who immigrate to the U.S. have a higher per-capita income than other nationalities. Mexican per capita income was the lowest.

When speaking with a director of an ESL program in Princeton I was warned that I would have a difficult time finding Native Spanish-speakers to help organize and implement a program for Latino children. She felt it was a social class issue and that those who could help would not want to work with the lower classes. And, of course,

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18 Latinos in Mercer, p. 4-29
19 In an interview with a Chilean mother who attends a Latino mothers and pre-school aged children it was apparent that there are no low income mothers involved with the group. Participants originated from Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru. All participants are professionals (teachers, engineers, doctors, lawyers, etc.) and/or housewives of professionals. This, of course, would be the tendency with native-English speaking mothers in U.S. society as well.
20 Latinos in Mercer, p. 2-12
those who would like to help are taking care of children full time and/or working long hours.

The City of Trenton has the largest Latino population in Mercer County. There are several organizations that have similar programs to that which I wish to establish at our school. For example, the Mercer County Hispanic Association (MECHA), which is located in Trenton, has programs for children and youth which offer academic assistance, cultural and recreational activities, summer camp, peer and leadership support programs for communication among and between the generations, as well as Latino mentoring.

In West Windsor and Plainsboro there are ESL classes available for older youth and adults. In Princeton there was a Family Literacy program but it has lost its funding because most of the families it served were undocumented. The Princeton YMCA, YWCA and Parks and Recreation provide summer camp to children of low-income families, but there is no linguistic or cultural enrichment program for heritage language communities. Latin American culture is celebrated in Princeton through the University of Princeton and the Princeton Arts Council. The Arts Council does offer scholarships to the children in the community, many of which are of Mexican and Guatemalan heritage. They also celebrate the Day of the Dead, inviting the whole community.

Our school has been prime for an after school activity program in Spanish since I began working there in 2001. I first began noticing this when I realized it was difficult to give my Hispanic students the linguistic challenges they needed within the context of our FLES program. One of the main issues I have wanted to address since then is that our Hispanic students develop pride and acceptance of their heritage language and cultures. So many of my Hispanic students have felt little motivation to excel in their first
language or to display their Hispanic identity. This is partially due to societal view of Latinos in the United States. They are depicted as lower class and poorly educated in the news, on many television programs and in movies. Even though we are in a diverse community where heritage languages and cultures are valued, I have heard of instances of Hispanic students being teased because of their accents. It’s hard to believe that this would take place here, but it may explain, in part, why my Hispanic students have not been as quick to embrace their heritage as our Chinese and Indian students, who have cultural and linguistic enrichment in after-school programs and weekend schools and/or classes at church and temple.

In the following section I describe the actual creation of an after-school enrichment program at our school which came to be called “The Spanish Club/El Club de español.” The creation goes from my original vision to the actuality of a successful program. I believe this initial start has taught us much about how we can be even more successful and can be a model for other communities and school districts.
CHAPTER II
CREATING A SPANISH CLUB

MY ORIGINAL VISION

I originally had the vision to establish a network of programs in Spanish for elementary school children that would cover five townships and boroughs. I envisioned art classes, sports clubs, language arts activities (drama, literature, etc.), story time, crafts, and dance. I hoped to tap into and/or add onto any programs already in place at the YWCA, township community centers, cultural centers and libraries.

In the summer of 2004 I contacted organizations and individuals to publicize the project, and to identify people who might support it. Many of my contacts worked for agencies already strapped for money and having difficulty meeting their original objectives, like ESL, literacy, and childcare. Although those I spoke with liked my ideas, they all felt there would be significant barriers—especially in finding funding sources.

One person who was especially helpful was Karen Longo-Baldwin, an ESL teacher in Princeton. She was enthusiastic about my plan, but detailed many of the obstacles I would face, including funding, cohesion of the Latino community, and transporting children to and from activities. Thanks to her I was able to focus on a less ambitious—but more realistic program. I would now focus on creating a single after-school club at my home school to promote heritage language and culture for our Spanish-speaking students.
INSPIRED BY PARENTS WILLINGNESS TO HELP

As the school year began in September I contacted several Latino mothers to discuss my idea. They were very encouraging and offered to help in any way they could. The first mother I spoke with was Josefina. We met by accident outside my office as she was enrolling her son in the fourth grade right before the start of school. Her family had just arrived from Mexico. She was a great first contact. In that initial conversation she mentioned that her sister, who worked for the Department of Education in Mexico, might be a good resource for materials in Spanish. The second volunteer I recruited was a student of Karen Longo-Baldwin. Both mothers inspired and encouraged me through their enthusiasm to help.

THE PROCESS OF CREATING THE CLUB

Community Education is the semi-autonomous organization that manages the enrichment programs at our school. I contacted them to ask if they would be interested in sponsoring a club in Spanish for our native speakers. The director liked the idea but felt it should be open to all students, not just native speakers. Since the majority of our students had been learning Spanish for three or four years I thought it would be possible to invite the non-native Spanish speaking students while still maintaining a high level of Spanish use in the club. I considered it vital to my vision that we maintain a high level of communication in Spanish, and not have to teach basic communication skills.

Still feeling some concern on not being able to offer the program to native speakers only, I wrote to another elementary Spanish teacher whom I had met online
through the Ñandu listserv\textsuperscript{21} She was running an after school club for her native Spanish speaking students. I asked her if she had any “insights or suggestions” about how to handle the non-native speaker requirement in my program. I told her: “I really want to help the Latino students to become proficient in their language and fully bilingual, biliterate and bicultural. In my mind it is more about their identity and self esteem.” She responded with great understanding of the value of both ways – inclusion or non-inclusion of non-Native Spanish-speakers. She said, “having advanced students of any background might make the class more 'high profile' and might show the Hispanic kids how important and valued it is to learn to read and write in Spanish because even their non-Latino friends are also working hard to do so,” This helped me to now widen my focus from native speakers “to give all students further opportunity to use the Spanish language and to give all participating students a better understanding and appreciation of Latino cultures and all the diversity therein.”\textsuperscript{22} 

In November the momentum started to pick up during National Education Week when I was able to connect with even more Latina mothers whom I’d invited to share their culture and language with my Spanish classes. They were very interested when I presented my idea for an after-school program to support heritage language. I met initially with two mothers and my colleague Leniz Camacho. We discussed what the mothers envisioned for their children and what we thought the children would enjoy at the end of a long school day. We emphasized that it had to be fun and not seem like more

\textsuperscript{21} Ñandu listserv is a listserv through the Center for Applied Linguistics for FLES teachers to network with one another, asking for help, sharing ideas on teaching, materials and curriculum.

\textsuperscript{22} WWPEF Mini-Grant Application for the Spanish Clubs. Amanda Amarotico. General Goals listed in Executive Summary (See appendix B, page 38-40).
studies with more work. We also agreed that we did not want cost to be an obstacle for any student and so set the fee at fifty dollars, forty dollars less than the normal cost for an after-school enrichment activity, and offered a sliding scale fee to those who could not afford the fifty dollars. At this meeting we gave the program the title, “Club de español/Spanish Club,” and wrote a description to submit to Community Education (see description in appendix B, page 41, center of letter to parents).

We decided to send a letter to all Latino families to announce our idea and to ask for their support (see appendix B, page 42). Out of fifty letters we received twenty-three responses. I contacted the parents who offered to volunteer with the club, and we scheduled another meeting in November to brainstorm ideas and shape a final program. (see agenda in appendix B, page 43).

Seven mothers came to this second meeting. We decided to organize each class around a cultural theme from each country represented by our volunteers. These countries included Mexico, Puerto Rico, Chile, Argentina and Colombia. The club would last for eight weeks. The first club would be an introduction and overview. The second through sixth classes would focus on the five countries, leaving the seventh class for review and the eighth as a rehearsal for an evening performance celebration. We envisioned holding a “grand-finale” the evening of the 8th and final session to enjoy a supper together and performances of poetry, drama, dance, and soccer.

I explained to the mothers that a Native Spanish-speaker would be hired to facilitate and teach the language arts portions of our club. I had already spoken with two of the mothers who were teachers in their home countries and the choice became easy when we discovered that one of the mothers did not have working papers.
Eight mothers, including our hired teacher, Sandra, my colleague, Leniz, and I met one last time in January, before the start of the club, to solidify the calendar of themes and fill in all the activities and volunteers for each week (see thematical calendar, appendix B, page 44). Parents not in attendance received meeting minutes and a copy of the thematic calendar.

THE ACTUALIZATION OF THE CLUB

As students arrived for the club each week they took their folder and a pack of sight word cards for a timed reading. Students kept track of how many words they read per minute (for list of words & timed reading chart see appendix B, page 45). Once all students had arrived we began serving a snack – a typical dish brought by the mother or mothers who were sharing their culture that day. Our hired teacher and/or the mothers also prepared a reading and/or writing activity for the session. Activities included “diversity bingo,” a getting-to-know-you activity (see appendix B, page 46), reading about Puerto Rico’s frog, the coquí, singing a song about the coquí, playing Mexican Lottery (a bingo game with traditional Mexican graphics; pictures of a guitar, a skull, a vagabond, etc), reading and acting out a traditional story from Colombia, reading and responding to Pablo Neruda’s poetry from “El Libro de las preguntas (The Book of Questions).”

One of our best lessons with true language arts activities in our fifth session, was Chile and the poetry of Pablo Neruda. Following is the lesson plan for this class and commentary.
LESSON PLAN

**Theme:** Chile and the Poetry of Pablo Neruda

**Activity:** Students will listen and respond to metaphorical/poetic questions or riddles written by Pablo Neruda in his book “El Libro de las Preguntas (The Book of Questions).”

**Materials:** book, “El Libro de las preguntas;” Large tablet of poster paper; pack of poster markers.

**Food:** empanadas, Chilean style

**Procedures:**

Introduction: Two parents introduce the day’s theme with a large shower curtain map asking a volunteer to come up and locate Chile. Talk a little about the food they brought and how it compares to “empanadas” from other parts of Latin America. One mother shares the typical dress of a “huaso,” the Chilean cowboy, and has three students model other clothing she’s brought.

Show students images of Chile with a picture book.

Briefly introduce the poet Pablo Neruda who was a Chilean poet who won the Nobel Prize in Literature and wrote about common themes with simple language. One example was his “Ode to the Onion.”

Show the ss. the book “El Libro de las preguntas,” and read several of the riddles pausing a short time between each question to allow ss. to get a sense of the type of poetry.

Ask students to go to assigned tables, grouping students in mixed proficiency groups. Show students Neruda’s riddle, “Pero, ¿por qué no se convence el Jueves de ir después del Viernes?” (But, why wasn’t Thursday convinced to go after Friday?), posted at the top of a large poster paper with several examples of answers. Ask students if they have any other ideas, emphasizing that there are no “right” answers. Write down their suggestions.

Next, with the help of four parent or high school volunteers give each group a large piece of poster paper with the riddle, “¿Quiénes gritaron de alegría cuando nació el color azul?” (Who cried for joy when

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the color blue was born?). at the top. Ask each group to write down as many answers as they can within 5 minutes. Volunteers can make sure all students understand and have the opportunity to give an answer.

After five minutes ask a representative from each group to come up and share their answers with the class.

COMMENTARY

This class went well because the riddles we chose were understood by all students. In other sessions we had parents share readings that were too long and complex for our non-native Spanish-speakers. They were also non-interactive activities. There was no negotiation of meaning. In the class on Neruda’s poetry all students were active negotiators and did not need to “check out” because of language overload. Cooperative learning activities are key to language use.

Some of the answers that children came up with for the riddle, “Who Cried for joy when the color blue was born?” were, “Sponge Bob por sus ojos azules” (Sponge Bob for his blue eyes), “Los defines por el océano azul” (The dolphins for the blue ocean), “Las nubes por el cielo azul” (The clouds for the blue sky), “Crayola por los crayones azules” Representatives who came up to read their answers were native and non-native speakers alike.

In this class we also had time to play a word game called “Bachillerato” which translates to “study for the Bachelors degree.” Each group gets a chart which has a column to write a letter of the alphabet. Then it has 4 or 5 more columns, each with a heading such as “Animal,” “Name,” “Country,” “Fruit or Vegetable.” A letter is pulled from a bag to which each group must think of a word in Spanish for each of the column headings. For example, if the teacher pulls a “P” from the bag, one student in each group
writes the letter in the first column of the first row, then with the groups help he/she might write “Perro,” “Patricia,” “Perú,” and “Papas” (for “Bachillerato” chart see appendix B, page 47. For photographs of this lesson see appendix B, pages 48-49).

This lesson was effective because it engaged all students. It is important for the teacher to plan structured but highly interactive lessons in the language arts component.

EVALUATION: DID WE MEET OUR GOALS?

It has always been in my heart of hearts that the program support the following three outcomes: 1) That my Latino students feel good about themselves and their heritage; 2) To increase students enjoyment of written and spoken Spanish; and 3) For students to be willing, if not eager, to speak Spanish at home with family.

As I stated in my application for a mini-grant: “The primary outcomes for this program are 1) Native Spanish-speakers’ language and culture will be affirmed by classmates, staff and the community. 2) All participating students will expand their Spanish vocabulary and/or have a better understanding and appreciation of Latino cultures and all the diversity therein” (appendix B, page 39).

Our first goal was met. The native Spanish speaking students were always arriving early at my office or the club. The club was to begin at 3:30 but the students would inevitably show up by 3:15 and ask what we were going to do and offer help with materials and equipment. During each session students appeared highly motivated, participating in all activities and sharing their ideas and experiences.

On the last day of the club I passed out a feedback form to all families. The Native Spanish speakers received the form in Spanish. The non-native speakers received
one in English (appendix B, pages 51-52). As you will notice, the questions on each version are different because the first goal is for native speakers only.

Out of the twenty-three students only five native speakers filled out and returned their feedback forms to me. I did receive verbal feedback either directly or indirectly from five of the non-native families. Three of these were direct and positive. They acknowledged that the program was challenging but positive for their child.

Two of the students with no Latino background dropped out by the end of the eight-week session. I am sorry to say that communication with these two families was not good. The first child to drop out told me and other mothers that he had too much going on and needed to cut back on after school activities. The director of Community Education called me shortly thereafter to say she hoped we were including all students in the class. She had received feedback from the student’s parents that there were mostly native speakers in the class and that he felt uncomfortable.

The second child to drop out had stopped attending without letting us know. When she did not come to the sixth or seventh class I called her mother to ask her if she would be able to attend the eighth and last class and participate in our Celebration night. The mother was defensive from the start of our conversation and replied that her daughter would not be attending any more. She said that her daughter said the class was made up of Native Speakers and she felt uncomfortable. Furthermore her daughter likes Spanish very much but the club was not meant for her and I should have been more thoughtful. I apologized, explained that there were other non-Latino students in the class and commented that I wish she had contacted me sooner. I also confirmed her feelings that the club was too difficult for the non-native speakers because most of the cultural sharing
was done by mothers who were not sensitized to the need to slow down and simplify their speech for the non-native speakers. Even the students with some Spanish spoken at home were challenged.

REFLECTION

The feedback from the native Spanish-speaking students showed us that the club was a very positive experience for them. Students who had become resistant to speaking Spanish at home are now speaking it more. Three out of the five who gave written feedback would like to have a more challenging club next time with more emphasis on reading and writing (appendix C, pages 54-57).

The feedback has shown us that we need to have at least two different levels for Spanish clubs. One would center around more reading and writing, the other would center around cultural games and songs with short and simple text. The higher level class could be taught by a Native speaker who is not trained in second language learning. The lower level should be taught by a native speaker who is also a Spanish as a second language teacher or who is very sensitive to the language limitations of lower level students: the non-native speakers and the Latino students who do not use Spanish as their primary language at home.

The lack of feedback from the majority of our families shows that we need to be more thoughtful about how we collect feedback. We should have asked for feedback midway through the club. For final feedback we should have taken the time to have students fill our their forms during class rather than sending it home on the last day.
Overall the Spanish Club was a great success. Parents came together and established supportive relationships with each other and with the school. Some of these relationships are likely to be long lasting. Latino students got to learn more about their own and other Latino countries through their own parents. They got to enjoy the written language through word games, stories, poetry and song. Non-native speakers got to experience Spanish language and Latino culture authentically through immersion. And in the end we all celebrated together through student presentations and a covered dish dinner, provided by all participating families (see photograph of celebration in appendix B, page 50. See article in appendix C, page 58).

WHAT IS NEXT?

We created Spanish clubs for the spring session, which included a Language Arts club for Native Speakers, a soccer club, coached in Spanish by a language teacher and certified coach, a Latino Dance club, and a Latin American Arts & Crafts club, to be taught in English by our art teacher (see descriptions in appendix C, page 59). The clubs did not run for a variety of reasons, mainly lack of enrollment due to poor advertising and outreach.

Two parents were very disappointed that the momentum of the first club might not continue, so decided to volunteer their time to offer the dance club for free on Fridays. We found twelve students to participate. Seven had attended the first winter Spanish Club. Six of the twelve students primary language is Spanish; three students have Latino roots but their primary language is English, and three are non-Latino.
The first half of the hour was run by a mother whose first language is English but who speaks Spanish fluently thanks to her Mexican-American parents. She played a low-key game or taught students a song or poem using percussion instruments. Games have included Hangman, Mexican Lottery (Bingo), and Serpientes y Escaleras (a Mexican version of Snakes and Ladders). The second half of the hour a Mexican mother taught traditional Mexican dances. On the last day of the club the students performed dances for their families.

In the fall we hope to offer the four original clubs again and work to make sure all families are well aware of these opportunities and their goals. And, who knows, perhaps we can start a trend in supporting ALL heritage language learners through after-school clubs in their heritage languages.