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# How Social Studies Curriculum Can Help Spanish Immersion Students To Develop And Improve Their Grammar And Language Skills

Juan Perona  
*Hamline University*

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HOW SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM CAN HELP SPANISH IMMERSION  
STUDENTS TO DEVELOP AND IMPROVE THEIR GRAMMAR AND LANGUAGE  
SKILLS

By  
Juan Andres Perona

A capstone submitted in fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Master of Art in Teaching

Hamline University  
Saint Paul, Minnesota

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Primary Advisors: Jason E. Miller, Patty Born Selly

Peer Reviewers: Annika Graif, Lean Corcoran, Amanda Jones, Adriana Maldonado,  
Riana Dilley

Content Reviewer: Molly Ojeda Opitz

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this capstone project to my wife, Elizabeth, who has always been an inspiration for me to better myself and pursue an academic career. To my family for their constant support and understanding, and to Sue, my dog, who patiently accompany me during my writing hours and keep me focused.

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION:**

My first teaching job has been teaching social studies in a middle school for 7th and 8th graders who came from an Spanish immersion program in Minnesota. As a brand new teacher with little experience in immersion programs and students, I was fascinated to observe the language abilities of my students. It was very clear to me from the beginning of my teaching that the large majority of my students, who were in the program from Kindergarten to 6th grade, were able to follow a social studies class taught completely in Spanish, complete assignments and actively participate in class discussions with no major problems. However, as I kept observing their language abilities, I also found out that many of them lack some grammar and vocabulary skills that I thought a student who participates in an immersion program should master. While students can keep a conversation in Spanish or understand an assignment, they have difficulties with simple verb forms, struggle with some vocabulary, or use their own “immersion language”, a mix of English and Spanish to fill in some of the “gaps” they have in their language (“blanketa” for blanket instead of “manta”, or “landa” for land instead of “tierra”). This is something that had puzzled me for the five years that I have been teaching to Spanish immersion students, and I would like to focus my capstone in this area. As a bilingual person who went through the arduous process of learning a new language, I know how important is to achieve a great level of literacy and grammar accuracy in your second language. Although verbal and understanding skills are

important, and most of my students seem to be exemplary on them, it is the reading and writing skills the ones that most students need to reinforce, and also the most important as they move from using Spanish in a social setting to use it in an academic and professional setting. The question that I would like to answer in this research project are: ***How Social Studies curriculum can help improve the language and grammar skills of Spanish Immersion students?***

In this first chapter I would like to explain how I came to work with Spanish immersion students in middle school, underline some of the language skills that I have seen most of the students lack, as well of some of the interventions that I have tried. I will also explain why I am interested in the area of language development for immersion students, and why I think it is very important for content teachers to support and help increase these grammar and language skills. Finally, I would like to give an overview of my proposal for a project that would create different activities within of the curriculum that purposely target some of those language skills that Spanish Immersion students lack or need more practice.

### **Overview**

My school and teaching career has always being linked with the Spanish language. I was born in Spain, moved to the United States in 2000 to marry a Spanish language teacher, and have developed an interest in education since I moved here.

My first jobs in education were related with my language skills. I worked as a bilingual paraprofessional in St. Paul, and later a Latino family outreach worker for the

Richfield School District. It was very clear to me that I would like to pursue a career in education, so after finishing my BA in History at the University of Minnesota, I got my social studies teaching license through the Hamline University Master in Teaching Program.

My first teaching job has been teaching 7th grade US History and 8th grade World Geography at Eden Prairie MN for the students coming from the Spanish Immersion Program. These students started in a full immersion program in Kindergarten , and receive their education almost exclusively in Spanish until 6th grade. After that they come to the middle school, where just two classes are taught in Spanish: a language class (Spanish Language and Culture) and a content class (Social Studies).

The purpose of the Spanish immersion social studies class in the middle school is, besides learning the content, to provide students coming from the Spanish immersion program with opportunities to practice and improve their Spanish language skills. The class could be considered a mixed immersion class: while discussions and assignments are conducted completely in Spanish, some reading and audio visual materials in English, due to lack of materials in Spanish and, in some cases, due to the complexity of the material. In that way, the students move from a total Spanish immersion program to just one or two hours a day, will certainly have an impact on their language skills. As I observe the language abilities in Spanish of my students, these are some of my observations:



- The large majority of the students have great comprehension skills. They can follow the instruction in the class, understand directions and complete tasks with little or no assistance.
- The large majority of the students have very good verbal communication, and are able to initiate and maintain a conversation in Spanish with little or no assistance.
- Many students seem to lack specific vocabulary. Most of the time it is academic vocabulary related to certain content areas, but sometimes are common words that seemingly every immersion student does not know. Some students use either words in English or “Spanglish” words in assignments or conversations in class to get their point across.
- Most of the students in the Spanish immersion program have grammar “gaps”, or lack of knowledge or practice of some basic grammar rules.
- For many students the transition from a total immersion program (elementary) to a partial immersion program (middle school) creates lack of continuity in language use and development, which result in loss of some language skills.
- Most of the students in the Spanish Immersion program need opportunities to practice their language skills in context, especially their writing skills. Some of them struggle to write complete sentences or paragraphs in Spanish, or to express their ideas clearly using Spanish.

I struggle with the idea of penalizing students in a content area (social studies) for something that I don't know if they have learned or if it is taught in the Spanish

language class. I noticed that some of the mistakes or “holes” are common among most of the students. After participating in a CARLA Institute class last summer, two colleagues (a Spanish language teacher and another Social Studies teacher) and I developed a series of activities to reinforce the correct use of “ser” and “estar” (the two verbs that express “to be” in Spanish). The activity was very successful, but I didn’t have the opportunity to examine the activity and see if it helped the students use “ser” and “estar” correctly. Thinking about that class and that activity, my goal with this project is to create a more comprehensive curriculum to support the development of language skills that Spanish Immersion students in a secondary school setting might lack or need to be reinforced.

The questions I need to answer are:

- What are the most common “gaps” that Spanish Immersion students have?
- Why is that?
- What can be done to support students in developing the language skills that they lack or need to be reinforce?
- More specifically, what can teachers in content areas (science, math, social studies) can do to support the development of these language skills?

## **Proposal**

My proposal is to create several activities within the social studies curriculum that, aligned with the Spanish Language and Culture, will support students in developing those language skills that they seem to miss or need to practice. In order to do so, these are the steps that I would like to take:

- Identify the language skills that Spanish Immersion students have the most difficulty developing; I will do this through a literature review of materials from experts and other colleagues, and through communication with Spanish Language teachers in Immersion Programs.
- Create language goals in the Social Studies curriculum that target these specific areas of language and grammar that students need to practice and improve.
- Create specific activities and assignments within the social studies curriculum that will reinforce the language skills that the students lack.
- Evaluate the impact of these activities and assignments in the language skills of the students (have they improved? If not, what could be the reason?)

### **Relevance of the proposal**

Language acquisition could be hard for some people. Not everybody develops a second language at the same pace. Students in the same setting (school) and with similar levels of motivation and interest in the language can have very different levels of language acquisition and skills. In that way, participating in an Immersion Program does not guarantee total mastery of the language. Finding what could be the most common language abilities that students in an immersion program can have a harder or longer time to acquire, and find ways to support the development of such abilities can help ease the anxiety of students, parents and teachers when they face a lack of progress on those areas. It will also help develop specific strategies to target the specific needs of these students. Recognizing the specific language areas in which immersion students tend to have difficulties will help language teachers to focus their teaching, and at the

same time it will help content teachers to find ways to reinforce those areas within their curriculum.

Being a social studies teacher of middle school students coming from an immersion program, I can see that some language skills are missing in most of my students. I want to investigate what are some of these missing skills, if they are common in most of the immersion students, and what some other schools and teachers have done to help students improve those skills. As part of an immersion program, I want my research and project to help improve the program. I want also to help my Spanish language colleagues, as well as other content area teachers. Also, as a new teacher in an immersion program, I want my project to provide ideas to new teachers on how to incorporate language goals to their lessons, and how those goals can help improve the language skills of their students. For many content teachers (like me) who lack language teaching skills, this can be helpful to put the importance of improving these skills as a goal along with the mastery of the material.

### **Summary**

To summarize, the goal of my proposed project is to identify ***How can Social Studies curriculum can help improve the language and grammar skills of Spanish Immersion students?*** Working with Spanish immersion students in a middle school I can see what are some of the areas in Spanish language skills that most of my students seen to have difficulties mastering, and I wonder what can I do to help them improve in those areas. I think my project will help improve those language skills, build confidence

in their Spanish, and also support the Spanish language curriculum with activities that will support what they are learning in Spanish class.

In chapter 2 I will review some of the literature by experts and other teachers about language skills in Spanish Immersion schools and what are some of the problems they encounter and some of the solutions they try. In chapter 3 I will develop in more detail my project: create activities aligned with the social studies and Spanish language and culture curriculums to provide support on learning specific language skills. In chapter 4 I will be reflecting on the project, what are my overall impressions of it, what I found, what worked, what didn't work, and what are some further steps that I think need to be taken to continue improving the grammar and language skills of Spanish immersion students in secondary schools.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will review some of the research and studies done in the field of language development in immersion programs, as well as the challenges that many of these programs have in common. The main goal of the chapter will be to try to answer the research question of this study: *What can content teachers do to support language development and improvement in Spanish Immersion students in a secondary school setting?*

The chapter will focus on four main themes found in the different sources studied. The first theme, language development, will try to answer the question *how* students develop language and literacy skills. Language development is an important theme to explore in order to understand how a second language is developed, so teachers can implement techniques and activities that effectively promote the improvement of the student's language skills. One of the goals of my project will be to integrate language development activities in the social studies curriculum in order to improve it.

The second theme, language improvement, will be a more refined look at language development, and will focus on the general or specific areas of the language that students in immersion programs need to improve. This is very important to know for immersion teachers, specially for those in content areas who need to implement those language improvement techniques on their teaching. Knowing what are the areas to improve, I will focus the language goals on my project in those areas.

The third theme, Spanish immersion, will be an overview of how language immersion programs work, and what are the benefits and challenges of such programs. The main focus will be on Spanish language immersion programs, but at the same time the chapter will review other similar programs, including English immersion programs in non-English speaking countries. Knowing the singularities of an immersion program will help us understand the particular challenges that immersion teachers face in order to effectively implement content and language goals with their students, and can guide the way I want to approach the language goals and lessons in my project.

The last theme, content areas, will focus on how teachers in content areas (science, math, social studies) in immersion programs teach their particular discipline in a different language, as well on what are the challenges they face. This part of the chapter will also concentrate more directly on the question, *What can content teachers do to support language development and improvement in Spanish Immersion students in a secondary school setting?* , and will also help me focus on the types of activities and language goals that I will create in my project.

### **Common Terms**

L1: A learner's first language (Fortune & Tedick, 2008).

L2: A learner's second language (Fortune & Tedick, 2008).

ELL: English Language Learners

### **Language Development: How Students Develop Language and Literacy Skills**

Most of the research in language development has been done during the early development of first language in children on their first stages of their education (pre-K and Kindergarten), but some studies has been done in the development of a second language, either by heritage students (students whose families speak a language other than English) or by English-speaking students.

In terms of early language development, some studies reveal that teachers play an important role on how a student develops language and literacy skills. Renee Neu, on her study *An Exploration of Oral Language Development in Spanish-Speaking*

*Preschool Students* talks about the importance of teacher language during instruction in order to develop the student's language, and how teachers should be the model of "rich and descriptive language" (Beauchat et al. 2009; cited in Neu, 212). Neu also talked about the importance of trusting relations between the students and the teacher, specially for ELL students (Neu, 212), and even the use of Spanish during the instruction of ELL students in English-based education. Neu believes in the importance of first language as a way to develop a new language, and how bringing Spanish instruction to English language lessons can enhances language and literacy development (pg. 212). In that way, when we talk about Spanish immersion students and the development of language skills in their second language (Spanish), to incorporate elements of their first language (English) could also benefit their Spanish language improvement.

Aleidine Moeller and Janine Theiler, in their study *Spoken Language Development at the High School Level: A Mixed-Method Study* researched how oral language develops on high school students. Moeller and Theiler also highlight the importance of how teachers need to adapt their teaching to improve language development. According to Moeller and Theiler, language development is demonstrated better through communicative activities rather than using test scores or other measures (Moeller & Theiler, 210). In that way, verbal activities like presentations, verbal collaboration and peer sharing will improve language skills.

Moeller and Theiler also indicate that "direct teaching of strategies before, during, and after each speaking in improved performance, (and) teachers need to be aware of the types of activities in which students participate and the ways in which such activities



support the development of oral proficiency” (Moeller & Theiler, 226). This highlights the importance of language objectives for Spanish immersion students in order to improve their language skills. If students are aware of what are the language areas targeted in the activity, and the teacher reviews it with them before, during and after the activity, the students will focus on it as well as in the content, and this practice will improve the targeted language skill.

Tara Fortune and Diane Tedick provide the more comprehensive rationale about language objectives for content classes in their project *Content-Based Second Language Instruction*. For Fortune and Tedick, language objectives shall be an important part of curriculum development in content-based classes. The language objectives help teachers to point out the grammatical structures and vocabulary that the students need to use to effectively communicate what they learn in the particular lesson (Fortune and Tedick). One interesting part of their study is the formula Fortune and Tedick developed to create language objectives. Using the Fortune and Tedick formula, the language objectives will include what language structure the students will use in the classroom during the lesson/activity, and what language feature or vocabulary will use.

**The Formula:** Students will use X (language structure) to do Y (functions) with Z (words/word groups).

**Grammatical structures:**

- prepositions to express being in/on/at a place
- present tense (3rd person sing/plural)
- what/where questions

**Functions:** (list of functions)

- ask questions (e.g., about geographic location)
- name geographic features and regions
- identify location of geographic features and regions

**Vocabulary:**

- mountains, rivers, plains, ocean, bay, desert, sea, forest, north, south, east, west, Atlantic, Mediterranean, Bay of Biscay, Portugal, Spain, France, Sierra Nevada

(Fortune and Tedick. <http://carla.umn.edu/cobalt/modules/curriculum/formula.html>)

This is extremely important, as language objectives need to be very specific in order to be effective. Using this formula will help teachers do so.

An interesting study by Maggie Broner and Elaine Tarone, *It is fun? Language play in a fifth-grade Spanish Immersion classroom*, highlights the use of language games as a way for bilingual students to develop language skills. According to Broner and Tarone, many times L2 learners use language for purposes of fun instead that for purposes of meaning, and it may contribute to the development of interlanguage (pg. 364). Broner and Talore give examples of some of these ludic language plays as very common in early language development (nursery rhymes, poems, fairy tales, fables (pg. 365) in young children, but they also highlight the importance of language play as a way to develop and improve language skills in L2 students. This becomes more critical as the students get into the adolescence. I used those word games sometimes with my students in class. As we study countries in Central Asia, I remind them that “Afganistán y Pakistán si ESTÁN en el examen, Turkenmistán y Kazajstán no ESTÁN”. Students recognized the similarities between the verb “están” and the “stan” at the end of the names, and find it amusing. At the same time, they remember the right verbal form of “estar” for plural.

According to Broner and Tarone, “From the point of view of these children, there is a lot more happening than just L2 acquisition: The social life of children is going on. As in all classrooms, the children are certainly learning academic subject matter and language, but they are also becoming socialized into the wider society and, by the age of 10 or 11, into preadolescent society as well” (pg. 369). For these students, language play is not only a way of developing and improving language skills (using strategies

such as; talking out loud to yourself in Spanish, repeating phrases to yourself silently, making up sentences or words in Spanish, imitating to yourself sounds in Spanish, having random snatches of Spanish pop into your head. (Lantolf, 1997, p. 11), but also a way to interact socially in the second language during a time (adolescence) in which the social aspect of life becomes more important, and in some cases the students lack the language skills necessary to fully interact in the second language. Some of these language play, Broner and Tarone said, including teasing, insulting, and parodying, are social as well as ludic (pg. 365). Teachers should use these language play activities and techniques in order to develop language, as well as promote the use of the targeted language (Spanish, in the case of immersion students) as much as possible in the classroom.

In these studies (Neu, Moeller/Theiler, Broner/Talore), the research found that true language development is not something that comes without the support of purposeful techniques and activities developed and implement by teachers. Use of language elements common to the students, reinforced through language objectives in the lessons, and activities that promotes verbal production in the targeted language will be important for the development of language skills in Spanish immersion students.

### **Bilingualism and Language Development**

Other factors affect language development. For the purpose of this study, bilingualism and biliteracy has been explored to see in which way it helps to improve language development. Many studies support the theory of bilingualism as a way to improve language development not only in the second language, but also in the primary

language. The importance of metalinguistics awareness, or how two languages can relate to each other, on language development is highlighted by Proctor, C. P., August, D., Carlo, M., & Barr, C. in their article *Language Maintenance versus Language of Instruction: Spanish Reading Development among Latino and Latina Bilingual Learners*. According to the authors, bilingual and biliterate people are more likely to understand metalinguistic mechanics sooner and in more depth than monolingual individuals. (Proctor et.al. 82). Proctor and his colleagues also highlight that bilingualism and biliteracy have been associated with increased language skills like literacy attainment and cognitive flexibility (Proctor et. al, 81). In that way, bilingual students are more aware of the mechanism of languages, which make them more receptive to the implementation of language objectives in their lessons.

Bilingualism does not mean to reinforce the secondary language in detriment of the primary. Alice Miano, Elizabeth B. Bernhardt and Vivian Brates found in their 2016 study *Exploring the Effects of a Short-Term Spanish Immersion Program in a Postsecondary Setting* that there is a strong relationship between first language and second language literacies (Bernhardt & Kamil, 1995). “Generally speaking, about 20% of second language reading performance is rooted in first language reading abilities, about 30% of any given performance is connected to grammatical abilities, and the other 50% is related to arenas such as interest, motivation, and topic knowledge (Bernhardt, 2011).” (Miano et.al, pg. 290-291). They also state that “If learners can comprehend important content material easily and efficiently in their first language, they are then better able to focus on, and acquire, linguistic elements in that content area in the second.” (pg. 291). In that way, Spanish immersion students are able to develop

literacy both in English and in Spanish in an almost simultaneous way. Also, literacy development activities and lesson that students learn and use in a regular language class (English or Spanish) can be use in a content class as well.

Both studies showed a correlation between bilingualism and language development. These studies show that bilingual students are more aware of language mechanism, which make them more receptive to language objectives in a content class, and also that language acquisition happens in both languages at the same time. In that way, language acquisition and practice activities used in a language class can be used as well in a content class with the same purposes.

### **Language Improvement: Which Areas of Language Development do Immersion Students Need to Improve?**

In this study language improvement refers to the general or specific areas that students in immersion programs need to improve, and also to the techniques, activities or curriculum that teachers in immersion classrooms need to develop and implement in order to achieve improvement in those areas. For students and teachers, being aware of the strengths and weaknesses in specific language areas are critical to continue developing the student's linguistic abilities (Dolotic et.al, 303) in order to plan specific activities and lesson that will use the strengths of students to help develop and improve their language skills.

A first step to identify language skills and areas to improve is to have a conversation with teachers who work with immersion students. In a conversation with Spanish language teachers of middle and high school, they identified the following

language skills and features that most Spanish immersion students seem to struggle to master:

- Literal in their use of language/translation of English phrases/slang/structures (como=like ("como, Yo no pude, como, abrir mi locker),
- English interference (¿Cuándo es "due"?) or inventing words ("blanketa" = blanket),
- Lack of formality
- Their accent is very Americanized
- AGREEMENT: (article)/noun/adjective (los personas, muchos gracias, la maestra es muy estricto, la mapa, ellos están enamorado, etc, etc);
- subject/verb especially in the preterite (yo nació; yo ganó; yo terminó,
- Verb tense agreement
- Lack of vocabulary for some "simple" things and lack of a more extended academic vocabulary (synonyms, variety of infinitives, etc),
- Lack of grammatical accuracy,
- Emotionally removed from people or culture of the language they speak.
- Fossilized errors

(Personal communication, 2018)

In their article *Balancing Content and Language in Instruction: The Experience of Immersion Teachers* Laurent Cammarata and Diane J. Tedick explore some of the weaknesses that immersion students have in their language development, as well of some of the ways in which immersion teachers can help improve those areas.

According to Cammarata and Tedick, although English-speaking immersion students can be very successful in both language proficiency and academic achievement, studies have shown that while immersion students acquire native-like receptive skills, their productive skills (being able to produce verbal and written products in a correct and academic language) remain lacking. The language they acquire typically lacks grammatical accuracy, lexical specificity and variety, and is less complex and sociolinguistically less appropriate. (Cammarata & Tedick, 253).

Cammarata & Tedick study, based on the experience of immersion teachers, also reveals that teachers in upper levels are concerned about the language abilities of their students as they move to higher grades, and language proficiency is not strong enough to engage the more complex academic content (Cammarata & Tedick, 253). The Cammarata & Tedick study suggests several ways in which immersion teachers can help students to improve their language abilities:

- Content-based instruction (CBI), a curricular approach that emphasizes the teaching of language through content, to identify two types of language objectives (content-obligatory and content-compatible) to maximize student language learning and use (p. 253)
- L1 use can both support and enhance L2 development, functioning simultaneously as an effective tool for dealing with cognitively demanding content” (p. 254)
- Choose target language features for instruction that

- a) differ in non obvious ways from majority language features (e.g., different ways to say “know” in Spanish and French—saber, conocer and savoir, connaître);
- b) are irregular and infrequently surface in classroom interaction, or both (formal/informal forms of “you”);
- c) do not carry a heavy communicative load and are therefore easily ignored (e.g., irregular endings marking gender, la mano [the hand])
- d) may create confusion with or annoy native speakers (e.g., differential use of “to be” and “to have” in Spanish and French)  
(Cammaratta & Tedick 264)

Besides productive skills for writing products, oral proficiency is also a main concern for immersion teachers and students. In their article *Living Language: Self-Assessment, Oral Production, and Domestic Immersion* Haley Dolosic, Cindy Brantmeier, Michael Strube and Mark Hogrebe study how self assessment of their oral skills can help French students in an immersion camp improve their oral skills. The operational definition of oral production fluency in their investigation did not include factors such as accent, grammar, and other such measures. Rather, it emphasized the simple creation of words and “understandable phrases” instead of error-free production or “native-likeness” (Dolosic et. al, 304). For the authors, one important factor for self-assessment is for the students to be aware of their individual strengths and weaknesses, often called individual learner variables (IDVs). These learner-specific



attributes have an impact, for better or worse, on learners' skills and preferences, and they have been shown to affect learning in meaningful ways...self-assessment allows students to investigate their individual learner profiles, discover their strengths and weaknesses, and assess their own performance and developing ability (Dolosic et.al. 304, 305). According to the authors, the study shows that "oral production in students ages 14–18 can improve as a result of participation in an informal language learning camp that incorporates direct instruction at or just beyond learners' level as well as in age-appropriate and engaging daily life and leisure activities". (Dolosic et.al. 314). Self evaluation is a great way for students to both evaluate their peers' language abilities and self assess themselves.

Another concern regarding language improvement is that, as students continue their education, the need for more complex language skills are necessary, especially in higher grades of middle and high school. This can create attrition in immersion programs, as students seem to lose confidence in their language skills to succeed in immersion content classes. In a 1997 study *Attrition in French immersion programs: possible solutions*, André Obadia and Clarie Thériault state that "A number of studies suggest that attrition may increase at the point where children change from elementary and secondary school...most frequency occurred after Grades 1 or 2 and between Grades 7 and 8... The study found out that most of the attrition happens in 7 grade" (Obadia & Theriauld, 508)

The study also found that the main reason why students abandon French immersion programs in Canada is due to academic difficulty (both struggle with the content taught in the target language and the anticipation of better performance in

English) (Obadia & Theriauld, 508). The authors made some suggestions on how to alleviate attrition in French immersion programs, like create a better liaison/connection between elementary and secondary schools, but one important point regarding language improvement is to establish realistic expectations about language performance in French, oral and written communication, by students (Obadia & Theriauld, 521). Realistic expectations can alleviate frustration in students, parents and teachers, and at the same time can help teachers and students to decide what are the language goals students need to achieve, and how to help them get there.

As in language development, another important factor in language improvement is the role of the teacher. In his article *The role of teacher-talk in a dual language immersion third grade classroom*, Hinako Takahashi-Breines highlights the importance of teacher-talk to improve language and communication skills in immersion students. According to Takahashi-Breines, “The goal of learning a language is not grammatical perfection, but meaningful communication among students and teachers.” (Takahashi-Breines, 475). In that way, the authors believe that teachers need modify their language in the classroom in order to help scaffold students' academic learning.” (Takahashi-Breines, 479), but at the same time recognize the importance of a thorough knowledge of the second language (Takahashi-Breines, 462). Takahashi and Breines identifies some of the characteristics of teacher talk: shorter and simpler sentences, slower and clearer speech, speech that promotes comprehensibility for the second language learners, which includes clarification requests, comprehension checks, repetitions, and rephrasing of their own and the learners' utterances (Takahashi-Breines, 472). The

Takahashi-Breines study remind us how important is the role of the teacher as a model and a way for students to improve their language skills.

In conclusion, what these experts found regarding language improvement for immersion students is that, in general, most of them lack production skills, especially in writing, and their overall language skills become more challenging as they move to higher grades in their education. This can create anxiety and attrition in immersion programs. Some of the suggestions these experts have are create clear and realistic expectations regarding language production, language goals for students in content lessons, use of teacher-talk to enhance comprehension, and promote self-assessment for students to evaluate their own language skills and help them improve in those areas identified as weaker.

## **Spanish Immersion: Characteristics, Benefits and Challenges of Spanish Immersion Programs**

Immersion education emphasizes the learning of a foreign language through education in that language. In that way, students in an Spanish immersion program will learn science, math and social students in Spanish. This model of education allows students to develop a second language other than English as they develop their native language at the same time. According to Herschenson, Stevenson & Waltmunson “(Native language) learners acquire their native language rapidly and without explicit training, whereas final achievement for adult (second language) acquisition covers a broad range of proficiency. (Herschenson, Stevenson & Waltmunson , pg 1)

## **Characteristics of Spanish immersion programs**

One of the most complete studies on immersion programs is the 2016 dissertation *Ready or not: The experiences of elementary two-way immersion teachers* by Ayishah D. Dennis. Dennis identify several models of immersion education:

- FLES (Foreign Languages in Elementary Schools) is a proficiency-oriented program that focuses on meaningful and purposeful communication instead of grammatical mastery. Typically, classes meet two to five times a week for 20 to 40 minute sessions and the level of proficiency acquired is directly related to the amount of time the students spend using the language (Dennis, 41).
- Total (One-Way) Immersion: Total (one-way) immersion programs typically begin in preschool or kindergarten and for the first two to three years of schooling, the target language is used 100% of time. This includes language arts and reading. In total immersion programs, English literacy is gradually introduced by second grade and the amount of English instruction is incrementally increased each year (Cummins, 1998, cited in Dennis, 42).
- Partial Immersion: In partial immersion, students are taught English 50% of the day and the target language 50% of the day, however language arts and reading are taught exclusively in English. When comparing one-way and partial immersion, one-way immersion has been shown to be more effective than partial immersion in producing improved English language achievement and providing students with the necessary language skills to manage more challenging

curriculum in the upper grades (Campbell, Gray, Rhodes, & Snow, 1985, cited in Dennis, 42).

- Two-Way Immersion, also known as dual immersion programs, are described as additive language programs that enable students to acquire a second language while maintaining their first language (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000). The major distinction between one-way and two-way immersion is that the student population consists of an equal representation of the two instruction languages. The population consists of native English-speakers who are learning Spanish and native-Spanish speakers who are learning English. Two-way immersion is most effective with a minimum of six years of bilingual instruction and a focus on high quality academic content in both languages (Dennis, 42-43)

*Table 2*

*Distribution of Minority and Majority Languages in Three Models of Dual Language Schooling*

Grade	50-50 Model	90-10 Model	Davis School
K	50-50	90-10	100-0
1st	50-50	90-10	100-0
2nd	50-50	80-20	85-15
3rd	50-50	70-30	70-30
4th	50-50	60-40	70-30
5th	50-50	50-50	70-30

(Smith & Arnot-Hopffer, . 264)

In her article *Éxito Bilingüe: Promoting Spanish Literacy in a Dual Immersion Program*, Smith, P.H., & Arnot-Hopffer identify the goals of an immersion program as development of bilingualism and biliteracy, high levels of self-competence, and positive

cross-cultural attitudes. (Lindholm and Fairchild (1990), cited in Smith & Arnot-Hopffer, 263)

### **Benefits of language immersion programs**

Most experts consider the immersion program as one of the best ways for students to achieve language and literacy mastery in a second language. Ayishah D. Dennis acknowledges that “one goal of sustaining a language immersion program that leads to high levels of fluency requires starting the study of the intended language as early as possible, usually in kindergarten or the elementary grades (Rosenbusch, 1995; cited in Dennis, 1). Julia Herschenson, Jeff Stevenson and Jeremy Waltmunson in their 2005 article *Children’s acquisition of L2 Spanish morphosyntax in an immersion setting* also emphasize the importance of early language immersion as a way to develop both L1 and L2 grammar:

“the native grammar constitutes the initial state of L2 morphosyntax, and that – while L2 characteristics may eventually be acquired – the native language is a crucial influence. (...) Adults learning an L2 are not, unlike young L1 learners, guaranteed mastery of the language being learned, as they gradually acquire vocabulary, morphology and syntax by using the primary linguistic data (the input of exposure to the target language). Their native language may influence the interlanguage grammar, while the relationship of morphology to syntax is a debated question, as the discussion below will illustrate. (Herschenson et. al.194, 197)

Smith and Arnot-Hopffer state the many advantages of learning through the native language. It facilitates the development of both basic and advanced literacy in

Spanish and English; it allows Spanish dominant students to gain important content knowledge that will make the English they encounter more comprehensible; and it enhances overall cognitive and social development” ( Smith & Arnot-Hopffer, 261). In her dissertation *The language learning motivation of early adolescent french and spanish elementary immersion program graduates*, Pamela S. Weseley states how important is to study a non-English language in school, not only because students fluent in foreign languages can be an important resource for the country, but they can benefit directly and personally from learning a language other than English. (Weseley 1). Weseley also indicates that “Immersion programs offer their students the opportunity to learn a second language through academic content (e.g., social studies, math), with language not being the topic of study per se.” (Weseley, pg.3)

According to Judith Liskin-Gasparro in her article *Linguistic development in an immersion context: how advanced learners of Spanish receive SLA*, “Immersion programs can be good for students who plan to live or study abroad, as the challenges presented in an immersion classroom are largely linguistic, rather than linguistic and cultural combination” (Liskin-Gasparro, 159). She also says that “Because (the students) language proficiency does not allow them to converse easily on a great number of topics, they are likely to be aware of their linguistic limitations. This, in turn, provides fertile ground for an investigation that uses introspective techniques” (Liskin-Gasparro,162-163).

Overall, the studies show the benefits of language immersion. Students learn a second language in an authentic setting, in a similar way that native speakers learn it. They also use it in content classes in an authentic way, and because they ultimately

develop a high level of proficiency they are also aware of their limitations, and can be motivated to improve their abilities.

### **Challenges of immersion programs**

Although immersion programs seen as an almost perfect way to learn a foreign language, they face many challenges. Some of the challenges of immersion programs identified by Dennis in her dissertation is the shortage of qualified teachers, inadequate articulation of the language between elementary and secondary schools, and curriculum that did not meet the needs of the students. In addition, external factors, such as, insufficient funding and changes in political policies also led to instability in foreign language elementary programs (Dennis, 15). She also stand that “With an increasing number of novice immersion teachers feeling unprepared to teach in an immersion classroom, not possessing an understanding of subject-area pedagogy using content-based instruction and lacking instructional strategies to effectively teach in an immersion classroom.” (Dennis, 14)

Attrition is another important challenge in immersion programs. As Obadia said on her study, struggle with the content taught in the target language and the anticipation of better performance in English are the main reasons why students abandon French immersion programs in Canada (Obadia & Theriauld, 508). In that way, Pamela Weseley highlight the importance of motivation as a way to maintain students involved on immersion programs. Weseley points out in her dissertation *The language learning motivation of early adolescent french and spanish elementary immersion program graduates:*



“ Studies in L2 learning motivation outside of immersion education have indicated that student motivation is consistently linked to success and persistence in the classroom (Dörnyei, 2003); some researchers have even suggested that with a better understanding of the social dynamics of L2 learning motivation, “it may be possible to strengthen learners’ bilinguality” (Clément, Noels, & MacIntyre, 2007, cited in Weseley, pg. 52)

Another frustration that some teachers had reported in the studies are the lack of materials in the targeted language. Smith and Arnot-Hopffer highlight that because teachers use the minority language across the curriculum, it (is) important for the school to be able to purchase Spanish materials for all subject areas (Smith and Arnot-Hopffer, 266)

Overall, lack of qualified teachers, attrition, insufficient funds or materials in the targeted language are some of the challenges that immersion programs face regularly. That is why is important to provide resources for teachers in immersion programs to be able to achieve the goals of the program: to improve the language skills of the students in the targeted language in an authentic way through content classes. If students, parents and teachers can see that the language skills are improving and the academic content is a way to do it, the attrition could be reduced. In that way, the goal of my project is to provide teachers with ideas to help improve those language skills.

## **Content Areas: How Content Teachers can Support Language Development and Improvement on Content Immersion Classes?**

Content-based instruction (CBI), or content and language integrated learning (CLIL) as it is called in Europe, is a curricular approach that uses language as the vehicle to teach non-linguistic content (Cammarata & Tedick, 2011). Content areas are those learning areas outside of the regular language instruction. Social Studies, Math, Science or other classes in which students don't receive direct language instruction are considered content areas, but students learn and participate in the classroom activities in the target language. Because of that, content area teachers need not only to master their content, but at the same time they need to master the targeted language in order of teach effectively in an immersion program.

Training and education in immersion teaching is fundamental for content teachers. In his article *Emerging Research and Practices in Immersion Teacher Education*, Tony Erber indicates the importance for student teachers to be experts in the areas taught by an immersion teacher, in addition to proficiency in the immersion language. (Erber, 324). Erber believes in the model of in-service for immersion education. Erber identifies 2 models for ITE (Immersion Teacher Education): those that are preservice or initial immersion teacher education programs and those that are in-service or professional development teacher education programs (Erber, 324). He also highlights that to be effective, in-service models need to be ongoing, relevant, collaborative, building on the prior strengths of participants, allowing participants to reorganize their existing pedagogical schemata, as well as being practical, conceptually

based and didactically driven. (Erber, 325). As Erber says, new teachers in immersion programs will need to be trained in how to teach immersion students. In that way, my project will serve as a resource for new immersion teachers to be familiar with some of the areas in which immersion students will need language reinforcement, and ideas on how to improve them.

Although in-service training is important, Elaine Day and Stan Shapson in their article *A national survey, French Immersion teachers' preparation and their professional development needs* say that right now most of the in-service training is falling short on providing effective education for content immersion teachers. According to their article, "most inservice initiatives in education generally fall short, mainly because they are delivered as one-shot workshops, often based on topics not selected by the teachers for whom they are intended, with follow-up support rarely provided" (Day & Shapson 1996). Day and Shapson surveyed 2000 French immersion teachers, representing 17% of the estimated population of French immersion teachers in Canada. In their study, Day and Shapson identify these activities as the most important for professional development in immersion:

- \* collaborative planning, work, or teaching in the school, district, or province;
- \* workshop in the district or at a conference;
- \* mini course or intensive course; and
- \* implementation of new curriculum.

The activity rated as least important was correspondence course or telecourse (Day & Shapson 1996).

Day and Shapson also recognize the importance of qualifications for teaching content-based immersion classes, but they also recognize the lack of teachers who have the qualifications needed to do so. According to their study, less than one-half of respondents who had preservice preparation for teaching French immersion indicated a course in francophone culture as part of their specialized preparation. (Day & Shapson 1996).

Regardless of the challenges of a content-based immersion program, the big question would be: how it this model of education affect students? According to Kori Floyd in her dissertation *The impact of second language acquisition and student achievement from teachers' perspectives*, teachers noted the following factors in contributing to language immersion as a successful model for producing positive student achievement outcomes: strong parental support; intrinsic student motivation to learn the target language; permission from the district to creatively modify, develop, and/or implement language immersion curriculum; and teachers' ability to effectively incorporate state standards and reach Federal benchmarks. (Floyd,68). In her study, she also recognizes the following challenges in the model: curriculum modification; working with potentially learning disabled children within the language immersion model; preparing students for standardized tests in English while teaching content in the target language; motivating and engaging students in the target language; inability of parents to reinforce curriculum at home due to a lack of proficiency in the target language; a lack of professional development for language immersion teachers geared toward language immersion education; and a lack of tests created specifically for language immersion students to measure proficiency. (Floyd, 69)

## **How Content Teachers Can Help Language Development in their Classroom:**

### **Social Studies**

There is not much research done in specific content areas in immersion programs. Regarding social studies, one of the most complete is the *Teaching social studies in the immersion classroom. Teacher's activity manual* by the Foreign Language Coordinator of Montgomery County Public Schools in Rockville, MD. According to the study:

“Social Studies Social differ from other classroom disciplines such as science and math subjects that lend themselves more easily to concrete learning experiences. For example, while studying the life cycle of the frog in science, a Grade 2 teacher can opt to construct an aquarium with the class so that students may observe first hand each stage of development in the frog's life cycle. As Grade 6 students learn about the relationships among the radius, diameter, and circumference of a circle, the teacher can plan activities to include round objects commonly found in the classroom, such as the face of a wall clock, other circular base of a wastebasket. In comparison, social studies objectives frequently are more abstract and difficult to visualize or bring into the classroom” (Teaching social studies, 3).

In addition to the frequently abstract nature of social studies objectives, immersion teachers must consider students' level of language proficiency. (Teaching social studies, 5).

So, what are some of the activities and considerations that social studies teachers need to do and be aware of to support both the language development and the

learning of the content in their classrooms? The manual "Teaching Social Studies" provide some examples:

\*Experiential activities: To be used effectively to place students in settings outside of the classroom; simulations can approximate an environment outside of the classroom. During experiential activities or simulations, students help to plan a realistic context in which they live" or "reenact events" that relate directly to some aspect of the curriculum. (Teaching Social Studies, pg. 16)

\* Teaching language through social studies concepts: While planning for and teaching social studies, immersion teachers also must think about ways to develop language skills as well as provide opportunities for students to practice, refine, and expand the skills they already have begun to master. Some of the techniques that promote the teaching of language through content in the immersion classroom are:

\* Use of caregiver speech

\* Extension and refinement of student language

\* Inclusion of immersion language objectives while planning content

lessons (Teaching social studies, pg. 22)

- The Inquiry Process: According to the manual, the inquiry process is one effective approach to teaching social studies in the immersion classroom. It describe it as "a model for integrating the goals of Social Studies and helping to make them accessible to students (Lewis, cited in Teaching Social Studies, pg. 27)

Fundamental to the curriculum of immersion programs is the integration of content and language. That is, language is used as the vehicle for teaching the subject

matter content that comprises the school curriculum of the local district. (Cammarata & Tedick, p. 251). Some immersion teachers of upper elementary grades report concerns about teaching advanced-level subject matter because students' language proficiency is not strong enough to engage the more complex academic content. Lack of systematic attention to language development during subject matter instruction contributes to the less than optimal levels of immersion language proficiency summarized earlier.

(Cammarata & Tedick, p. 253). Some of the challenges that immersion content teachers face to integrate language in their content are:

1. Identity transformation—seeing themselves as content and language teachers;
2. External challenges—facing time constraints, lack of resources, district pressures, and other factors that are outside of the teachers' control;
3. On my own—experiencing a growing sense of isolation;
4. Awakening—developing an increased awareness of the interdependence of content and language; and
5. A stab in the dark—having difficulty identifying what language to focus on in the context of content instruction. (Cammarata & Tedick, p. 257)

In conclusion, content teachers in content-based immersion programs face the challenge of being content teachers and language teachers at the same time. This could be difficult as they can lack training, materials and other resources, but at the same time is fundamental for the development of the students' language skills to provide them with opportunities and activities to develop and reinforce them. Language goals and content goals in the lesson planning, experiential activities and inquiry

projects are great ways to promote language development and improvement in the content classroom.

## **Summary**

To summarize, language development and language improvement need to be supported in the classroom, something that is very important in immersion program, when language development seem to come in a more “natural” way. Language objectives in content classes are very important for language skills development. Bilingualism has been proven to have a direct correlation with language development and improvement. Regarding immersion programs, although the studies show that in general immersion students develop language skills in both languages with no hindrance between them, some of the challenges that the studies found are lack of production skills in immersion students, high anxiety in upper grades, which create attrition in the programs, and lack of qualified teachers and resources for the programs. In the case of content teachers, the fact that they need to be language and content teachers at the same time can be a challenge, mostly because of the lack of effective training, but it also creates unique opportunities for them to implement activities within the curriculum to develop and improve the language skills of their students.

In chapter 3, I will describe in detail my intended project. The goal of the project is to identify those areas of language development that most students in an specific dual immersion program need to improve, and then create and implement specific activities within the social studies curriculum for 7th and 8th grade to help them improve those language areas.



## CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Introduction

The objective of my project is to create activities for the social studies curriculum of 7th and 8th grade in an Spanish Immersion Program that will support the improvement of Spanish language abilities of 7th and 8th graders in this program. The main goal of the project is to find answers to the question: *What can content teachers do to support language development and improvement in Spanish Immersion students in a secondary school setting?*

In order to do that, the first step will be to identify the areas of Spanish language development that most students in 7th and 8th grade seen to struggle to master, are weak, or lack. Once identified these language areas, I will create several activities that, while they will be targeting learning goals in the social studies curriculum, they will also target specific language objectives to help improve the identified language areas. Finally, I will evaluate the performance of the students in these activities, to see if they were effective or not in improving the targeted language abilities.

### Setting

My original plan is to conduct my project in my 7th and 8th grades classes during the 2018-19 school year. My students come from a Spanish dual immersion program open to the student in the district, which follow the traditional 90-10 Model that we saw

in chapter 2 (see table). (Smith & Arnot-Hopffer, pg. 264)

*Table 2*  
*Distribution of Minority and Majority Languages in Three Models of Dual Language Schooling*

Grade	50-50 Model	90-10 Model	Davis School
K	50-50	90-10	100-0
1st	50-50	90-10	100-0
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3rd	50-50	70-30	70-30
4th	50-50	60-40	70-30
5th	50-50	50-50	70-30

As the students move to the middle school, they receive two immersion classes: Spanish Language and Culture (every other day) and Spanish Social Studies (US History in 7th grade and World Geography in 8th grade). It is important to notice that not all students who move from the dual immersion elementary school participate in both immersion classes. Most of the students choose to take both classes (Spanish Language and Social Studies), but some of them choose just one of them or none, taking regular Social Studies classes in English and/or choosing another language to study.

## **Participants**

The participants in the project will be 7th and 8th grade students in regular or enriched Spanish US History and World Geography classes. Most of the students in 7th grade Spanish Social Studies come from the Spanish Dual Immersion school in the district, but not all. A small number of students come from other similar immersion programs in the Twin Cities metro area or other states. Also, some ELL students are

placed in the Spanish Social Studies class. Some of the students are newcomers to the country, with a very limited level of English. Taking a content class in their native language help them to become familiar with the school setting in a place where they are more comfortable communicating, and also could be less frustrating than their English content classes.

### **Rationale**

The goal of a Spanish dual-immersion program is to enable English speaking students to become proficient in the second language at levels similar to native Spanish speakers (Dennis, 2016). In order to do that, it is very important to consider in what ways non-language teachers in immersion programs need to contribute toward that goal. Obadia and Theriauld indicates the need of more complex language skills as the students progress in their academic career (Obadia & Theriauld, 508). In other words, as students move to higher grades, they need to reinforce and practice their language skills, not only in the language classroom, but also in the rest of their immersion classes. In a setting like a regular middle school, where immersion students just receive a maximum of 8 hours per week of education in Spanish, practicing and reinforcing specific language abilities is essential to improve and maintain them. The intention of this project is to help develop academic activities for the social studies curriculum that will help Spanish immersion students improve their language skills while working in content material.

## **Project Description**

In this section I will describe in more detail the project, each parts of it, as well as a tentative timeline.

### **Part 1: Identify language skills to practice and reinforce**

One of the most important parts of this project is to identify those areas of the Spanish language abilities that most students in an immersion program seen to need more help developing or struggle with. Experts in the literature review identify some of these areas, like productive skills (Cammarata & Tedick, 2012; pg. 253), peer evaluation or verbal skills. Teachers in the district who work with 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders were also asked to identify specific areas of language development their students will need more help or practice to improve. These teachers are the ones who have the most recent interaction with the students, and will have very useful information about their strengths and weaknesses in terms of Spanish language abilities.

### **Part 2: Curriculum Development**

The main part of the project will consist on a series of activities within the Social Studies curriculum that will target the language areas to develop/ improve as well. Once identified the language areas to target, I will create or adapt some of the activities in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies curriculum to help the students develop and practice the targeted language areas.

After reviewing the literature review and the opinion of the Spanish language teachers, these are some of the initial consideration to write curriculum activities:

- Introduce language objectives in the planning and activities along with the learning goals for the content. These language objectives will be presented to the students at the beginning of the activity, and will help them focus in the language area that I intend to reinforce. The goal of these language objectives are to maximize language learning and use (Cammarata & Tedick 2012, pg. 253), and need to have very specific features (for example, the targeted language ability or feature need to differ in non obvious ways from English, or being irregular, or infrequent from the classroom use) (Cammarata & Tedick, pg. 264). One example of these language objectives along with learning goals could be an activity that two of my colleagues (Andrea Haug and Molly Ojeda Opitz) and me designed for 8th grade World Geography. One of the language abilities that 8th grade Spanish immersion students seen to struggle is the correct use of the verb “ser” or “estar” for “to be” (“ser” describe a more permanent state of being, while “estar” is more temporary. But, as many rules in Spanish language, it has many exceptions). In order for them to practice this ability, the students participate in a “Pokemon search” around the school. Pictures of Pokemons were placed in the hallways, and the students need to find them and fill a worksheet describing the Pokemon and the place where it was located. The language objective for the activity was: “I will be able to use the correct verb to describe the Pokemon (ser) and the place where is located (estar)”; the learning goal was “I will be able to identify absolute location (coordinates in a map) and relative location (description of the location) of a place or object”.

- Being productive skills and fluency some of the areas already identified by experts (Cammarata and Tedick; Liskin-Gasparro) as language areas to improve for Spanish immersion students, the activities created to support the improvement in these areas need to purposely promote production and fluency. Essays, short answers, presentations, interactive activities will be the most effective ways for students to practice their language in a more productive way than filling worksheets with one word or a short sentence or by taking a multiple choice quiz. Oral production (through presentations or interactive activities among students) will also help to promote and improve fluency.
- ***Teaching social studies in the immersion classroom. teacher's activity manual*** (1990) offers some great ideas to social studies teachers for developing curriculum. One of the ideas suggested that I am more interested in is inquiry projects, which could provide ways for students to practice their productive skills in Spanish. Inquiry projects and inquiry process approach is used in many different ways in social studies, so I will use this activity model to promote Spanish oral and written production.

## **Assessment**

Once I know what are the language areas in which most of the students in immersion seen to struggle or need more help developing ( Spanish language teacher survey) and I have the ways to help students improve their abilities in these language areas (social studies activities with language objectives), the next step will be to evaluate how effective these activities are in improving their language skills. In order to

do this, I will evaluate their performance in the activities, looking closely to the specific language skill that the activity target in its specific language objective. This evaluation will give me an overview of how effective the activities are in improving the Spanish language skills of the students, and will determine if the students will need further practice or if the activity needs to be reviewed in order to improve it.

## **Summary**

To review the overview of this project, the goal of it is to find answers on how social studies teachers in Spanish immersion programs can help improve the language abilities of their students. In order to do so, I will determine which areas of Spanish language seen to be the most challenging or hard for students to develop and master using my findings in the literature review and the opinion of Spanish language teachers who works with Spanish immersion students. Once I determine which are these areas, I will create or adapt several social studies activities that will target the development and practice of the specific language areas to improve. Language objectives in social studies activities, activities that promote language production (both oral and written), and inquiry projects are some of ideas suggested by experts that I found during my literature review and I plan to use along with others. I will have a pre-assessment activity to evaluate the language skills of my students, and I will evaluate the different activities to see their progress during the year.

In the next chapter I will explain the process of the project, the results of the surveys and activities, and an overall evaluation of the whole project.

## CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSIONS

### Introduction

After completed my project, this chapter would be a reflection on how effective I think the “Integrating Language Skills in the Secondary Level” toolkit would be in answering my research question: *What can content teachers do to support language development and improvement in Spanish Immersion students in a secondary school setting?* The goal of the project is to provide examples of curriculum lessons and units in which language goals are included in social studies lessons to help teachers and students develop and improve specific language skills that most Spanish immersion students need to practice more in order to achieve a higher level of academic Spanish language. In this chapter I will reflect on the process of creating language goals for social studies curriculum: the format and examples of language goals, how effective it has been with students, and what are some things that I learned during the process of writing the project. I will revisit the literature review and the parts that I found most important. Finally, I will review the possible implications and limitations of the project, how the project can be expanded to future research project, and how I intend to use the results of the project in the future.

### Language Goals for Social Studies Curriculum: What I had Learned

The “Integrating Language Skills in the Secondary Level” toolkit is a series of social studies curriculum lessons that incorporates Spanish language goals (what



language feature the students need to concentrate during the lesson) as well as learning goals (what the students will learn in the lesson). Language goals serve two purposes: one, students will remember specific Spanish features that they need to use in specific situations. For example, if the language goal is to use the imperfect tense to describe the trip across the ocean of an immigrant during the 1900s, the students will know that when they are writing their descriptions. The other purpose is for teachers to evaluate the language skills of their students. If during the evaluation of the descriptions the teacher sees that most of the students had written them using the imperfect, he/she would see that the language goal is effective and students are close to master the use of the imperfect tense. If, on the contrary, most students seem to struggle with using the imperfect, the teacher can choose to review the language goal again with the students and plan to include the same language goal in future lessons.

### **Curriculum format:**

I looked at several curriculum formats before starting writing my lessons, some that I had used in graduate classes, the Understanding by Design format, one used in my school district, and I decided to create a template that incorporates several elements of them. This is an example of the template:

#### **Lesson #**

Targeted language skills:

Overview of the lesson:

## **LESSON PLAN TEMPLATE**

### **BASIC INFO:**

Teacher Name:	Subject/ Course:
	Grade:

LESSON:	UNIT:
	Approximate Time Frame:

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

LEARNING GOALS:
LANGUAGE GOALS:

**LESSON OVERVIEW:**

BRIEF OVERVIEW:
MATERIALS: Text: Worksheet: Others

**SEQUENCE:**

Introduction (Priming):
Review of Language Goals:
Processing and Interacting:
Retaining for mastery (assessment) - Learning Goal (Material) - Language Goal

**MODIFICATIONS:**

Enriched/ advance:
Special Needs:

In general, is a template very similar to the one I used in some of my graduate classes to write lesson plans. I incorporate the “Modifications” part at the end, an element that is common in Understanding by Design lesson templates, which I found one of the most challenging parts of the curriculum writing, but at the same time one of the most useful. As we teachers never know the level of our future students, it is important to plan ahead on how to differentiate our teaching to best serve the needs of our students. I also include some elements of the common language used in my district when we design lessons (priming, processing, retaining for mastery) because my initial goal is to use the toolkit during the 2018-2019 school year, and I want to have some commonalities with what we are already doing schoolwide in terms of lesson planning.

The elements that I include in the template, which is the main purpose of my project, are the ones related to language skills. In “Targeted language skills” I identify what are the language skills that I want my students to practice during the lesson. In “Language Goals” I describe in more detail what skills the students will be practicing in the lesson and how. I used the formula created by Fortune and Tedik in their CoBBaLTT project to write my language goals:

Students will use *X (grammatical structure)* to *Y (communicative function)* with *Z (words/word groups)*.

(Fortune and Tedik. CoBBaLTT project)

(For example: Students will use the present tense to identify location or physical characteristics of Pokemons using the correct verb (ser or estar)

“Review of language goals” is the part in the teaching sequence in which students and teachers will review the language feature that they will be practicing during the lesson. For example, in the “Pokemon Go” activity the teacher will review when we use the verb “ser” (to describe something or somebody’s physical appearance) and when we use “estar” (to describe the location of something or somebody). Teachers can also go over the verb form (él es vs. él está) in this part of the lesson.

The last part related to the language goals is the “assessment: language goals” part. This is the part of the lesson where the teacher would evaluate if the students have achieved mastery of the target language skill during the lesson or they would need more support.

### **How effective have language goals has been in my lessons**

During the current school year I introduce language goals to my students in 7th and 8th grade. My goal was to try some of them with my students this year, and have them familiarized with having language goals in their lessons as well as learning goals.

The first lesson I tried was the “Pokemon Go” activity (Lesson 1 in the Toolkit). In that lesson, the students need to locate “Pokemon” pictures hidden around the school. Once they found it, they need to write down the description of the “Pokemon” using the verb “ser” and the location of the “Pokemon” using the verb “estar”. The lesson was very successful, as the language goals were very specific. We review in class before starting the activity the differences between using “ser” and “estar”, the verb forms, and the

students had reminders in their packet. Also, the 8th grade Spanish language teacher and I planned to do the activity right after they had a review lesson on “ser” and “estar” a few days earlier.

I was not as successful with lessons that had less specific language goals, like the “Invictus” essay peer review (Lesson 5 in the Toolkit). In that lesson, the students need to write an essay answering one of 5 questions about the movie “Invictus”. The language goal was to evaluate the use of Spanish and the content of their peers. After the peer review the students had time to edit their essays before turning in their final copy. As I evaluate the essays, I noticed that very specific language features like verb forms, subject and verb agreement or gender agreement were commonly mistaken by many students. After that experience I decided to change my language goals for the lesson to make them more specific. I included a list of specific language features that I wanted the students to look for when they review their peers’ essays and have them work in groups of 4 or 5 with an specific feature assigned to review in each essay. In that way, if a student has gender agreement assigned in the group, he/she will look just for parts of the essays were the noun and the article does not agree in gender (for example “el casa” or “la carro” instead of “la casa” and “el carro”)

### **Unexpected Learning**

My original idea was to create a series of language strategies that teachers can use in a content class like social studies to promote specific language skills that students seen to struggle with mastering them. However, as I progress in my research and writing the project, I decided to change the focus and concentrate in language goals

for social studies lessons. The rationale for it is for two reasons. One, I am not a language teacher, as many of other Spanish immersion content area. A. D. Dennis recognized that one of the challenges for Spanish immersion programs is the lack of qualified teachers (Dennis, 15) and I feel that my project would be more valuable for social studies teachers if they provide examples of language goals and how to integrate them in lessons that they are already teaching. The other reason why I decided not to focus in language learning strategies is because I believe that one of the virtues of the content class in an immersion program is that students can use their language abilities in an authentic setting, facing authentic language challenges that would face in a native content class, and I feel like using activities that already are being used in a language class could be both redundant and artificial. Language goals, on the other hand, help students concentrate in certain language skills in each lesson, but they solve them in an authentic setting.

However, I believe that for the language goals to be more successful they need to be aligned not only with the language skills that the students need to struggle with, but also with what the new ones that are learning in the Spanish language classes. In that way, collaboration between Spanish language teachers and content teachers need to be close in order to create an effective learning-practice-master flow, mostly in secondary school settings (middle and high school), where students are exposed to different teachers during the day and need a higher academic level of language skills.

## The Literature Review: Important Parts

The literature review help me focus my project by highlighting some important points. I used the ideas in the studies to help me identify several of the language skills that I wanted to focus in my curriculum development, and also to find evidences that what I observed in my Spanish immersion students (disparities in their Spanish language skills; some very strong, some weak) is something common in immersion programs.

One of the main part of the project is language goals for social studies lessons. In that way, studies like Aleidine Moeller and Janine Theiler's supports the importance of activities that support and develop language proficiency (Moeller & Theiler, 226). The most important and useful study regarding language goals has been the Fortune and Tedick CoBaLTT website project "*Features of Language Objectives for the CBI Classroom*". The CoBaLTT project not only highlight the importance of language goals in curriculum development for content areas, but it also provides a very useful formula to create very specific goals, including the language structure the students will use in the classroom during the lesson/activity, and what language feature or vocabulary will use.

Other parts of the literature review that I found important have been those studies that point out common gaps in language skills in Spanish immersion students. Cammarata and Tedick, Liskin-Gasparron, and *Teaching social studies in the immersion classroom. teacher's activity manual* have provided me ideas of what language skills I wanted to target when I wrote the curriculum lessons in my project. It is

almost impossible to target every single language skill, so focusing on those identified by the studies makes the project more specific and useful.

### **What new connections or understandings I made to the literature review?**

After reviewing several studies in language development, bilingualism, language improvement and Spanish immersion programs, I came to several conclusions.

Immersion programs provides an excellent opportunity for students to develop very advanced language skills in the targeted language. Most students excel in verbal communication and understanding, and many can achieve high levels of literacy. However, immersion programs does not guarantee total bilingualism, so realistic expectations need to be in place to avoid frustration from stakeholders (parents and students) and attrition from teachers and administrators. At the same time, as students move to secondary school settings, their need for academic and social language increase, and so their language skill needs. Provide tools for content teachers, that in many cases are not extensively trained in teaching those language skills is extremely important.

### **Possible Implications of the Project**

The goal of my project is to provide teachers with ideas for how to improve the language skills of their Spanish immersion students. In terms of implications, the main part of the project is the creation of language goals for social studies lessons and units, so one of the implications could be a requirement for content teachers to include language objective in their lessons the same way that many teachers are required to



include learning goals in them in different formats (learning objectives, essential questions, targeted goals...)

During my project I concluded that in order to identify specific language skills where Spanish immersion students struggle in general, and ways to practice and improve them requires a close collaboration with Spanish language teachers within the same school the content teacher works. Another important implication could be a collaboration between language and content teachers to create language goals for students, aligned with the Spanish language curriculum, and that administration and/or district provide time and opportunities for this collaboration.

### **Some Limitations of the Project**

The main limitation of the project is the large variety of language skills that Spanish immersion students need to perfection in order to get closer to full bilingualism and literacy in Spanish, as well as develop a rich academic language. It is virtually impossible to target every single one of them, so my project just focused in several identified after reading the studies in the literature review and interviewing Spanish language teachers who work with the same group of students that I have in the last 6 years working in the district.

The other limitation is the lack of training in teaching Spanish language that many content teachers have. Although all of the content teachers in Spanish immersion programs are required to have a high level of language skills, and many of them are native speakers, it is not the same to teach those skills effectively without proper

training. This is why collaboration with the Spanish language teachers is very important in order to create and implement effective language goals in content curriculum.

### **Future Similar or Related Research Projects in Similar or Related Areas**

I think my project is a good starting point to start thinking about what are some things that immersion programs should do to promote academic language skills for immersion students in order to succeed in higher academic levels. Future projects could expand the range of academic skills, create language goals for curriculum in other content areas like science and math, or provide a more comprehensive curriculum set for a whole academic year in an specific school setting, including lesson plans, schedule of language skills to teach and practice, and language goals for every lesson and unit.

I believe that any future similar or related projects should be done in collaboration with Spanish language teachers that can provide their expertise in terms of language skills to target and what are some effective ways to reinforce them in content classes.

### **Recommendations**

For teachers that would use the “Integrating Language Skills in the Secondary Level” I recommend them to use it as a guide for themselves, not as the absolute, bulletproof set of perfect lessons. A lesson that could work for me it could not be as effective in other settings due to the differences in the students, the teaching style or the materials available. Teachers should feel free to manipulate, change, add and remove any elements that find convenient for them to do so. Also, their students needs in terms

of language skills could be completely different, so use the format to create your own language goals based on those needs.

I would recommend administrators and districts to encourage the use of language goals along with learning goals in each lessons. I found that this is very successful in focusing the students in what are the skills that they need to focus on, and I found that those language skills have been better as I evaluated them in their oral and written work.

Also, I would recommend collaboration with Spanish language teachers to create very specific language goals based in the need of the students, aligned with the Spanish curriculum (if they are studying “ser” and “estar” in September, incorporate language goals in social studies lessons that focus on “ser” and “estar”) and with efficient strategies to promote the improvement of those skills.

### **Future Results**

My goal is to use the language goals that I create in the toolbox during the 2018-19 school year with 7th and 8th grade Spanish immersion students in my school. I would reflect on how effective the language goals has been to improve the language skills of the students in the specific lessons and activities that I develop in the toolkit. If the language goal has been effective, I will create similar language goals for other lessons within the social studies curriculum. If the language goal has not being effective, I will look at the reason and make the adjustments necessaries (make the language goal more specific, incorporate more practice activities and opportunities on the targeted language skill...)

## Summary

To conclude, in this final chapter I review how my project, a toolkit for Spanish immersion teachers called “Integrating Language Skills in the Secondary Level” would help answer the research question: *What can content teachers do to support language development and improvement in Spanish Immersion students in a secondary school setting?* I gave an overview of the project, which focus mainly in integrating language goals in social studies curriculum, and how these language goals help students focus in those Spanish language skills that they need the most practice during activities and lessons in the social studies class. I learned that language goals could be the most important element that social studies teachers can incorporate in their curriculum design and lesson. Fortune and Tedick provide a great structured formula to create specific language goals.

I also learn how difficult could be for content teachers without a Spanish language teaching training to incorporate activities that teach and/or review the language skills that immersion students need more practice on, so collaboration with Spanish language teachers in their own schools would be essential to create language goals and activities that are aligned with the Spanish language curriculum and are helpful for the students. These could implicate a requirement for content teachers to incorporate language goals in all of their lessons, and districts and administrator providing time for Spanish and content teachers to collaborate in creating language goals and review activities.

My project is not the result of a comprehensive research in a large number of schools and programs, as it focuses in one school district and an specific group of students (middle school students in grades 7th and 8th), so the results could differ if applied to other schools or districts. The idea of the project is not to provide Spanish immersion teachers with bulletproof lessons, but to give ideas on how to integrate language goals in social studies lessons and what are some examples of activities that can promote reviewing and practice of specific language skills that Spanish immersion students will need to achieve a high level of academic language proficiency in the future.

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