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Socio-academic identities of Spanish heritage learners: instructional implications for high school Spanish teachers

Shelly Jeanne Boley
Iowa State University

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Socio-academic identities of Spanish heritage language learners: instructional implications for high school Spanish teachers

by

Shelly J. Boley

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Program of Study Committee:

Marcia Harmon Rosenbusch, Co-Major Professor

Katherine Richarson-Bruna, Co-Major Professor

Linda Quinn-Allen

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The United States, as it is known today, is a nation of immigrants. Recently, there has been a dramatic influx of one particular population within communities across the country; those of Spanish-speaking origins. The population with this background is currently the fastest growing immigrant group and is predicted to make up nearly 25% of the population of the U.S. by the year 2030 (Tienda, Mitchell). This national trend has had a marked impact on many Midwestern communities that have mostly been considered homogeneous.

Iowa is a state in the center of the heartland of the United States. Once considered a mostly white, middle class state that prides itself on family farms and education, Iowa is now faced with a shift in demographics that has major implications for these types of homogeneous ideals. According to the Iowa Latino Affairs website, the Latino enrollment in Iowa public schools rose 700% between the 1985-86 and 2005-06 school years from 4,069 students to 25,145 students. At this rate, the Latino population in Iowa schools could surpass 100,000 students by the year 2036 (iowalatinofairs.org). Shifts such as these require schools to consider many changes within the school setting.

One such implication concerns the high school Spanish classroom. For many reasons it is important to encourage students who come from Spanish-speaking backgrounds to receive a formal education in their primary language (Freeman). These reasons include, but are not limited to, the promotion of cross-cultural understanding within the school and community, the maintenance of the students' own cultural and linguistic identities, increased development of literacy skills and future business and professional opportunities (Peyton 244-245). Also, because it is required for many

students to complete a varying number of years of a high school foreign language to enroll in or graduate from colleges and universities, a large number of students of non-Spanish speaking backgrounds are choosing to study Spanish as a foreign language (www2.state.edu/regents). Traditionally, these two groups of learners, both Spanish Heritage Learners, students who have experience with the Spanish language outside of the formal school setting, and English speakers learning Spanish as a foreign language, have been placed in Spanish class together (Hancock). Therefore, the issue at hand is how do high school Spanish teachers create an environment suitable for both groups of learners?

In addition to working with both groups of learners mentioned, it is also necessary to consider the variation of student backgrounds within the Spanish Heritage Learner population itself. First, Spanish Heritage Learners bring varying linguistic backgrounds to the class. Different countries of origin, varying levels of education and home experiences in the primary language and multiple bilingual ranges are considerations (Valdés, *“The Teaching of Minority Languages “*). Secondly, each student has his/her own identity as a Spanish-speaker based on each student’s experiences and background with the language (Freeman). Finally, students’ views of their own bilingualism and how that fits into the classroom environment are influential for Spanish teachers’ curriculum and instructional practices (Durán-Cerda).

For a high school Spanish teacher, then, there are many issues related to preparing instruction for a Spanish class that evolve from these demographic shifts and variances in student enrollment. Teachers can no longer teach to one group of learners; Spanish teachers must consider a wide variety of student backgrounds. With this consideration,

the possibility of teaching students who have outside experience with the language requires new ways of thinking and a shift in pedagogy.

In this research project, I will discuss themes related to the instruction of Spanish Heritage Learners (HL) enrolled in high school Spanish classes. Because this student group encompasses a broad range of students, I will identify the range of Spanish HL students and will discuss Spanish HL education and the importance of Spanish HL socio-academic identities in Spanish language courses at the high school level. After reviewing the methodology used for this research, I will talk about my findings from my fieldwork based on one teacher and three student participants. Finally, I will share what these findings imply for the field of Spanish language education, as well as, suggest areas for future research work.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Heritage Language Learners

There are many terms used to identify people who speak a language other than the culturally dominant language within a particular community. The terms *heritage language*, *heritage culture*, *heritage learner*, *heritage language learner*, and *heritage language speaker* are all accepted classifications, yet each encompasses a broad scope of definitions. In determining who heritage language learners are, for the purposes of this study, I chose the collaborative definition found in *Who Are Our Heritage Language Learners? Identity and Biliteracy in Heritage Language Education in the United States* by Hornberger and Wang. Considering a wide range of literature, they proposed that “in the U.S. context, HLLs [heritage language learners] are individuals who have familial or ancestral ties to a particular language that is not English and who exert their agency in determining whether or not they are HLLs of that HL[heritage language] or HC [heritage culture]” (27). This description, in particular, allows a specific identification of student ancestry yet provides each student agency, or ownership, in determining his/her own identification.

As I discuss Spanish language education for this particular student population, I chose to use the term Spanish Heritage Learner (HL) as a means of identifying their particular language identity in the context of a Spanish foreign language classroom setting. Incorporating *Spanish* into their identification seems appropriate as Spanish is the specific language context I am studying within the classroom setting. Additionally, I feel the term HL allows for the incorporation of *heritage language* and *heritage culture*, both of which are instrumental in determining students’ socio-academic identities.

When referencing Spanish language instruction, it is important to identify differences between foreign language instruction compared to heritage language instruction. Typically, foreign language education is aimed towards students who have no background with the target language outside of the formal classroom setting. This is an example of elective bilingualism. Elective bilinguals generally choose to enroll in a foreign language class and “typically come from majority language groups” where they can “add a second-language without losing their first language” (Baker 4). Contrarily, heritage language education provides language instruction to students who have prior knowledge of the language based on their identification as a heritage learner. This is an example of circumstantial bilingualism. Circumstantial bilinguals generally “learn another language to function effectively because of their circumstances (e.g. as immigrants)” and their first language is at risk of “being replaced by the second language” as they “operate in the majority language society that surrounds them” (Baker 4). In the case of this study, I will be examining instruction for students who identify themselves as Spanish HLs attending a high school Spanish foreign language class.

The High School Spanish Classroom

To begin to address the curricular and pedagogical transformation of high school Spanish language classes, it is important to consider what should be happening in a typical high school foreign language classroom. It is recommended that high school Spanish teachers, mostly trained to teach Spanish as a foreign language, follow the guidelines established by the Student Standards Task Force of the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, first published in 1996. The *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* were developed and written for foreign language teachers in

a language classroom. According to the standards document, the philosophy used when developing the standards is:

[I]anguage and communication are at the heart of the human experience. The United States must educate students who are equipped linguistically and culturally to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad. This imperative envisions a future in which ALL students will develop and maintain proficiency in English and at least one other language, modern or classical. Children who come to school from non-English-speaking backgrounds should also have opportunities to develop further proficiencies in their first language (7).

The standards are divided into five groups, or goals, often referred to as “the 5 C’s”: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. Each goal is then divided into two or three content standards that “describe the knowledge and abilities that all students should acquire by the end of their high school education” (National Standards 27). It is the committee’s contention that incorporating the 5 C’s into the foreign language classroom will provide students with the best educational opportunities in the given language.

Additionally, the National Standards provide educators with input regarding instructional strategies. It is suggested that “a variety of approaches can successfully lead learners to the standards,” but it is difficult to specifically identify which are most effective (24). One thing that is certain is that the guidelines allow teachers to break from the traditional skills focus and look more at the interpersonal (active negotiation of meaning), interpretive (appropriate cultural interpretation of meaning), and presentational

(creation of messages that facilitate interpretation from the other culture) modes of communication (Freeman; National Standards). These modes allow for student practice which is defined as “opportunities for meaningful language use (both receptive and productive) and for thoughtful, effortful practice of difficult linguistic features” (DeKeyser 181). DeKeyser suggests that basic options for designing practice involve “thinking about, manipulating, and/or producing or comprehending language at different language domain levels” as associated with written or spoken language (182). When preparing tasks to facilitate practice in a foreign language classroom, the tasks should be interactive, meaningful and focus on task-essential forms (DeKeyser 182).

By presenting students with a variety of rich practices, instruction can provide a setting that works towards incorporating the interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes of communication recommended by the National Standards. As referenced by Valdés (2000), these communicative modes are a suggested framework to help “understand and expand the bilingual range of students who have grown up in homes where non-English languages are spoken” (Freeman 60). Using a variety of instructional techniques based on the standards within the framework of these modes is a helpful tool for teaching Spanish to native English-speakers and Spanish HLs alike.

According to the Standards, however, there are specific needs to consider when teaching “students with home language backgrounds” (19). Primarily, teachers must consider the variation of students’ abilities and proficiencies within their heritage language. Considering that Valdes’ explanation of bilingualism existing on a sliding continuum suggests a variety of proficiency levels, the students’ individual language strengths and areas of need will impact their outcomes in a foreign language classroom

(Baker). Regardless of their proficiencies, however, the Standards stress that instruction needs to maintain the students' heritage language strengths while providing support for the areas in which they need further development and to "use the language for reading and writing" (20).

When further considering the specific needs of Spanish HLs in the high school Spanish class, there are many factors; some of which go beyond "the 5 C's" and general instructional practices. To meet the educational goals required for HLs, there are a number of challenges: the tie between language and identity, social implications of language and academic success, and the use of instructional practices that meet the appropriate developmental and educational needs while considering the prior knowledge and skills of this student population within the given classroom context.

Language and Socio-Academic Identity

The terms identity, self-concept and self-system from an ecological perspective determine the "hierarchical and multidimensional construct involving the perceptions, descriptions, and evaluations of one's self in relation to significant others, the social environment, and specific contexts" (Hornberger, Wang 6). When considering these factors and their impact on student achievement, specifically in a language course, it is imperative to demonstrate the correlation between language and identity. As language is not "only an instrumental tool for communication", but also "the carrier of cultural values and attitudes", one can see how language identity in terms of values and attitudes can influence student learning in a class that was established for students whose self-concept is associated with a different language identity (Daniel Tatem 139). This placement of Spanish HLs into a mainstream foreign language classroom, in fact, causes questions of

identity as HL students can often speak or carry on conversations, but at times cannot “write, read or understand grammatical concepts being presented to them in the traditional second language classroom” (Durán-Cerda 43). This lends to the students’ feelings of inadequacy in the language and thus confusion concerning their identity as a Spanish-speaker.

Beyond classroom instruction, the language-identity connection carries heavy significance. For many Spanish speakers, there is a strong tie to their heritage language which “unites them and gives them a sense of community” and “helps them retain their cultural and political identity in the United States” (Rong, Preissle 108). Recognizing that students bring their outside identity into the classroom, then, requires Spanish language teachers to respect their prior knowledge as viable and meaningful. By regarding their language identity as significant, “[s]tudents’ native languages provide access to academic content, allow more effective interaction, and are part of the students’ overall language and literacy knowledge” (Brisk 21). The inclusion of these identifying qualities can serve to enrich the classroom environment as well as support the students’ self-perceptions as HLs.

As HLs construct their identity within their heritage culture and the mainstream U.S. culture, they often find themselves falling somewhere in the middle, a place that is referred to as “the third space” (Darder 13). The third space is where HLs process the formation of their cultural identity and negotiate a hybrid, border identity as HLs within the U.S. context. A border identity, as detailed by Bejarano in *¿Qué onda? Urban Youth Culture and Border Identity* is specific to the “ethnic identities of people of Mexican decent” in the United States (3). This border identity involves “social, culture and

political distinctions” that divide the heritage culture and impact their “identity-seeking process and identity constructions” (3). Through this process, HLs must “differentiate and define themselves through their youth cultures, exposure to U.S. and Mexican popular cultures, language use and educational status, varying conceptualizations of citizenship status or non-status, and the social hierarchies and levels of discrimination they encounter within the school setting” (Bejarano 4).

In addition to language and culture identity concerns in a typical Spanish classroom setting, HLs also are faced with social implications that impact their academic success with the Spanish language. When HLs are co-learning in a typical Spanish class, the non-heritage students “may resent the heritage speakers’ native-like familiarity with oral language and the appearance that the Spanish speakers are studying ‘a language they already know’” (Hancock 1). In the meantime, however, HLs tend to feel more challenged when they are using Spanish in an academic setting because they are more familiar with speaking in daily terms (Durán-Cerda; Hancock). Valdés (“*The Art of Teaching Spanish*”) also identifies that, beyond the instructional goals of standard dialect, transfer of reading and writing abilities, the expansion of bilingual range, and the maintenance of the heritage language, in high school, it is necessary to attend to “the development of academic skills and the increase of students’ pride and self-esteem” (195).

Moreover, it is suggested that the needs of HLs in the classroom vary depending on student characteristics (Valdés, “*The Teaching of Minority Languages*”). Valdés determines that newly arrived immigrant students require language maintenance, continued development of age-appropriate language competencies and the acquisition of

prestige variety of the language at varying levels determined by their literacy skills. She further expands on the differing needs of HLs as second or third generation bilinguals, which include maintenance, retrieval and/or acquisition of language competencies, expansion of bilingual range, transfer of literacy skills and acquisition of prestige variety of the language. This variety of language needs for HLs, in addition to the needs and abilities of the students learning Spanish as a foreign language, call for deliberate pedagogical responses.

Looking deeper into language identity and academic outcomes for Spanish HLs, research indicates that HLs have an increasingly high dropout rate and overall low performance within the U.S. school system. The high school completion rate for HLs in the United States show that “[o]nly 81% of U.S.-born Latinos, 70% of the foreign-born who are naturalized citizens, and 40% of the noncitizen Latinos ages 25-29 have a high school diploma” (Gibson et. al. 2). Although not all students identified as “Latino” are Spanish-speaking or HLs, the education system needs to consider ways in which it can better reach Latinos who are Spanish HLs academically and increase HL performance in school. One notable barrier to HL academic success is teacher knowledge and lack of understanding of “the social, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds” of HLs and the impact their identities as HLs has on their learning (Gibson et.al. 3).

One relevant yet often misunderstood characteristic of HLs is “codeswitching”. Codeswitching is the practice of combining languages, which monolinguals can consider to be a result of lazy or sloppy language habits. Interestingly, there is evidence that codeswitching likely demonstrates more language fluency than deficit and can be a valuable linguistic tool (Baker). Codeswitching demonstrates “the full language

resources that are available to a bilingual, usually knowing that the listener fully understands the code-switches” (109). Although there are many purposes of codeswitching, all of which are interconnected, the main consideration is that it is a natural language occurrence for bi-or multilingual communities. In an educational setting, however, teachers may misunderstand this language characteristic if they are not adequately informed or prepared to work with HLs in their classrooms.

Instruction for Spanish Heritage Learners

Since “[s]uccessful teaching of heritage (HL) students requires a curriculum for them that can be used whether they are in heritage classes or share classes with foreign language students,” it is of value to consider a variety of language acquisition methods and approaches when planning curriculum and instruction (UCLA International Institute). However, specific methods for teaching Spanish to Spanish HLs are relatively new and may be unfamiliar to Spanish foreign language teachers. Thus, addressing this student groups’ learning needs poses a challenge for educators who have not been trained to work with HLs.

When working to teach to the specific yet diverse needs of Spanish HLs, especially within a foreign language setting, one possible approach is through differentiated instruction. Differentiated instruction “encompasses a wide range of teaching strategies and attitudes” focused on students and learning (Blaz 1). The main objective of this approach is to ensure that the content of the lessons, the means by which the students learn that content and how the student demonstrates learning is compatible for each student’s readiness level, interests, and preferred mode of learning (Tomlinson). This approach allows for instruction that teaches students what they need to know,

according to curriculum and standards, in a complex yet flexible way that accommodates student differences with a variety of teaching styles. The student differences to consider when using differentiated instruction are learning styles, interests, prior knowledge, socialization needs and comfort zones (Blaz). These approaches would provide a high school Spanish teacher with the opportunity to address the needs of Spanish HLs the appropriate learning opportunities within the foreign language classroom setting.

One particular method suggested to be particularly helpful for HLs is the Cummins' framework (Hall 53). Cummins' theory addresses the relationship between language and cognition through "basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) and cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP)" (Baker 174). More specifically, BICS is an approach that utilizes "contextual supports and props for language delivery" such as language comprehension and speaking skills whereas CALP uses "'context-embedded' situations" for non-verbal support that includes analysis and synthesis (174). BICS/CALP, then, addresses the need for students to access sufficient language proficiencies as well as rich curriculum, which Cummins suggests should happen simultaneously.

Moreover, Cummins' BICS/CALP model allows for formative assessment, contextual referents, and greater cognitive demand leading to an enhanced academic experience. Although most of the literature references the Cummins model as a means to "ensure that children who need to learn a second language are provided with classroom experiences that give them rich language learning opportunities whilst also making the curriculum content meaningful and accessible," it is reasonable to transfer the intent of the framework to students who are studying their first language in a second language

setting (Cline, Fredrickson 23). Looking deeper into the aims of Cummins, who clarifies that “the key components of contextual support in the classroom is intended to help teachers to match appropriate types of support to the needs of a particular student,” allows for the Spanish foreign language classroom to serve as a primary language setting for foreign language learners in the class (23).

Summary

In this literature review, I was able to determine that there are many considerations when working with HLs in a formal classroom setting. First, Spanish foreign language teachers should know and follow the recommendations provided by the National Standards. Establishing a Spanish language learning environment that focuses on subject matter content rather than traditional skills sets such as isolated vocabulary lists and grammar would create a more comfortable and meaningful atmosphere for HLs. I further discovered that Spanish HL identities are unique and can impact their learning in a Spanish language classroom. These bordered identities influence how students perceive themselves as Spanish-speakers linguistically, culturally, socially and academically. All of these characteristics impact their Spanish language learning and can enrich the classroom environment if acknowledged. Finally, I learned that teaching with these characteristics in mind suggests the implementation of differentiated instruction. By differentiating instruction, Spanish foreign language teachers can consider Cummins’ suggestions for formative assessment, contextual referents, and greater cognitive demand based on the particular needs of HLs in their classes.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Research Approach

The desire to learn how to teach Spanish to varying student populations within the classroom setting was the influence for designing this study. I wanted to create a study that allowed me to better understand how Spanish Heritage students' educational needs differed from those of their peers who are primarily English speaking. I also wanted to learn from the perspective of a teacher who has experience working with Spanish HLs how to better teach this student group in my own high school Spanish classroom.

To meet these aims, I chose to complete a qualitative study since this approach “seek[s] to make sense of personal narrative and the ways in which they intersect” (Glesne 1). By desiring to understand the viewpoints of both the Spanish teacher and her Spanish HLs to gain a better understanding of the Spanish classroom environment, methods consistent with qualitative inquiry seemed most appropriate. In a similar sense, I appreciate how qualitative research methods “are used to understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social conditions” (4).

Methodologically, my approach to data collection resembles a micro-ethnography as described by Urmstron Philips in *The Invisible Culture*. She suggests that the microanalysis associated with participant observation of educational anthropology is rooted in the traditions of “identity and meaning [which are] constituted in human interaction” (xii). She continues by stressing the process as an “accumulation of interactions” and the importance of “a relationship of such interactions” as a way of

conceptualizing such face-to-face relations (xiii). It is this realization that I, too, strive to incorporate into my understanding of the relationships and interactions of the participants of my study.

When conducting research, it is important to identify the relationship between the methodology and theoretical approach. As I have described my chosen methodologies used in this study, it is necessary to discuss the theoretical perspectives that guided my understanding of the socio-academic identities of Spanish HLs in relation to instructional practices in the high school Spanish classroom.

Symbolic Interactionism:

According to Crotty, symbolic interactionism “is an approach to understanding and explaining society and the human world” (3). This understanding is built on the relationship between society and the individual. The interactionist approach is framed by the bridge between social structure and person, which “must be able to move from the level of the person to that of large-scale social structure and back again” (Stryker 53).

This relationship is fluid as:

the self has a structure that does not simply reproduce the interactive behavior that is captured in the concept of society. That is, only some part of human interaction is describable in terms of a structure of positions and roles; and, since both self and society derive from interaction, only part of the self is describable in these terms. (Stryker 79-80)

Although no one person is wholly described by his/her interaction within society, society itself has an impact on each one. Likewise, society is sculpted by its participants, which are the people interacting within it.

With the nature of interactionism relying on the premise that a) people react based on the meaning they have created for individual things, b) this sense of meaning comes from each person's social interactions and c) this process is interpretative, I draw on this approach to analyze what each participant shared with me regarding his/her understanding of his/her identity and how that relates to the greater context of Spanish class and of student success (Blumer).

Blumer states that the importance of social interaction "lies in the fact that (it) is a process that *forms* human conduct instead of being merely a means or a setting for the expression or release of human conduct" (8). For the purposes of this study, I intend to understand how the social and academic interaction impacts HL identity and therefore their conduct socially and academically in Spanish class. This correlation seems vital as "a focus on the person without a correlative focus on social structure, or vice versa, is necessarily partial and incomplete" (Stryker 53).

Critical Theory:

When considering theory from a critical perspective, one must look at "the notion that all knowledge is created within a historical context and it is this historical context that gives life and meaning to human experience" (Darder et. al. 12). Specifically, critical theory is "concerned with how domination takes place, the way human relations are shaped in the workplace, the schools and everyday life" and the understanding of how this perspective has been shaped by the dominant perspective (Kincheloe, Steinberg 23). With the dominant group often being classified by race or other ethnic traits, I see personal identification with a non-dominant language associated with a non-dominant ethnic group as a representation of a critical issue as well.

An important component of critical understanding also relies on how one can negotiate the idea of perspective through self-reflection and a “framework of principles is developed around which possible actions can be discussed and analysed” (Kincheloe, Steinberg 24). By focusing on students’ perceptions of their own socio-academic identities, the students themselves are encouraged to reflect on their own understanding of critical social structure and the impact it has on their academic encounters. Their perspectives, then, allow me as the researcher to examine their influence on the classroom environment through the curriculum, instruction and the ways in which communication takes place.

Personal Subjectivity

In qualitative studies it is vital to consider in-depth researcher reflection. Personal reflection allows the researcher the opportunity to establish “a conscious use of reflection to examine one’s own personal biases, views, and motivations and to develop self-awareness in interaction with others” (Spindler, Hammond 36). By articulating one’s own personal subjectivity through detailed reflection that provides such self-awareness, the researcher can “understand the ways in which knowledge of self and other mutually inform each other” (36).

For this study, I reflected on my prior experiences in the field of Spanish foreign language instruction and what I bring to the research on a personal level. As a high school Spanish teacher in an English dominant community, the ideas of bilingualism and second language acquisition have been areas of my own personal interest. One of the goals of teaching a foreign language is to give students an opportunity to learn and use a second language and thus become bilingual. As often as we spoke in class and practiced

using Spanish in a variety of communication modes, I regularly questioned if there was ever any chance of my students becoming bilingual in both English and Spanish. My idea of being bilingual did not seem to mesh well with our district curriculum or available classroom opportunities. It did not seem possible to become bilingual when the second language was only available for 45 minutes a day, 5 days a week. Even then, students were not using every precious minute to practice Spanish. In my mind, the goal of bilingualism was not attainable in that setting.

Upon beginning to research the topic of second language acquisition, I began to question my initial understanding of bilingualism. I had a very specific belief as to what being bilingual actually looked like. Although I thought there were different levels of “knowing” a language—being able to use limited vocabulary, being communicatively functional, or speaking casually—I did not necessarily find those traits to be consistent with bilingualism. I thought this idea of “knowing” reached beyond speaking and basic function. I thought that the speaker had to be able to express, connect, communicate effectively, and in essence, “live” the language to truly “know” it. I believed that there had to be an organic element present for there to be any possibility of bilingualism, which I did not see happening in the traditional high school Spanish classroom.

In a similar sense, I did not see myself, a university Spanish major who studied in Mexico on two separate occasions and had taught Spanish for 10 years, as being bilingual. I felt like most of my experiences with Spanish were derived from a school environment. Although I saw bilingualism as being fluid where its definition could be based on individual situations and environments, I did not see myself fitting into that definition. I think I would have been more open to considering myself bilingual while I

was studying abroad, but my lack of overall confidence in my Spanish speaking abilities blocked me from believing that I could actually be bilingual. I did not feel like my strengths in reading and writing in Spanish were sufficient.

Once I began to understand Valdés' continuum of bilingualism, as clarified in *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* by Colin Baker, my understanding of bilingualism began to shift. As Baker describes this continuum, there are various levels of abilities between the two sides of a monolingual spectrum (language A and language B). As each side flows from being monolingual in language A to the other side of monolingualism in language B, there is a middle ground that does not have an arbitrary cut-off, but rather a continuous flow of language dimension. He also suggested that a perfect meeting in the middle, the notion of a perfect balanced bilingual, is an idealized concept. Baker further expresses that “[m]ost bilinguals will use their two languages for different purposes and with different people” (9). If that is actually the case, then I would have to reevaluate not only my understanding of bilingualism, but also my own status as a bilingual and the goals I set forth in my Spanish language classroom.

This question of bilingualism caused me to think about my own teaching practices related to Spanish-speaking students. In my levels II and III Spanish classes in a central Iowa classroom, each semester I had at least one Spanish HL in my classes. Although my student population was overwhelmingly native English speakers, often born and raised in the same community, I had the opportunity to teach several students who were not of that background. These “other” students who had varied family backgrounds, all had native Spanish speaking abilities and wide-ranging Spanish academic experiences. Although I realized they brought some level of prior knowledge into the class, I did not

have any understanding of what impact that would have on their learning in an academic Spanish setting structured to meet the needs of English monolingual students. I was, in fact, trained to teach Spanish as a *foreign language*.

This lack of understanding led to quite a bit of frustration; I did not know how to teach this student population. From my frustration, I found myself complacent with the idea that all of my students, regardless of their language background, could complete the same tasks. I remember telling them to just “go through the motions and get through it the best they could.” Who would want to learn in that environment? As a result, few of my Spanish heritage students were successful in Spanish class, which was too often an occurrence with all of the sections of Spanish foreign language courses offered at my school. This reality was confusing to the Spanish teachers who felt they worked hard and provided adequate instruction and to the school counselors who placed them in the course for an “easy A” in a language they already knew. It was this personal situation that led me to want to investigate ways to more successfully teach Spanish to heritage learners in a traditional high school Spanish classroom. Building a greater understanding of Spanish-speakers, their language identity and their educational needs will give me the skills and knowledge required to provide them with the most meaningful education possible in my classes and not only maintain but also enhance their bilingualism.

During my preparation for this study, in particular, I also found myself considering what I expected to see upon beginning my classroom observations. As a Spanish teacher trained pre-Standards, I realized that I have a specific vision of what a Spanish foreign language classroom might look like. From my methods coursework, student teaching and teaching experiences, and continuing education efforts, I have

developed my own perceptions of what I may experience in a typical Spanish class. These perceptions are founded on the importance of teaching in the target language, yet tend to be more language structure focused within a broad theme or unit. Often times these units correlate with the chapter of a Spanish language textbook that is used by each teacher in the school in order to maintain a sense of equal instruction for all students. As I prepared to enter the classroom as a researcher, it was necessary for me to consider these preconceptions and open my mind to what was actually happening in this particular classroom setting rather than what I thought I might see during my observations. Understanding my perspective as a Spanish Foreign Language teacher provides the lens for which I processed my classroom observation experiences.

Research Setting

I chose to conduct my research during the last six weeks of the 2008-2009 academic school year in a town I will call City Heights, Iowa. The City Heights Community School District is home to 8 school buildings: six elementary schools for students enrolled through grade 5, one middle school which serves grades 6-8 and one high school for grades 9-12 (www.iowa.gov). My fieldwork took place in a classroom setting of the town's high school, which I will call City Heights High School. It involved working closely with a tenured high school Spanish teacher in this central Iowa high school, her classroom and three of her Spanish heritage students as focal students. I observed two classes, which were both called Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish. This level is consistent with a 5th year offering of Spanish at this particular high school.

Community Context

City Heights is a central Iowa town. As an Iowa native, I would say City Heights is representative of a typical, mid-sized town that seems to align itself with ideals associated with Midwestern living. With a population of under 50,000 people, City Heights sees itself, according to the city's website (retrieved May 15, 2009) as "a growing city that has held on to its small-town charm." City Heights is a town that is proud of its "thriving economy, low unemployment, excellent schools, and a wonderful variety of housing options" and views itself as a "great place to live, work and raise a family" (from the city's website). The majority of the town is classified as White and there is only a small racial or ethnic minority representation. According to the State Department of Education, over one-fourth of the city's population is listed as being high school age (grades 9-12) and enrolled in school.

Research Participants

Cheryl Gruess, as she will be known in this study, has been teaching at City Heights High School for many years. Initially she taught Spanish II, III and IV. In time, her teaching assignment began to shift levels to accommodate the addition of Advanced Placement (AP) Spanish and a course entitled Spanish for Hispanics, which are the two Spanish language classes she currently teaches. Along with her Spanish courses, Mrs. G., as she is affectionately known, also works towards creating a culture-rich environment at City Heights High through a course entitled Cultural Issues, which is an experiential elective she also currently instructs. Mrs. G. is well known in the community and surrounding areas for her work with Spanish language instruction, cultural understanding and Spanish

HLs in particular. Although I had not met her before this study, I was familiar with her professional efforts and as I re-enter the Spanish teaching profession, consider her a colleague.

Mrs. G. has an educational background in Spanish language and education. She received both her Bachelor's Degree and Masters Degree in Spanish Language and has studied teaching well beyond her formal education. She is well versed in authentic assessment and the creation of rubrics as well as the development of integrated curriculum. Her extensive travels to Spanish speaking countries have also provided her a great perspective on Hispanic culture, which is not only an asset in her classes, but also aids her work as the district's Culture Equity Specialist.

At the time of my study, Mrs. G. was teaching AP Spanish and Cultural Issues. At City Heights High School, Spanish HLs are *enrolled* in Spanish for Hispanics I, II, III, or IV simply based on their classification as a Freshman, Sophomore, Junior or Senior, but they *attend* the AP Spanish class that follows the traditional sequence of Spanish I through AP. Therefore, the Spanish HLs taking a Spanish language class at City Heights can receive up to four years of AP Spanish instruction with Mrs. G depending on how long they have attended City Heights schools.

According to the City Heights Community School District's website, the prerequisite for enrollment in Spanish for Hispanics is a Spanish home background. The course description details that:

Spanish for Hispanics courses provide opportunities for heritage speakers (those with a home background in Spanish) to maintain, retrieve, or acquire language

competencies in Spanish. Students come with a wide variety of backgrounds including:

- Recent arrivals with sound prior educational experiences
- Recent arrivals with little formal education
- First generation immigrant students educated primarily in U.S. schools
- Second and third generation “bilinguals” schooled exclusively in the U.S.

The description also explains that Spanish-speaking students’ needs differ from their primarily English-speaking peers who are learning Spanish as a foreign language, but that they will be in attendance together at the AP level and that the HL students will be “given individual education plans that appropriately develop their individual language skills”.

Mrs. G. taught two sections of AP Spanish first and third periods that I observed during the course of my study. Her first period class had 22 students enrolled, 18 of which were primarily English speaking students enrolled in the traditional Spanish class sequence, and 3 Spanish Heritage Learners and 1 Foreign Exchange student from Chile who were enrolled in Spanish for Hispanics. Third period consisted of 26 students, 8 of whom were Spanish Heritage Learners enrolled in Spanish for Hispanics while the remaining 18 were AP students who had followed the traditional sequence.

For this study, I chose to focus on Mrs. G. and three of her Spanish HLs from her first and third period classes. The students were chosen based on their signed parental consent and student assent for participation and Mrs. G.’s recommendation based on her perception of high, middle and low achievement. By studying students with varied success in Spanish class, I will be able to collect a broad perspective of student

experiences which will provide more meaningful data. Through these criteria, the focal students chosen for this study were, as they will be called, Nico, Julia and Alejandro.

Data Collected

For my data collection process, these research questions and methods were used:

Table 1

Research Question	Methods of Data Collection
What is the impact of Spanish Heritage Learners on instructional practices in an Iowa high school Spanish class?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 classroom observations in 6 visits (2 class periods per visit) • one 40 minute audio-recorded interview with focal Spanish teacher • review of 3 activities and assessments prepared by teacher
What is the influence of Spanish Heritage Learners' identity on their language acquisition and student experiences with Spanish language development in a formal setting?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 classroom observations (per student) • one 15-20 minute audio-recorded interview with each of the 3 focal Spanish Heritage Learners • review of 3 samples of earlier student work

To answer my research questions, I collected data from classroom observations and audio-recorded interviews with both the teacher and the focal students. The observations took place two class periods a week. During this six week study I wrote detailed notes about the instruction, events and conversations observed while sitting in the back of the classroom. The purpose of these observations was to collect data helpful to understanding the instructional techniques used to teach Spanish Heritage Learners and to observe their interactions within the classroom environment to better understand their needs.

In addition to collecting data from classroom observations, I interviewed each participant once. The interview with the teacher lasted approximately 40 minutes whereas each student interview was 15-20 minutes in length. The primary goal of the interviews was to gain information about Spanish Heritage Learners' needs in the

Spanish language classroom environment from each of the participants' perspectives. These needs focused on their academic outcomes, overall instruction, curriculum and socialization.

Finally, I was able to see samples of activities and assessments prepared by the teacher and the students' productions of this work. The work I examined were writing activities printed from the web-based site, "nicenet" (www.nicenet.org), written grammar exercises and written exams and an oral final exam, which I was able to observe. This information allowed me to see first-hand what the teacher prepared in order to assess the students' progress as well as the students' ability to produce the Spanish language through general written work, formal grammar and their use of spoken language in the classroom environment.

Data Analysis

In *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach* by Maxwell lists these steps as a means of beginning to analyze qualitative work:

- Reading interview transcripts;
- Reading observation notes;
- Writing notes and memos from readings;
- Develop tentative ideas about categories and relationships from notes and memos (96).

It was with this set of suggested guidelines that I chose to begin to analyze my data for this qualitative research project. I interviewed my participants, transcribed each interview from an audio-recording, kept a detailed, written record of all of my observations, and prepared formal fieldnotes, which includes key words, an abstract, a

narrative summary and enduring questions from each observations, from those records. I chose to use all of this information, then, to read and reflect through the process of writing memos, which are described as being a conceptual process that allows the researcher to “tie together different pieces of data into a recognizable cluster, often to show that those data are instances of a general concept,” and begin to code my findings (Miles, Huberman 72).

My initial method of coding is referred to as “open coding.” In a workshop by Leslie Bloom, professor at Iowa State University, she described open coding as a technique that “immediately follows transcription of interviews, when the interview is still in your mind.” During this process, I used a large margin in my interview transcriptions to identify the main points from each line of the transcription document. Then, I was able to assess my interview transcriptions as a whole to begin to see major issues emerging. These issues became a starting point for me to “wonder or speculate or hypothesize about data” and make comparisons (Strauss 63).

Maxwell stresses that “reading and thinking about your interview transcripts and observation notes, writing memos, developing coding categories and applying these to your data, and analyzing narrative structure and contextual relationships are *all* important types of data analyses” (96). With this in mind, I tried to be conscious of all of these aspects during the data analysis process. After using my initial pieces of data to code and write memos, I worked towards reflecting on the issues that emerged towards final data reduction.

Chapter 4: Findings—The Teacher

During my time observing and interviewing Mrs. G., her teaching practices were characterized by the inclusion of cultural understanding, differentiating instruction for her Spanish HLs and building relationships with her Spanish HLs. The relationship between these themes and my research questions are identified as:

Table 2

Research Question	Themes
What is the impact of Spanish Heritage Learners on instructional practices in an Iowa high school Spanish class?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HL identities impact classroom instruction • HL educational needs impact curricular choices • Relationships with HLs influence instructional climate

Classroom Environment

When I arrived to begin my formal classroom observations for this research project, Mrs. Guess greeted me in the main hall before leading me into the pod of foreign language classrooms and into her room in the far back corner. The entrance of the room was positioned at the back of the instructional space. Two rows of student tables were divided by a center aisle and faced a white board positioned at the far side of the room. Behind the students' seats was Mrs. G.'s desk and filing system, which is where she pulled out a chair and small table for me to sit and observe.

As I took my spot, which was against an outside wall with large windows that let in a warm light and housed an assortment of knickknacks, I looked around to get a feel for the classroom environment. The room had a fresh, bright appearance with a generous amount of sunlight, clean white walls and sparse decorations. The strong scent of new carpet overpowered the space. Mrs. G.'s classroom is a part of the newly constructed building into which staff had recently been relocated. It appeared that many of the details

had yet to be incorporated into the décor since the bulletin boards were yet to be filled, decorations were sparse and boxes were stacked in the corners of the room.

While students began to file into the classroom, Mrs. G. hustled around organizing papers and addressing students in a cheerful manner. She pleasantly chatted with various students using both English and Spanish. As the beginning of the class period neared, Mrs. G. began to gather students from the commons area into the room. She engaged the students in a jovial, joking manner. She spoke to some students in English while others were addressed in Spanish. It appeared that she choose to use whichever language would be considered the students first or native language in her address. I come to this conclusion based on Mrs. G.'s specific effort to introduce me to her Spanish HLs after her greeting. This introduction was also conducted in Spanish. Each student smiled graciously and shook my hand, but did not speak directly to me. As we greeted each other, Mrs. G. told me where each student was born and what his/her cultural country of origin was.

My first impression of Mrs. G. was that she had a very bold personality. Upon these initial interactions, I felt somewhat overwhelmed by her frankness and straightforward approach. Her demeanor seemed to overpower her physicality. She was an average sized woman with a kind face and bright, expressive blue eyes. Her appearance was simple yet her carriage was strong. She moved about the room with purpose and addressed each person she came across with a focus. I imagined myself as one of her students and pictured myself feeling slightly intimidated by her vigor. From my primary observations, however, her students did not appear to share this feeling as

they were quick to engage with Mrs. G. and their conduct with each other looked warm and pleasant.

HL Identities and Classroom Instruction

In working with Mrs. G. during this study, it was evident that she was very cognizant of her HLs' identities during classroom instruction. There were many occasions where she introduced cultural issues related to her HLs during class and included these issues as a means of creating an culturally rich environment that acknowledged and supported student differences.

During my first observation, one Spanish HL arrived 17 minutes late. Mrs. G. welcomed him, but did not make an issue of his tardiness. During each of my observations, this same student arrived late. One time, Mrs. G. welcomed him by saying, "Mejor que nada" (better than never). On another occasion Mrs. G. stopped her classroom discussion when this student entered. She asked him, "Hola, ¿cómo estás? ¿Por qué siempre estás tarde?" (Hi, how are you? Why are you always late?). She sincerely did not ever appear to be angry, but simply wanted to discuss why he was late every day. Even though the student did not offer a response, the situation provided a reference for later classroom instruction.

Mrs. G. used these interactions as a cultural lesson during a review of the students' final projects. In a discussion of their culture final, Mrs. G. asked the students to review what they had learned about one of the themes, cultural practices and perspectives. She told them that the perspectives part involved how people think. "Like, arriving late. Being late is the practice, but the perspective is that there is an unending amount of time," she explained. When I asked her about these situations, she assured me

that she counts them tardy every day, but that it does not have much effect on their late arrival. According to Mrs. G., “they will tend to come late to this class and then not go to some of the others at all.” When I asked what impact this had on them she responded:

The discussion about time and tardiness and all that is just as much for them as it is for everybody else. I mean, to them, it is probably a mystery how everyone else tends to be here... The kids come in late all the time, the kids get marked late and, so what?

I sensed discussions like this allow students to acknowledge their cultural backgrounds, which in turn provides an environment where students are not degraded for their differences and cultural discussions are encouraged.

I witnessed many situations where Mrs. G. focused on culture and an *understanding* of student differences rather than an attempt at trying to change who each student was. Several students expressed that her true understanding and appreciation of culture helped them feel connected to her. They felt like she understood them in ways that other teachers did not. Students also expressed appreciation for her open nature and interest in discussing culture and cultural differences, even when the topics were difficult or somehow controversial. Mrs. G. told me herself that “you have to bring up those things no one wants to talk about” in order to create an open environment that facilitates communication and understanding. This “open environment” appears to guide her instructional approach in Spanish class.

One example is in the way she spoke Spanish with her HLs and tried to emulate the accent and speaking styles of her various students. For instance, on one occasion, one of the focal students, Nico, arrived late to class with a pass. He spoke to Mrs. G. using a

very thick, Cuban accent and a rapid rate of speech. Mrs. G. responded to him using a similar rate of speech and a comparable accent. When she and I discussed this interaction, she told me she believes that trying to use the students' accents when speaking directly to them is an important part of not only the language, but also of making connections with students. I suggested that it takes a lot of skill to be able to do that with all of the different language backgrounds of her students. Her response was that it does not take that much skill, it is more of an effort that the students notice and appreciate. It is that type of effort and care that appeared to aid her connections with her students on a personal level which, in turn, allowed her to better connect with them on an academic basis.

Mrs. G. then used this interaction with Nico as a point of discussion for the entire class. This "teachable moment" allowed students to interact with Nico and recognized his abilities in front of the class. By utilizing instructional opportunities in an effort to incorporate the students' unique language backgrounds and abilities and supporting them as valid within the classroom setting, Mrs. G. provides opportunities to empower her HLs by validating this outside ability before his peers, which she said allowed them the opportunity to "be the star." By placing HLs in an environment that provides an appropriate level of the spoken language (AP rather than traditional early levels), students are able to feel like they can function fittingly within the classroom setting, even though I did not witness this language environment. Mrs. G. noted that many schools "put those kids in a beginning course where they fail, feel like fools, the kids are too young to understand cultural differences to discuss those, then they just become freaks there." By providing her HLs with a more advanced instructional setting that recognizes their

oral/aural skills, HLs are provided a chance to feel like they fit in, and are given opportunities for more appropriate levels of instruction. With this infrastructure, HLs will find more success in a formal Spanish class. Mrs. G. feels that her room “is a room [where] for one hour a day being who they are really is a cool thing to be and a big advantage and that’s the way [she] like[s] to keep it.”

HL Educational Needs and Curricular Choices

Mrs. G. has been teaching Spanish and HLs for a long time. In speaking with her about her preparation for instructing the Spanish HLs in her class, she initially suggested that there was no impact on her planning at all. She said that she does not:

sit around and go, ‘well, let’s do this for the Hispanics or that for the Hispanics.’

I mean, you hear me modify most everything we do for them. I don’t make them

do everything. I make them do other things, but I don’t really change what I do.

Even though this was her first reaction to my question, my time spent observing and interviewing her demonstrated that was not actually the case. In speaking at length with Mrs. G., it is evident that she thinks much more about her HLs when planning curriculum and instruction than she may realize. Perhaps after so many years of teaching, her planning has become more instinctive and natural which masks the conciseness she displayed for the HLs in her classes.

One consideration Mrs. G. gives her HLs when planning curriculum is the inclusion of advanced literature. During one particular lesson I observed, Mrs. G. led the class through a reading story fragment from *Nada menos que todo un hombre* by Miguel De Unamuno¹. During this reading, Mrs. G. was not only able to assist the students

¹ De Unamno, Miguel. “Nada Menos Que Todo Un Hombre.” *Encuentros Maravillosos: Gramática a Través de la Literatura*. Ed. Abby Kanter. Addison Wesley Longman, 1998.

through understanding the reading, but she also worked in many additional pieces of information about the author, his country of origin and the time period during which the piece was written, which provided the opportunity for rich, contextualized curriculum .

During this lesson, students read aloud and Mrs. G. asked typical content questions in Spanish such as “¿Cuándo nació?, ¿Cuándo murió?, and ¿Dónde nació?” (When was he born?, When did he die?, and Where was he born?) regarding the background information provided about the author. After that basic information was discussed, however, Mrs. G. began to talk with the students about the time period in Spain during which this story was written. She asked the students what war America was involved in 1898. After several shoulder shrugs from the students, she provided them with a hint. She announced “remember the” The students mostly shouted out, “Alamo.” Mrs. G. laughed and said, “Maine!” The students look confused. “The Maine?” one student asked. “Yes,” she responded, “the Alamo was the Mexican American War. The Maine was the Spanish American War in 1898.”

She continued discussing her version of the war and referenced the psychological impact on the Spaniards as they lost and the U.S. won. She explained to them that a group of writers tried to “pump up” the country by writing about all of the great yet simplistic qualities of Spain. She correlated this attempt to the school having a bad football season and gearing up for the upcoming basketball season. She then role played for the students, as if to be speaking like one of the authors, “The glory of Spain isn’t in the empire, but in the everyday life of Spain—the wheat growing in the field.”

During this interaction, Mrs. G. demonstrated her knowledge of the language through the discussion of the reading as well as her ability to supplement a reading with

historical and cultural references, all while maintaining her sense of humor and light-hearted attitude. Mrs. G. had indicated to me that these types of literature lessons are often items she considers eliminating from her curriculum, but she realizes that her HLs need it as a means of advancing their written language skills. The one detail regarding the lesson that I think may not have benefited her HLs is holding her contextual discussion in English. This would have been a great opportunity to continue to reinforce her HLs' need for highly contextualized content in the target language.

In addition to electing to include appropriate literature, Mrs. G. also suggested to me that she depends a lot on differentiating her curriculum in order to meet the needs of her HLs. She mentioned that she has all of her students participate in dialogs via the "nicenet" website, but her HLs are given a separate connections and discussion topics that are more relevant to their interests and language abilities. HLs are also assigned different oral presentations than their non-HL peers that are more appropriate to their specific abilities and outside experiences.

There are also activities that Mrs. G. does not require her HL students to complete that their non-HL peers must do, which are determined based on the content and purpose of each activity. One example is that throughout the semester, Mrs. G. requires her students to participate in an assigned task she calls "encuentros," which requires students to complete activities from a list of options involving the Spanish language and culture. This task is intended to get her students involved with the local Spanish-speaking community. She realizes, however, that her HLs have a connection to the Spanish-speaking community outside of school and therefore do not require their participation in this assignment.

Other curricular considerations Mrs. G. makes based on her HLs' specific educational needs are related to grammatical concepts. During one of my observations, the class was working on a review of all the forms of the verb *ir* (to go). As Mrs. G. quickly went through the forms of the verb orally, students followed along filling in the forms on a page in their "verb notebooks" which she provided at the beginning of the year. In this book, students must provide forms into charts of a verb chosen by the teacher. The verb charts are organized by subject pronouns and are listed for each of the various forms and tenses of the Spanish language. During this exchange, Mrs. G. went through the forms quickly and thoroughly with the students and her address seemed much more serious than it had been during other activities such as the reading activity.

This particular lesson also proved to evoke a different reaction from Mrs. G.'s HLs. During this exchange of information, one group of HLs in the back of the room was huddled around their verb books discussing the forms and the charts. They appeared to be having a difficult time determining the spelling of the verbs Mrs. G. was listing out loud and seemed unsure where exactly to place each form on the charts provided. As they discussed this dilemma in Spanish, they flipped their papers back and forth looking at the multitude of charts and tenses listed not knowing where to put these words.

As this group of 3 HLs struggled to prepare their verb sheet, Mrs. G. assisted the class by explaining, "You take the *ellos* form of the preterit, you drop the *-ron* and you add an *-a* and you get...?" This exchange did not look to help out the student group in the back. "What?" they questioned, looking frantically around the room, at each other and at the blank spaces on their papers. As they looked desperately at each other, they whispered to each other, "I don't know."

It is found that students who speak Spanish outside of the school setting often feel their language skills do not fit in with the structure of the school's second language learning environment (Durán-Cerda). This exchange during the grammar review of the formal structures of the verb *ir* in all of its tenses is an example of the frustration HLs can feel with this type of lesson. The verb references were not within any given context and appeared to confuse many of the HLs.

I later learned that Mrs. G. realized this challenge. In order to accommodate her HLs, she altered the testing format for the assessment associated with this task in order to assist them. She felt this modification provided her HLs with a greater opportunity for success on a task that was formatted for teaching Spanish as a foreign language and was therefore more difficult for them to complete. Although her HLs still had to fill in the verb charts in the same forms as their non-HL classmates, she allowed the HLs to complete one chart at a time rather than fill them all in during one exam. She also allowed her HLs to take each portion of the test as many times as needed in order for them to feel like they had the chance to complete them accurately.

This is an example of the difficulties HLs encounter when working with the structured skills associated with a foreign language classroom. Mrs. G. stated that this “formal language” versus “informal language” is an issue when the students begin to take a structured Spanish language class. She shared, “most of the kids sense that the Spanish they are hearing in class isn't the exact kind they speak at home, but it's real important to explain that to them, to be comfortable with it” and not to exaggerate that their spoken language does not fit in with the formal language of the classroom setting.

One way to help the students work through this disparity, according to Mrs. G., is by building the students' vocabulary. She shared that "vocabulary, oddly enough, is a challenge. One of the things we've discovered is that the home environment is not rich in vocabulary for Spanish even though Spanish may be the language they speak".

According to Mrs. Guess, the variation of prior-vocabulary can cause the HLs to become uncomfortable in the classroom because "high school level Spanish has [a lot] to do with vocabulary" and "everybody thinks they know how to say all these things when they don't."

This concept was exemplified during one of the HL's oral presentations. Mrs. G. shared with me that in the first years of this particular student's formal Spanish education, the student was in front of the class discussing a given topic. At one point, she turned to Mrs. G. and asked her, "*Cómo se dice* Thursday again?" (How do you say Thursday again?). With this in mind, Mrs. G. suggested that working in opportunities for students to build their vocabulary, especially abstract vocabulary, is essential. She feels that giving the students the tools through increased vocabulary provides them the skills to express themselves on the emotive level which helps them feel connected to the school environment as well. One consideration Mrs. G. did not discuss, however, is related to the practice of codeswitching. Perhaps the student's combination of languages was not a deficit but rather a natural expression of her bilingualism. This concept proves to be a challenge for foreign language teachers who focus on a language immersion environment that stresses maintaining a single-language setting.

Other issues regarding the students' general knowledge of the Spanish language are related to advanced grammar concepts and their written language skills. In terms of

grammatical issues, Mrs. G. finds that most of her HLs are not familiar with advanced verb structures such as the imperfect subjunctive and the perfect tenses. In working with students, her “impression is that at the high school level most kids who use the imperfect subjunctive who are Heritage Speakers use it when they shouldn’t to try to sound fancy,” but typically use it incorrectly. By incorporating formal grammatical instruction into the curriculum, reading formal literature that uses advanced grammar properly and providing students the occasion to listen to each other and the teacher speak using formal Spanish, students are able to begin to gain exposure to the correct use of grammatical structures.

In terms of spelling, Mrs. G. sees that as “a huge issue.” She said that providing the HLs with spelling lists to try and get them to memorize words has proven to be ineffective. What she says she tries to do is convince them “that being able to write would be a good skill” and an important part of using their language skills in the workforce. She tells the students:

If you go to a company and write a letter and anybody reading it knows the person who wrote it can’t spell and doesn’t know accents, the Hispanic people who read it won’t respect you and won’t pay any attention and therefore you lose your job. So, I think they get that part. It’s just trying to build their self-esteem that they are bilingual and that there aren’t that many Spanish-speaking people who speak really good English so if they do, this is a real good way for them to make money.

HL Identities and Classroom Relationships

One means of building HLs’ self-esteem in a Spanish foreign language classroom is by establishing a strong student-teacher relationship. Building a classroom that encourages

communication and understanding is most likely to occur in an environment where relationship building is a focus. According to Mrs. G.:

relationship building is the key to everything and it has to happen. And, the vast majority of your energy has to go into that rather than worrying about what lesson you're teaching. And then they'll probably learn just as much listening to you speaking Spanish as they do from anything else you create. But, there's a magic and a certain touch that you have to use in that relationship building.

By building relationships with her HLs, in particular, Mrs. G. feels that she can act as an advocate on their behalf. She shared that she feels "it would be a mistake to really focus too much on language acquisition as a goal in working with these kids" for several reasons. She feels the biggest accomplishment for her in working with her HL students is that "they're coming to school, they're learning something, (and) they're feeling smart." These actions coming together, she finds, allows for the opportunity of "teachable moments" that everyone can benefit from and relate to.

During my time in the classroom, I was able to see Mrs. G. and her HL students interact with each other. There were many occasions where they would laugh with each other, tell jokes or stories, and discuss current topics such as the swine flu and how the HLs felt about it. They openly talked about their personal thoughts and feelings and appeared to communicate very comfortably with each other. Mrs. G.'s HLs were not only comfortable interacting with her communicatively, but also physically. Students regularly allowed Mrs. G. to put her arm around their shoulders or pat them on the back. Students also offered Mrs. G. a hug on occasion. All of these interactions looked to be

natural and well-intended. There was an obvious comfort level shared between Mrs. G. and her HLs.

Mrs. G. seemed aware of the students' social needs within the classroom setting and encouraged her HLs to form relationships with each other. She feels the students are able to find a certain comfort level due to the structure of the classroom makeup. Mrs. G. stressed the importance of having Spanish-speaking students in Spanish class together. She finds that this not only allows them to rely on each other but also to learn from each other. She sees her HLs as being quite typical "in terms of creating their own community" within the classroom setting. They are able to "understand each other in a way nobody else does" and it is a place where they socially can "speak Spanish to each other and not get any dirty looks." By engaging in this social interaction in Spanish, the HLs also are able to learn from each other. Mrs. G. sees that the students "start to become aware that (they) are not all the same just because (they) speak Spanish," which she finds they do not necessarily realize when they start the class.

Chapter 5: Findings—The Students

During my time observing and interviewing the focal students for this study, I recognized that HLs language identities impacted their Spanish language learning needs and their social and academic relationships within the classroom setting. The correlation between these themes and my research questions are identified as:

Table 3

Research Question	Themes
What is the influence of Spanish Heritage Learners' identity on their language acquisition and student experiences with Spanish language development in a formal setting?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HL language identities influence specific language learning needs • HL identities impact relationships within the foreign language classroom

Nico

Nico, a handsome, clean-cut teenager with medium, ashy toned skin and a sweet smile was enrolled in Mrs. G.'s AP Spanish class as a junior in high school. He often wore clean, slightly baggy jeans and a button down shirt. His clothes were always pressed and coordinated and was well accessorized with a silver chain and watch and an earring in each ear.

During my observations, Nico appeared to be a well-liked student. He was outgoing and positive in nature. He had an openly close connection to Mrs. G., but also looked comfortable interacting with his peers when appropriate. He spoke freely with his classmates and interacted with the primarily English speaking students seated in the same area of the classroom.

Identified as a high achieving student in Spanish class, Nico possessed qualities that Mrs. G. suggested aided in his success. He completed his work, participated in class and had a close student-teacher relationship with Mrs. G. He had a strong Spanish language background that included formal education in his native country.

Nico was born in Cuba. He was raised there until he was in second grade when his mom won the lottery and relocated to the United States. Once in the U.S., Nico said his formal education in Spanish stopped until high school, but he continues to only speak Spanish at home. His mother's advice, "don't ever forget your first language."

When Nico first began to attend schools in the U.S., he encountered many challenges. He mentioned that not only was instruction in a new language, but school expectations were new to him. He also discussed difficulties he had going to school with Spanish-speaking students from different countries. He shared:

I was in school with a lot of Mexican kids and hondureños and ecuatorianos so their Spanish was a lot different than my Spanish so I had to mix in with them.

They wouldn't understand me sometimes, either how fast I spoke it or the words I would say.

He said that even today, he doesn't really hang out with many students from Mexico because many of them, in his opinion, do not make good choices and he does not want to take part in some of their activities. Most of his peer group, outside of classes, comes from teammates on the school's soccer team. Many of these peers only share English as a common language with Nico.

Socially, in Spanish class, Nico has encountered some difficulties speaking Spanish with his classmates. He said:

Sometimes I don't even speak Spanish to them because they won't understand me because I speak it too fast or don't pronounce all the letters, so most of the time I just go to the English and Mrs. G. gets mad at me, so it doesn't affect me really, but sometimes I do just not speak it to them cause I fit into what their, like

the level they are sometimes, so if they're not getting what I'm saying, I just talk to them in English. I speak English and they can understand me.

Although Nico mainly speaks English with his peers, he feels maintaining his spoken Spanish at home with his mother has allowed him to feel at ease in Spanish class. He said that he does not find class challenging and that he tries to help his classmates with their learning while making his own learning a priority as well. Nico claims, "I'm in there with them for half of the things, but the other things I'm helping them, or in other cases not doing something." Although Nico is not of Mexican decent, this is an example of how he feels a certain sense of a bordered identity. He is caught in a "third space" which socially does not include his native Cuban Spanish yet encourages him to use Spanish academically. Also in this space he feels like there is academic content that is not relevant to his language learning needs as well as content that he continues to find challenging.

When I asked him if he found it difficult to find a balance between what he knows and what he needs to learn, he suggested that was not necessarily how he saw his situation. He views his language needs to be more focused on the structure of the language such as accents, but finds the repetition of the class year after year to be redundant. This repetition, in his mind, only prepares him for helping his peers during class. Overall, Nico feels his Spanish speaking background is a benefit in class. He told me, "I got the speaking down, I just need the writing, so yeah, I'm a step ahead, but I still got to back track a little bit to be in the same thing they are sometimes."

Nico's strengths in speaking were evident during his oral final. He chose to speak in front of the class on his own rather than present a dialogue with a Spanish HL

classmate. He sat comfortably on a stool in the front of the room and chatted, using his signature Cuban accent and rate of speech, about his Cuban background, interests and life in the United States.

It was also evident from his work that his realization of needing to work on his written skills is accurate. He does have ability with writing in Spanish, yet there are grammatical details that demonstrate a certain lack of knowledge of grammatical structures or spelling. For example, on the web-based writing activity called “nicenet,” Mrs. G. asked her HL students to respond to the question, “¿Qué tal tu español? ¿Te sientes cómodo hablando delante de otros en una situación formal? ¿Puedes escribir bien? ¿Qué te falta para poder usarlo en el trabajo algún día? Menciona las cosas que quieres estudiar para mejorarte.” (How is your Spanish? Do you feel comfortable speaking in front of others in a formal situation? Can you write well? What do you lack in order to be able to use it in a job some day? Mention the things you want to study to improve).

Nico’s response read, “mi español es muy bien. yo puedo hablarlo cuando quiera y tambien lo puedo escribir muy bien. lo unico que me falta es saber escribir los asentos en las palabras. y si algun dia podre alomejor trabajar de traductor para alguien o alguna compañia” (*my Spanish is well. I can speak it when I want and I also can write it very well. The only thing I am lacking is knowing how to write accents in words. And if one day I will alomejor to work as a translator for someone or some company.*) Although Nico demonstrated a wide range of vocabulary and ability to express advanced ideas, his lack of punctuation, capitalization and minor spelling issues support his awareness that he can improve on his formal writing ability.

From speaking with Nico, he suggested that one major aspect that has influenced his success in Spanish class is his relationship with Mrs. G. Nico's mother is a member of the custodial staff at City Heights High School. Nico remembers coming to work with his mother on Friday nights before basketball games to help her clean before he was a student at City Heights High School. He recalled being in the Foreign Language hall and seeing his mom talking to Mrs. G. From the time he was nine years old, Mrs. G. and his mother both encouraged him to take Spanish class when he was in high school. He shared, "[Mrs. G.] told my mom, 'oh, we got to get Nico to take Spanish. That would be good for him, although he speaks Spanish, that would be good for his reading and writing' and that's how it all began, since I was a little kid".

Mrs. G.'s efforts to get to know her Spanish Heritage Students, in particular, has been very meaningful to Nico. He said, "she knows what to say and what not to say to us and she's a very good teacher and she knows how to obviously deal with the both Spanish-speaking and the non-Spanish-speaking, so I mean she's gotten it down. She understands us a lot." By feeling understood, Nico finds that he is able to be himself in Spanish class which makes taking part in the classroom lessons more comfortable. This comfort level provides him the opportunity to use and grow with the language in the classroom context.

Julia

Julia, a senior, was a student in Mrs. G.'s AP Spanish class who viewed herself as a completely balanced bilingual. Born to Mexican immigrants in California, Julia said that, although Spanish was her first language, she grew up speaking both English and Spanish at home. At the age of 5 she moved with her family to City Heights.

Chosen as the participant who represents middle level achievement, Julia had moderate success in Spanish class. Julia's attendance and work completion were average. Mrs. G. viewed her participation in class as acceptable and suggested she could do better if she were more focused.

Julia's appearance was slightly disjointed. Where she had perfectly manicured nails, her hair was often a disheveled mess of dark brown curls that were randomly pinned back with half of them falling out around her face and neck. She had a fair complexion and large brown eyes framed by long, curly, dark lashes. Some days she wore a full face of makeup. Other days she was more natural. Some days she wore more put together outfits like polo shirts, plaid walking shorts and stylish flip flops. Other days she would come to class dressed in oversized hooded sweatshirts, torn jeans and sneakers.

In speaking with Julia, her variation of styles and physical looks seemed to be a reflection of her overall personality and identity as a Spanish speaker. Not only did she say she was raised speaking both languages, but she also said that she was equally comfortable speaking both. This was reflected in her pronunciation of her name. When I heard her speaking in English, she pronounced Julia with an English accent. When she spoke in Spanish, Julia was pronounced with a Spanish accent.

One difficulty Julia has experienced in Spanish class has been in speaking with her primarily English-speaking peers. She expressed:

Sometimes they ask me a lot of questions and like I feel like I can't answer them. Like, it's weird because they ask me the easiest words but they put them in like different sentences than I use them cuz I talk really different and they learned

differently cuz I feel like these people, like people in lower Spanishes, like people get taught really different words and they ask me these words and I don't really know, probably cuz they're so formal. Like, different Spanish than I talk.

Overall this language discrepancy, according to Julia, comes from the variation of the way in which they were introduced to the language. Julia initially learned Spanish in the home environment whereas her primarily English-speaking classmates first learned Spanish in a formal classroom setting. She feels her language background is based more on everyday conversation and her peers have a more structured introduction to the language. This disparity is a challenge for Julia in terms of managing her own bordered identity as a Spanish Heritage Learner within the context of the high school Spanish classroom setting.

Although Julia has had social challenges in Spanish class, she feels her dual language ability has been a strength for her academically. She said, "I can get higher points on things cuz it's like my language and also I can learn in English cuz she teaches in English. I'm good in this class cuz I know both languages." Even with the benefits she finds from speaking both English and Spanish, she mentioned it can be challenging because the languages can fuse with each other at times and cause Julia a lot of confusion. Sometimes, she said, "I get mixed up like I'll like not know a word in English and know it in Spanish" which causes her to mix the two languages together without even thinking about it.

This was exemplified in Julia's class work. One example is in a "nicenet" response to the question, "¿Cuáles son las cosas que quieres estudiar para mejorar tu español? ¿Cuáles actividades te ayudarán amplificar tu vocabulario? (What are the things

you want to study to improve your Spanish? Which activities will help you amplify your vocabulary?) To this question, Julia provided the written response, “mi espanol es muy bueno pero necesito improve es una de mis favoritas clases!” (*my Spanish is very good but I need improve is one of my favorite classes!*) Her response lacked necessary punctuation and capitalization as well as included the English word “improve” rather than using the Spanish word “mejorar.” This combination of languages (English within the Spanish phrasing) and the missing tilde on the “ñ” in “español” demonstrate both her mixing of the two languages, which is natural for bilingual students, as well as the lack of written skills learned within the formal school setting.

Another example of Julia’s combination of English and Spanish was seen during her oral final. During this time, Julia and another Spanish Heritage Learner sat in the front of the classroom and held a discussion about various topics in Spanish. She chatted comfortably about every day experiences like telling the class when her birthday is and describing her family using vocabulary that she was able to incorporate into a typical discussion. There were several occasions, however, that Julia deferred to English words when that word choice was the first to come to mind over the Spanish vocabulary word. When asked “¿Cuál es tu tienda favorite?” (What is your favorite store?), her response was “the mall” in English. Another time, during a discussion in Spanish about the use of cell phones in class, Julia offered, “No me gusta. Es distracting” (I don’t like it. It’s *distracting*). Although it is common for a Spanish foreign language teacher to focus on her practice of codeswitching as a language deficit, it is important to remember that it often is an indicator of dual language strength as a bilingual.

Even so, Julia suggested that speaking a lot of Spanish during Spanish class would be the most helpful aspect in her learning. By being more immersed in the Spanish language, she feels she would have more of an opportunity to focus on speaking just Spanish and would perhaps become better at not mixing the languages together when she is expressing herself orally.

Alejandro

Alejandro was a senior in Mrs. G.'s AP Spanish class. He was slight in stature and had skin that was a beautiful golden, dark brown. His slightly longer black hair glistened from the gel he used to slick it back. He had piercing black eyes and a sparse goatee. He often was dressed in overly baggy jeans and a sports style blue City Heights warm up jacket and dark sneakers. Although he did not appear to wear jewelry, I never saw him with out his white ear buds for his portable music player hanging around his neck.

Alejandro looked to be a reserved person. He sat in the back row of the Spanish classroom. He often sat stiffly with his hands folded and his expression gazing towards the tabletop. When he talked he spoke with a soft tone and a slight mumble. During classroom interactions, he frequently would answer Mrs. G.'s questions to himself under his breath, but did not offer to share his knowledge or understanding openly to the entire class unless chosen by Mrs. G. to do so. When I spoke with him, he had very little eye contact and his responses to my questions were brief, incomplete or nonexistent.

Selected to represent low achievement for this study, Alejandro did not demonstrate active participation in Spanish class. Mrs. G. viewed him as lazy and

disinterested. She also told me that their relationship with each other was very turbulent at first, but had greatly improved over the years.

Alejandro enrolled in Spanish for Hispanics class because “it was just something [he] wanted to do.” Although he grew up speaking Spanish at home, he did not have a formal education in Spanish until he enrolled at City Heights. Alejandro finds that the content of the class is “pretty easy,” but it is challenging to feel like he and his Spanish-speaking peers have to hold back on advancing in the language while they wait for their primarily English-speaking classmates who work at a slower pace. Although he does not find the class academically challenging, Alejandro says his grade does not necessarily reflect that. He told me, “my grade is not where it should be right now cuz I’ve been slacking off. It’s just me. Yeah, it’s just my personality. I don’t take a lot of things seriously. Sometimes I’m serious, but I just don’t take things seriously.” According to Mrs. G., this lack of seriousness regarding school in general has put Alejandro at risk of not graduating this year.

Even though Alejandro said he does not take class seriously, he does not over socialize either. He said, “well, I don’t really talk to anybody unless they talk to me first. So, I wouldn’t just go up to someone and say, ‘hey.’ I just like sit in my desk and do what I’m supposed to be doing and I won’t talk to anybody like I am in most of my classes.” Although when he does speak with his peers he said he is comfortable speaking to both English and Spanish speaking students, he tends to socialize mainly with other Hispanics because “[i]t’s just much easier” for him. He finds that the ability to “go from Spanish to English like in a second” rather than “trying to stay in just one language” is more comfortable for him since that is the manner in which he is accustomed to

communicating. Even though Alejandro was accustomed to the natural practice of codeswitching as a bilingual student, communicating solely in Spanish did not appear to be a difficult task during his oral final. During a discussion with a Spanish HL classmate, Alejandro spoke comfortably, used a native-like accent and rate of speech and never once incorporated English into his presentation.

Academically, Alejandro's written language skills show strengths and weaknesses. When asked the same question on "nicenet" as Julia regarding the things he wants to learn in Spanish class in order to improve, he responded, "Las cosas que me gustarian estudiar son los acsentos para saber usarlos" (The things that I would like to learn are the accents in order to know how to use them). In this example, his basic grammatical structures are appropriate, yet his spelling and punctuation show a need to improve in the written form. Given the abilities that I was able to see him demonstrate, I wonder if his written language skills would improve with a more serious approach to his schoolwork.

Even though Alejandro claims to not be a serious student, he appreciates Mrs. G.'s efforts in the classroom. He feels that her efforts towards teaching her HL students are a challenge since they "already know how to speak the language" compared to their primarily English-speaking peers. He sees her position as needing to "figure out what are the little things she can help us improve on." He thinks "that's what makes it tougher on her." When I asked him how she figures that out, he said she was able to work towards their individual needs by focusing on communication with the HLs.

Alejandro suggested that when working with Spanish-speaking students in a Spanish classroom, it is important to know "who you're talking to and the kind of person

they are.” He felt that is what he has experienced while working with Mrs. G. which as been a positive experience overall. According to Mrs. G., this relationship took quite a bit of time to develop and they had to work through some difficulties, but once they had a relationship grounded in open communication and understanding, they had a much better working relationship with one another. Alejandro agreed that the relationship he has with Mrs. G. “is good” and that having a good relationship is a positive way to achieve success with H.L. students.

Summary

The input I received from these three focal students provided valuable information categorized as: speak Spanish in class, understand and demonstrate an understanding for HL student identities, and develop relationships in order to encourage HLs’ academic and social growth. These themes can be seen in the students’ experiences in Spanish class from our discussions during their interviews and through review of their oral and written work. While each student had unique experiences within the classroom setting, each referenced these themes as relevant to their learning and overall classroom experience.

Chapter 6: Implications

Using the Spanish Language

In speaking with the teacher and focal student participants, it became evident that one of the best ways to teach Spanish to Spanish HLs is through the Spanish language. Mrs. G. suggested that HLs “[will] probably learn just as much listening to you speaking Spanish as they do from anything else you create,” which was an idea also supported by the students. In their own way, Nico, Julia and Alejandro each suggested that speaking Spanish and having the opportunity to hear Spanish in the classroom setting would help them grow linguistically and academically.

This notion of providing a language-rich environment is also supported by the Foreign Language Education Project. It is my understanding that the National Standards encourage teachers to provide opportunities to address the 5 C’s through meaningful use of the target language using various, interconnected curricular elements. They also suggest instruction that incorporates interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational modes of communication, which likely would be most beneficial when practiced in the target language.

Although I was not able to observe Mrs. G. providing much instruction in the target language during my time in her classroom, it is apparent from speaking with her that she understands the value of teaching in Spanish. By providing and maintaining an environment rich in language for HLs, they will be provided occasions to speak and hear Spanish that go beyond their outside influences and focuses on academic language growth. Not only is this practice pedagogically sound, it is also something that the students themselves see as valuable, as was evident from my focal students in this study.

The challenge for many Spanish foreign language teachers, then, is to embrace these suggestions and put them into practice. Teachers who are learning about the National Standards after their initial pre-service teacher training may have to drastically alter the way in which they view language acquisition practices. This requires a shift in pedagogy and overall instruction. Taking advantage of professional opportunities to learn such techniques would be helpful. Workshops available through the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and professional organizations such as the state foreign language organizations or the state language organization chapter, such as the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese enable teachers to gain information and further resources on teaching both in the Spanish language and using the National Standards for optimal language instruction. Learning how to implement these teaching strategies will create a learning environment that benefits HLs through language and context rich instruction.

Understanding Spanish HL Identities

Understanding Spanish HL identities as being complex is an important part of teaching them in a Spanish foreign language class. One component of HL identities that is often misunderstood is codeswitching. This misunderstanding was noticeable while talking to Mrs. G. and her HLs. There appeared to be a lack of understanding that codeswitching is a normal part of bilingual communication. Mrs. G. identified this practice as an example of insufficient vocabulary, which implies language deficiency. As was discussed in the literature review, codeswitching can also be a natural mode of communication for bilingual students in which they draw on their vast language resources when expressing their thoughts and ideas. It is understandable that this mode of communication is

misunderstood if a Spanish foreign language teacher is not aware of this linguistic characteristic. As a result, it is important for Spanish teachers to have access to workshops or classes to inform them about specific HL characteristics like codeswitching.

Accepting codeswitching in a foreign language setting can be trying for Spanish teachers who focus on maintaining a single language environment. If teachers follow the recommendation of creating an environment where only Spanish can be spoken, this environment neglects to acknowledge students with border identities and their unique linguistic backgrounds. It is vital for Spanish teachers to learn about specific characteristics related to their HLs and embrace these qualities as a part of their identities. I feel teachers can continue to focus their instruction in the target language and accept their HLs backgrounds in the same classroom environment. This atmosphere will allow them to feel confident in their background knowledge and accepted as Spanish-speakers in a space that also provides them exposure to rich, contextualized language.

Teacher-HL Relationships

One of Mrs. G.'s strengths, from my observations and from her HLs' accounts, is in the rapport she has with her students. In particular, Mrs. G. appeared to have a special bond with her HLs and she felt it helped her connect with them on a social and academic basis. When working with Spanish HLs in a Spanish language context, the teacher needs to acknowledge her students' prior knowledge and language strengths in order to connect with them.

Mrs. G.'s students suggested that this connection helped them socially and academically. Nico and Alejandro stated that their personal relationships with Mrs. G.

encouraged them to want to be more successful in class. Like her students, Mrs. G. also recognized the importance of being connected to her HLs. She viewed building relationships as the single most important aspect of working with HLs. She found that being connected to her students gives them a sense of being connected to school. This connection encourages attendance and participation and offers them a sense of belonging. This type of bond with a teacher who understands their identities as HLs could be a determining factor in the Latino success rates in U.S. schools mentioned in the literature review.

Building personal connections with HLs also gives teachers the opportunity to provide individualized instruction. Instruction consistent with differentiation would allow the Spanish teacher to consider HLs' outside experiences, cultural interests and perspectives, prior language skills and social needs within the existing curriculum. Teachers will not be able to achieve these aims if they do not build relationships that allow them to learn these specific qualities of each HL in their classes.

Mrs. G. spoke to me about ways in which she modified her activities and assessments in class to suit her HLs' background with the language and their identities as Spanish-speakers. Learning students' backgrounds, including curricular components that address their language skills and needs, and including additional or excluding unnecessary activities for her HLs are ways in which Mrs. G. differentiated her instruction.

In speaking with the HLs in the class, however, they were not overtly aware of these individualized components of the class. At times they felt their language growth was being held back by the slower progression of the non-HL classmates.

Directions for Future Work

Although I discovered many things of value from this study, there were several things I wish I could have done differently which would impact my involvement in future studies of this nature. First, I found the time I dedicated to collecting data to be minimal and quite limiting. In the future, I would certainly dedicate more time in the classroom observing and interviewing my participants. Not only would I have more data with which I could work, but I also would have had the opportunity to make more connections with students and have more meaningful interviews with them. At times my focal students' responses seemed lacking, perhaps due to their discomfort talking with me since I did not provide enough time in my study for them to see me as anyone other than an outsider within the context of their classroom environment. Secondly, I would have liked to interview each participant more than once. Multiple interviews would have given me the chance to ask follow up questions to my initial interview questions and expand on situations I observed in the classroom. I found these two distinctions to be limitations to my findings during this study.

What I was able to gain from my experiences with this study, however, will help me grow professionally and personally as a Spanish teacher. I feel that many of the themes encountered as benefits for teaching Spanish to Spanish HLs are consistent with quality teaching in general. Concepts such as getting to know your students, differentiating instruction, and using the target language in class are beneficial to all students, including HLs. It is always helpful to be reminded of what is important for effective foreign language instruction.

There were findings, however, that were specific for teaching Spanish to HLs. The two themes that seemed particular to the HL population in Spanish class are student identity and the placement of students in an appropriate sequence for Spanish language courses. Interestingly, these two themes go hand in hand as students' understanding of themselves impacts their formal language learning in the classroom context and the classroom environment into which the HL students are placed affects their perceptions of themselves as Spanish language speakers and learners.

This study demonstrated the challenges HLs faced when enrolled in Spanish language class with students who are learning Spanish as a foreign language. The focal students discussed feeling held back in their language growth and having difficulties speaking Spanish with their foreign language peers. Mrs. G. also discussed the difficulties HLs face when they are enrolled in beginning level courses where they fail and feel like disappointments. The disconnect presented from these participants suggests that further study on HL enrollment in Spanish foreign language classes and the impact it has on their identity would benefit HL Spanish language education.

Further understanding the relationship between these aspects of the HL Spanish learning experience would lend itself to future studies. Examining in more detail this relationship, the impact it has on HLs as Spanish language students in the formal classroom context and the choices for class course options for HLs would be beneficial to the educational field and HL language learning.

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